

How to be A Good Creature
by Sy Montgomery.
200 pages with illustrations.
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. \$20.00.

Review by Somerville Off the Shelf correspondent Ed Meek

Have we been looking at animals the wrong way? Sy Montgomery thinks so.

For much of our history, animals have been thought of as sources of food or game or as pests. In recent years, science has “discovered” that many animals are sentient and even intelligent. This has led to a rethinking of the value of animals based on how close they are to being human. Coco the gorilla, for example learned to use sign language and was able to teach other gorillas to sign. But as we learn more about the complex society of bees, or the ability of octopi, a shift in perception is taking place. Sy Montgomery, in *How to be a Good Creature*, expresses this new and evolving attitude toward animals.

From this perspective, animals are not valuable because they taste good or because they are almost as smart as humans, but because of their own unique characteristics. Montgomery delves into her experiences with thirteen animals including her four dogs, three emus, a pig, an octopus and a few exotic creatures from Guyana. She finds that she is able to communicate with all of them and that if she shows that she cares about them, they respond in kind. The emus show her where they secretly sleep and allow her to camp with them. An octopus grasps her hand with seeming affection. Her dogs bring her daily joy on walks and games of frisbee. Sy Montgomery suggests we try being a good creature when we interact with animals and our efforts will pay dividends.

