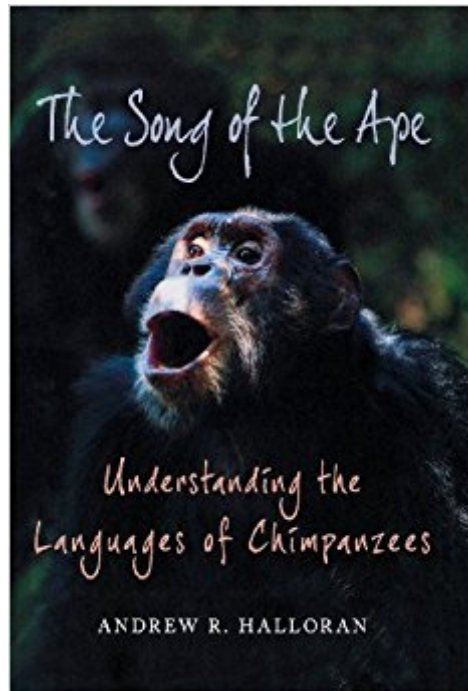




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# The Song Of The Ape: Understanding The Languages Of Chimpanzees



## Synopsis

An absorbing investigation of chimpanzee language and communication by a young primatologist. While working as a zookeeper with a group of semi-wild chimpanzees living on an island, primatologist Andrew Halloran witnessed an event that would cause him to become fascinated with how chimpanzees communicate complex information and ideas to one another. The group he was working with was in the middle of a yearlong power battle in which the older chimpanzees were being ousted in favor of a younger group. One day Andrew carelessly forgot to secure his rowboat at the mainland and looked up to see it floating over to the chimp island. In an orchestrated fashion, five ousted members of the chimp group quietly came from different parts of the island and boarded the boat. Without confusion, they sat in two perfect rows of two, with Higgy, the deposed alpha male, at the back, propelling and steering the boat to shore. The incident occurred without screams or disorder and appeared to have been preplanned and communicated. Since this event, Andrew has extensively studied primate communication and, in particular, how this group of chimpanzees naturally communicated. What he found is that chimpanzees use a set of vocalizations every bit as complex as human language. *The Song of the Ape* traces the individual histories of each of the five chimpanzees on the boat, some of whom came to the zoo after being wild-caught chimps raised as pets, circus performers, and lab chimps, and examines how these histories led to the common lexicon of the group. Interspersed with these histories, the book details the long history of scientists attempting (and failing) to train apes to use human grammar and language, using the well-known and controversial examples of Koko the gorilla, Kanzi the bonobo, and Nim Chimsky the chimpanzee, all of whom supposedly were able to communicate with their human caretakers using sign language. Ultimately, the book shows that while laboratories try in vain to teach human grammar to a chimpanzee, there is a living lexicon being passed down through the generations of each chimpanzee group in the wild. Halloran demonstrates what that lexicon looks like with twenty-five phrases he recorded, isolated, and interpreted while working with the chimps, and concludes that what is occurring in nature is far more fascinating and miraculous than anything that can be created in a laboratory. *The Song of the Ape* is a lively, engaging, and personal account, with many moments of humor as well as the occasional heartbreak, and it will appeal to anyone who wants to listen in as our closest relatives converse.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Those of us who work with nonhuman species can appreciate the subtle observations that Andrew Halloran in *The Song of the Ape* shares about individual chimpanzee personalities, dynamic relationships, and vocal communication. Whether in the wild or in captivity, Halloran shows us that the presence, or absence, of an individual can be pivotal to the survival and evolution of the group or another chimpanzee. Once again we are reminded that animals are not numbers but are unique beings deserving of our respect. This exploration into the complexity and behavioral dynamics of an ever-changing social group of chimpanzees leads us to think about new ways of studying sentient minds on the planet. For anyone interested in animal behavior and our closest relatives, this book is not to be missed!”  
—Dr. Denise L Herzing, author of *Dolphin Diaries*  
“The field of ape language research for decades has asked whether we can teach them to speak our language. Andrew Halloran has approached the question from a more intriguing--and sensible--perspective that has received short shrift: How do chimpanzees communicate with each other? Working with groups of captive chimpanzees living on separate islands, Halloran decoded some of their communications and dialects, and, more importantly, showed that there's a complexity to their vocalizations that humans barely understand.”  
—Jon Cohen, author of *Almost Chimpanzee* and *Shots in the Dark*  
“Halloran is a wonderful storyteller, and his gripping account of living among the apes alternates between thrills and chills, humor and tender moments..  
—Kirkus Reviews (starred)  
“...the author's detailed descriptions of the chimps themselves...make this book unique. Because of Halloran's considerable skill at literary nonfiction, the chimps of his study are as fascinating as characters in a novel. Strongly recommended for general readers who enjoy Jane Goodall's chimpanzee books.”

~ Library Journal (starred) ~ "... an engrossing account of communication development among these intelligent animals, presented with genuine affection for them as individuals...With its intriguing mix of personalities and examination of complex primate social relationships, this book will captivate and, most importantly, provide valuable insight into these kindred creatures.~  
~ Publishers Weekly ~ "Halloran has written a fascinating book that easily spans the gap between scientific research and popular reading tastes.~  
~ Booklist ~ "This is a fascinating book that provides us with a better understanding of chimpanzees and how they communicate.~  
~ Tucson Citizen

Andrew Halloran, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Scientific Literacy at Lynn University in Boca Raton and works as a primatologist for the Maderas Rainforest Conservancy in Nicaragua. He received his Ph.D. at Florida Atlantic University studying biological and linguistic anthropology. He lives in Delray Beach, Florida. *The Song of the Ape* is his first book.

There is truly a divide in this county, and I'm not talking about red states and blue states... There is a growing abyss between people who understand the unique magnificence of chimpanzees as chimpanzees, and those who continue to seek to humanize the apes for the mere benefit that accrues to themselves. *The Song of the Ape* brought this realization home to me, with a figurative slap on the back by Higgy, the alpha male who takes center stage for most of Halloran's story. (If there is any doubt about the wonder of chimpanzees, in and of themselves, Higgy removes the final shreds.) Halloran leads his readers through an exploration of chimpanzee language, using the stories of Higgy, Hank, Little Mama, and others. When he gave me that connection to real chimps who faced real challenges, I was finally able to make more sense of the language debate that took off with Washoe and Nim and Koko. Of course! Researchers back then (and even still today) were judging the apes on whether they could "speak" a language that we were imposing on them, rather than appreciating chimpanzees for the natural language they have spoken for millennia. Pant hoots are not, it appears, just noises. Halloran has a sly way of inserting science into an absorbing and, at times, emotionally difficult story. Using a timeline starting in the 1930s, he translates peer-reviewed research into storytelling, weaving threads of chimpanzee life as it exists in the wild, in private ownership, and in accredited animal facilities. The graceful and brutal true stories gave me a better understanding of the commonalities that make chimpanzees so uniquely wonderful. I also came away with a deeper appreciation of the tragedy that comes from "humanizing" chimpanzees as pets, entertainers, and research subjects. Halloran explains it better than I can: "In the same way that we

assume a culture in another part of the world would function better if its people adopted our own cultural traits, we assume that chimpanzees are members of a more relevant species if they act and communicate just like a human. This is why we put them in films, make them learn sign language, watch them ice-skate in circuses, and make them dress up for tea parties in zoos. This is why we are surprised when, in the end, they don't quite act like little humans. This is why we are shocked when a chimpanzee gets violently aggressive toward a human caretaker. This is why we are disappointed when we realize that a chimpanzee really can't use sign language in any meaningful way. However, when we look at chimpanzees relating to each other and their own given environments, we see the miracle of a species inheriting, teach, and surviving by learned behaviors that fit their own situations."In a growing litany of news reports of chimp attacks, we see how private chimpanzee owners do not understand, as Halloran shows conclusively, that primates cannot survive - in any humane sense of the word - without socialization with their own species. If owners did understand that, they would never breed them to sell as entertainers or pets, to live as pseudo-humans. And if you don't understand and respect the animals you breed and sell, you are putting communities and the animals at risk. The Song of the Ape, thankfully, ends on high note. (Spoiler alert: Just when I was about to start yelling at the book, to stop a chimpanzee war between groups affiliated with Higgy and Hank, Hank's group is transferred to Lincoln Park Zoo. It seems that zoo always comes through for chimpanzees!) We leave the intertwined stories knowing the chimps better, understanding the issues on a deeper level and, thanks to helpful footnotes throughout, with an enticing pile of suggested readings. And, thanks to Halloran, I can even speak some chimpanzee! Now if only everyone could hear the song of the ape...

Andrew Halloran has written what may be one of the most important books on the subject of language and non-human communication in recent times. As an interested layman, I have followed the ups and downs of the attempts to teach apes and dolphins human language for decades. Halloran's brilliant insight was to stop trying to teach chimps to speak and instead, simply to listen. In doing so, he not only discovered that they were having conversations without us, but, I believe, he has uncovered the genesis of human language in the process. With his talent for telling a great story, the author weaves an intriguing tale that stays with you long after you finish the book. I have caught myself observing my own "vocalizations" to my 3 dogs, and observing their vocalizations and interactions with each other with a new insight. It is my hope and my expectation that Dr. Halloran's work will spawn more research along these lines.

Very informative for a reader such as myself who is a non-primatologist but curious about how Chimpanzee's communicate. This book does a good job of detailing the author's experiences. However, he goes into way too much detail about why we (humans) communicate the way we do. I understand he was trying to help us relate to the way Chimps communicate but it took up pages and pages of detailed analysis of human communication methods and frankly, I was so bored by it I skipped over a lot of the book. I enjoyed the parts of the book about the chimpanzees though.

This book is wonderful. It is edifying, insightful & very informative yet down-to-earth in an entertaining & engaging fashion! It presents a new understanding, appreciation and love for how things are, instead of how we think they 'should' be. Little Mama, Elgin & Higgy ... the whole cast is present... and your intellect will dance to a song of compassion & wonder... read and enjoy!

This was very informative. I am always interested in non human primate communication and this gave a good insight.

Dr. Halloran takes us on a journey that began long ago in Africa and comes to light in present-day USA. Not only do we come away with a deeper understanding of a particular group of chimpanzees, but also of ourselves as humans. Although this is a scholarly work, Dr. Halloran's narrative ability is captivating. I highly recommend this book!

A wonderful journey into the life and culture of chimpanzees. Dr. Halloran does a brilliant job not only bringing these real chimps to life on the page, but draws you in as another individual in the troop. 5/5

Well written chronicle of the author's hunt for the language of chimpanzees. It is not too technical or scientific for a layman to understand, while still introducing us to tales of individual animals, who we come to know and love by the end of the book. Delightful!

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