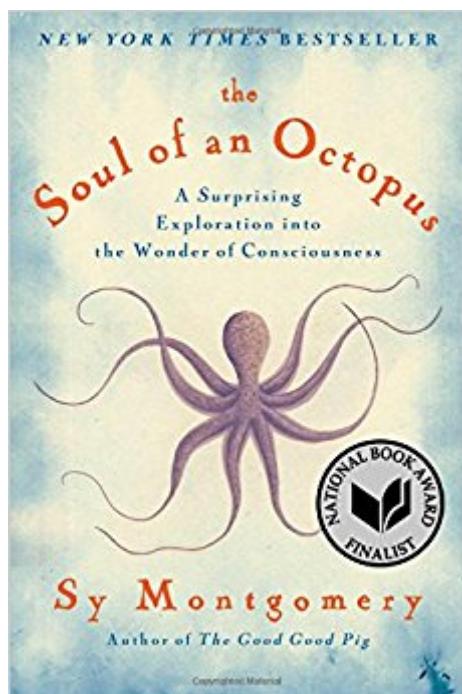


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# The Soul Of An Octopus: A Surprising Exploration Into The Wonder Of Consciousness



## Synopsis

Finalist for the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction New York Times Bestseller *The Soul of an Octopus* does for the creature what Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk* did for raptors. *New Statesman*, UK Starred Booklist and Library Journal Editors' Spring Pick "One of the best science books of the year." *Science Friday*, NPR A *Huffington Post* Notable Nonfiction Book of the Year One of the Best Books of the Month on Goodreads Library Journal Best Sci-Tech Book of 2015 An American Library Association Notable Book of the Year Another New York Times bestseller from the author of *The Good Good Pig*, this "fascinating, touching, informative, and entertaining" (Daily Beast) book explores the emotional and physical world of the octopus—a "surprisingly complex, intelligent, and spirited creature" and the remarkable connections it makes with humans. In pursuit of the wild, solitary, predatory octopus, popular naturalist Sy Montgomery has practiced true immersion journalism. From New England aquarium tanks to the reefs of French Polynesia and the Gulf of Mexico, she has befriended octopuses with strikingly different personalities—gentle Athena, assertive Octavia, curious Kali, and joyful Karma. Each creature shows her cleverness in myriad ways: escaping enclosures like an orangutan; jetting water to bounce balls; and endlessly tricking companions with multiple "sleights of hand" to get food. Scientists have only recently accepted the intelligence of dogs, birds, and chimpanzees but now are watching octopuses solve problems and are trying to decipher the meaning of the animal's color-changing techniques. With her "joyful passion for these intelligent and fascinating creatures" (Library Journal Editors' Spring Pick), Montgomery chronicles the growing appreciation of this mollusk as she tells a unique love story. By turns funny, entertaining, touching, and profound, *The Soul of an Octopus* reveals what octopuses can teach us about the meeting of two very different minds.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Enter the mysterious intelligent alien world of the octopus. Experience a real intelligence based on a sense of touch that humans can barely imagine.” (Temple Grandin, author of *Animals in Translation*) “Renowned author Sy Montgomery’s latest gem is a must read for those who want to dissolve the human-constructed borders between “them” (other animals) and us. Surely, there are large differences among nonhuman animals and between nonhuman and human animals, but there also are many basic similarities. Connecting with other animals is part of the essential and personal process of rewilding and reconnecting with other animals, and *The Soul of an Octopus* is just what is needed to close the gap.” (Marc Bekoff, author of *The Emotional lives of Animals*) “Diving deeper than Jules Verne ever dreamed, *The Soul of an Octopus* is a page-turning adventure that will leave you breathless. Has science ever been this deliciously hallucinatory? Boneless and beautiful, the characters here are not only big-hearted, they’re multi-hearted, as well as smart, charming, affectionate...and, of course, ambidextrous. If there is a Mother Nature, her name is Sy Montgomery.” (Vicki Constantine Croke, author of *Elephant Company*) “In *The Soul of an Octopus*, Sy Montgomery immerses readers into an intriguing, seductive world just beneath the ocean waves and the lives of the creatures living within. In this beautifully written book, she brings empathy, insight, and an enchanting sense of wonderment to the bonds we inherently share with other beings—“even those seeming far different from us.” (Vint Virga, DVM *The Soul of All Living Creatures*) “A captivating book on an intelligence as “alien” as one from outer space. And it’s not science fiction.” (Bernd Heinrich, author of *Mind of the Raven*) “Can an octopus have a mind and emotions, let alone a soul? Sy Montgomery faces these questions head-on in her engaging new book as she explores the world of octopuses, making friends with several and finding heartbreak when they die. They aren’t, she discovers, simply brainless invertebrates, but personable, playful, conscious beings. Montgomery’s enthusiasm for animals most of us rarely see is infectious, and readers will come away with a new appreciation for what it means to be an octopus.” (Virginia Morell, author of *ANIMAL WISE: How We Know Animals*

Think and Feel)"With apparent delight, Montgomery puts readers inside the world of these amazing creatures. A fascinating glimpse into an alien consciousness." (Kirkus Reviews)"The Soul of an Octopus is one of those works that makes you hope we can save the planet if for no other reason than to preserve the wondrous beasts we are fortunate enough to share it with." (Steve Lysaker, *Outward Hounds*)"Sy Montgomery's joyful passion for these intelligent and fascinating creatures will have you rethinking that order of calamari." (Library Journal Editors' Spring Pick)"Sweet moments are at the heart of Montgomery's compassionate, wise and tender new book... Only a writer of her talent could make readers care about octopuses as individuals... Joins a growing body of literature that asks us to rethink our connection to nonhumans who may be more like us than we had supposed." (St. Paul Pioneer Press)"I can't do justice to the wonder of this book, the joy and pain and fellowship and grief that Montgomery brings to life with her words...Completely engrossing and accessible." ([malcolmavenuerreview.blog](http://malcolmavenuerreview.blog))"Montgomery's passion for other species is infectious...[Her] warmth and exuberance...make good reading, and her awe and admiration are uplifting... I felt informed, moved, and inspired - which is all a reader could possibly hope for from a book." (Union Leader)"An engaging work of natural science... There is clearly something about the octopus's weird beauty that fires the imaginations of explorers, scientists, writers." (The Daily Mail - UK)"Delightful." (NATURE)"Fascinating... touching... informative... Entertaining books like The Soul of an Octopus remind us of just how much we not only have to learn from fellow creatures, but that they can have a positive impact on our lives." (DAILY BEAST)"A gripping new book bridges the gap between humans and one of this planet's strangest and most wondrous creatures." (Global Newswire)"Journalistic immersion... allows Montgomery to deliver a deeper understanding of the 'other,' thereby adding to our understanding of ourselves. A good book might illuminate something you knew little about, transform your world view, or move you in ways you didn't think possible. The Soul of an Octopus delivers on all three." (New Scientist)"Charming and moving...with extraordinary scientific research." (The Guardian (UK))"[Montgomery's] compassion and respect for the species make for a buoying read." (Newsday)"Sy Montgomery's The Soul of an Octopus does for the creature what Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk* did for raptors." (New Statesman (UK))"Informative and entertaining, part memoir and part scientific exploration, reminds us that if we are the best creatures on the planet at thinking, we can benefit by thinking about the creatures that may be doing it in some other way." (Columbus Dispatch)"Naturalist Montgomery writes exceptionally affecting and enlightening books inspired by both rigorous scientific curiosity and enraptured wonder and empathy for all living beings...In prose as gripping and entwining as her subjects' many arms, Montgomery chronicles the

octopus' phenomenal strength, dexterity, speed... She also tells funny and moving stories about her friendships... Montgomery's uniquely intimate portrait of the elusive octopus profoundly recalibrates our perception of consciousness, communication, and community." (Booklist (STARRED review)) "What makes this book unusual is that Montgomery doesn't try to answer this question [about consciousness] by sifting through piles of research. Instead, she ... listens. She develops extensive relationships with a handful of individual octopuses at the New England Aquarium, each with its own personality, its mundane dramas and tragedies. She records every small moment, treating each octopus like a character in a Jane Austen novel. The effect is wonderful. By the end, it's hard to shake the feeling that these bizarre creatures really do have rich internal lives, even if we still lack the imagination to grasp them entirely."

(Vox) "Montgomery's journey of discovery encourages the reader to reflect on his or her own definition of consciousness and 'soul.' In the end, the book leaves one with the impression that our way of interacting with the world is not the only way or the most superior way and that sentience similarly comes in a variety of equally astounding forms, all worthy of recognition and compassion." (Science Magazine) "Montgomery's journey of discovery encourages the reader to reflect on his or her own definition of consciousness and 'soul.' In the end, the book leaves one with the impression that our way of interacting with the world is not the only way or the most superior way and that sentience similarly comes in a variety of equally astounding forms, all worthy of recognition and compassion." (Shelf Awareness, Best Book of 2015 List) "A Notable Book of the Year (Huffington Post)" "The Soul of an Octopus is an astoundingly beautiful read in its entirety, at once scientifically illuminating and deeply poetic, and is indeed a worthy addition to the best science books of the year." (Science Friday, NPR) "This miraculously insightful and enchanting book expands our understanding of consciousness and sheds light on the very notion of what we call a 'soul.'"

The book's greatest reward isn't the fascinating science • although that is riveting and ablaze with rigor • but Montgomery's bewitching prose, pouring from the soul of a literary naturalist who paints the marvels of the ocean's depths like Thoreau did the marvels of the New England woods." (Brainpickings) "Award-winning author Montgomery reveals [octopuses' beauty. The book takes readers on a vivid tour of their complex inner world] explores their proclivities, their relationships and their intelligence and ultimately tries to deduce whether they possess consciousness." It is hard to come away from this book without a new appreciation for these wonderful creatures." (Scientific American) "2016 Notable Book (American Library Association)"

Sy Montgomery is a naturalist, documentary scriptwriter, and author of twenty acclaimed books of nonfiction for adults and children, including the memoir *The Good Good Pig*, a New York Times bestseller. The recipient of numerous honors, including lifetime achievement awards from the Humane Society and the New England Booksellers Association, she lives in New Hampshire with her husband, border collie, and flock of chickens.

I was certain I would love this book having encountered many octopuses while diving, and firmly being in the camp that they, like other living creatures, are sentient souls. We cannot know specifically what they are thinking but let's give them credit for having thoughts and capacity for something more than simple reaction to physical stimuli. I was eager to learn more about this. The book gets two stars because I did read it in its entirety - an easy enough read - and enjoyed the occasional information tidbits; furthermore if this treatment of the topic persuades anyone out there to think anew about such creatures, then despite shortcomings, there is some value to it. However, I give it no more than two stars for two reasons: 1. This was pretty thin gruel, as others have said, with respect to any new or particularly insightful information about octopus behaviors or relationships or what we might deduce about octopus intellect or emotional life from closely and rigorously observing these things. This more is a story about the author's many visits 'behind the scenes' to a series of captured aquarium octopuses, and about the aquarium staff associated with that activity. The main gist about 'soulfulness' is drawn from how these confined creatures responded to the author, and others, in ways that she interpreted to be friendship. Perhaps so, perhaps not - she offers little to support this beyond the sensation of suckers winding up her arms, and what may have just as likely been the animals' desperate attempts to find relief from such close boring confines. 2. That leads to the second reason for only two stars. If as seems the case that the author and aquarium staff care so deeply for these creatures, how can they then reconcile confining - alone - in a small dark boring pickle barrel for months at a time, animals captured in young and mid-life from their wild free oceanic homes. It might just be that these octopuses rise up in their barrel prison and taste those protruding arms with their suckers because there is NOTHING ELSE TO DO other than dying of depression. This confinement seems cruel beyond imagining...indeed one of the captured octopuses does die trying to escape, and others chomp at the restraints in similar attempts. It seems we've come to some consensus that this is not the way to treat primates, why then should it be ok for marine creatures which are being highlighted in this very same book as smart, soulful, and sentient. Does not add up. One can reasonably argue the value, plusses and minuses of zoos and

aquarium in general, but capturing and tightly confining smart, free, wild animals for eventual display - and losing some in this process as the price of doing business - does have implications that are an inherent yet all but unacknowledged under-theme of this book. This created a wrinkle that this reader at least just could not overcome. For a more cogent treatment of this topic, I recommend Carl Safina's 'Beyond Words, What Animals Think and Feel' or watch his excellent recent TED talk on the same topic.

I once kept an octopus in a sea water aquarium. For the week that I kept her, she spent all her time watching every move that I made. Every night even though I piled the aquarium with plywood heaped with books and anything heavy, she would crawl out and I would find her on the rug the next morning. Thinking she was dead, I would scrape her into a dustpan and put her back in the aquarium where she would come to life -- unhappily. She had so much impact on me that by the end of the week I knew I had to put her back in the ocean. Her huge consciousness had made me feel small and stupid for trying to keep a creature that could make itself felt that way in a small aquarium. This happened in the '60's but I never forgot her and I have ever since been crazy about octopus (and cuttle fish). We have so consistently underrated the creatures we share the world with that this was a wake up call for me. For awhile, I wanted to be a marine biologist but I knew I wouldn't want to spend my time killing and cutting up living creatures to "scientifically" study them. If rats don't take over, than surely the octopus will once we are gone. Oh, yes, and I LOVED THIS BOOK and the woman who wrote it.

I would probably not have given this book a second glance except that just days before it was offered to me for review I had read *Turtle Reef*, an Australian contemporary romance novel, in which the heroine, working at a marine park, befriended an octopus. I was intrigued by the relationship and was delighted by the opportunity to learn more. *The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness*, is written by Sy Montgomery, an author, naturalist, documentary scriptwriter, and radio commentator. It offers a very readable and rather unique blend of personal experience, scientific knowledge and philosophical opinion about what is understood, and unknown, about the nature of octopuses. I knew little about octopuses — not even that the scientifically correct plural is not octopi, as I had always believed (it turns out you can't put a Latin ending —,i.e., on a word derived from Greek, such as *octopus*). But what I did know intrigued me. Here is an animal with venom like a snake, a beak like a parrot, and ink like an old-fashioned pen. It can weigh as much as a man and

stretch as long as a car, yet it can pour its baggy, boneless body through an opening the size of an orange. It can change color and shape. It can taste with its skin. Most fascinating of all, I had read that octopuses are smart."What Montogomery is able to show in *The Soul of an Octopus* is that octopuses are complex creatures who exhibit personality, intelligence and emotion, despite having neural systems completely alien to our own. During her time spent at the New England Aquarium she befriended several individual octopuses including Athena, who was the subject of a popular 2011 Orion magazine piece, "Deep Intellect" which went viral and was the inspiration for this book, Octavia, Kali and Karma. Through her study of, and interaction with, these extraordinary creatures she shares what she learns from both science and her experiences, while musing on the mystery of the 'inner lives' of the octopus, who grow from the size of a grain of rice and live for, on average, just four short years. *The Soul of an Octopus* is as smart, playful, curious and surprising as the creature it features. A fascinating read I'd highly recommend.

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