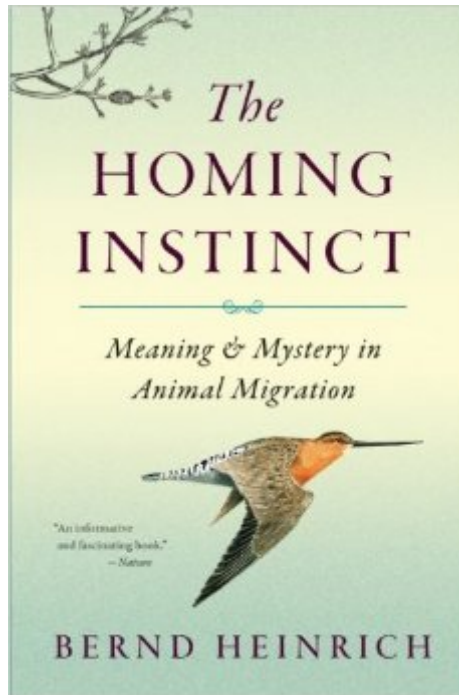


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The Homing Instinct: Meaning And Mystery In Animal Migration



Synopsis

“A noted naturalist explores the centrality of home in the lives of humans and other animals . . . A special treat for readers of natural history.” Kirkus Reviews “Every year, many species make the journey from one place to another, following the same paths and ending up in the same places. Every year since boyhood, the acclaimed scientist and author Bernd Heinrich has done the same, returning to a beloved patch of western Maine woods. Which led him to wonder: what is the biology in humans of this primal pull toward a particular place, and how is it related to animal homing? In *The Homing Instinct*, Heinrich explores the fascinating mysteries of animal migration: how geese imprint true visual landscape memory; how scent trails are used by many creatures to locate their homes with pinpoint accuracy; and how even the tiniest of songbirds are equipped for solar and magnetic orienteering over vast distances. And he reminds us that to discount our human emotions toward home is to ignore biology itself. A graceful blend of science and memoir . . . [Heinrich’s] ability to linger and simply be there for the moment when, for instance, an elderly spider descends from a silken strand to take the insect he offers her is the heart of his appeal.” Julie Zickefoose, *Wall Street Journal* “Deep and insightful writing.” David Gessner, *Washington Post*

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Customer Reviews

What is "home"? How and why are animals drawn toward it? That's the topic of Bernd Heinrich's new book. Thanks to the title and to the dust jacket illustration, we initially think here of the act of

migration, and especially of the most noticeable ones: of large groups of birds flying overhead in the spring and the fall. But Heinrich gives us additional examples of homing in species of insects, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals; from his own observations and from the research of others. The animals may be led by instinct, sight, or a combination of reading the landscape and responding to magnetic earth forces. The choice depends on species, location, and opportunity. It's interesting stuff. The topic of homing is a much richer one than it may appear at first thought. Then: What comes after the creature finds its best territory? Home building and home maintenance, of course. And we learn more fascinating details about the kind of structures that animals create, if they feel the need to build them. Now Heinrich turns his sights toward humans. (And we knew that he would get to this eventually, after we read the Preface.) We follow him to Maine, to his own most familiar places. Here he gives us further fodder for consideration, especially in debating why humans developed into home-builders at all. I wish he had reached this connection a bit sooner, though. And he doesn't quite resolve the personal conflict that he references in the Preface. Still, I do appreciate his final, environmentally savvy, conclusion. Animal lovers should be forewarned or reminded that Bernd Heinrich IS a scientist. He "collects" animals for study, hunts for deer, and has no qualms about sacrificing bumble bees to orb spider webs.

Has Bernd Heinrich ever written a bad book? Not to my knowledge. From his first, groundbreaking, study of temperature control in bumblebees, *Bumblebee Economics* his studies of raven behavior (*Ravens in Winter*, 1991; *Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds*, 2007) on why solitary birds share their food with other solitary birds, to his lovely autobiography cum biography of his father, *The Snoring Bird: My Family's Journey through a Century of Biology* (2007), everything he writes has been enriched by his blend of scientific rigor and poetic description. (The books I haven't read show how wide-ranging his biological interests run: he's written on how animals prepare to die, running and evolution, the trees in his woods, the wildlife year round in his Maine woods, bird nesting and the invention of monogamy, geese, an owl, and insect physiology and behavior in general. Now he tackles homing: animal migration, nesting and nest-building, and in the process, talks about his own "home", which is more the forest surrounding his cabin in Maine than the house itself. He is generous in recognizing and commenting on other scientists. The results of their work, in lab and in the wild, permit him to generalize beyond his own experience, which he relates lovingly. It is the combination of the analytical with the loving and accepting observer of animal ways that makes Heinrich such a good guide.

Animal migration is a well-known phenomenon and most of us do not give much thought to it. If we do think about it in passing, we would imagine that weather and food would be the driving reasons for the animals and birds to migrate and that they must be genetically programmed to manage the migration process. But in this fascinating book *^The Homing Instinct^*™, Bernd Heinrich creates scientific poetry by delving deep into the mechanisms and mysteries of animal migration: how geese imprint true landscape memory; how scent trails are used by many creatures from fish to amphibians, to pinpoint their home if they are displaced from it; and how the tiniest of songbirds are equipped for solar and magnetic orienteering over vast distances. It will surprise the reader on realizing that even butterflies can migrate over hundreds of miles and some ocean birds can fly thousands of miles without even stopping once! And over the vast ocean landscape how do they even know where they are? Many, many more similar mysteries are covered in this wonderful book. Another real surprise is the deep physiological emotions showed by many creatures when they get back to their home, that Bernd highlights with a beautiful example of the sandhill cranes. With this as a background Bernd then builds up a larger story of what a home means to animals as well as humans and what a home and its creation means for human happiness and survival. The variety of creatures that Bernd covers is mind boggling – from cranes, albatrosses, loons, geese, pigeons to locusts, bees, dragon fly, butterflies, and then to ants, beetles and leeches and goes on to Turtles, Salmon, Eels and many more!

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