

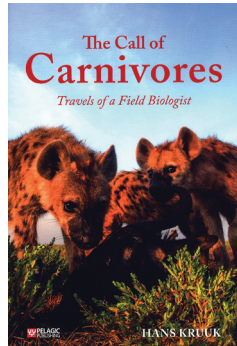
The Call of Carnivores: Travels of a Field Biologist

By Hans Kruuk. 2019. Pelagic Publishing. 200 pages, 176 colour illustrations, and 55 drawings, 34.58 CAD, Paper.

Part travel log, part research biography, this book is a love letter to wild places and the animals that reside in them—a chronicle of the author's life's work and time spent finding “excuses” (as he puts it), to visit and study fascinating species. The author is a distinguished field biologist and natural scientist who emphasizes observation first, questions second, and experiments third. One of the ‘old school’ behavioural ecologists, the common thread in *The Call of Carnivores* is an exploration of what makes a species social versus solitary, gregarious versus independent. Even the table of contents is immediately interesting—Gulls and their enemies (Chapter 3), Olfactory delights and olives (Chapter 18)—and promises an interesting read.

The book begins in roughly chronologic order, with a short introduction to the author's childhood, their research on Dover Sole fish as a nascent biologist, and their student assistant and graduate work on the (unfortunately now devastated) gull colony of Ravensglass, on the shores of the Irish Sea. The bulk of the book takes place on the African continent, primarily focussing on Spotted Hyenas but also speaking on the behavioural ecology of other carnivorous species, including Lions, Honey Badgers, Brown Hyenas, Striped Hyenas, Cheetahs, and prey animals. Additional brief (one to four chapter) forays into otters, vultures, badgers, dogs, and a smattering of other species round out the remaining chapters.

Refreshingly, although the main focus of the book is the large carnivores that are the subject of the author's research, this is not a book devoid of humans, not one of the score that paint a picture of a majestic landscape devoid of the people who have inhabited it for generations. Kruuk writes with obvious respect for the people of the Serengeti savannah and Kalahari deserts, and descriptions of their interactions



and opinions of the large carnivores they share their lives with is accompanied by a generous dash of culture and traditions.

Interspersed with the text are hand-drawn sketches by Ineke Kruuk and Diana Brown, which are excellent additions. The photographs included, although obviously of various ages, serve to reinforce and add to the text. *The Call of the Carnivores* delivers on the early promise of its enticing table of contents, teaching the reader to view Spotted Hyenas as top predators and lions as scavengers, grappling with questions of specialization and sociality, and retaining its sense of fun throughout. Kruuk is a humble and engaging narrator, admitting lack of experience and mastery, confessing mistakes made and lessons learned.

This is a book I came to enjoy more and more as I read it, and the author's sense of humour is well reflected in the writing. At the start of Chapter 23, talking this time about staying stock still to observe a Platypus, Kruuk's description of his mental anguish at being set upon by “an army of leeches galloping towards” (p. 202) had me smiling ear to ear. Although the relatively short chapter format may lend itself to short bouts of convenience-based reading, in my experience this is a book best read on purpose, when one can carve out deliberate time to read.

As much as it will teach you new facts and entertain you, the highlights of this work for me were the moments where the writing truly pulls you into the author's world—the diverse, breathing ecosystems of incredible wildlife. The book is worth reading if only for these moments alone. Kruuk's passion for his study species and temptation towards ‘side projects’ is palpable, and his tendency towards temporary distraction based in fascination is endearing and very recognizable for the naturalist inside all of us. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who has felt the call of wild places and wild species. One thing is for certain, you will never look at hedgehogs the same way again.

HEATHER CRAY
Halifax, NS, Canada