

Alex & Me

How a Scientist and a Parrot Uncovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence

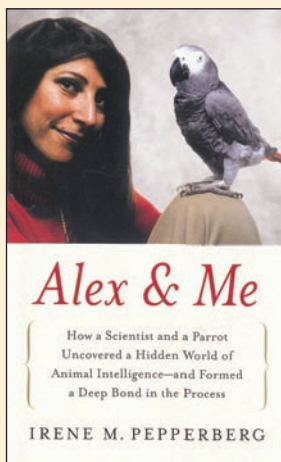
by Irene M. Pepperberg, Review by Jamie Whittaker

THE COVER READS "How a Scientist and a Parrot Uncovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence—and Formed a Deep Bond in the Process." This is an excellent description of the book and its contents.

The author, Irene M. Pepperberg, begins at the end, with the death of Alex and all the media attention that it created. His passing was also the beginning of her acceptance of how deep her bond was with him and of the realization that the world was paying attention to Alex and his accomplishments. Irene goes back to her first encounter with birds, when she was four years old and takes us through her awkward childhood where there was almost always a bird in her life. She chronicles the events that led her from an academic life in theoretical chemistry to a career in animal communication research.

In the early years, she and Alex led a gypsy life trying to gain recognition and funding for their research, while the bond between them strengthened. Through the ups and downs of their professional life together the research continued. They moved from Purdue University to the University of Arizona to MIT to Brandeis University, always hoping to find solid funding and a permanent home. Even with all the moves and the changes in volunteers and staff, Alex never failed to surpass the goals Irene set for him.

She introduces us to the real Alex, the bird that seems




very familiar to those of us who have Grey parrots in our homes. She shows Alex as playful, often demanding and sometimes affectionate. She describes Alex's life and not just the celebrity bestowed on him. Irene is clear in always depicting Alex as a bird; she speaks of Alex with respect and often refers to him as her feathered colleague and friend. Her narratives clearly describe the daily life of the

parrot that we knew as Alex, the African Grey.

In the last chapter, the raw emotion Irene describes on learning of Alex's death leaves the reader with no doubt about her genuine love for him. She speaks philosophically of the lessons learned through Alex. She reminds us of our oneness with nature and that the world is populated with thinking, conscious creatures, with the admonishment to remember that they are their own creatures, not little humans.

Alex & Me is the story that bird lovers have been waiting to read: The story about the off-camera Alex and the special bond he shared with Irene.



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Revised January 2008

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