

Fitz and his handler, **Tegan Tingley**, visit at St. Joseph's Villa in Salt Lake. They were recently treated to a portrait of Fitz, created by one of the residents there. Excellent likeness, and a very sweet gift.



Ask Headquarters

“If a patient says they would like to make a donation to ITA, what should we say?”

Talking about money is always hard for most of us! But you can keep it simple and say something like, “How kind of you. My dog and I volunteer and are not paid, but our organization, Intermountain Therapy Animals, is always grateful for support. Thank you so much.” Then you can refer them to our website. It’s a perfect opportunity to hand them one of your partner’s trading cards and show them the website address on the back, or they can scan the QR code. If someone should slip cash to you, you can thank them graciously and bring it to the office at your convenience.

Something puzzling you? Send us your question and we will answer in the next issue of the *Hydrant*, so that everyone can get the answer!



What Do Animals Know About Death?

NYTimes Review: *Playing Possum*, a new book by the philosopher Susana Monsó, explores the mysteries of grief and mourning in the animal world.

Our neighbor's cat, Mittens, was an adventurer who used to sneak into our house whenever the opportunity presented itself. His other hobbies included daily games of tag with his fellow cats on the block and getting into backyard brawls with raccoons. When he went missing a few weeks ago, our own cat started behaving differently. Usually silent and regal, she became clingy and would wail while she stared out the window. "She's in mourning," my husband said. We assumed Mittens was dead. Did our cat "assume" the same thing?

Talking about animals and mourning invites inevitable charges of anthropomorphism, that tempting habit of projecting human characteristics on to a nonhuman animal. But as Susana Monsó explains in "Playing Possum: How Animals Understand Death," our fear of anthropomorphism can lead to the opposite sin of "anthropectomy" — the denial that an animal exhibits humanlike characteristics. "Both mistakes are equally serious," Monsó writes. "They are both false descriptions of reality."

Monsó is a Spanish philosopher (she translated her book herself), and "Playing Possum" keeps returning to questions of knowledge: what humans know; what animals know; and what humans (may or may not) know about what animals (may or may not) know. Monsó stops such lofty conundrums from floating away into the stratosphere by tethering them to intriguing anecdotes from the natural world — a chimpanzee that carries around the corpse of a bush baby; pregnant mice that reabsorb their fetuses into their bodies to avoid the predations of infanticidal males; ants that can be tricked with chemical markers into treating live ants as dead ones.

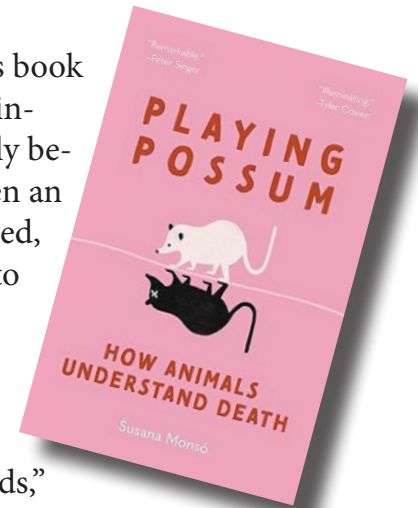
I also learned from this book that "playing possum" involves more than simply becoming immobile; when an opossum feels threatened, "she stops responding to the world and starts to salivate, urinate, defecate and expel a repugnant-smelling green goo from her anal glands,"

Monsó writes. This seems a lot more involved than just "playing": Expelling stinky goo is definitely committing to the bit. Monsó compares the imperiled opossum to Schrödinger's cat, "dead and alive at the same time."

"Playing Possum" is an unexpected mix of witty and grisly, cerebral and earthy. Monsó doesn't so much answer questions about death as raise new ones, encouraging us to shed our reflexive anthropocentrism by paying close attention to what animals do, even when it fails to accord with human modes of behavior.

Some animals do appear to experience grief, Monsó says, referring to female giraffes wandering about the area where a calf had died and to peccaries repeatedly grooming a dead peccary's corpse. She opens the book with a striking photograph from a chimpanzee rescue center that went viral in 2009: A dead chimp named Dorothy is being pushed in a wheelbarrow past a group of her fellow chimps, who are uncharacteristically silent while they stare at her, seemingly solemn and transfixed.

Were the chimps grieving? Did they know that what had happened to Dorothy would one day happen to them? Monsó frames her book in terms of the "philosophy of animal minds." She realizes



What Do Animals Know About Death? (Cont.)

that for skeptical readers “who doubt that animals even have minds” such an approach might seem a hard sell. But her enthusiasm for her (admittedly morbid) subject is so winning that by the end of the book I was persuaded that many nonhuman animals do indeed have a “concept of death,” even if it isn’t necessarily the same as our own.

Grief indicates an affective bond with the deceased. But Monsó cautions that an awareness of actual death need not be a proximate cause. Grief can be caused by “the mere absence of a loved one.” We tend to conflate grief with an understanding of death because of our “emotional anthropocentrism,” Monsó argues. “Given that grief is the prototypical human response to death, we expect animals that understand death to exhibit grief, but this need not necessarily be so. In the same way that there can be grief without a concept of death, there can be a concept of death without grief.”

Monsó points to other responses to death that are more prevalent among nonhuman animals in the wild, including cannibalism and necrophilia. She says we should consider the role that violence plays in animals’ lives. For predators, the death of their prey “is a reason for joy.”

But when we wonder about an animal’s understanding of death, we are usually talking about the death of “conspecifics” — members of an animal’s

own species, not members of species that an animal has evolved to kill. I don’t need a philosopher to tell me that my cat rejoices when she kills a mouse. Death is extremely common in the non-human world. What I had not previously considered was its connection to play. Monsó includes a graphic description of the methods that bottlenose dolphins will use to torment and kill harbor porpoises. It’s not as if this behavior is a form of predation; the dolphins do not feed on their porpoise victims. Researchers speculate that such seemingly gratuitous “harassment” gives dolphins a chance to hone their fighting techniques and bond with one another.

Monsó ends her book by highlighting a paradox: Humans have a sophisticated understanding of death, one that includes its “inevitability and unpredictability”; yet we are constantly trying to distract ourselves from this terrifying knowledge. Animals in the wild cannot escape this reality, and Monsó suggests we might learn something from them. “We’re not a unique species,” she reminds us. “We’re just another animal.” Maybe denying our mortality is our warped version of playing possum; we get so caught up in hiding from death that we don’t really live.

From Playing Possum:

The idea of human beings as an entirely separate, more-than-animal species is becoming less and less tenable by the day.

Scientists have been trying for a long time to find a characteristic that will definitively separate us from the other species. So far, all candidates have fallen. Neither the use of tools, nor culture, morality, or rationality are exclusive to human beings. Nor is a concept of death. We’re not a unique species. We’re just another animal.

of playing possum; we get so caught up in hiding from death that we don’t really live.

PLAYING POSSUM: How Animals Understand Death | By Susana Monsó | Princeton University Press | 243 pp. | \$29.95



Preparing for Personal Emergencies

Recently we offered our periodic suggestions to prepare for our animals in weather disasters, such as floods, tornadoes or earthquakes. This time we'll focus on *personal* emergencies, such as a stroke, heart attack, or accident that may befall YOU individually.

In the confusion that accompanies a person's unexpected illness, accident or death, pets may be overlooked. In some cases, pets are discovered in someone's home days after a tragedy.

You should set up two kinds of caregivers for your companion animals, for *emergencies* and for *permanent care*.

Emergency Caregivers:

- Find at least two responsible friends or relatives who agree to serve as temporary emergency caregivers in the event that something unexpected happens to you.
 - Provide them with keys to your home; feeding and care instructions; the name of your vet; and information about the permanent care provisions you have made for your animals.
 - Make sure your neighbors, friends and relatives know how many animals you have and the names and contact numbers of the individuals who have agreed to serve as emergency caregivers.
 - Those emergency caregivers should also know how to contact each other.
 - Carry a wallet "alert card" that lists the names and phone numbers of your emergency caregivers.
 - Post "in case of emergency" notices on your doors or windows, specifying how many and what types of animals you have. These will alert emergency-response personnel during a fire or other disaster. Keep them updated!
 - Affix to the inside of your doors a notice listing emergency contact names and phone numbers.
- Because animals are still legally considered property, you cannot leave money to the animals themselves, but you can leave money to individuals to provide for their care.
 - It's possible that the emergency caregivers may be needed to help if your will is challenged. Such proceedings can drag on but your animals' needs are real and urgent, every single day.
 - You can roughly determine the amount of money needed by taking your average monthly total x 12 for one year, and then multiplying by the expected life expectancy of each animal—plus extra to account for veterinary emergencies, etc.
 - First, decide whether all of your pets should go to one person, or whether different pets should go to different people. If possible, keep bonded animals together.
 - When establishing this important role, consider partners, adult children, parents, brother and sisters, and friends who know and love your animals.
 - Discuss with your chosen person, or people, in detail to get their agreement and so they know what to expect. Make sure you choose someone you trust implicitly to do what is in the best interests of your animal(s) and your values.
 - Stay in touch with these designated caregivers and alternates. Over time, people's circumstances and priorities change, and you will want to know that the arrangements are still okay from their vantage points and for you own peace of mind.
- **Do these things now.** You do not want your beloved companions, already traumatized by losing you and their home, to experience further trauma by ending up in shelters, where their own lives may be ended, too, if new homes are not found.

Because animals need daily care, and will need immediate attention should you die or become incapacitated, the importance of these simple but crucial preparations cannot be overemphasized.

Permanent Caregivers:

It is vital to include formal instructions for your companion animals in your will or trust. Consult an attorney to make sure your instructions are in line with your state laws, and *do not be "embarrassed" or hesitant to bring up this crucial topic.*



Paintings with Dogs

in Red, White & Blue



LEFT TOP: Goran Djurovic - The Dog



RIGHT TOP: Gennine Zlatkis - Flying Ace

LEFT BELOW: Sally Muir - Lurcher - 2008

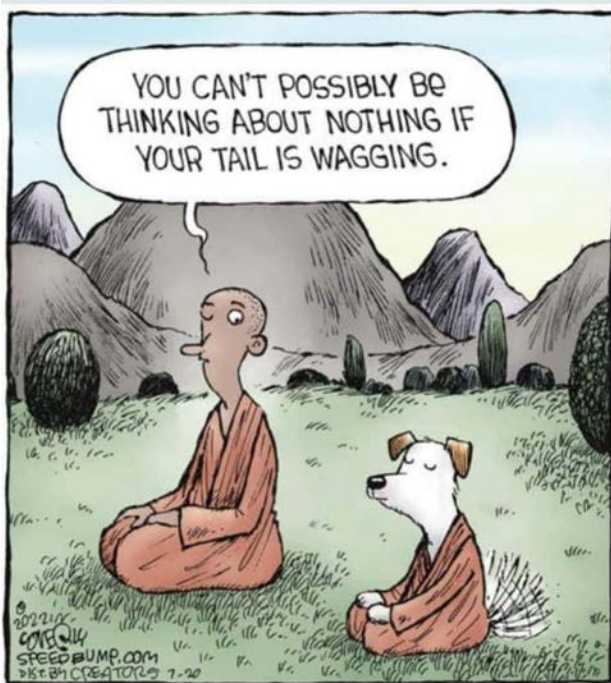
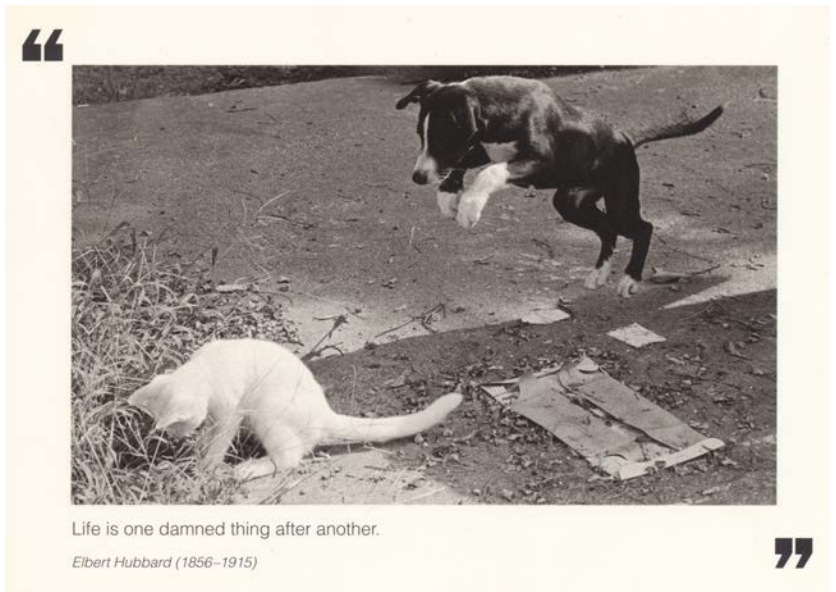
RIGHT BELOW: Ammi Phillips - Girl in Red with Her Cat & Dog - 1834-36




The Lighter Side



"Hey, bucko ... I'm through begging."



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