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Southern Elephant Seal  
*Mirounga leonina*

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# natural CLASSIC



Each month we ask one of our experts to tell us what wildlife book classic – novel, field guide or treatise – has most influenced him or her, and to list a personal library of top ten classics. Here, Shirley McGreal, founder of the International Primate Protection League, reveals all.

Anyone publicising the plight of primates faces a dilemma: should they concentrate on 'sexy' species such as gorillas and chimpanzees, or should they give equal consideration to more lowly species, such as macaques and baboons?

I've always felt drawn to the latter groups of primates, and in 1987, I read a book that has since been a source of inspiration and encouragement. That book is *Almost Human*, by Shirley Strum. In 1972, Strum started her study of the 'Pumphouse Gang' of baboons at Kekopey Ranch in Kenya. At that time, many theories of male baboon aggression and dominance prevailed. As Strum started to unravel baboon behaviour, she quickly began to see that things were far more complex.

She learned that female baboons formed the stable core of baboon society and that the males stayed in groups for shorter periods, spending considerable time working their way into new groups. When Strum started her study, a male baboon, Ray, was working his way into the Gang. Ray took his time and used social skills – not his canine teeth. Strum was soon to learn that baboons have, in fact, a low aggression level.

Strum's account of her attempt to

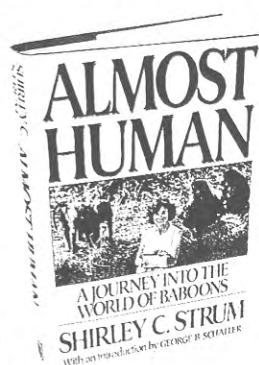
share her findings with baboonologists at a 1978 conference ("the worst 10 days of my life") is hilarious. She ended up being accused of inventing data, and was told that there had to be a male dominance structure among the Pumphouse baboons and that she must have missed it.

Strum's role as objective observer did not prevent her forming a deep attachment to 'her' baboons. When Kekopey Ranch was divided into small farms, the baboons inevitably began crop-raiding. Some of them were shot. Clearly, the Gang was doomed unless it was relocated.

It is at this point that the reader's admiration for Strum soars. Landowners were not enthusiastic about accepting new baboons, and it took all Strum's persuasiveness (which must have been considerable) to arrange the relocation of not just the Pumphouse

baboons, but two neighbouring troops. It is to her immense credit that she succeeded in releasing them intact, and her account of the manoeuvres is riveting.

As Strum says, what she did is about reciprocity. Part of what she got, she gave back. To the baboons, yes, but also to her children, who, she says, may one day "be able to watch the Pumphouse Gang too."



### Shirley McGreal's top ten

● **Almost Human: A journey into the world of baboons**, by Shirley Strum (Elm Tree Books, 1987, op).

● **The Animal Connection**, by Jean-Yves Domalain (Heinemann, 1978, op). A former animal smuggler exposes the filthy tricks of the trade. Nothing changes.

● **The Apes**, by Vernon Reynolds (Cassell, 1968, op). A big influence when I founded IPPL.

● **Gorillas in the Mist**, by Dian Fossey (Houghton Mifflin, 1983, op in UK). An introduction to the animals that the author calls "the greatest of the great apes."

● **Himalaya**, by Yoshizazu Shirakawa, preface by Sir Edmund Hillary (Harry N Abrams, 1972, op). Spectacular mountains and people.

● **Orang-utan**, by Barbara Harrison (Oxford University Press, 1988, op).

Early efforts to stop the orang-utan trade and to rehabilitate confiscated animals.

● **Ring of Bright Water**, by Gavin Maxwell (Penguin, 1974, £5.99). People who like primates tend to like otters, too. I don't know why.

● **Travels in the Lands of the Gods (1893-1907): The Japan Diaries of Richard Gordon-Smith** (Prentice-Hall, 1986, op). Early observations of Japanese fauna, flora and customs.

● **The Wildlife of India**, by E P Gee (Collins, 1964, op). Presents India's wildlife, including the rare golden langur named *Prestbytis geei* after the author.

● **The Year of the Gorilla**, by George Schaller (Ballentine Books, 1965, op). A pre-Fossey look at the mountain gorillas.