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Marc Bekoff Ph.D.
Animal Emotions

Feeling Stranded? Get Out and Enjoy Nature's Healing Powers

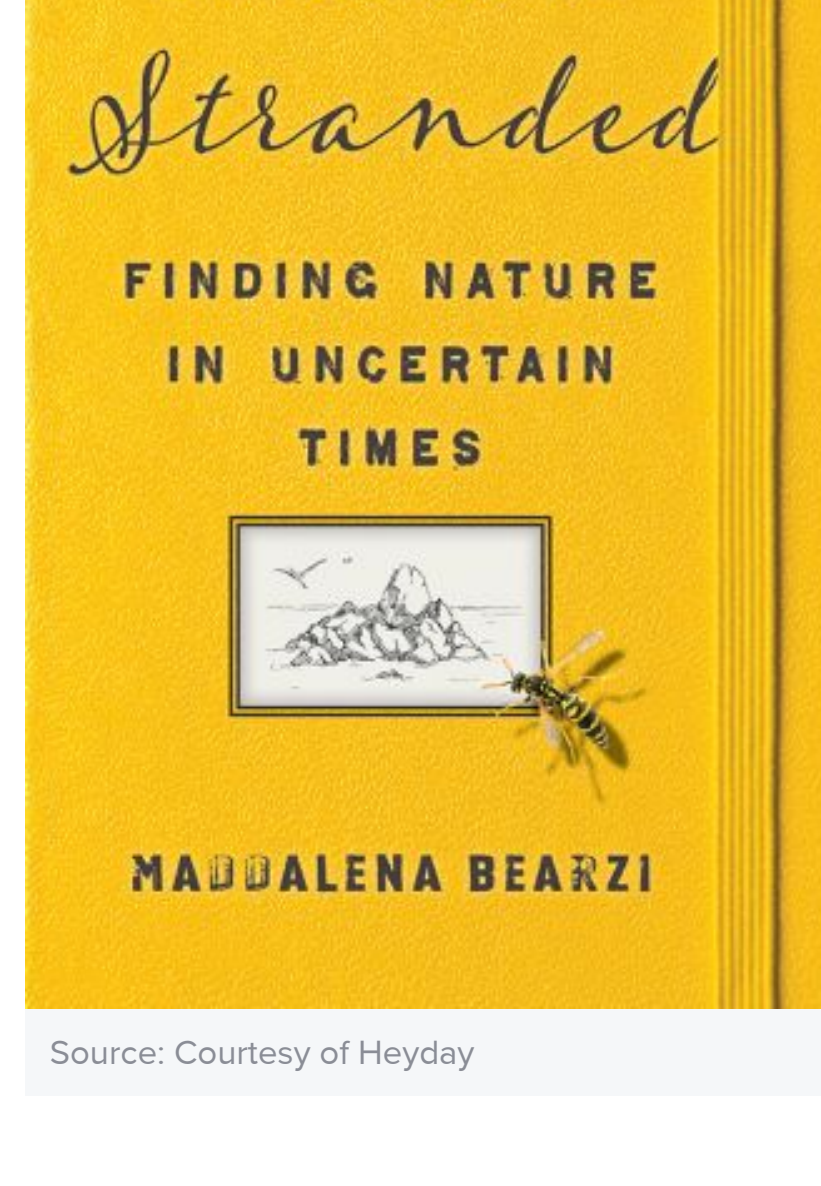
Maddalena Bearzi offers an eye-opening guide for connecting with local nature.

Posted April 18, 2023 | Reviewed by Michelle Quirk



KEY POINTS

- (Re)finding nature is healing and spreads hope, compassion, empathy, and coexistence in our communities of human and nonhuman beings.
- With a green thumb and a canine sidekick named Genghis, Bearzi finds much to marvel at in her garden's "ordinary" everyday fauna and flora.
- She invites us to look at, listen to, and revel in the everyday grandeur of the natural world—and to embrace our responsibility to sustain it.



Source: Courtesy of Heyday

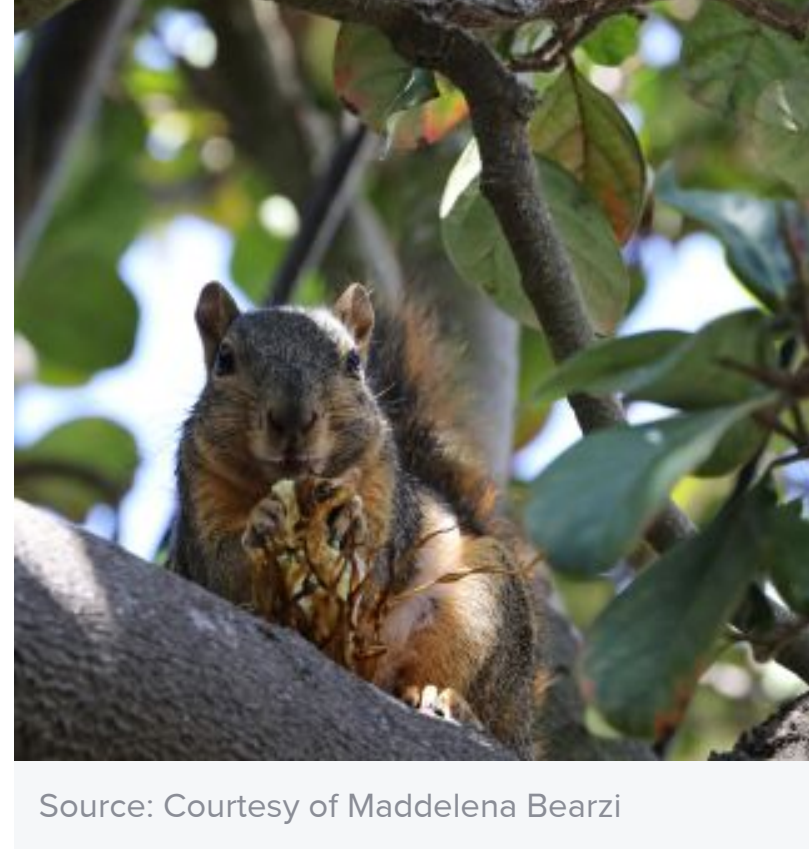
Once I began reading Dr. Maddalena Bearzi's latest book *Stranded: Finding Nature in Uncertain Times*, I couldn't put it down. Her important book is a wonderful reminder of just how critical it is to get outside, rewild ourselves, and enjoy the diverse and magnificent fauna and flora who await our attention and appreciation. (Re)finding nature is healing for individuals and spreads hope, compassion, and empathy in our mixed communities of human and nonhuman beings.

I'm pleased Maddalena could answer a few questions about her guide for healing our hearts and souls—a collection of vignettes about the incredible everyday creatures she met during the COVID-19 lockdown and a call for living in harmony with nature—in a period called the "anthropause."¹

Marc Bekoff: Why did you write *Stranded: Finding Nature in Uncertain Times*?

Maddalena Bearzi: As a field marine biologist, my most natural state is being outside, out on the ocean in the company of dolphins and whales. When the pandemic arrived, I, like everyone else, came to realize that it was here to stay. With no place to go other than my backyard and occasional solitary ventures into my suburban Los Angeles neighborhood, I began to reconnect with the surrounding nature—that within my reach. I rediscovered the wilderness around me, without leaving the three-mile radius from my home. And, slowly, I began to feel that same bursting curiosity toward the "ordinary" urban-dwelling creatures swarming around me as I did when I was a child, back in my parents' garden in Italy.

Discovering the wildlife wonders surrounding me every day brought me to appreciate what I left unexplored at my doorstep. And I felt compelled to share my reflections with others, hoping that readers, by looking at the non-human beings in their own urban jungles, might better understand that these animals have their own purposes on Earth, which, as I wrote in my book "have just as much value as ours."

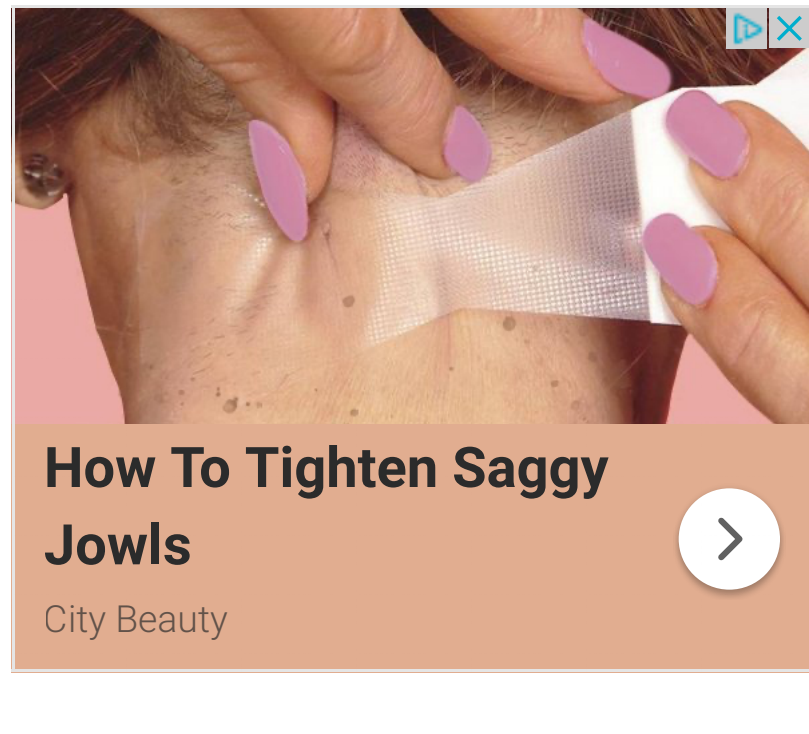


Source: Courtesy of Maddalena Bearzi

MB: How does your book relate to your background and general areas of interest?

MB: I am a behavioral ecologist by training, and I've made a career studying dolphins, whales, pinnipeds, and other marine creatures. Before becoming involved with the charismatic world of marine mammals, I investigated several other species, most of whom were land-bound. I studied the home range and homing behavior of the Italian wall lizard for my Bachelor's thesis; I helped out with projects on different species of birds, amphibians, and reptiles in Sardinia and Tuscany; and I worked with sea turtles along the shores of two remote reserves of the Yucatan Peninsula, in Mexico, for six consecutive summers. The species *per se* didn't matter because, for me, any animal is fascinating to observe: large or small, slimy or scaly, in a carapace or covered in thick fur. My work as a scientist became more and more that of an environmentalist.

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MB: Who is your intended audience?

MB: This nonfiction popular book targets both adults and young adult readers. The essays do not require any specific knowledge of the topics. *Stranded* is for nature lovers, for people caring about the environment and the current status of our planet, and for those who don't realize that wildlife is close at hand and that they don't need to be a scientist to understand and value it. One might also call this a sort of *self-help book*—driven by nature—for readers in search of solace in trying times.

MB: What are some of the topics you weave into your book, and what are some of your major messages?

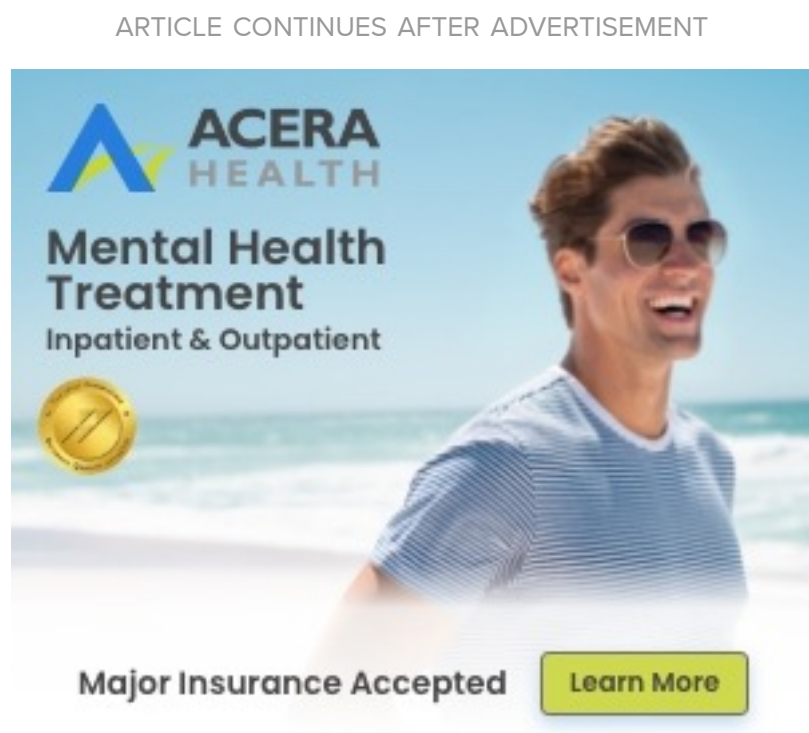
MB: *Stranded* is made up of essays about some of my experiences with the nearby urban wildlife. One can walk alongside *Opus* the Opossum in my backyard, spot the drey of an invasive Eastern Fox squirrel among the branches of a nearby oak tree, follow the push-ups of a Western fence lizard, or spy inside the gashes of my lounge chair to discover the architectural marvel of a paper wasp nest. There are thoughts on the beauty of Mother Earth and our environmental quandary; recollections of my life spent in the company of animals, with some humans included; what I've learned from the wilderness—near and far—using the power of observation we are *all* equipped with.

The hope is that others might gain a better understanding and appreciation of nature, perhaps finding therein some reprieve and inspiration in unsure times, present and forthcoming.

MB: How does your book differ from others that are concerned with some of the same general topics?

MB: *Stranded* is a personal memoir and an invitation to readers to better see, understand, and appreciate the intrinsic beauty of their nearby wilderness in a way they can relate to while keeping a conservation agenda in mind. This book takes inspiration from an extraordinary and harsh time in our history: a worldwide pandemic. Through storytelling that (with any luck) avoids academic jargon, I emphasize the power of ubiquitous nature to bring relief in the moments of uncertainty that impact our lives. All of us could use a little more human and natural connections. I offer some take-away lessons that I've learned through watching nature, both close to home and far away; insights that readers may find useful in their own lives.

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Because it all comes from *my* personal experiences, *Stranded* is somehow unique for its genre, and possibly well-timed. *I think that now, perhaps more than ever, there is a hunger for readers to bond with human and nonhuman beings, to seek nature, to feel that we are not alone on this planet, and to find relief.*

MB: Are you hopeful that as people learn more about the beauty of nature and how good it is for them, they will treat nonhumans and their homes with more respect?

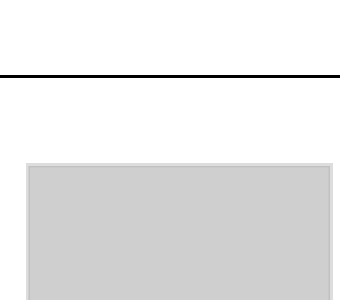
MB: Yes. As I wrote in my book, observing nature—near or far—tends to nurture not only a better understanding and appreciation of other species we share the planet with but also elucidates our wrongdoing toward them. In the end, whether we choose to see it or not, we are still part of a grandiose and magnificent web of life where all is linked and interdependent. And our salvation lies in our connection to nature.

References

- In conversation with Dr. Maddalena Bearzi, president and cofounder of the Ocean Conservation Society and a passionate scientist, active conservationist, photo-journalist, and published author of books and articles. She and Craig Stanford wrote *Beautiful Minds: The Parallel Lives of Great Apes and Dolphins*. She is also the author of *Dolphin Confidential: Confessions of a Field Biologist*, winner of the 2013 Green Book Festival Award, Animal Section) and *Stranded: Finding Nature in Uncertain Times*. Her first illustrated children's book for Roaring Books is forthcoming.
1. See *Neighborhoodly Animals Offer Valuable Lessons About Coexistence*. The word "anthropause" was coined in an *essay* by Dr. Christian Rutz and his colleagues called "COVID-19 lockdown allows researchers to quantify the effects of human activity on wildlife." Rutz and his colleagues wrote: "We noticed that people started referring to the lockdown period as the 'Great Pause,' but felt that a more precise term would be helpful. We propose 'anthropause' to refer specifically to a considerable global slowing of modern human activities, notably travel. We are aware that the correct prefix is 'anthropo-' (for 'human') but opted for the shortened form, which is easier to remember and use, and where the missing 'po' is still echoed in the pronunciation of 'pause' (pəʊz)."



About the Author



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