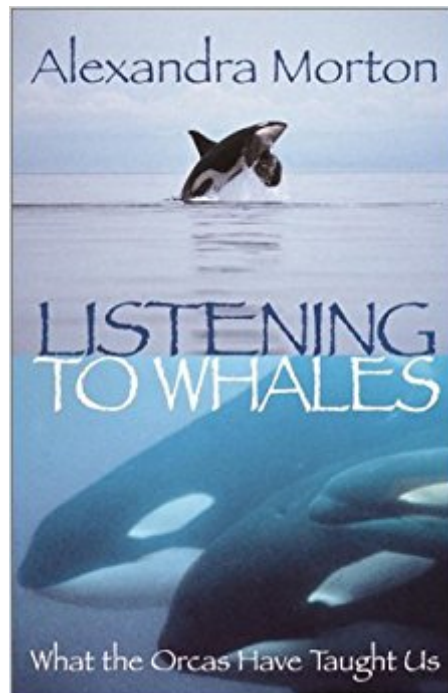




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# Listening To Whales: What The Orcas Have Taught Us



## Synopsis

For the past twenty-five years, Alexandra Morton has been at the forefront of whale and dolphin research, dedicating her life to the study of orcas (also known as killer whales). Now in *Listening to Whales*, Morton shares the spellbinding story of her career, her adventures in the wilderness, the heartbreak she has endured, and the rewards of living her life on her own terms. Born into an artistic family in Connecticut, Morton experienced a seismic jolt when at age twelve she first read the work of primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall and knew she wanted to study wild animals. Soon afterward, listening for the first time to orcas communicating with each other, she knew she had found her life work. In the late 1970s, while working at California's Marineland, Alexandra pioneered the recording of whale sounds by dropping a hydrophone into the tank of two killer whales. She recorded the varied language of mating, childbirth, and even grief after the birth of a stillborn calf. At the same time she made the startling observation that the whales were inventing and perfecting wonderful synchronized movements, a behavior that was soon recognized as a defining characteristic of orca society. In 1978, Alexandra moved with her husband, photographer Robin Morton, to a remote bay in British Columbia to continue her research with wild orcas. For a few idyllic years, Alexandra and Robin shared their passion for whales, cruising the green northern waters and raising a baby boy. But tragedy struck when Robin died in a terrible accident. Only the love of her son and her abiding dedication to whale research gave Alexandra the strength to continue her groundbreaking work. Her recordings of the whales that swim by her house have led her to a deeper understanding of the mystery of whale echolocation, the vocal communication that enables the mammals to find their way in the dark sea. She continues to be among the renowned researchers attempting to break down the barriers of interspecies communication. At once an inspiring story of a woman's determination to live her life on her own terms and a fascinating study of the profound communion between humans and whales, this book will open your eyes anew to the wonders of the natural world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Orca researcher Morton describes her more than 20 years studying the movements and sounds of orcas, the mammals, actually dolphins, commonly known as killer whales, or, regionally, blackfish. After getting her ears wet cataloguing the recordings John Lilly (the author of *Man and Dolphin*) made of his controversial language experiments with dolphins, Morton turned her own hydrophone on the captive orca pair Orky and Corky, at the now closed Marineland of the Pacific in Palos Verde, Calif. Inspired by Jane Goodall as an important but rare model, she soon decided to find wild orcas to record launching her lifelong study of the animals in the coastal waters of British Columbia. She has faced down the inherent difficulty of finding the elusive creatures she studies, the periodic economic uncertainty of life in a remote place and the death of her husband in a diving accident. Throughout her warm, energetic memoir, she relates her work to the strides made by other marine biologists, consistently balancing her open curiosity about the vagaries of mother nature with solid scientific inquiry. In later chapters, her focus turns to the impact of salmon farms on the coastal ecosystem. Morton's rich descriptions of individual orca movements, and how each relates to the species as a whole, course alongside her passionate defense of the ecological balance of the region; she infuses both with just the right amount of personal reflection to make this an engaging tale of a woman's commitment to science and a life well lived. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Morton has spent nearly 20 years studying the language and behavior of the orcas, or killer whales, that roam the waters of British Columbia. The author of two children's books on whales, she is a field scientist in the tradition of Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey. Although she does not possess an academic degree in science, she writes eloquently of the orcas' social groupings, strong mother-child bonds, migration patterns, and interactions with humans. Morton also graphically describes the effects of fish farming, logging, development, and whale-watching expeditions on the environment. Her book is primarily of value as an autobiographical document of a determined and

highly self-motivated woman rather than a work of scientific popularization like Serge Dedina's *Saving the Gray Whale* or Dick Russell's *Eye of the Whale*. Readers will be impressed by the physical hardships of field work, the moving account of the death of her marine photographer husband in a diving mishap, and her stories of rearing her children on shipboard and in an isolated coastal community. Suitable for all public libraries. Judith B. Barnett, Pell Marine Science Lib., Univ. of Rhode Island, Kingston

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This is a personal biography as much as it is a book about killer whales. It tells the life story of a researcher trying to decipher the complex sonic language of these magical beasts but in the process the author connects us to these beasts in a very personal emotional way. I was very touched by descriptions of the plight of these magnificent, highly social, intelligent beasts confined in small pools at marine parks. The book moves from research done at these parks to the straits of Georgia where the author relocates to study the whales in their native habitat. From this vantage point the ecological disaster of the salmon fish farms is described that will persuade you to never buy farmed fish. If you are interested in learning more about the social life and the communications of killer whales in a book that is a good read then this one is for you

To experience this book is like hearing the blood pump through Alexandra Morton's veins. She IS the words embodied here. If you've ever wondered what it is to really feel a part of Nature's wide family, read this book. If you've ever wondered what it might be like to live in the sea and view the sun through the lens of the water, read this book. If you've ever wondered what joy there might be to call at night to your clan and have them gather 'round you with chirps and whistles and maybe even love, read this book. Alexandra Morton knows Orcas, and I'm wagering they know her too. Her story is charged with ecstasy, adventure, tragedy and poignancy. You can get the plot from everyone else. What I'm telling you is that this story will enthrall you. You may even be changed by it. Now THAT's worth a read.

I enjoyed this book tremendously. It was educational, interesting, and fun to read. It's terribly sad what the Salmon farms and their pollution have done to waters once teeming with life. If the Government's of the world had a lick of sense they would shut them all down. Cheap Salmon isn't worth the destruction up and down the food chain. At some point we are going to have to decide what's more important, Corporations making more money, or life on this planet. (including ours) I know which side I am taking. Thank you Ms. Morton for taking the time to write this fascinating book.

This well written book describes the author's fascination with all animals and her willingness to travel far to observe and research killer whales. In addition to providing her history and knowledge of the whales, her use of language is delightful.

Mrs. Morton describes in infinite detail her life exploring and researching the orcas of the Canadian northwest. This is an autobiography of her life, her experiences, and her research. Very interesting, at times heartbreaking, and ending as uplifting and hopeful. I highly recommend this book!

This is the autobiography (so far) of whale researcher Alexandra Morton who came to the remote Broughton Archipelago in 1984 to study orcas and was herself woven by nature into the warp and woof of that amazing place. While telling a fascinating story the book imparts a great deal of knowledge in so painless a manner that we hardly notice. We learn, for example, that there are three kinds of orcas: "residents," who eat mostly fish; "transients" who eat mostly seals and sea lions; and "offshores" who--nobody knows for sure--may well eat mostly sharks. Though whales, both captive and free, are the stars of this story, the real star is the Broughton itself with its myriad islands and channels, its sunny summer breezes and howling winter storms. With so few people living in the Broughton, the BC government pillages its islands with clearcuts, and both levels of government cooperate to pollute its waters with open netcage salmon farms. Courageous residents fight a running battle to protect the wild coast and wild fish they love from the blindness of bureaucrats and the greed of multinational corporations. This wonderful story, which is all true, will make you cry for the ocean, and at the same time renew your hope in the power of courageous people to change the world. If you have a kayak, go and paddle through the Broughton that Alexandra and her friends are fighting to save for us. You might even be able to help.

It's amazing how intelligent, compassionate, beautiful and truly wonderful parents these lovely creatures are. (better than so many of us "humans". I learned so much, and will be re-reading it; just in case I missed anything. I've told many of my family/friends to read it, and all the other orca books I've bought since reading this one. I can't get enough info about them. They're simply magical.

I didn't realize until I read the book how drawn I am to marine biology esp. whales. She starts in Malibu with Dr. Lilly and moves to the old Marineland where she listens herself and ends up on Vancouver Island where pods were just beginning to be studied. I expected something more New

Age. She sticks to well-documented ideas about orca's social behavior. When she feels things beyond what is scientifically proved, she says that this is what she felt and you feel for someone who has devoted this much time and thought to these animals her observations are not inappropriate. This is now one of my favorite books.

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