

Fabian Allmacher
with Eva Foraita



Preface by
Dr. Gary Gray

ANIMAL ATHLETICS

Bodyweight training with **animal moves**
based on nature's model

riva

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info@rivaverlag.de

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*For the man who rolled with me on the floor when I was little.
And who taught me to walk straight through life when I grew up.*

For my dad.

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Preface by Dr. Gary Gray

When we think of movement, exercise, training, and rehabilitation we expect to associate words like mobility, flexibility, stability, strength, endurance, and power to the thought process and experience. These words typically evoke the feelings of work, boredom, discouragement, and frustration. We rarely expect to correlate words like playful, joyous, fun, motivating, encouraging, and empowering to the process of getting fit. The powerful transformation of the traditional negative perception and reality of working out into a natural positive attitude of opportunity and pleasure is what has been accomplished by Fabian Allmacher with Eva Foraita in **Animal Athletics**.

Within **Animal Athletics**, Fabian builds a compelling case that the “right way” of exercise has its foundations within the movements of animals and our own neuromusculoskeletal motor developmental process as babies and toddlers. His case becomes stronger as he explains that this form of “integrity training,” because of its simplicity and authenticity, serves as the ongoing motivation to seek and live a life of great fitness and happiness.

“As soon as one has found the right way, movement and exercising become an instinct, a natural need.”

Preamble, *Animal Athletics*

Fabian takes advantage of the positive influence of his father as a veterinarian and competitive athlete, along with his own passion, also as a veterinarian, accomplished athlete, a personal trainer, and Fellow of Applied Functional Science® to bring

us an engaging text that I believe will become the foundation for all forms of exercise, fitness, and sport.

As a way to set the stage for the Animal Moves Training Programs, Fabian introduces us to the ultimate motivation, the “why” behind the “what”. The principles of movement are presented, and the obvious strategies that emanate from those truths lead right into the “hows” of the movement. Understanding the strategies that lead to the animal exercises immediately engages us and fills us with confidence and a unique feeling of courage.

The movements are presented as two basic forms: those that involve no change in location and those that do involve a change in location. They are sequentially organized as beginner, intermediate, and advanced movements. My favorite aspect of the program is the dynamic transition from one movement into another, as well as the ability to creatively combine movements for specific goals.

Perhaps the most significant feature of *Animal Athletics* is the heartbeat of the text. The intelligence of Fabian is quickly realized and appreciated. The physical abilities that Fabian has developed by “practicing what he preaches” is evident within the revealing photos of the movements. As impressive as the evidence of his mind and body is, his heart and spirit of enhancing the lives of others is what resonates loud and clear.

As human beings we should be in awe of our animal friends and seek to mimic their abilities in order to enhance ours. Fabian craftily encourages and empowers us to *intransformatize* (personally becoming the part or the thing) in order to logically and progressively improve our ability to move.

Therefore, stretching as a scorpion, eagle, or mermaid; jumping hopping as a bunny, frog, or kangaroo; kicking as a cassowary or dog; walking as a duck, bear, crab, or beast; pushing up as a wild cat or dolphin; dancing as a lemur – all are opportunities to *intransformalize* and all are privileges taught to us by Fabian to move well and to love life.

For this we are thankful. So if your goal is to engage in a training program that is playful, joyous, fun, motivating, encouraging, and empowering, **Animal Athletics** will be something that you will be thankful for as well.

Dr. Gary Gray

Preamble

Animals as well as books about animals have played an important role in my life since my childhood. You may think of children's literature like *Winnie-the-Pooh* or *The Jungle Book*. And yes, these two classics were on my bookshelf. However, there were also impressive-sounding titles like the *Parasitology of Pets*, which were not necessarily suitable for bedtime stories, but provided me with another view on animals. Why books like these? Because I was raised by a veterinarian. And that makes one familiar with the less cuddly, more realistic and fascinating aspects of the animal world quickly.

My father took me from an early age along to his appointments. In those many visits together, I learned that to avoid being caught by a charging boar, always run away zig-zag. And that a standard drill is the perfect tool for dental work on horses. I also learned how to relieve a cow that has stuffed itself with too much wet clover of painful gas. No wonder I chose to study veterinary medicine. I graduated as a certified veterinarian in 2004.

My father's second passion – his enthusiasm for sports – had an even greater influence on me. He had been a competitive swimmer. Likewise I was an avid swimmer for a long time. This was my first intensive experience with bodyweight training, and is the basis of this book, *Animal Athletics*.

Today, I am a personal trainer, athletic coach, mobility expert, master trainer, and instructor for bodyART® and other concepts, with an international clientele. With my personal training approach of Integrity Training I accompany individuals, groups and high-performance athletes on their journey to greater fitness and movement sensitivity. In doing so, I help my clients to develop their natural apti-

tude to the best of their ability, and thereby to find a stronger self, both physically and mentally. After all, the most important relationship in our lives is the one with ourselves. If this is intact – if we feel good – then we can reach our personal maximum.

This also means that we regularly do what our body has been made for: exercising. The more regularly we train our inborn skills, the more capable we become. Sports should not be a burden or a force that makes you “work against yourself” – there are already enough constraints in life, and it would be a waste of time to handicap ourselves with another compulsion.

As soon as one has found the *right way*, movement and exercising become an instinct, a natural need.

This is exactly where the circle of the animal world and this very book *Animal Athletics* completes. In the whole world, no wild animal has to rouse itself to move – it simply has to move in order to survive! And it would never do this any other way than the one corresponding to its nature and physical presuppositions. There are no false or dysfunctional moves in the animal world. Pure efficiency prevailing, moves have been practiced for hundreds and thousands of hours on the largest training surface of the earth: in the wild, on land, in the water and in the air. This merciless functionality, born out of sheer need of survival, is the simple and yet successful secret of these born athletes. And us humans – precisely the supposedly “civilized” world – can learn a great deal from that.

At this point, I would like to share a very personal experience. In the course of 30 years operating as a coach and enthusiastic athlete myself, I have learnt

a lot about movement concepts, tried many smart training devices and dealt with a variety of training-scientific theories. Many of them have inspired me, and not only a few gave me valuable impulses for my own work. Some were merely an interesting experience, following the slogan “at least I tried it.”

Today, however, if I have to answer the question to what has provided my highest personal value – also in consideration of the further development of my athletic abilities – then the answer would have to be the training forms that need no equipment. Just ourselves, our body, some physical space and one hundred percent focus on ourselves. Nothing else needed to reach our personal limits and achieve maximum training results. It’s the same as needing just a few tasty, natural ingredients to cook

a delicious meal. Or as needing only few words to express a deep feeling. It is just as everything else in life: the simplest things that bring us back to the origins are the best. This wisdom is well worth remembering in our modern, highly technological, and sometimes very complex world.

The Animal Athletics represent this effective simplicity. They combine animal moves with early-child-moving-patterns and serve as a great tool to explore the playfulness and fun of moving and exercising from a new point of view.

It’s all up to you – now it’s all about realizing your full potential.

... and you will become a beast!

Chapter 1

Natural movement intelligence

or why gorillas and lions don't need a gym

A predator hunting its prey at incredible speed. A gorilla, easily swinging its massive body from branch to branch. A child refusing to give up after numerous failed walking attempts. All these are all examples of animals and children moving intuitively and without instructions. They needn't be told how to do it right, or how much longer until they would reach their goal. In our industrialized world, the adult *Homo sapiens* are lacking this instinctual sense of movement.

Such a pity – but it's easy to explain: for animals and toddlers, constant movement is not just pas-time, but it is necessary for survival. They are highly motivated to be as good as possible in anything; which may be securing food, finding a place to sleep, impressing a mating partner, escaping the enemy, or simply reaching the colorful sparkling object on the table and walking into mom's arms.

In modern industrial nations, adults are deficient of this compelling motivation. Through civilization, we have developed everything fitting to serve our own comfort. We invented increasingly fast means of transportation and developed dense infrastructure of supply. Particularly in large cities, the next supermarket is only a few hundred meters away. Natural enemies – in the narrow sense – do not exist anymore, aside from those fellow species that steal away the last bar of chocolate in the shelves..

In short, there is *no need* for us to move much anymore, and we've gotten used to this. Interestingly, achieving the best possible result requiring the least effort is also part of the evolutionary development. But this merciless efficiency is now directed against us as we are beginning to lose our innate skills. Moving and exercising declines, while temptations in forms of food are everywhere. This lifestyle has a massive impact on our body image and overall constitution. Frankly, this means: We do not only get fat and sluggish, but also endanger our health and lose our innate ability to move.

When the guilty conscience alarm sounds or the first pain settles, we again do what we have learned in industrialized society. We use technical tools instead of really exercising and eat supplements and superfoods. In fitness studios, weights are lifted, you use devices and measure your activities meticulously with modern digital tools that record heart rate, burned calories and oxygen saturation in the blood.

If we re-program this program regularly, we feel good and on the safe side. We can tick it off the to-do list! Sports is done. The duty is fulfilled. In autopilot mode, we do what we need to do. Think about how many people really like to go to the gym and how often you hear phrases such as *I can't pull up to do my workout today!* or *That's it, for today!*

These are sentences that should get you thinking. After all, it is about moving, which should do us good and where we are fully committed.

It is time to stop exercising in autopilot mode.

We should begin to move more consciously, playfully and at the same time focused.

Training plans directly from nature

To regain the playful, joyous relationship to body movement is a very important goal in this book. And we, ourselves, set the best example. We only have to turn back the biological clock by a few years. As toddlers, we were innate move-pros and born as mobility experts. We built up our skills step by step. First we rolled, then we creped, then crawled, then kneaded (our very first squats!) and at some point we took a few wobbly steps, which finally became ever more unerring. We followed an innate “training plan” that no one had created, but which was optimized by our testing, rejecting, re-testing and adapting. Each of these patterns served as the basis for the next step in our development.

And today? In all honesty, when did you last try to roll on the ground, trying to reposition from your belly to the back? This may have been a while ago, and it is not unlikely that you won't be as good as you were as a baby and toddler back then. Not to mention that you might feel a bit childish and perceive this action as not appropriate at your age. But be brave! If you try it, you have already taken the first step in a stressful journey back to the powerful moving resources that slumber inside you.

With the *Animal Athletics*, we take full advantage of this heritage. We roll, creep, crawl, bounce and move our bodies playfully through the different levels by taking different joint positions. This is how we practice highly functional movement patterns,

which are a genius recipe for more exercise competency and less pain. Animals and small children practice them every day. We can learn a great deal from these perfect athletes!

Animal Athletics evoke our capabilities

Animal Athletics are a suitable instrument to recapture the natural movement intelligence that is programmed in our DNA. The different exercises, which are inspired by animal moves and early childhood patterns, are pure bodyweight training. No equipment is required and the workouts can be carried out anytime and anywhere. Within the concept, all dimensions of fitness come into play. The animal exercises train mobility, coordination, strength and endurance. And you will have lots of fun because the animal exercises can be combined in different, creative ways and new sequences. With some skills you will soon be able to put together your own animal training.

Whether you're an amateur sportsman or a functional training fan, or looking for some new inspiration as a professional athlete, or even guiding groups and individuals in training – you will always find valuable suggestions, perhaps even a new passion for yourself. Who benefits from Animal Athletics in which way will be further explained in Chapter 2.

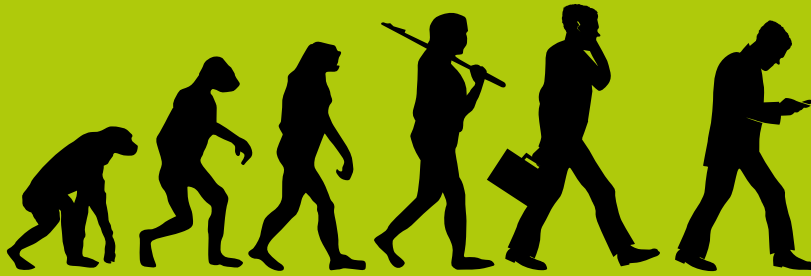
Putting the enjoyable aspects aside – at this point, it should be mentioned that it will also be bestially exhausting. But: the result is really worth it. With *Animal Athletics*, you will gain an athletic body and better functioning physique, as by very nature intended.

Come and be strong with me like a bear. Quick like a cheetah. Agile like a monkey. And lithe like a feline predator.



Genetically so close, yet so far away

The chimpanzee, being our closest relative in the animal kingdom, shares up to 99 % of our genetic makeup. But considering our movement skills nowadays, we are worlds apart from our ancestors!



From the sportive gifted primate to the “Smombie” (smartphone zombie) – with Animal Athletics, we find our way back to the roots!

Chapter 2

The basics

At the beginning, we talked a lot about natural movement patterns and natural movement intelligence, both of which can be found in Animal Athletics.

But what exactly does that mean? Let's look at the way animals train in the wild. You will notice that no single move is repeated in an identical manner. Just imagine a lion. With each hunting move, the lion learns something more about the movement patterns of its prey, as well as about deception maneuvers and escape strategies and how to successfully apply them. It must always be flexible and adapt its behavior in order to optimize tactics. Likewise, we see this adaptability in monkeys who are going from knot to knot and branch to branch. The branches – being high and low, thick and thin, sometimes standing closer together, sometimes further apart – are the monkeys' challenge. Sometimes they have to spring further, then again closer, higher or lower. They cannot rely on ISO standardized altitudes, otherwise the monkeys would fall into the blank. This means that all animals exercise their survival-assuring patterns of movement within an infinite range of variation. Nature creates its own obstacle course, and is doing this very well. The opposite of this is the guided device training in the fitness studios of Homo sapiens.

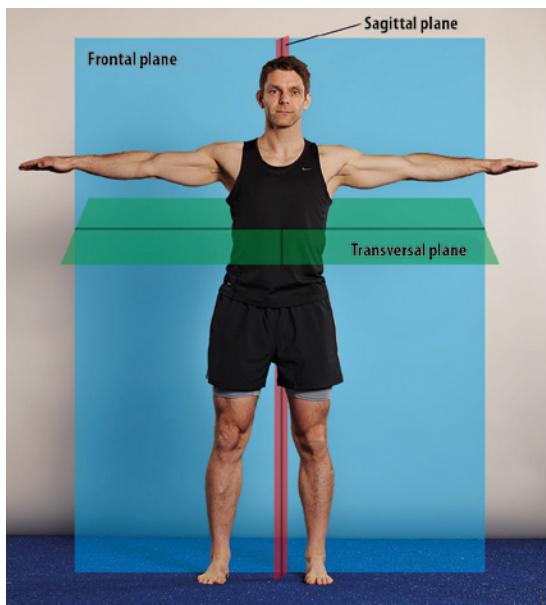
We clamp devices onto ourselves and carry out the same moves exactly day by day, always in the same manner, always using the same radius, completely mechanically. From a stimulatory point of view, this is not only tiring, but also completely

meaningless. What exactly is there that our body could possibly learn from that? Although this way we may build muscle mass, other dimensions such as mobility and coordination are completely left out. We cannot develop a real functional movement competence since only isolated muscles are stimulated and that does not fit the understanding of the natural system use of our body.

Animal Athletics, on the other hand, is a body-weight training based on the model of nature. The Animal exercises are exercised freely (i.e., not guided by devices) and can take place in any kind of space. The repertoire comprises a wide spectrum from simple to complex workouts, from beginners or conditionally and coordinatively advanced athletes. The exercises require full physical involvement, so just a few of the exercises are enough to make you sweat – and even more so when you try performing the exercises as smooth and fluently as possible, which requires a maximum of body-control every single second. In order to understand the three-dimensionality in Animal Athletics training, the following terms are helpful as they describe the movement levels more detailed:

- frontal (movement along the frontal plane from left to right)
- sagittal (movement along the sagittal plane from front to back as well as from top to bottom)

- transversal (movement along the transversal plane around the longitudinal axis)



- supine
- prone
- lateral position
- sitting
- quadruped
- kneeling (one knee / two knees on the ground)
- standing (single / double stand)

As short as this list might seem, as infinite are the variations possible within these basic positions. Additionally, there are the transitions from one position to another. In these very transitions the potential for the development of the movement patterns is revealed. Here, the highest level of body-control is required to smoothly move from one motion to the next. Just think of the example with the rolling move from the back to the prone position, and back again, which we have to learn again with difficulty, although it came to us so naturally and easy as a toddler.

Ground-based movement

Natural movement patterns form the basis of Animal Athletics, and this is not only due to the above-mentioned three-dimensionality. One could also add that we often leave the upright position and return to forms of movement that we have been practicing nonstop as babies and toddlers. Animal Athletics is dedicated to the ground-based movement, including ground-like moves such as crawling, creeping or rolling. We often use all four extremities meaning that both weight distribution and the effect of gravity are very different from an upright standing position and the movement chain is triggered by variable initiators. As opposed to a move starting in the feet while walking, here, it is occasionally triggered by the hands or, for example in the rolling moves, by a turn of the head. By using Animal Athletics, we recapture the entire range of movement competences that have been lost and forgotten in the course of our bipedal adult life. This is done by adopting following positions:

Holistic approach instead of isolated skills

Holistic is a term used very often in the functional training community. Looking around in the animal kingdom, it becomes clear that this is not a fashion phenomenon but the most natural thing in the world. With animals, too, the complex interplay of different abilities is the reason for the advantage over external influences within the survival struggle. Let us take the lion as an example. It needs endurance as well as sprinter qualities in the final stages of hunting its meal. And finally, in order to crack the cervical vertebrae of the prey, it needs strength. In other words, it is the combination of strength, endurance and speed in the final phase that makes the lion the king of the savannah.

However, with regard to gender aspects, it is worth mentioning that it is actually the lioness that deserves this title – as she is usually the food

provider of this species. In this sense, the Animal Athletics aim at the interaction of several abilities as provided by nature. These include mobility and flexibility, strength and stability, coordination, perseverance endurance, speed and a special form of plyometrics.

Back on all fours

We move around as bipeds. This has given us some evolutionary advantages but also some drawbacks. Biologically speaking, the adaptation of our musculoskeletal system to the upright course has not yet been completed. The spinal column as an axis organ of our body completes a twin task: on the one hand, it must carry the entire weight of the torso, on the other hand it must secure mobility in all directions. This is a challenging task.



With numerous exercises in the quadruped, we override this *bipedal dominance* and connect with the ground again through the four extremities. Otherwise always under pressure, the spine benefits from this exercise. When crawling into the Beast – to name just one example – the body weight is distributed on all four limbs, which greatly reduces the load on the cervical vertebrae, thoracic vertebrae and lumbar vertebrae. Additionally, the spine is in its natural, free and relaxed S-shaped position when crawling. All vertebrae are returned to the normal physiological and anatomical structure position, and the pressure on the discs is significantly lower than in the upright position.

Whenever a structure is relieved, another one will be loaded even stronger: the anterior extremities carry a part of our weight in the quadruped and at times even control our entire body weight, for example during the Monkey's exercise in the jumping phase. Thus we strengthen our upper body strength as leg-dominant creatures.

It is worth it taking a closer look at the all-fours position from a strength-building point of view. What happens when we take this position? We position our body parallel with the ground, into the very position where the gravitational force (gravitation) is at its maximum. We have to make a much bigger effort in order to stay in one position because we lay out a larger *target* for the force of gravity. This effect will be amplified if there is movement during the exercise dynamics. Now our body has to work to a large extent in order to keep the mass under control, to speed it up, slow it down, and accelerate again. In these exact transitional zones lies the potential of performance development. Hereby, the eccentric force is trained, which includes the extension of the muscle against the resistance, playing a central role in performance building.

Let's get back to our monkey as an example to focus on another aspect, namely the variable power axis. By placing the hand directly under the shoulder – sometimes in front, on the right or on the left – we always reach new loading angles in a brace position and thus create new training stimuli,