

ANIMALS: BEHAVIOR

Big Picture

Animal behavior includes all the various ways animals interact with each other and their environment.

The root of certain behavioral patterns has sparked a debate over nature versus nurture, where natural behavior is caused by an animal's genome and nurtured behavior is a result of an animal's environment. Both factors, however, play a key role in innate and learned behavioral patterns. Types of behavior for animals include cooperation, communication, aggression, courtship, and parenting.

Key Terms

Ethology: The study of animal behavior.

Stimulus: The trigger for a behavior.

Nature-Nurture Debate: The debate over whether certain behavior is controlled by genes (nature) or is a result of the organism's environment (nurture).

Innate Behavior: Behavioral pattern that is controlled almost exclusively by genes and occur instinctively in animals without practice or instruction.

Reflex: An involuntary and consistent behavioral pattern that is in response to a stimulus.

Learning: A change in behavior that is in response to an experience.

Social Animal: An animal that lives in a society.

Society: A group of animals that live and work together.

Cooperation: When animals live and work together for the benefit of the entire society.

Circadian Rhythm: Cyclic changes in behavior that occur during a 24-hour cycle.

Aggression: Behavior that intends to cause harm or pain on another animal. Aggression could be an action or a threat of action.

Mating: When a male and female of the same species come together to reproduce.

Animal Behavior

Ethology studies animal behavior and tries to determine the **stimulus** or cause for a behavior, as well as the reasons why and the ways the behavior developed.

- Trying to answer these questions resulted in the **nature-nurture debate**.
 - Typically, behavior results from a combination of genetic and environmental factors.
- Behaviors that increase fitness are more likely to become common over time.

Sometimes an organism may behave in a way that endangers itself but helps the survival of its kins (close relatives).

- For example, an animal may alert its kins to a predator nearby by making warning sounds. These sounds will make it easier for the predator to find the animal, but its kins will have a better chance of escaping. This is called kin selection.

Innate Behavior

All members of a species have some **innate behaviors** that occur instinctively. The animal can perform a behavioral pattern the first time it comes across the stimulus.

- Usually involves basic life functions - finding food, caring for offspring.
- In humans, only **reflexes** are innate behaviors
 - Example: a baby will try to grab an object placed in its palm, but the baby does not actually control this reaction

Learned Behavior

- **Learning** causes behavior changes based on experience and is not something the organism is born with
- Humans and some animals are capable of **insight learning**, which is based on past experience and reasoning

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Play (School)

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Insight learning (Chimp)

Animal Behavior Study Guide

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