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READER,

You might just be an animal.

Where do animals draw the line between us and them? We draw our line in the mud at the word “animal.” It is us versus them. Perhaps the animals choose to see you and I, living upon our great earth together. Both have families, friends, lovers. Both value love, loyalty, empathy. Perhaps we are the beasts, choosing to draw a line in the mud while the animals embody humanity, choosing to forgive us for drawing that line in the mud.

The path to understanding is better with a companion. We can see ourselves through our animal counterparts, and with each other, come to a better understanding of one another and ourselves. To walk step in step.

I believe in the planet.

I believe in life.

I believe in love.

When we believe together, we live together.

SPREADING GRATITUDE,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "Kelly Henderson" in a cursive, flowing script. The first name "Kelly" is written with a large, prominent 'K' and 'y'. The last name "Henderson" is written in a similar cursive style, with a large 'H' and 'n'.

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COMMUNICATION KINGS

The discovery that apes can talk using hand gestures may shed more light on language development.

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LEARNING FROM THE CHIMPANZEES

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR DOGS BODY LANGUAGE

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Concerning an issue of such relevance in our culture, where do our animal counterparts stand?

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HUMANS ARE BEASTLY, BEASTS HAVE HUMANITY

A look at how fables allow glances of ourselves as animals, isolating a single aspect of temperament and manners.

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INGRID NEWKIRK

Newkirk speaks to us about her film 'I Am an Animal' and the impact she has had on animals, and animals have had on her.

KELLY HENDRICKSON

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KELLY HENDRICKSON

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Away You Go
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BELIEFS

Approachability
Gratitude
Organic Symmetry
Understanding


klover design

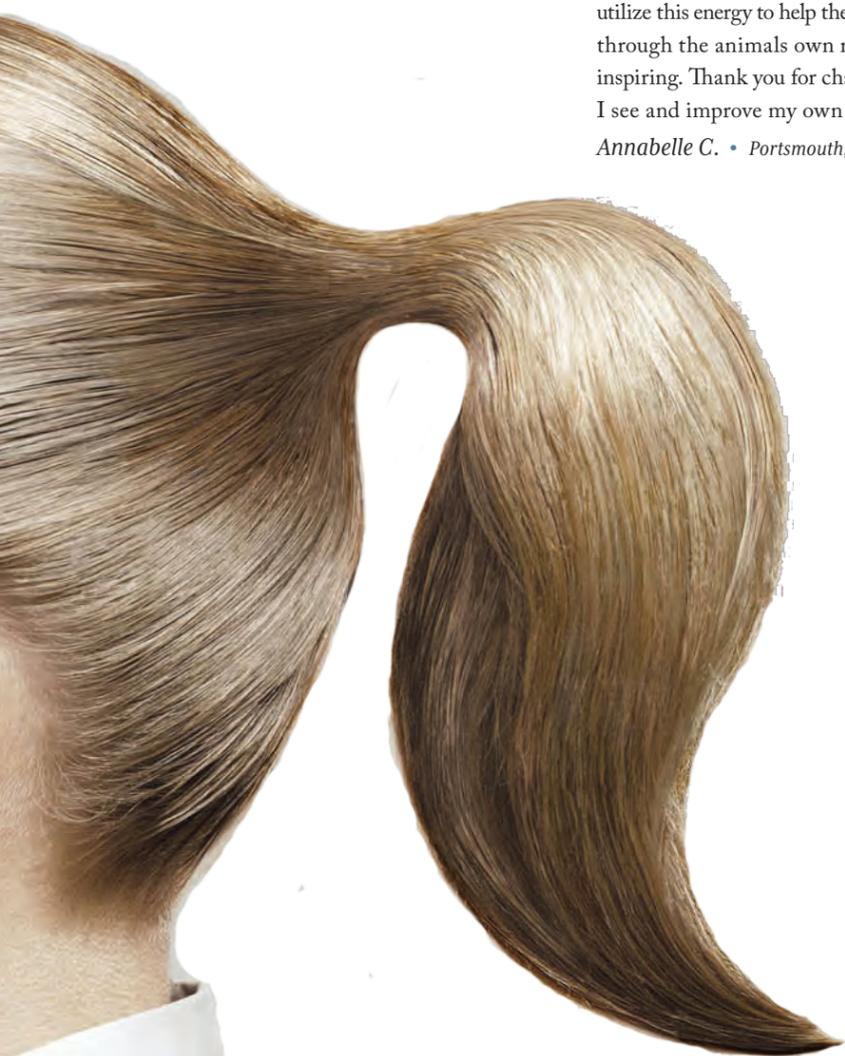

Pony Tales

What a wonderful and interesting article! Interesting to learn that turquoise is the color of communication (and happy that it is my favorite color). And spot on about St. Paul's Cathedral Hill Nursery, and what they are like with their thoughtful manner.

Teresa M. • Savannah, GA

As a trained yoga teacher, I have spent enough time studying energy and practicing meditation to understand the theory that we are all made of energy and, if receptive enough, we can tap into that energy to learn more from each other, even animals. Seeing St. Paul's Cathedral Hill Nursery utilize this energy to help the rescued animals through the animals own requests was inspiring. Thank you for changing the way I see and improve my own community.

Annabelle C. • Portsmouth, ME



Have something to say? Write to us at www.youandi.com and let us and others hear!

VINCENT VITTECOQ

LETTERS to us

Bugs and BP

I really like your take on "responsibility" vs. "blame" in your post, and how all of us becoming more aware of our own actions and how they impact everyone around us, the more change will occur. Guilt and blame are total wastes of time. They just keep us from thinking about solutions to this problem and ways to prevent it. Being aware is the first step. Pay attention to what *you* do every day, then try to live your life closer to what you think is right.

Cameron T. • Boston, MA

Does My Dog Know I'm Blind

This is a very interesting topic for discussion. However Stanley Coren (who believes dogs have better language and math skills than toddlers), is way off base, as usual. Dogs do not have a theory of mind in anything close to the way he describes, and to think that they do violates the laws of evolution and neuroscience.

Leo D. • Los Angeles, CA

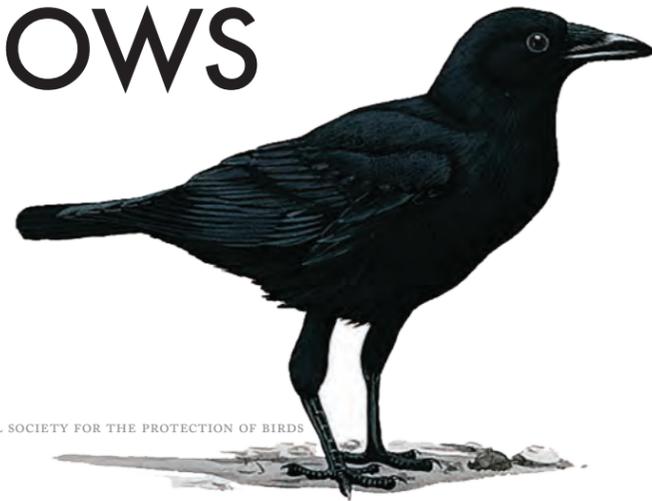
I do not believe my Dog (Pedro) has any concept that I am blind. He does however adapt to my limitations, certainly more so than my fellow man seems to. That said I know for a fact that he is more than prepared to take advantage of the fact that I cannot see, by being an opportunist, but then he is a Labrador Retriever! At the end of the day though it is entirely possible that his behaviours are simply responses with the psychology of a pack where I am the Alpha. Society at large considers me less able than the person next to me, a moot point in my relationship with my Dog

Rudy L. • Salem, NH



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CROWS



ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

SMART ANIMALS

presented by NOVA scienceNOW



WHICH IS “SMARTER”—
a dog, a cat, a bonobo, or an octopus?

Experts on animal cognition tend to bristle at the notion of ranking different species. Each creature, they’ll argue, has brain-processing powers that allow it to thrive in its own ecological niche. Yet the experts we spoke to still had their favorites, and you may have yours.

Members of the crow family are as clever as the great apes. That might seem surprising. But the crows and the apes have similar challenges, or similar problems to solve. They’re both highly social, and living in a complex social world can be challenging because you’ve got to be both competitive and cooperative.

Over the past decade or so my colleagues and I have shown that members of the crow family are capable of remembering the past. They can remember, if you like, what happened where and when. And many psychologists thought that this ability to remember the past, to travel back in the mind’s eye and re-experience things that have happened to me, was uniquely human.

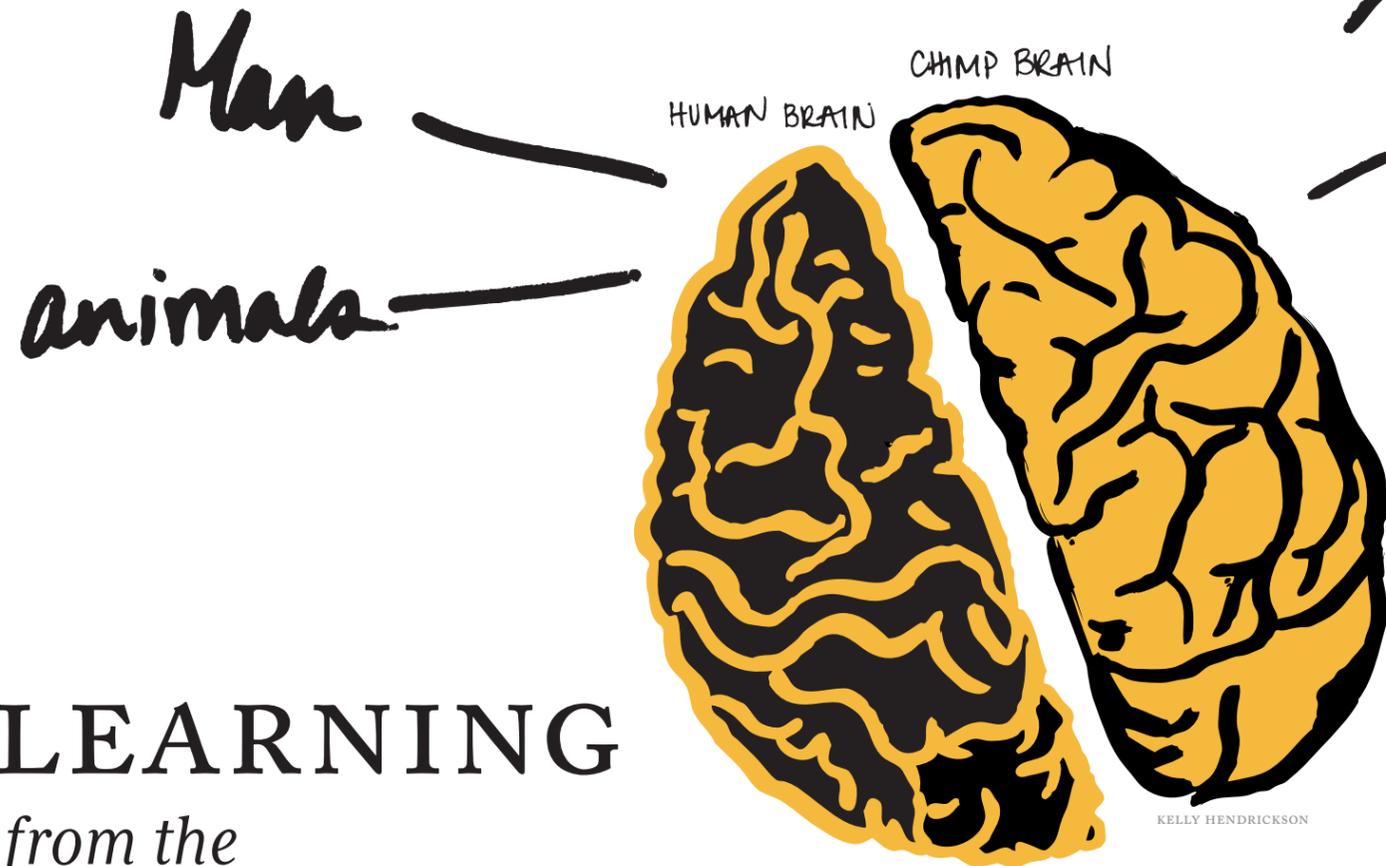
They are also capable of experience projection, of putting themselves in another birds’ shoes, if you like — another skill that was thought to be unique to humans and possibly the great apes. I think that this research shows that the derogatory term “birdbrain” should be reversed, at least for members of the crow family. They’re brainy birds, not birdbrains. 

— NICKY CLAYTON

Nicky Clayton is a professor of comparative cognition in the Department of Experimental Psychology at Cambridge University and a 2010 Fellow of the Royal Society. Her specialty is intelligence of the crow family, which includes crows, jays, and ravens.



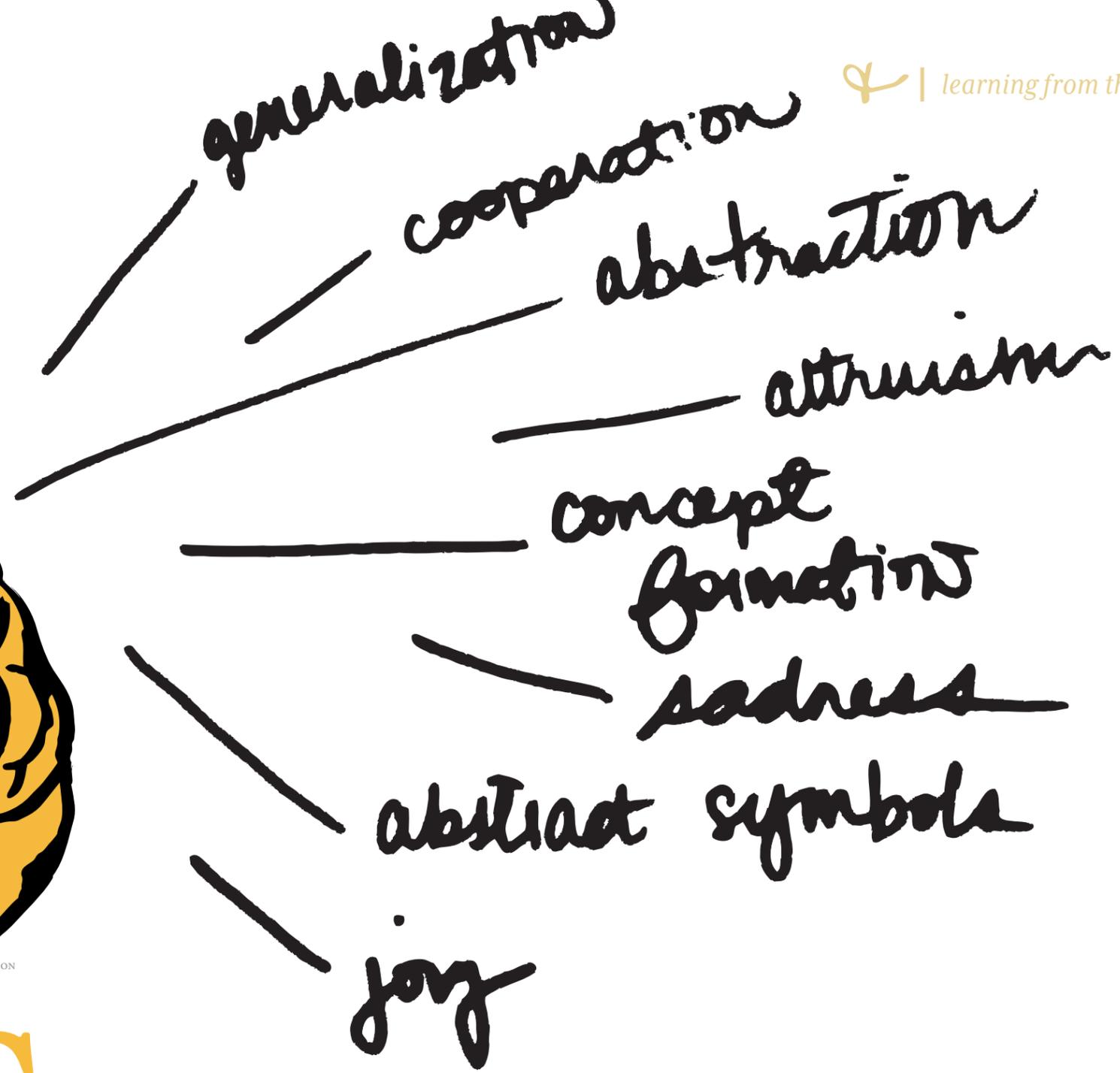
KELLY HENDRICKSON



LEARNING
from the

CHIMPS

Jane Goodall
a message humans can understand



WHEN I BEGAN MY STUDY of wild chimpanzees in 1960 at gombe Stream Research Center it was not permissible, at least not in ethological circles, to talk about an animal's mind. Only humans had minds. Nor was it quite proper to talk about animal personality.

Of course everyone knew that they did have their own unique characters — everyone who had ever owned a dog or other pet was aware of that. But ethologists, striving to make theirs a “hard” science, shied away from the task of trying to explain such things objectively.

~~he~~ ~~she~~ ~~it~~
~~who~~ ~~which~~
~~its~~ ~~which's~~

KELLY HENDRICKSON

One respected ethologist, while acknowledging that there was “variability between individual animals,” wrote that it was best that this fact be “swept under the carpet.”

How naïve I was. As I had not had an undergraduate science education, I did not realize that animals were not supposed to have personalities, or to think, or to feel emotions or pain. I had no idea that it would have been more appropriate—once I got to know him or her — to assign each of the chimpanzees a number rather than a name. I did not realize that it was unscientific to discuss behavior in terms of motivation or purpose. It was not respectable, in scientific circles, to talk about animal personality. That was something reserved for humans. Nor did animals have minds, so they were not capable of rational thought. And to talk about their emotions was to be guilty of the worst kind of anthropomorphism (attributing human characteristics to animals).

The editorial comments on the first paper that I wrote for publication demanded that every “he” or “she” be replaced with “it,” and every “who” be replaced with “which.” Incensed, I, in turn, crossed out the “it’s” and “which’s” and scrawled back the original pronouns. As I had no desire to carve out a niche for myself in the world of science but simply wanted to go on living among and learning about chimpanzees, the possible reaction of the editor of the learned journal did not trouble me. The paper, when finally published, did confer upon the chimpanzees the dignity of their appropriate genders and properly upgraded them from the status of mere “things” to essential beingness.

When I first began to read about human evolution I learned that one of the hallmarks of our own species was that we, and only we, are capable of making tools. I well remember writing to Louis Leakey about my first observations of the chimpanzees of Gombe, describing how David Greybeard not only used bits of straw to fish for termites but how he actually stripped leaves from a stem, and thus made a tool. And I remember, too, receiving the now oft-quoted telegram that Leakey sent in response to my letter: “Now we must redefine tool, redefine Man, or accept chimpanzees as humans.”

*We must redefine the tool, redefine Man, or **ACCEPT** chimpanzees as humans.*

By and large, people were fascinated by this information and by the subsequent observations of other contexts in which the Gombe chimpanzees used objects as tools.

The mid-1960s saw the start of a project that, along with other similar research, was to teach

their minds are uncanningly *like our own*

abstraction, concept formation, and an ability to understand and use abstract symbols. And so, with new incentive, psychologists began to test the mental abilities of chimpanzees in a variety of ways. Again and again the results confirmed that their minds are uncannily like our own.

As in Darwin’s time, it is again fashionable to speak of and study the animal mind. This change came about gradually, and was, at least in part, due to the information collected during careful studies of animal societies in the field. As these observations became widely known, it was impossible to brush aside the complexities of social behavior that were revealed in species after species. A succession of experiments clearly proved that many intellectual abilities that had been thought unique to humans were actually present in nonhumans — particularly in the nonhuman primates and especially in chimpanzees — although in a less highly developed form.

Today, ethological thinking and methodology has softened, and it is generally recognized that the old, parsimonious explanations of complex behavior were inappropriate. The study of animal mentation is fashionable, and the examination of animal emotions is commonplace. This is without doubt due, in large part, to the information that came in from long-term field studies conducted during the 1960s. All of these careful observations, made in the natural habitat, helped to show that the societies and behavior of animals are far more complex than previously supposed by scientists. In light of the new information, overly simplistic explanations were generally abandoned, leading to a changed and expanded understanding of our fellow animals on Earth.

Of all the facts to emerge from my years of research on the chimpanzees at Gombe, it is their humanlike behaviors that most fascinate people: their tool-using and tool-making abilities; the close supportive bonds among family members, which can persist throughout a lifetime of 50 or more years; and their complex social interactions—the cooperation, the altruism, and the expression of emotions like joy and sadness. It is our recognition of these intellectual and emotional similarities between chimpanzees and ourselves that has, more than anything else, blurred the line, once thought so sharp, between human beings and other animals. Through observations of chimpanzees, people’s attitudes toward nonhuman animals has definitely begun to change. In fact, the winds of change are blowing. There is finally, in our society, a growing concern for the plight of nonhuman animals. This changed attitude, among scientists and nonscientists alike, has unquestionably come about because chimps are so like us.



KELLY HENDRICKSON



I looked into his eyes. And it was like
looking into the eyes of a man.
And the message was, 'Won't anybody help me?'

One of the unexpected rewards that I have found as I become increasingly involved in conservation and animal welfare issues, has been meeting so many dedicated, caring, and understanding people. I cannot close this without sharing a story that, for me, has a truly symbolic meaning. The hero in this story is a human being named Rick Swope who visits the Detroit zoo once a year with his family. One day, as he watched the chimpanzees in their big new enclosure, a fight broke out between two adult males. Jojo, who had been at the zoo for years, was challenged by a younger and stronger newcomer, and Jojo lost. In his fear he fled into the moat which was brand new, and Jojo did not understand water. He had gotten over the barrier erected to prevent the chimpanzees from falling in — for they cannot swim — and the group of visitors and staff that happened to be there watched in horror as Jojo began to drown. He went under once, twice, three times. Rick Swope could bear it no longer. He jumped in to try to save the chimp, despite onlookers yelling at him about the danger. He managed to get Jojo's dead weight over his shoulder, and then

crossed the barrier and pushed Jojo onto the bank of the island. Rick held him there — the bank was very steep and if he were to let go Jojo would slide back into the water — even when the other chimps charged toward him, screaming in excitement. Rick held Jojo until he raised his head, took a few staggering steps, and collapsed on more level ground.

The director of the institute called Rick. "That was a brave thing you did. You must have known how dangerous it was. What made you do it?" "Well, I looked into his eyes. And it was like looking into the eyes of a man. And the message was, 'Won't anybody help me?'"

Rick Swope risked his life to save a chimpanzee, a nonhuman being who sent a message that a human could understand. Now it is up to the rest of us to join in too. ♪

understanding your dog's BODY LANGUAGE





RAISED SLIGHTLY

1 Dogs who are happy and comfortable will raise their ears slightly, as though they're saying, "I'm happy, and I'm paying attention. Just tell me what to do." It's the sign of a happy, confident, alert dog.

RAISED HIGH

2 Dogs raise and rotate their ears to locate and identify sounds. When your dog finds something to be particularly excited about, he'll prick his ears high and point them forward in the direction of the sound. This is a sign that he's alert and ready for action.



RELAXED, DOWN + BACK

3 When nothing exciting is going on, which is most of the time, dogs keep their ears in a relaxed position. This is what you'll often see when you're petting your dog or rubbing his head. It means he's not particularly excited, just relaxed and content.



FLAT + BACK

4 When your dog lays his ears flat against his head, you'll know he's afraid and is perfectly willing to back down from whatever is threatening him. Submissive dogs usually put their ears back and flat against the skull when they're faced with an aggressive dog or person.

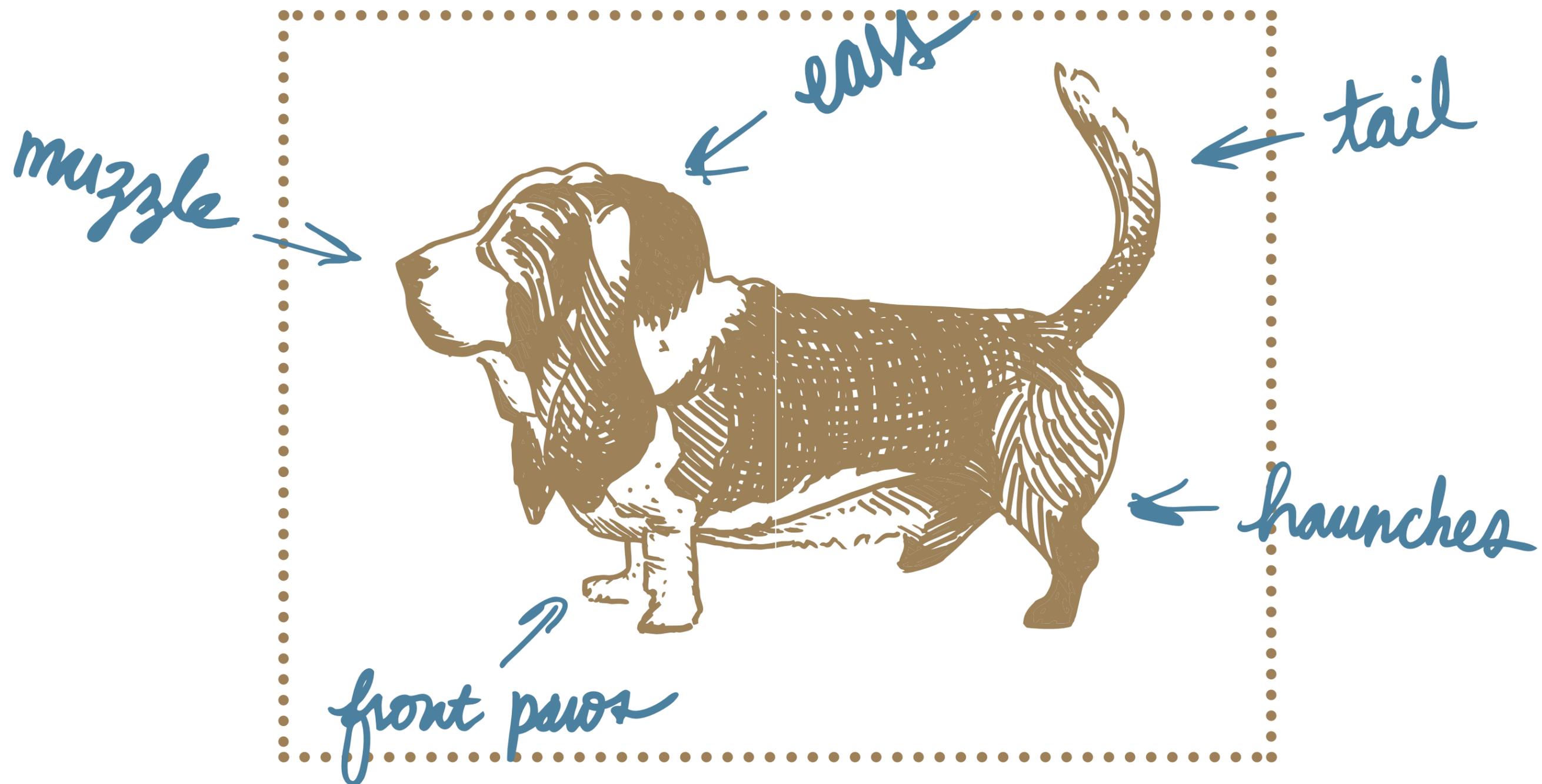


SWEEPING BACK + FORTH

5 As with humans, dogs sometimes have mixed emotions and aren't sure exactly how they feel. This ambivalence is often expressed in the way they move their ears. You might see your dog's ears wavering back and forth when you reprimand him and he doesn't really like what he's hearing.

dogsears

DOGS' EARS COME IN A WIDE ARRAY OF SHAPES AND SIZES, AND they're one of the most expressive parts of the body. You have to look closely to read them correctly, however. Positions that look almost the same can mean entirely different things.



dogs bodies

IT'S CERTAINLY NOT HARD TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR DOG IS telling you when it meets you at the door after you've been out for awhile - the joyful grin and madly wagging tail say it all. Most of us quickly learn our pet's basic repertoire of overt language. But some of the signals dogs give are subtle or confusing.

HOSTILE TAIL WAGGING

1

Wagging tails don't always mean friendliness. The animal's whole posture signifies aggression. Even without growling or showing its teeth, a dog behaving like this has a chip on its shoulder. Remove your dog from the scene quietly.

FRIENDLY TAIL WAGGING

2

A friendly or curious dog's tail will be wagging in wide sweeps, hanging down. Offer this dog the back of your fist to smell, and then you can probably pet it if you wish.

SUBMISSIVE POSTURE

3

Sometimes a dog will lie on its belly with its ears flattened and the fur along its back flat and smooth. A dog that avoids confrontation in this manner usually makes a good city dog.

SIGNS OF FEAR

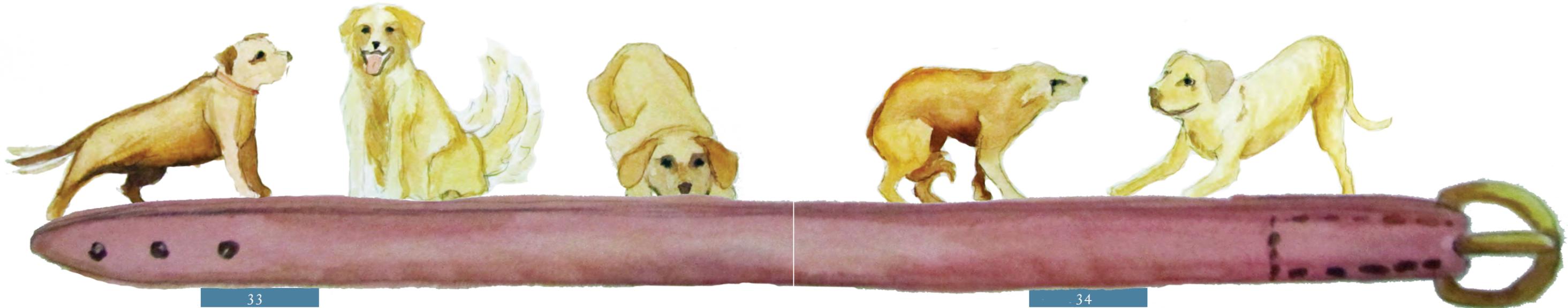
4

The dog may instinctively crouch close to the ground to protect its belly, and it may approach you and your dog in circles. Unless it gets over its fear, relaxes, and shows friendliness or submission, it's best to move away quietly.

PLAY POSITION

5

Let's say your dog suddenly bounces down on its chest and elbows with its ears flattened and its rear end in the air. A dog that merely wants to play may also jump excitedly and bark, grin and wag its tail, run around in circles, and roll



ask yourself...



can animals be
GAY

THE LAYSAN ALBATROSS IS A DOWNY SEABIRD WITH A SEVEN-FOOT WINGSPAN AND A NOTCHED, pale yellow beak. Every November, a small colony of albatrosses assembles at a place called Kaena Point, overlooking the Pacific at the foot of a volcanic range, on the northwestern tip of Oahu, Hawaii. Each bird has spent the past six months in solitude, ranging over open water as far north as Alaska, and has come back to the breeding ground to reunite with its mate. Albatrosses can live to be 60 or 70 years old and typically mate with the same bird every year, for life. Their “divorce rate,” as biologists term it, is among the lowest of any bird.



When I visited Kaena Point in November, the first birds were just returning, and they spent a lot of their time gliding and jackknifing in the wind a few feet overhead or plopped like cushions in the sand. There are about 120 breeding albatrosses in the colony, and gradually, each will arrive and feel out the crowd for the one other particular albatross it has been waiting to have sex with again. At any given moment in the days before Thanksgiving, some birds may be just turning up while others sit there killing time. It feels like an airport baggage-claim area.

Once together, pairs will copulate and collaboratively incubate a single egg for 65 days. They take shifts: one bird has to sit at the nest while the other flaps off to fish and eat for weeks at a time. Couples preen each other's feathers and engage in elaborate mating behaviors and displays. "Like when you're in a couple," Marlene Zuk, a biologist who has visited the colony, explained to me. "All those sickening things that couples do that gross out everyone else but the two people in the couple?... Birds have the same thing." I often saw pairs sitting belly to belly, arching their necks and nuzzling together their heads to form a kind of heart shape. Speaking on Oahu a few years ago as first lady, Laura Bush praised Laysan albatross couples for making lifelong commitments to one another. Lindsay C. Young, a biologist who studies the Kaena Point colony, told me: "They were supposed to be icons of monogamy: one male and one female."

Young has been researching the albatrosses on Oahu since 2003; the colony was the focus of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, which she completed last spring. (She now works on conservation projects as a biologist for hire.) In the course of her doctoral work, Young and a colleague discovered, almost incidentally, that a third of the pairs at Kaena Point actually consisted of two female birds, not one male and one female. Laysan albatrosses are one of countless species in which the two sexes look basically identical. It turned out that many of the female-female pairs, at Kaena Point and at a colony that Young's colleague studied on Kauai, had been together for 4, 8 or even 19 years — as far back as the biologists' data went, in some cases. The female-female pairs had been incubating eggs together, rearing chicks and just generally passing under everybody's nose for what you might call "straight" couples.

LESBIAN is a human term

Young would never use the phrase "straight couples." And she is adamantly against calling the other birds "lesbians" too. For one thing, the same-sex pairs appear to do everything male-female pairs do except have sex, and Young isn't really sure, or comfortable judging, whether that technically qualifies them as lesbians or not. But moreover, the whole question is meaningless to her; it has nothing to do with her research. " 'Lesbian,' " she told me, "is a human term," and Young — a diligent and cautious scientist, just beginning to make a name in her field — is devoted to using the most aseptic language possible and resisting any tinge of anthropomorphism. "The study is about albatross," she told me firmly. "The study is not about humans."

Two years ago, Young decided to write a short paper with two colleagues on the female-female albatross pairs. "We simply reported what we found," she said. "It's definitely a little bit of a tricky subject, and one you want to be gentle on." But the journal that published the paper, *Biology Letters*, sent out a press release a few days after the California Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. The resulting story joined others, including one in this paper, and as the news ricocheted around the Internet, a stampede of online commenters alternately celebrated Young's findings as a clear call for equality or denigrated them as "pure propaganda and selective science at its dumbest" and "an effort to humanize animals or devolve humans to the level of animals or to further an agenda." Many pointed out that animals also rape or eat their young; was America going to tolerate that too, just because it's "natural"?





FEMALE ALBATROSS IS CAPABLE OF LAYING ONE EGG PER YEAR

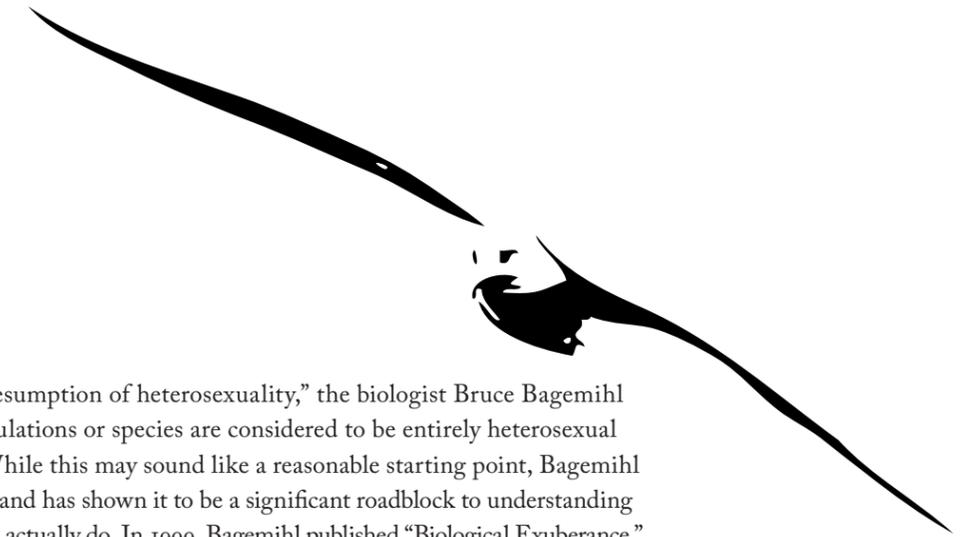
Nevertheless, since as early as 1919, biologists have periodically found nests of albatrosses (and similar species of birds) with two eggs inside them, or with a second egg just outside, as if it had rolled out. (This will inevitably happen; there's simply not enough room in the nest for two eggs and one Laysan albatross.) Scientists have a term for the phenomenon of extra eggs in a nest: a "supernormal clutch." But they never had a real explanation.

In the early 1960s, one ornithologist tried to put the whole cumbersome mystery of two eggs in a nest to rest by asserting that some of those female birds must simply be able to lay multiple eggs. The claim was apparently based on sketchy data, but supernormal clutches were so rare that it was hard to rack up enough observations to disprove the hypothesis. Real progress was finally made in 1968, when Harvey Fisher, a dean of midcentury albatross science, reported on seven years of daily observations made at 3,440 different nests on the Midway atoll in the middle of the Pacific. Fisher concluded that "two eggs in a nest are an indication that two females used the nest, although at different times." As Brenda Zaun recently told me, "It never dawned on anyone to sex the birds."

Zaun, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was studying a Laysan colony on Kauai 40 years after Fisher's publication. She realized that certain nests there seemed to wind up with two eggs in them year after year; the distribution of the supernormal clutches wasn't random, as it would presumably be if it were caused exclusively by egg dumping. On a hunch, Zaun pulled feathers from a sample of the breeding pairs associated with two-egg nests and sent them to Lindsay Young, asking her to draw DNA from the feathers and genetically determine the sexes of those birds in her lab. When the results showed that every bird was female, Young figured she'd messed up. So she did it again — and got the same result. Then she genetically sexed every bird at Kaena Point. "Where it wasn't totally clear, or I worried that maybe I mixed up the sample, I actually went back into the field and took new blood samples to do it again," Young told me. In the end, she genetically sexed the birds in her lab four times, just to be sure. She found that 39 of the 125 nests at Kaena Point since 2004 belonged to female-female pairs, including more than 20 nests in which she'd never noticed a supernormal clutch. It seemed that certain females were somehow finding opportunities to quickly copulate with males but incubating their eggs — and doing everything else an albatross does while at the colony — with other females.

Young gave a talk about these findings at an international meeting of Pacific-seabird researchers. "There was a lot of murmuring in the room," she remembers. "Then, afterward, people were coming up to me and saying: 'We see supernormal clutches all the time. We assumed it was a male and a female.' And I'd say: 'Yeah? Well, you might want to look into that.'" Recently, journals have asked her to confidentially peer-review new papers about other species, describing similar discoveries. "I can't say which species," she explains, "but my guess is, in the next year, we're going to see a lot more examples of this."

It may seem surprising that scientists sometimes don't know the true sexes of the animals they spend their careers studying — that they can be tripped up in some "Tootsie"-like farce for so long. But it's easy to underestimate the pandemonium that they're struggling to interpret in the wild. Often, biologists are forced to assign sexes to animals by watching what they do when they mate.



"There is still an overall presumption of heterosexuality," the biologist Bruce Bagemihl told me. "Individuals, populations or species are considered to be entirely heterosexual until proven otherwise." While this may sound like a reasonable starting point, Bagemihl calls it a "heterosexist bias" and has shown it to be a significant roadblock to understanding the diversity of what animals actually do. In 1999, Bagemihl published "Biological Exuberance," a book that pulled together a colossal amount of previous piecemeal research and showed how biologists' biases had marginalized animal homosexuality for the last 150 years — sometimes innocently enough, sometimes in an eruption of anthropomorphic disgust. Courtship behaviors between two animals of the same sex were persistently described in the literature as "mock" or "pseudo" courtship — or just "practice." Homosexual sex between ostriches was interpreted by one scientist as "a nuisance" that "goes on and on." One man, studying Mazarine Blue butterflies in Morocco in 1987, regretted having to report "the lurid details of declining moral standards and of horrific sexual offenses" which are "all too often packed" into national newspapers. And a bighorn-sheep biologist confessed in his memoir, "I still cringe at the memory of seeing old D-ram mount S-ram repeatedly." To think, he wrote, "of those magnificent beasts as 'queers' — Oh, God!"

"What Bagemihl's book really did," the Canadian primatologist and evolutionary psychologist Paul Vasey says, "is raise people's awareness around the fact that this occurs in quote-unquote nature — in animals. And that it can be studied in a serious, scholarly way." At the heart of evolutionary biology, since Darwin, has been the idea that any genetic traits and behaviors that outfit an animal with an advantage — that help the animal make lots of offspring — will remain in a species, while ones that don't will vanish. In short, evolution gradually optimizes every animal toward a single goal: passing on its genes. The Yale ornithologist Richard Prum told me: "Homosexuality is a tough case, because it appears to violate that central tenet, that all of sexual behavior is about reproduction. The question is, why would anyone invest in sexual behavior that isn't reproductive?" — much less a behavior that looks to be starkly counterproductive. Moreover, if animals carrying the genes associated with it are less likely to reproduce, how has that behavior managed to stick around?

Individuals, populations or species are considered to be entirely heterosexual until proven otherwise.

In the last decade, however, Paul Vasey and others have begun developing new hypotheses based on actual, prolonged observation of different animals, deciphering the ways given homosexual behaviors may have evolved and the evolutionary role they might play within the context of individual species. Different ideas are emerging about how these behaviors could fit within that traditional Darwinian framework, including seeing them as conferring reproductive advantages in roundabout ways. Male dung flies, for example, appear to mount other males to tire them out, knocking them out of competition for available females. Researchers speculate that young male bottlenose dolphins mount one another simply to establish trust and form bonds — but those bonds turn out to be critical to reproduction, since when males mature, they work in groups to cooperatively gain access to females.

These ideas generally aim to explain only particular behaviors in a particular species. So far, the only real conclusion this relatively small body of literature seems to point to, collectively, is a kind of deflating, meta-conclusion: a single explanation of homosexual behavior in animals may not be possible, because thinking of “homosexual behavior in animals” as a single scientific subject might not make much sense. “Biologists want to build these theories to explain everything they see,” Vasey told me. So do journalists, he added — all people, really. “But none of this lends itself to a linear story. My take on it is that homosexual behavior is not a uniform phenomenon. Having one unifying theory that explains why it’s happening in all these different species might be a chimera.”



blurred, imperfect
copies of
HUMANS

The point of heterosexual sex, Vasey said, no matter what kind of animal is doing it, is primarily reproduction. But that shouldn’t trick us into thinking that homosexual behavior has some equivalent, organizing purpose — that the two are tidy opposites. “All this homosexual behavior isn’t tied together by that sort of primary function,” Vasey said. Even what the same-sex animals are doing varies tremendously from species to species. But we’re quick to conceive of that great range of activities in the way it most handily tracks to our anthropomorphic point of view: put crassly, all those different animals just seem to be doing gay sex stuff with one another. As the biologist Marlene Zuk explains, we are hard-wired to read all animal behavior as “some version of the way people do things” and animals as “blurred, imperfect copies of humans.”

When I visited Zuk at her lab at the University of California at Riverside last December, an online video clip of an octopus carrying a coconut shell around the seafloor, and periodically hiding under it, was starting to go viral. For a few days, people everywhere were flipping out about how intelligent and wily this octopus was. Not Zuk, though. “Oh, spare me,” she said. To us, Zuk explained, that octopus’s behavior reads as proof that “octopuses are at one with humans” because it just happens to look like something we do — how a toddler plays peekaboo under a blanket, say, or a bandit ducks into an alleyway dumpster to avoid the cops. But the octopus doesn’t know that. Nor is it doing something so uncommon in the animal world. Zuk explained that caddis-fly larvae collect rocks and loom them together into intricate shelters. “But for some reason we don’t think that’s cool,” she said, “because the caddis-fly larvae don’t have big eyes like us.”

Something similar may be happening with what we perceive to be homosexual sex in an array of animal species: we may be grouping together a big grab bag of behaviors based on only a superficial similarity. Within the logic of each species, or group of species, many of these behaviors appear to have their own causes and consequences — their own evolutionary meanings, so to speak. The Stanford biologist Joan Roughgarden told me to think of all these animals as “multitasking” with their private parts.

It’s also possible that some homosexual behaviors don’t provide a conventional evolutionary advantage; but neither do they upend everything we know about biology. For the last 15 years, for example, Paul Vasey has been studying Japanese macaques, a species of two- and-a-half-foot-tall, pink-faced monkey. He has looked almost exclusively at why female macaques mount one another during the mating season. Vasey now says he is on to the answer: “It isn’t functional,” he told me; the behavior has no discernible purpose, adaptationally speaking. Instead, it’s a byproduct of a behavior that does, and the supposedly streamlining force of evolution just never flushed that byproduct from the gene pool. Female macaques regularly mount males too, Vasey explained, probably to focus their attention and reinforce their bond as mates. The females are physically capable of mounting any gender of macaque. They’ve just never developed an instinct to limit themselves to one. “Evolution doesn’t create perfect adaptations,” Vasey said. As Zuk put it, “There’s a lot of slop in the system — which,” she was sure to add, “is not the same as saying homosexuality is a mistake.”

MANY PEOPLE ASSUMED YOUNG WAS A LESBIAN.

She is not.

she was being mistaken for a bad scientist

THESE PEOPLE SEEMED TO PRESUME THAT HER RESEARCH WAS COMPROMISED BY A PERSONAL AGENDA.

About two dozen birds were knocking around when Lindsay Young and I arrived at Kaena Point one afternoon. Young dished about a few of them — “Her mate didn’t show up last year”; “God, this one’s annoying” — as they waddled by. Laysan albatrosses are not nearly as graceful on land as they are in the air; even they seem surprised by the size of their feet. (Later that week, at a nearby resort, I would recognize their gait while watching an out-of-shape snorkeler toddle back to his beach towel in rented flippers.) “I’m just writing down who’s here,” Young said, reading the numbers on the birds’ leg bands and marking them on her clipboard. After trying and failing to get a clear view of one bird’s leg with binoculars, she finally just walked over and leaned over to look.

This is the luxury of studying Laysan albatrosses. Having evolved with no natural predators, the birds have no fight-or-flight instinct — you can basically go right up to one and grab it. In fact, Young did just this a short while later, slinking up to a male on all fours, sweeping it in by its flank and, in one expert motion, straightjacketing the wings under one arm and clamping the beak shut in her other hand. Then, she walked over and handed the thing to me; she needed to take an expensive tracking device off the bird’s ankle. “Sorry, but it’s like watching a thousand-dollar bill fly around,” she said. She took some pliers from her backpack to twist off the anklet and, as I stood bear-hugging the albatross, she added: “They have a nice smell. It’s a little musty.”

Young and Marlene Zuk are now applying for a 10-year National Science Foundation grant to continue studying the female albatross pairs. One of the first questions they want to answer is how these birds are winding up with fertilized eggs. Typically, albatrosses fend off birds who aren’t their mates. So Young has been trying to determine if males who arrive back at the colony before their own partners do are forcing themselves on these females or whether these females are somehow “soliciting” the males for sex. She was staking out Kaena Point on a daily basis, trying to watch these illicit copulations unfold for herself. This was Young’s third year; so far, she’d only managed to see it happen twice.

Young and I ambled around for half an hour, maybe more. She pointed and, in a monotone, said, “So, that’s a female-female pair.” We crouched and watched the two birds, numbers 169 and 983. After a while, Young and I got up.

Homosexual activity is often observed in animal populations with a shortage of one sex — most frequently at zoos. Still, pairing off with another female creates its own

problems: nearly every female lays an egg in November whether she has managed to get it fertilized or not, and the small, craterlike nests that albatross pairs build in the dirt can accommodate only one egg and one bird. So Young was also trying to figure out how a female-female pair decides which of its two eggs to incubate and which to chuck out of the nest — if the birds are deciding at all, and not just knocking one egg out accidentally. From a strict Darwinian perspective, Young told me, “it doesn’t pay for one bird to incubate the other’s egg unless her partner is going to let her egg be incubated the following year.” But presumably, neither female bird knows whether an egg is hers or the other bird’s, much less whether it’s fertilized or not. A Laysan albatross knows to sit on whatever’s under it. “They’ll incubate anything — I have a photo of one incubating a volleyball,” Young said.

And these were only preambles to more questions. Ultimately, either the rules of albatrossdom were breaking down and the lesbian couples were booting up some alternate suite of behaviors, governed by its own set of rules, or else science had never understood the rules of albatrossdom to begin with. It’s the complexity and apparent flexibility of the species that fascinates

Young — the puzzle those female-female pairs create at Kaena Point just by existing. She’s not trying to explain homosexual behavior. She’s trying to explain the albatross.

Many people assumed Young was a lesbian. She is not. Young’s husband, a biological consultant, was actually an author of the paper, along with Brenda Zaun (who is also not gay, for what it’s worth). Young found the assumption offensive — not because she was being mistaken for gay, but because she was being mistaken for a bad scientist; these people seemed to presume that her research was compromised by a personal agenda. Several people I spoke to told me their own sexual identities actually helped spur or maintain their interest in the topic; Bruce Bagemihl argued that gay and lesbian people are “often better equipped to detect bias when investigating the subject simply because we encounter it in our everyday lives.” Vasey told me, “People automatically assume I’m gay.” He is gay, but that fact didn’t seem to detract from his amusement.



In retrospect, the big, sloshing stew of anthropomorphic analyses that Young’s paper provoked in the culture couldn’t have been less surprising. For whatever reason, we’re prone to seeing animals — especially animals that appear to be gay — as reflections, models and foils of ourselves; we’re extraordinarily, and sometimes irrationally, invested in them.

What animals do — what’s perceived to be “natural” — seems to carry a strange moral potency: it’s out there, irrefutably, as either a validation or a denunciation of our own behavior, depending on how you happen to feel about homosexuality and about nature. During the Victorian era, observations of same-sex behavior in swans and insects were held up as evidence against the morality of homosexuality in humans, since at the dawn of industrialism and Darwinism, people were invested in seeing themselves as more civilized than the “lower animals.” Robert Mugabe and the Nazis have employed the same reasoning, as did the 1970s anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant, who, Bruce Bagemihl notes, claimed in an interview that “even barnyard animals don’t do what homosexuals do” and was unmoved when the interviewer pointed out what actually happens in barnyards. On the other hand, an Australian drag queen known as Dr. Gertrude Glossip has used Bagemihl’s book to create a celebratory, interpretive gay animal tour of the Adelaide zoo, marketed to gay and lesbian tourists. The book has also been cited in a brief filed for the 2003 Supreme Court case that overturned a Texas state ban on sodomy and, similarly, in a legislative debate on the floor of the British Parliament.

James Esseks, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Project at the American Civil Liberties Union, told me he has never incorporated facts about animal behavior into a legal argument about the rights of human beings. It’s totally beside the point, he said; people should not be discriminated against regardless of what animals do. (In her book, “Sexual Selections,” Marlene Zuk writes, “People need to be able to make decisions about their lives without worrying about keeping up with the bonobos.”) That being said, Esseks told me, polls show that Americans are more likely to discriminate against gays and lesbians if they think homosexuality is “a choice.” “It shouldn’t be the basis of a moral judgment,” he said. But sometimes it is, and gay animals are compelling evidence that being gay isn’t a choice at all. In fact, Esseks remembers reading a brief mention of animal homosexual behavior during an anthropology class in college in the mid-’80s. “And as a closeted guy, it made a difference to me,” he told me. He remembers thinking: “Oh, hey, this is quote-unquote natural. This is normal. This is part of the normal spectrum of humanity — or life.”

for whatever reason,

WE’RE PRONE TO SEEING ANIMALS AS

*reflections,
models and foils*

OF OURSELVES

Those wanting to discriminate against gays and lesbians may have roped the rest of us into an argument over what’s “natural” just by asserting for so long that homosexuality is not. But affixing any importance to the question of whether something is natural or unnatural is a red herring; it’s impossible to pin down what those words mean even in a purely scientific context. (Zuk notes that animals don’t drive cars or watch movies, and no one calls those activities “unnatural.”) In the end, there’s just no coherent debate there to have. Animal research demonstrating the supposed “naturalness” of homosexuality has typically been embraced by gay rights activists and has put their opponents on the defensive. At the same time, research interpreted — or, maybe more often, misinterpreted — to be close to pinpointing that naturalness in a specific “gay gene” can make people on both sides anxious in a totally different way.

Still, many people who contacted Featherstone were actually grateful — for the same, baseless prospect. Some confessed struggling with feelings for members of the same sex and explained to him, very disarmingly, the anguish they’d been living with and the hope his fruit-fly study finally offered them. There were poignant phone calls from parents, concerned about their gay children. “I felt bad in a way,” Featherstone told me. It was hard not to be moved, and he would try to explain the implications of his research, or lack thereof, politely. “But there’s also this liberal, modern side of me that’s like: ‘Take it easy, lady. Let your son be your son.’”

Not long ago, more than two years after the publication of the fruit-fly paper, a woman wrote to Featherstone about her college-aged daughter. The daughter couldn’t shake an attraction to other girls but honestly felt she’d never be able to bring herself to accept it either. She was now contemplating suicide. “She feels that she is losing herself,” the mother wrote, “that sweet, innocent light that is within her.” Like many who reached out to Featherstone, the woman and her daughter seemed to take for granted that homosexuality was inborn — natural. Otherwise, the situation wouldn’t feel so tortuously unfair. The mother begged Featherstone to rethink his unwillingness to turn his fruit-fly research into a treatment. “We all deserve a choice,” she wrote.





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get dirty.

EAT 5 SERVINGS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, STAY SWEET

We're for the dogs.



Some people are for the whales. Some are for the trees. We're for the dogs.

The big ones and the little ones. The guardians and the comedians. The pure breeds and the mutts. We're for walks, runs, and romps. Digging, scratching, sniffing, and fetching. We're for dog parks, dog doors, and dog days. If there were an international holiday for dogs on which all dogs were universally recognized for their contribution to the quality of life on earth, we'd be for that too. Because we're for dogs. And we've spent the last 60 years working to make them as happy as they've made us.

Dogs rule.





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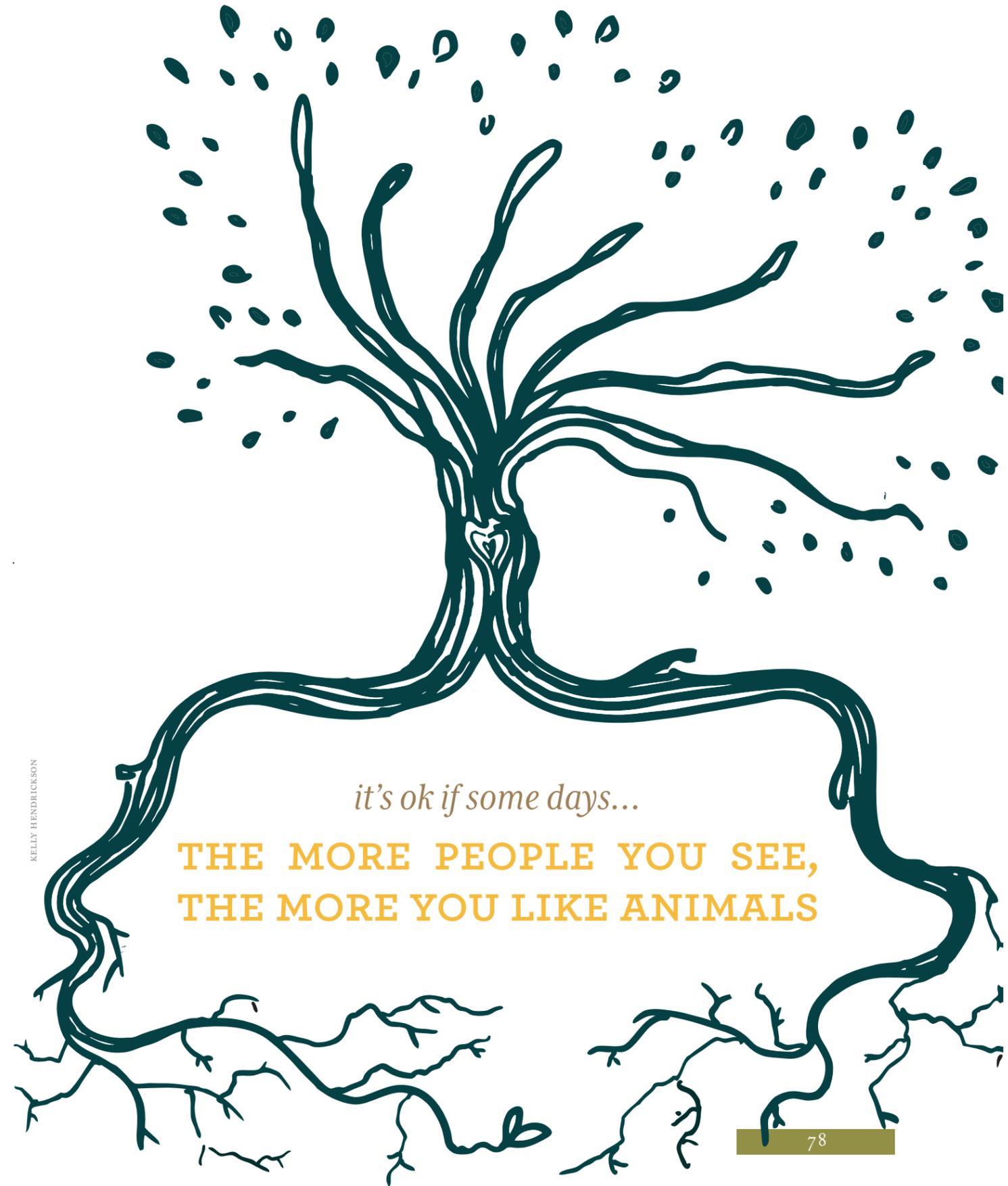
Can Animals Be Gay?

More than 4,000 miles across the Pacific, at a place called Taiaroa Head in southeastern New Zealand, two female Royal albatrosses (a related species) were building their nest. Later that winter, those two birds would become one of only a few known female-female pairs to successfully fledge a chick

at Taiaroa Head in more than 60 years of continuous observation of the colony. (Two years before, the same two birds had engaged in a threesome, presiding over a single nest with the help of one male — just another “alternative mating strategy” albatrosses sometimes engage in.)

The tourism board of Dunedin, a gay-friendly region of New Zealand, held a publicity-grabbing contest to name the “lesbian albatross” couple’s chick. For months, as the paired females incubated their egg, a press officer at Tourism Dunedin issued releases, and news organizations around the world, from England to India, ran with the story. The P.R. woman also tried to interest me in a story about a flightless kakapo bird in the region named Sirocco who’d recently made a memorable appearance on the BBC — “He actually started to shag the presenter, Mark Carwardine!” she wrote to me — and “has avid followers on Facebook and Twitter!”

A biologist working with the albatrosses at Taiaroa Head, Lyndon Perriman, seemed to bristle at the idea of naming any albatrosses — “They are wild birds,” he wrote to me in an e-mail message. He noted that the female-female pair made for an inconvenient tourist attraction because their nest was not visible from any of the public viewing areas. It seemed fitting: people’s ideas about the couple were riveting enough; it wasn’t necessary to see the actual birds. The chick hatched on Feb. 1. Tourism Dunedin named it Lola. The shortlist also included Rainbow, Lady Gagabatross and Ellen. ♡







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