

Book Review

THE QUESTION OF ANIMAL CULTURE. Editors: Kevin N. Laland and Bennett G. Galef. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 2009. ISBN 9780-674-03126-5, 351 pp.

It has been 10 years since the publication of the first articles on culture in cetaceans (e.g., Rendell & Whitehead, 2001), and the question of whether there is (or is not) culture in animals continues to spur much controversy and discussion. A strong addition to the dialogue is this recently published volume. Kevin Laland and Bennett Galef have gathered prominent scientists to summarize views along the continuum, from the strongest advocates of animal culture to the strongest skeptics. The result is essential reading for anyone interested in this topic, and it provides insight into our own culture.

The book is structured into 13 chapters prefaced by a brief history of the debate on animal culture. Primate culture is this volume's primary focus, though there are two contributions regarding marine mammals—one by Hal Whitehead, and the other by Brooke Sergeant and Janet Mann. Both cetacean chapters are found in the "middle of the road" for the range of opinions voiced in this compendium. Whitehead's contribution reveals his interest in how much social learning determines variation in a behavioral pattern, such as vocal traditions in sperm and humpback whales, and he devotes a large section to statistical methods. Sergeant and Mann discuss dolphin foraging behaviors observed in their study population of bottlenose dolphins in Shark Bay, Australia, and argue their case that some of those behaviors may be considered cultural traditions.

There has been a recent cry to protect cultural, as well as genetic, diversity, particularly for cetaceans. Whitehead (2010) concluded that social learning and culture should sometimes be considered when delineating population units for conservation and management. A number of scientists noted, around the time of the 2010 meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Morocco, that the evidence is high and mounting that a number of cetacean species are second only to humans in mental, social, and behavioral complexity, and that whale harvesting should be ended on that basis. Even at the February 2010 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement

of Science (AAAS), scientists concluded that new data on cognition and culture among whales should be the guideline for international wildlife policy.

I highly recommend this well-written (and well-edited) compilation regarding the existence of animal culture. My own personal opinions on the topic of social learning aside, I found the issues and topics throughout the book to be discussed and argued convincingly. This book will be an interesting read for a wide audience.

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Literature Cited

- Rendell, L., & Whitehead, H. (2001). Culture in whales and dolphins. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 24, 309-382.
- Whitehead, H. (2010). Conserving and managing animals that learn socially and share cultures. *Learning & Behavior*, 38, 329-336.