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Rupert Sheldrake
on Unexplained
Animal Powers

Human–Animal
Communication

Animals in the
Séance Room

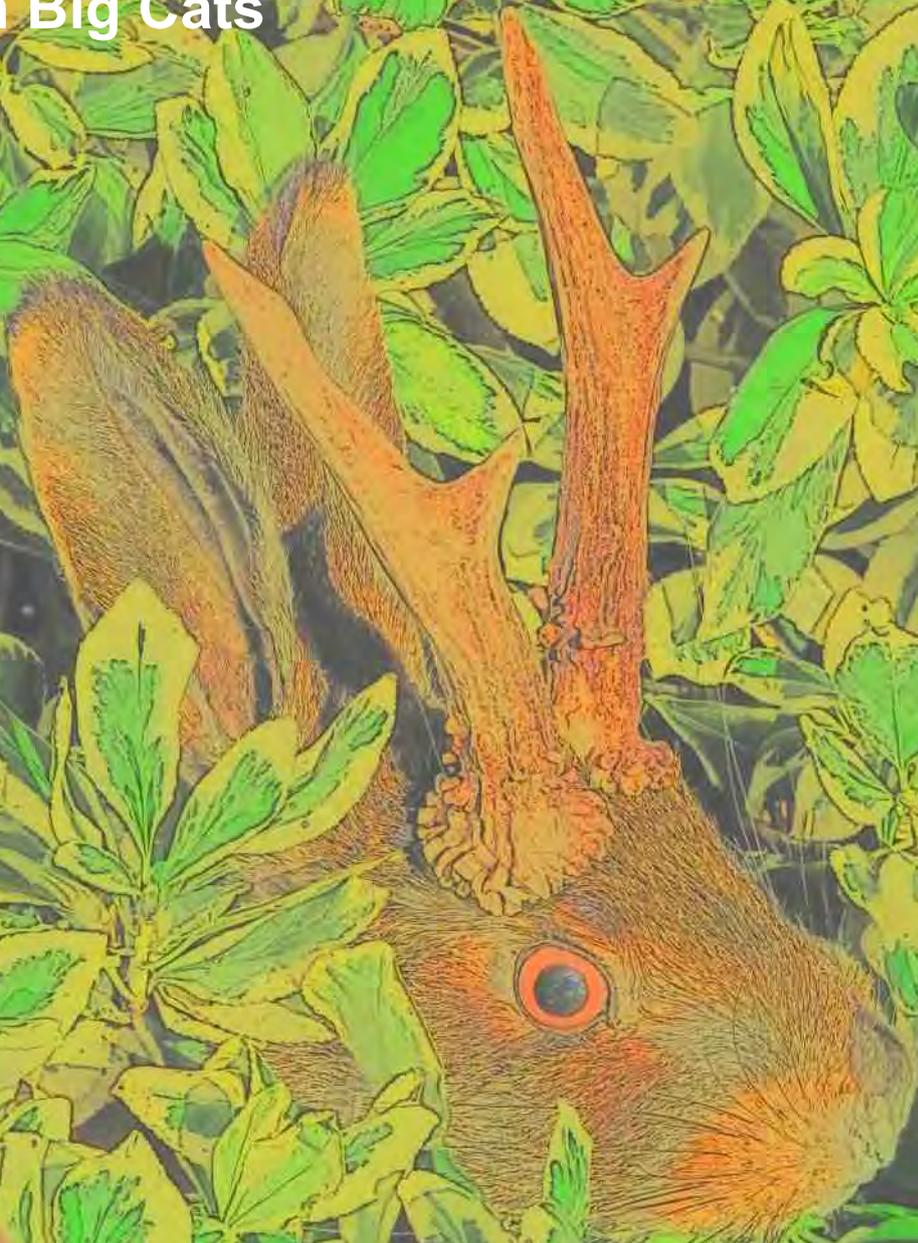
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Human–Animal Communication Research

DEBORAH ERICKSON



There are several examples in the non-human animal world of selected individuals possessing advanced skills to communicate verbally with humans. Alex the grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) exhibited cognitive capacities comparable to marine animals, such as bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), Bonobo apes (*Pan Paniscus*), and sometimes four to six-year-old children. 'Of particular interest is that his [Alex's] abilities are inferred not from operant tasks common in animal research, but from vocal responses to vocal questions; that is, he demonstrates intriguing communicative parallels with young humans, despite his phylogenetic distance.' [1] Without training and on his own initiative, Alex also appeared to transfer his ability to use 'none' to comment on the absence of an attribute (different/same or smaller/bigger) to the absence of a specific quantity, as in zero.

The bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) is known for a high level of language competency. Herman's study proposed that the dolphin's cognitive structures for the interpretation and manipulation of auditory information are highly developed. The study included an exploration of the dolphin's specializations in auditory information processing, language comprehension, sentence understanding (relational sentences, structurally novel sentences, co-joined sentences), and generalization and representation of meaning. 'Overall, the positive findings on the ability to process and manipulate auditory materials complexly is in keeping with the expectations based on the extensive auditory and sound

production specializations of the dolphin, and concomitant developments in auditory cortex.' [2]

For over 120 years a small group of scientists has been investigating telepathy, often obtaining significant results. In 1985, a meta-analysis covering twenty-eight parapsychological studies showed a hit rate of 37 per cent. A leading member of the Committee for Scientific Inquiry performed a meta-analysis of the same data and also found that the odds against chance were extremely high. [3] Quantum physics research of the last twenty years has discovered that physical objects are not as separate as we once thought they were. At the quantum particle level, all separateness disappears and everything is connected. Schrödinger and Born described this process as entanglement. [4] However, Einstein more descriptively called it 'spukhafte Fernwirkung' or 'spooky action at a distance'. [5] He believed that quantum entanglement would someday be seen as a mathematical error in calculation.

Instead, scientists continue to be baffled by repeated discoveries at the subatomic level that simply do not subscribe to the previously-known laws of physics. 'Reality is woven from strange, "holistic" threads that aren't located precisely in space or time. Tug on a dangling loose end from this fabric of reality, and the whole cloth twitches, instantly, throughout all space and time.' [6]

Animal telepathy was first written about by William J. Long, who was a minister and well-known naturalist of the early twentieth century. He accepted animal telepathy

as 'a natural gift or faculty of the animal mind, which is largely unconscious, and it is from the animal mind that we inherit it [...] that the animals inherit this power of silent communication over great distances is occasionally manifest even among our half-natural domestic creatures.' [7]

A small group of scientists conducted psi research with kittens (*Felis catus*) beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the focused period of experimental parapsychology research in the 1960s and 1970s. Exploratory trial results showed above-chance scoring, but only for some of the kittens; one of the best-scoring kittens had a close relationship to Osiris and his family. Another series of trials using an independent experimenter showed no positive deviation from chance, and the electric shock trials showed a significant psi-missing effect – in other words, obtaining scores significantly below chance levels. [8]

Long's writings were the inspiration for animal telepathy studies by Sheldrake. [9] Several thousand people wrote to Sheldrake reporting the remarkable telepathic behavior of their pets, particularly dogs, that seemed to know when their owners were coming home. A detailed study completed with a domestic dog named Jaytee and his guardian showed positive results of the animal's behaviour prior to the guardian arriving home. [10]

Wiseman, Smith and Milton disputed Sheldrake's results with a supposedly similar study with the same animal, guardian and methods. [11] However, Sheldrake criticized the Wiseman study, citing a flawed use of criterion and data

plotting.[12] Wiseman, Smith and Milton countered with a defence of their version of the study. However, in a later interview Wiseman admitted, 'It depends how the data is collected, so I don't think there's any debate, but the patterning in my studies are the same as the patterning in Rupert's studies. That's not up for grabs. That's fine. It's how it's interpreted.' [13] Clearly, controversy surrounding parapsychology research is never far behind a published study that supports a psi hypothesis.

In a later study, Sheldrake and Smart tested another return-anticipating Rhodesian Ridgeback dog named Kane. In nine out of ten videotaped trials, Kane spent most of his time looking out of a front window when his owner was on her way home. He anticipated his guardian's arrival more than ten minutes in advance, even if she returned in an unfamiliar vehicle, taxi, when the people at home did not expect her, or when she set off for home at randomly-selected times. Sheldrake explained, 'If the possibility of telepathy is admitted, then the simplest explanation is that the dogs are responding to their owners directly. The problem with this suggestion is that some people reject the very possibility of telepathy on theoretical grounds. And even among those who regard the existence of telepathy as a question to be answered empirically rather than theoretically, no one knows how it might work.' [14]

One of the most unusual communications received by Sheldrake was one written by Aimee Morgana, guardian of a (then) ten-year-old African grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) named N'kisi. N'kisi was reported to respond to Morgana's thoughts and intentions in a direct manner that appeared to be telepathic in nature. Morgana reported that

N'kisi had awakened her by commenting on the actions in her dreams.[15]

More recently, Dutton and Williams published an exhaustive meta-analysis review of animal psi research that explored two main threads.[16] The first was experimental research that has been generally conducted within a classical conditioning paradigm: animals can be trained to respond to a stimulus and a baseline response is measured that 'has tended to explain animal psi as an evolutionarily adaptive process of information transmission'. The second is animal fieldwork, which recognizes the importance of the human-animal relationship for the occurrence of psi. They argued that 'the evidence suggests that animal psi may function as an expression of relationship or "resonance" between individuals.' Taken as a whole, the authors concluded that animal psi research evidence reveals a small psi effect that is not easily replicable, subject to fluctuations, decline effects, and an unclear source. Like humans, animals appear to vary in terms of possible psi ability, and the research indicates the central importance of the experimenter-participant relationship. However, from a conventional research perspective, the relationship between the experimenter and animal participant is considered to be a potentially confounding factor.

In other recent research, Erickson conducted fifty telepathic animal communication sessions with human guardians and their canines.[17] The guardian/canine teams were in thirty-six different cities from Erickson and the guardian was on the telephone for the session, which was recorded. Five standard questions were asked of all dogs, then the session was opened to the guardian's questions, which were

not known by Erickson in advance of the session. After the session, the guardians received a link to the recording and a web survey form that included all of the questions asked and all of the answers received from canine, then independently ranked the accuracy of the information telepathically received during the session. Using a ranking scale of 1 (entirely inaccurate) to 6 (entirely accurate), the guardians' average accuracy ranking across all fifty sessions was 5.12.

A follow-up research project with a similar design was conducted with therapy horses (*Equus caballus*) who worked with PTSD-diagnosed military veterans. The veterans submitted their questions ahead of the session and received a written report of the communication session with their horse. The veterans' average ranking of the usefulness of the information received telepathically from the horses was 4.9; the horses' guardians' average ranking was 5.75.[18] Clearly, telepathic interspecies communication as explored by Long and more recently by Sheldrake and Erickson is appropriate for continued structured research.

Animals can keep people connected to their feelings, without which there is no real meaning in life. When people remain connected to their emotions, they will not lose their way in the mental abstractions and technological innovations that attempt to consume the focus of their lives. Still deeply connected to nature and their natural place in the universe, animals have a great deal to teach people. 'The animals have lifted a veil and made a connection with us in that place where we are all one. The animals are calling us to council.' [19] Ψ

NOTES

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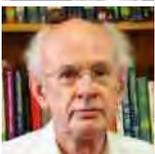
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