



PhotoCredit: Brakefield, Tom

LOVE AND EMOTIONS IN ANIMALS

BY XARENI PACHECO EHRHARDT

*Emotions are the gifts of our ancestors.
We have them and so do other animals. We must never forget this.
—Marc Bekoff, The Emotional Lives of Animals*

Love in animals is a fascinating and heartwarming aspect of their behaviour. Just like humans, animals experience deep emotional connections and exhibit affectionate behaviours towards their mates, offspring, and other members of their social groups. Parental love is widespread in the animal kingdom, exemplified by the strong attachment between a mother and her offspring. Many animals, like elephants, wolves, and cows, demonstrate immense care and protection towards their offspring. They invest significant time and energy into nurturing and teaching their young, ensuring their survival and well-being. Love also extends beyond individual relationships, as animals exhibit social bonds within their groups. These connections are built on trust, cooperation, and mutual support, reflecting a profound sense of love and camaraderie.

Scientific research has uncovered remarkable insights into the emotional lives of animals. Through studies in evolutionary biology, cognitive ethology, and social neuroscience reveal that a wide range of creatures experience profound and complex emotions. These emotions have evolved as adaptive traits in numerous species and play a crucial role in fostering social connections.



PhotoCredit: Schwartz, Jeffrey

They act as a powerful bonding agent, facilitating interactions between friends, mates, and even rivals. Additionally, emotions enable animals to respond adaptively and flexibly in diverse situations, ensuring their survival and well-being.

According to Frans de Waal, emotions are deeply rooted, initially subconscious states that emerge into consciousness during various situations. His exploration of emotions extends beyond humans to our animal counterparts, particularly primates. Through extensive research and observation, de Waal highlights the striking similarities between human and animal emotions, challenging the traditional notion that emotions are exclusive to humans. From empathy and compassion to jealousy and anger, emotions shape interactions and relationships, within and across species. By bridging the gap between humans and animals in terms of emotions, de Waal invites us to reconsider our understanding of these complex phenomena.

Rather than becoming preoccupied with whether attributing human-like qualities to animals is appropriate, we should be more concerned about the grave error of denying our shared evolutionary history, as de Waal aptly terms it, 'anthropodenial'. By ignoring the overwhelming evidence of evolution and clinging to the belief that only humans possess the ability to think, feel, and comprehend, we hinder our understanding of our own species. Recognising the principles of evolution compels us to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all life forms. To build genuine and compassionate relationships with the natural world, we must respect and value these profound connections that span across species.

Throughout history, humans have arrogantly placed themselves above all other beings, considering themselves the rulers of the natural world. This mindset has had catastrophic effects on both animals and the environment. Despite growing awareness among researchers and life science specialists, the idea of human superiority stubbornly persists. It is high time we recognise the devastating consequences of this delusion of grandeur and take responsibility for the harm inflicted upon the animal kingdom and the Earth itself.

Observing displays of affection in animals fills the heart with warmth and admiration for these incredible creatures. Love in animals truly reminds us of the boundless potential for connection that exists in the world, transcending boundaries and touching the souls of all who witness it. Understanding and appreciating the love that animals experience can deepen our connection with them and foster a greater sense of empathy and compassion towards all living beings.

References:

- Bekoff, M.** (2010). *The emotional lives of animals: A leading scientist explores animal joy, sorrow, and empathy—and why they matter.* New World Library.
- De Waal, F.** (2019). *Mama's last hug: Animal emotions and what they tell us about ourselves.* WW Norton & Company.
- Kremer, L., Holkenborg, S. K., Reimert, I., Bolhuis, J. E., & Webb, L. E.** (2020). The nuts and bolts of animal emotion. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 113, 273-286.
- Milligan, T.** (2014). *Animals and the Capacity for Love. In Love and Its Objects: What Can We Care For?* (pp. 211-225). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

