

Letters

Interspecific Affection in Animals

The article on baboons stroking kittens and making pets of them (*Int J Stud Anim Prob* 2(1):7-8, 1981) is quite interesting. The care of offspring and the family is said by some writers to be instinctive and automatic but when we attain a full understanding of these matters they most likely will be seen to develop from simple senses which give feelings of comfort and pleasure, from the simple, primitive worms coiled about their eggs, to the modern man caring for his family in fulsome love.

In the kitten-baboon case, however, we are concerned with behavior outside of the usual and which does not lead to the usual evolutionary results, that is to reproduction of a given species. In fact cats are so constituted that they act as parasites somewhat like the cowbirds and cuckoos of the world and slip themselves into the role of a small offspring which the protector is willing to accept.

I once saw a group of three cattle in Austin, Texas of which one was part Brahma, as the Texans call the Zebu cattle from India. One was obviously the dominant one and the owner, who was Professor of Physiology at the University of Texas, told me that it was of higher intelligence and it "took care" of the other two.

Some years ago at the monkey island in the San Antonio Zoo there was a most interesting situation involving three species of monkeys, none of which I knew nor did I make an attempt to find out. First was a small-tailed monkey and another about twice as large which was reputed to fight and beat up on the smaller species. However, I never saw this happen because there was one large monkey in the same compound around which the smaller monkeys hovered in close attendance. He was a fairly small short-tailed monkey about the size of the Gibraltar ape and he savaged any of

the medium-sized monkeys that interfered with the smaller ones in any way. He moved in a slow, lordly manner with many of the smaller monkeys around him, some even sitting between his forelegs. He showed no affection for the smaller simians and in fact accorded them the most magnificent neglect. Nevertheless, he was the respected policeman and so far as body movement went he was accorded every deference. This is a plain case of care and protective behavior crossing species lines.

The most striking example of care and cross-species kindness was shown in two photographs relatively recently in the *National Geographic*. The pictures were taken along the southern reaches of South America and showed the relatively huge body of a southern elephant seal female upon which a brash southern fur seal youngster had ensconced himself. The next scene showed the big female rolling the impertinent youngster off, but holding him carefully with one flipper against the side of her body so that he would not fall too far. This is certainly an instance of protection and care shown for a specimen not of the same species. It did not involve petting or fondling, but the tolerance and kindness stand out.

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