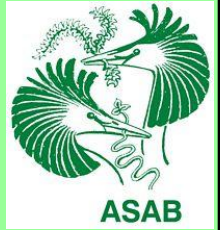


ASAB Newsletter

Autumn 2011



A note from the Newsletter Editor...

Dear ASAB member,

Welcome to the Autumn 2011 edition of the ASAB Newsletter! It has been another busy year for ASAB, with successful conferences in London, Cambridge and St Andrew's that have each showcased the breadth and depth of research covered by members of our society. If you missed out on the Summer meeting in St Andrew's, you will find a view from the conference, kindly provided by Christine Schwab from the KLI for Evolution and Cognition Research in Austria, on page 3. We also have news from ASAB's Accreditation Committee, on its recent involvement with the BBC about self-taught dog trainers giving advice on behaviour problems. There are also the usual news and highlight updates on animal behaviour research published in the last few months.

With Winter very surely on its way, thoughts now turn to the annual Winter conference in London Zoo. This year is a particularly special year, as we are celebrating ASAB's 75th birthday! Amongst the celebrations, Prof. Aubrey Manning will be taking us on a trip down ASAB Memory Lane, highlighting the achievements and progress in the field with a few anecdotes thrown in for good measure! You can read more about what is in store on page 4.

We are keen for ASAB members to continue to send us items for the Newsletter and to include on the ASAB website, so please do get in touch if you have any news or comments to include in future editions. We would also like to hear about your exciting research news, so let us know if you have a paper being published that you'd like to share! As ever, you can contact me at ASABNewsletterEditor@gmail.com.

With all best wishes,

Lisa Collins

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In the news...

A brief look at some of the animal behaviour coverage in the media this Autumn

A recent study published in the journal *Nature* shows that the offspring of **promiscuous female dark-eyed juncos** have greater reproductive success than offspring sired within a social pair. The study by Gerlach et al (2011; *Proc. Roy. Soc. B*, publ. online Aug 31) analysed DNA profile data from 17 breeding seasons and found that F1 extra-pair offspring produced twice as many young on average as F1 within-pair offspring.



The finding that **cows are capable of magneto-reception** and align themselves with magnetic fields (Burda et al, 2008, *PNAS*) was called into question with the publication of a paper by a Czech research team repeating the experiment using further Google Earth images. Hert et al (2011, *J. Comp. Phys. A* 197:677-682) found no evidence to support Burda et al's earlier work. However, the debate continues as Burda's team have since re-analysed Hert's data and have found that it actually *does* support their original findings (Begall et al, in press, *J. Comp. Phys. A*). The difference in opinion may be due to logistical errors in the re-analysis say Hert and colleagues, but for now,

the jury is out!

It seems that **extravagant courtship displays by males become redundant** if mothers can manipulate the sex ratio. Fawcett et al (2011; *Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 108:15925-15930) developed a mathematical model that called into question whether sexiness of males matters if females can choose their offspring's gender. It seems the ability to choose gender reduces the fitness differences between those females that bag an attractive male and those whose mate is less attractive. This work predicts that the most extravagant male sexual displays should be found in those species where mothers have little or no control over sex ratio.

Being bullied when young doesn't a wimpy adult make, say Sánchez-Macouzet & Drummond (2011; *Biol. Lett.* 7: 869-871). Previous experiments have shown that adverse conditions during early life can lead to negative long-term effects on growth and competitive behaviour. However, in the long-lived marine bird, the blue-footed booby, which have a clear dominance status as chicks, the aggressiveness of dominant chicks as adults was no different from that of the subordinate chicks.

The BBC stands down for the sake of animal welfare

ASAB's Accreditation Committee generally spends its time quietly awarding recognition to appropriately qualified clinical animal behaviourists and working with the companion animal industry body, the Animal Behaviour & Training Council (ABTC), to promote professional standards in animal training and behaviour therapy. But we also stand guard for the welfare of companion animals in the UK and this time it was the BBC who came into our sights.

Early in October the BBC's *The One Show* aired an item showing a (rather telegenic) self-taught dog trainer using overtly bullying techniques to inhibit resource-related aggressive behaviour a pet Jack Russell. The footage included boxing the dog round the face with his feet and treading on the dog's toes whilst taking control of food and other resources the dog was guarding. By the end of the item the dog was clearly cowed and was inhibiting its aggressive behaviour, but none of the emotional issues driving its aggression had been addressed, leaving a canine ticking bomb of fear and frustration. This will

inevitably erupt in future explosions of aggression, thus putting the safety of the family and the future life of the dog at risk.

The Accreditation Committee, and hearteningly, nearly every other animal welfare organisation in the country, immediately put in a complaint to the BBC and Ofcom outlining the problems with what was portrayed and offering an expert to appear on the programme to explain it all to viewers. After some initial mutterings about "good" TV footage and a planned series over the coming weeks, the BBC backed down and a well-known TV vet was on the sofa doing the job for us – "telegenic", it seems, is not in our remit. The latest news of the issue is that the self-taught young man has signed up for some education.

Emma Creighton
Secretary of the ASAB Accreditation Committee

* ASAB Summer Meeting 2011 – View from the Conference*

To say it upfront: intelligence is what one makes of it. Despite a lively panel discussion about how to define intelligence there was yet no consensus reached. But as long as the audience of a conference about “Understanding animal intelligence” (organized by Gillian Brown, Carl Smith and Kevin Laland) is provided with such a valuable collection of multifaceted and insightful contributions as was the case in St. Andrews this summer, one couldn’t care less.

Twenty one oral and 75 poster presentations tackled their understanding of animal intelligence from various directions, addressing topics that ranged from problem-solving and innovation, to concept learning, inequity aversion and teaching, all starting with two exceptional plenaries by Louis Lefebvre and Susanne Shultz about brain evolution and encephalization and the questions of how they are linked with cognition and how to gain operational definitions of intelligence to measure (social) cognition.

One of the famous examples about sophisticated cognitive skills was given by Elisabetta Visalberghi in her plenary about tool-use in bearded capuchin monkeys and how much the animals understand about physical properties of the stone tools to make functional selective choices. The fraction of researchers working on social learning in animals was well represented by Elli Leadbeater who gave an excellent example of how bumblebees can use social information in a foraging context by using location cues and raising the notion that the use and spread of social information can be based on “simple” mechanisms. Alex Thornton followed a similar line when he gave an overview of his work on meerkats that show high levels of social learning but he used it to raise the probably most provocative question of the conference: does culture really make you smart? Maybe not, when we consider how eager individuals may be to actively seek information conspecifics would rather

conceal (Uri Grodzinski on western scrub-jays in a caching context), or to seek (physical) explanations for properties such as solidity in the absence of causal visual cues (Amanda Seed on chimpanzees in modified trap tube tasks). But how can individual information go on? How may it be transferred into collective information? Here, work on small organisms can give big answers as was shown in Elva Robinson’s talk, based on an awesome micro-tech experimental set-up, about how rock ants turn information about nest site quality into individual decisions to accept or decline presented nests even in the absence of alternatives for comparison. Furthermore, the intriguing plenary by Tom Seeley about swarm intelligence in honey bees further investigated questions of how and when groups reach collective decisions.

Although it is impossible to cover everything from the conference in so few words, this short overview will hopefully provide an idea of the variety of the contributions and seed curiosity about future work on some rather newly raised questions, such as the relationship between cognition and sexual selection by Neeltje Boogert, which led to some lively discussions during the generous breaks.

And finally, the inauguration into the secrets of ceilidh dance! A long awaited, stamina testing, but ultimately rewarding, event that made a grand finale to the conference in the dignified buildings of Lower College Hall. Before heading back home, a couple of people took the opportunity to visit the living links center at Edinburgh Zoo and enjoyed the great pleasure of being shown around by Andrew Whiten through these amazing facilities. What a nice farewell present!

Christine Schwab
KLI for Evolution and Cognition Research, Austria



*Winter ASAB Meeting 2011 *

Why do animals mate with the “wrong” partner?

1st – 2nd December, Zoological Society of London meeting rooms, Regent's Park, London, UK

Registration: FREE! Just turn up!

Organisers: David Shuker and Nathan Bailey, University of St Andrews.

Plenary Speakers:

Professor Marlene Zuk (University of California Riverside)

Professor Karin Pfennig (University of North Carolina)

Our understanding of sexual selection and the evolution of animal mating systems is based on the idea of competition for mates, in terms of both the quantity and quality of those mates. It has become clear though that animals often attempt to mate with partners that appear to be of low quality. Such partners range from apparently low fitness individuals of the opposite sex but of the same species, through to members of the same sex or even members of a different species, from which no fitness benefits should accrue.



In this two-day meeting we will explore the evolutionary causes and consequences of seemingly "sub-optimal" mate choice behaviour. There are two questions we hope will be addressed. First, are behaviours such as reproductive interference between species or same-sex matings within species biologically relevant or merely quirky pathologies that offer little insight? Second, to what extent do mate choices in one context (getting the "right" species or sex, or the "sexiest" partner) inform us about mate choice in other contexts?

We hope to stimulate both empiricists and theoreticians to think again about what we expect from mate choice, how discriminating animals should be, what we think mate quality actually is, and to consider whether unusual mate choices may help or hinder our view of mating systems and sexual selection. We are particularly keen to bring together biologists studying similar phenomena under different paradigms. Although mate choice is our focus, we expect the discussion to be wide-ranging and relevant to those interested in animal decision-making, especially context-dependent choice, and individual variation in behaviour more generally.

In addition to these presentations, we are also delighted that **Professor Gene Robinson** (University of Illinois) will be giving the **2011 Tinbergen Lecture** during the meeting, and that **Dr Sarah Pryke** (Macquarie University) will be giving her **Christopher Barnard Award for Outstanding Contributions by a New Investigator** talk. Finally, **Professor Aubrey Manning** (University of Edinburgh) will help us celebrate 75 years of ASAB with a special plenary talk considering the history and development of ASAB.

Abstract submission has now CLOSED.

A programme of talks and a list of posters is now available online at <http://asab.nottingham.ac.uk/meetings/index.php>.

The full abstract booklet can be found here [ABSTRACT BOOKLET](#). In order to save resources, we will not be printing out the abstract booklet for delegates, but the abstract booklet will remain available as a pdf on-line after the meeting.



ASAB Easter Conference 2012
11th – 13th April 2012
Aberystwyth University, UK

Postgraduate workshop: Wednesday 11th
Conference sessions: Thursday 12th & Friday 13th

Registration now open!

For further information:

www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibers/events/

**Follow us on Twitter: #EasterASAB2012 or find
us on Facebook: Asab Easter Conference 2012**

VIth European Conference on Behavioural Biology

20th-22nd July 2012, Essen, Germany

The next European Conference on Behavioural Biology will take place in Essen, Germany, from Friday, July 20, to Sunday, July 22, 2012. The meeting is organized by Hynek Burda, Sabine Begall, Marcus Schmitt, Marie-Therese Bappert, and Philip Dammann. ASAB members can find all information on the meeting web site: www.ecbb2012.org.

There is a call for **proposals for symposia** for ECBB 2012.

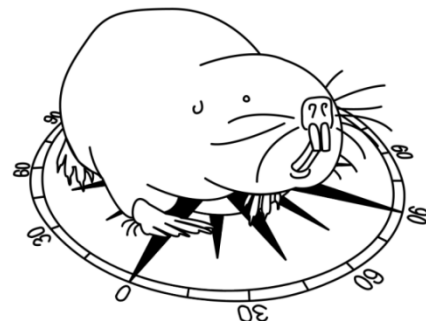
If you are interested in organizing a symposium, please prepare a short 1-2 page abstract, that should include:

- a descriptive title
- one or two paragraphs explaining the purpose of the symposium and its relevance to behavioural biology
- a tentative list of speakers (incl. their institutions)

Symposia are restricted to half-day sessions.

Please send your proposal to the organization committee (ecbb2012@uni-due.de) by the 31st of December 2011.

ECBBVI • 20 - 22 July 2012



European Congress on Behavioural Biology
University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

ethology Investigates: Cooperation

An online conference

The editors of **ethology** and Redouan Bshary are hosting the first **ethology Investigates** online conference.

November 29th to December 2nd, 2011

While Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection emphasizes the importance of competition between individuals, survival often depends on organisms working together to increase fitness, fight disease, watch for enemies or hunt for food – all forms of cooperation. The **ethology Investigates** online conference on cooperation explores cooperative behaviour within and between species, applying the holistic framework of Tinbergen's four "why" questions.

Go to www.ethologyinvestigates.com to register today

Confirmed speakers: Sarah Brosnan (Georgia State), Mike Cant (Exeter), Jens Krause (Berlin), Redouan Bshary (Neuchâtel)