

Do other animals experience joy?

by Arni – Lower IV





Do other animals experience joy?

A debate has been going on for some time about whether animals, other than humans, feel emotions such as sadness or happiness and if they do whether it is anything similar to humans. Most emotions that are linked to animals are due to fables written by people searching for an explanation for certain animals behaviour. For instance, foxes are

thought to be cunning and tortoises are believed to be persistent but is that truly the case? Scientifically, it is difficult to detect some emotions, especially joy. This is because unlike most emotions joy does not trigger any sort of clear behaviour and has different effects on different individuals.

For example fear triggers clear behaviours such as to fight or flight. Joy, on the other hand, could look like relaxation in certain individuals and an abundance

of energy in others. Another hindrance in scientifically proving that animals can experience emotions such as joy, is that the way someone might test their ideas on an animal causes some controversy.

For instance, the idea that animals must feel fear to survive, was proven by clinical experiments done to cause animals to fear their food supply, through electric shocks. This test results in evidence that animals are able to experience fear and also attempt to prevent the danger from repeating.

However, this test could be seen as unfair and cruel to the animals and it could be argued that it is not right to hurt animals, just for humans to gain some knowledge that could have been attained a different way. This could cause experiments that might shed light on the question not to be permitted.

Many people do not care about the answers as much as the way they were discovered, which is a mindset that could delay or damage proving that animals experience joy. This being said, Carl Safina, the author of a book called *Beyond Worlds: How Animals Think and Feel*, talks about whether animals can feel emotions in an interview. He states that in order for animals to have emotions, they must be conscious of their surroundings. He believes that the dispute over





whether animals can feel emotions, is due to the lack of a clear definition for consciousness. Carl Safina's definition of consciousness is that you are able to have a "mental experience". This is when you are aware of what you are experiencing; for example, a motion sensor is not aware that it is sensing motion. In contrast, humans are aware when they see someone moving that they are in motion.

He also believes that animals are conscious as they react to movement: fight or flight or curiosity. Carl Safina's logic leads us to believe that animals do feel emotions and so it is probable that animals do feel joy. In addition, as stated earlier, most emotions found in animals exist to increase survival chances.

For example, fear and pain alert animals to a danger that they do not want repeated. Therefore, it is logical to assume joy and pleasure must also exist to alert animals to an action that should be repeated in order to have a better shot at surviving.

In conclusion, my opinion is that it is possible for animals to experience joy. I think this because it is necessary for animals to feel joy in order to survive. I also believe that as there is clear evidence for animals experiencing other emotions, it is likely that animals can experience joy as well.

However, gathering scientific proof of joy in animals will probably be rather difficult and may take some time due to disagreements that might be caused by experimenting on animals. This being said, from the direction that science is going at the moment, it is likely that there will be a more definite answer to this question very soon.

Written by **Arni** – Lower IV (Year 8)

Examples of emotion shown in animals

- A way to see for yourself whether an animal is conscious or not (using Carl's definition) - dogs are known for their curiosity and you can see the obvious awareness in their reaction in seeing new people.
- Lawrence Anthony was a conservationist who had a reputation of being able to comfort elephants and even claimed to be able to communicate with them. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack. However, the elephants have not forgotten him. According to Lawrence Anthony's son, the herd of elephants have gone to his house, on the edge of the reserve, every night after he died. It is not unusual for elephants to mourn a member of their herd but it is remarkable for them to apparently pay their respects to a human.





theabbey.co.uk