

Beyond Instinct: Understanding the Social Life of Non-Human Animals to Promote Animal Welfare

Pablo Páramo

Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Colombia

Abstract

This study examines the social, cognitive, and emotional complexity of non-human animals and considers its implications for animal welfare, education, and human–animal relations. It challenges anthropocentric assumptions that have traditionally restricted moral consideration to humans and argues that recognising animals as social and sentient beings provides a stronger scientific and ethical foundation for their protection. The research adopted a multidisciplinary approach combining a review of philosophical, behavioural and animal-welfare literature, direct observations in natural environments and zoological settings, and a questionnaire administered to participants from ten Latin American countries. The analysis addresses cognition, social learning, cooperation, reciprocal behaviour, emotions, cultural transmission and social organisation across different species. Particular attention is given to Coordinated Behavioural Activation (CBA), proposed as a functional framework for explaining how social signals activate coordinated responses that contribute to group cohesion, protection and reproductive success. Survey findings indicate greater recognition, emotional concern and willingness to protect mammals than birds, reptiles and insects, revealing important differences in human attitudes towards animal groups. Overall, the study argues that scientific knowledge of animal social life should be translated into educational practices capable of reducing speciesism, strengthening empathy and narrowing the gap between concern for animals and protective action. Education is therefore presented as a central means of promoting more ethical, informed and sustainable relationships between humans and other animals.

Keywords: Animal Welfare; Education; Non-Human Animals; Social Behaviour