



Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity (Stonewall Inn Editions (Paperback))

By Bruce Bagemihl

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A Publishers Weekly Best Book

One of the New York Public Library's "25 Books to Remember" for 1999

Homosexuality in its myriad forms has been scientifically documented in more than 450 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and other animals worldwide. *Biological Exuberance* is the first comprehensive account of the subject, bringing together accurate, accessible, and nonsensationalized information. Drawing upon a rich body of zoological research spanning more than two centuries, Bruce Bagemihl shows that animals engage in all types of nonreproductive sexual behavior. Sexual and gender expression in the animal world displays exuberant variety, including same-sex courtship, pair-bonding, sex, and co-parenting--even instances of lifelong homosexual bonding in species that do not have lifelong heterosexual bonding.

Part 1, "A Polysexual, Polygendered World," begins with a survey of homosexuality, transgender, and nonreproductive heterosexuality in animals and then delves into the broader implications of these findings, including a valuable perspective on human diversity. Bagemihl also examines the hidden assumptions behind the way biologists look at natural systems and suggests a fresh perspective based on the synthesis of contemporary scientific insights with traditional knowledge from indigenous cultures.

Part 2, "A Wondrous Bestiary," profiles more than 190 species in which scientific observers have noted homosexual or transgender behavior. Each profile is a verbal and visual "snapshot" of one or more closely related bird or mammal species, containing all the documentation required to support the author's often controversial conclusions.

Lavishly illustrated and meticulously researched, filled with fascinating facts and astonishing descriptions of animal behavior, *Biological Exuberance* is a landmark book that will change forever how we look at nature.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Bruce Bagemihl writes that *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* was a "labor of love." And indeed it must have been, since most scientists have thus far studiously avoided the topic of widespread homosexual behavior in the animal kingdom--sometimes in the face of undeniable evidence. Bagemihl begins with an overview of same-sex activity in animals, carefully defining courtship patterns, affectionate behaviors, sexual techniques, mating and pair-bonding, and same-sex parenting. He firmly dispels the prevailing notion that homosexuality is uniquely human and only occurs in "unnatural" circumstances. As far as the nature-versus-nurture argument--it's obviously both, he concludes. An overview of biologists' discomfort with their own observations of animal homosexuality over 200 years would be truly hilarious if it didn't reflect a tendency of humans (and only humans) to respond with aggression and hostility to same-sex behavior in our own species. In fact, Bagemihl reports, scientists have sometimes been afraid to report their observations for fear of recrimination from a hidebound (and homophobic) academia. Scientists' use of anthropomorphizing vocabulary such as *insulting*, *unfortunate*, and *inappropriate* to describe same-sex matings shows a decided lack of objectivity on the part of naturalists.

Astounding as it sounds, a number of scientists have actually argued that when a female Bonobo wraps her legs around another female ... while emitting screams of enjoyment, this is actually "greeting" behavior, or "appeasement" behavior ... almost anything, it seems, besides *pleasurable sexual* behavior.

Throw this book into the middle of a crowd of wildlife biologists and watch them scatter. But Bagemihl doesn't let the scientific community's discomfort deny him the opportunity to show "the love that dare not bark its name" in all its feathery, furry, toothy diversity. The second half of this hefty tome is filled with an exhaustive array of species that exhibit homosexuality, complete with photos and detailed scientific illustrations of the behaviors described. *Biological Exuberance* is a well-researched, thoroughly scientific, and erudite look at a purposefully neglected frontier of zoology. --*Therese Littleton*

From Publishers Weekly

A brilliant and important exercise in exposing the limitations of received opinion, this book presents to the lay reader and specialist alike an exhaustively argued case that animals have multiple shades of sexual orientation. The book is broken into two sections, the second containing species "portraits" detailing recorded homosexual/transgendered behaviors. The main portion of the book sets out to reveal and, indeed, revel in the documented evidence to date that some 450 species engage in both sustained and occasional "gay," "lesbian" and transgendered pairing, parenting and play. Animals (both heterosexual and homosexual) also rape and divorce, commit "child" abuse and infidelity and can be lifelong celibates. Human claims to uniqueness in this arena are shown to be increasingly difficult to maintain. The overall effect is to detonate the myth that animals are solely driven by heterosexual reproductive urges, as Bagemihl, a biologist, amasses evidence with case study after case study of species ranging from whiptail lizards to bottlenose dolphins, flamingoes, vampire bats and giraffes. But his book offers more than a zoological laundry list. Biologists who have long classified these behaviors as taking place only in "abnormal" conditions or as "pseudo-copulation," "mistakes," "practicing" and domineering sexual bullying are frequently shown to be willfully ignoring behavior that does not reflect their own worldview or accepted scientific thought. What might so easily have turned into a tub-thumping activist tract hitched to the need for acceptance of homosexuality

among humans is instead elevated to a hugely inclusive, celebratory biological interpretation of the world. Bagemihl convincingly overturns previous inviolable "truths" that scarcity and functionality are the prime agents of biological change, and advances instead the idea that abundance and extravagance?"biological exuberance"?are just as crucial to the mosaic of life. Numerous illustrations by John Megahan.
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From Kirkus Reviews

A scholarly, exhaustive, and utterly convincing refutation of the notion that human homosexuality is an aberration in nature. Biologist Bagemihl, who formerly taught cognitive science at the University of British Columbia, argues persuasively that our current understanding of biology and evolution is tainted by a heterosexually biased interpretation of animal behavior. He intends as his audience both a scientific and a general readership; he reaches both with his clear and straightforward presentation. Focusing primarily on mammals and birds, and citing only strictly documented case studies, he firmly establishes in part one of this work that homosexual and transgendered behaviors occur widely in the animal world. Bagemihl's definition of homosexuality includes a diverse range of activities organized under five headings: courtship, affection, sex, pair-bonding, and parenting. He views the challenge before us now as the need to abandon a traditional point of view, whereby "same-sex activity is routinely described as being 'forced' on other animals" or is viewed as a substitute for heterosexual coupling that occurs only when no other (i.e., no heterosexual) mate can be found as the first choice of those concerned. A new understanding of animal relationships should therefore also recognize that not all animal sexual activity is aimed at reproduction we must reconsider traditional explanations of the links between reproduction, evolution, and natural selection. Part two is organized as a thorough reference guide to homosexual behaviors in individual animals and birds, complete with extensive examples and rigorous footnotes. Bagemihl does realize that some among us will never be convinced that homosexuality occurs freely and frequently in nature. But his meticulously gathered, cogently delivered evidence will quash any arguments to the contrary. -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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