

BOOK REVIEW

Behavioural biology of laboratory animals

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The overall goal of this book is given as providing the reader, as someone working in the maintenance and care of laboratory animals involved in research programmes with information about the way the animals live in the wild and the way that they should live in captive research settings. It is intended that the book will achieve an improved understanding of laboratory animals and allow the reader to refine the care and treatment of the animals in their facilities and to improve the wellbeing, welfare and wellness of the animals in their care. Of the 48 authors and contributors there is a good balance between North America and Europe/UK with one contributor from Australia, unfortunately but perhaps understandably there are no contributors from the developing world.

The 537 pages are divided into 30 individual chapters, plus in Part 3, ethograms, for 14 of the species listed in Part 2. For those unfamiliar with the term ethogram the authors explain that they are a list of behaviours that can be observed and scored while watching animals. Ethograms facilitate a process whereby different observers can observe animal behaviour and record their observations in the same way which is obviously important for serious scientific research.

As well as providing an Introduction to Animal Behaviour, Part 1 also discusses 'abnormal' behaviour in a research setting, including a definition of what is classed as abnormal behaviour. It also provides an insight of the prevalence of abnormal behaviour, particularly in Non-Human Primates, as well as the other species covered in the book. Causes of abnormal behaviour are also discussed. Obviously these topics could have a whole book devoted to them so in a book such as this the discussion is relatively superficial but useful nevertheless. In my opinion the Chapter on utilising behaviour for the assessment of animal welfare is particularly useful.

Part 2 provides information on the behavioural biology of 25 species regularly found in research setting around the globe. Some of them may be less common within the UK for example, deer and white footed mice, prairie and meadow voles. However, as Animal Technologists are only too aware we never know what tomorrow will bring and this book will provide a useful reference manual for the facility bookshelf. As well as the more common rodent and lagomorph species it also discusses behaviour of farm animals, poultry and other birds, reptiles and amphibians and 7 primate species are also included.

Part 3 is devoted to selected ethograms with 14 species covered in Part 2 (the introduction to this section says 16 species but I only counted 14) links for online ethograms of mice and macques are also provided. The authors stress that if behaviour is to be used to assess welfare then a functional ethogram is essential.

All of the chapters are extremely well referenced and will provide the reader with opportunities for further research. In my opinion the book achieves its objective and I would whole-heartedly recommend that every establishment should have a copy available in the library at the very least but preferably in every animal facility.

This time, the EDI Group is focussing its "Let's Talk" article on another protected characteristic, Neurodiversity

Let's talk about ... Neurodiversity in the workplace

"You probably can't tell by looking at me, but my brain works very differently to yours. If you were to meet me, you'd probably notice that I'm tall and I have blonde hair. You might notice that I don't often make eye contact. But you won't see that I'm also extremely sensitive to bright lights and loud noises. I am hopeless at reading body language and I miss conversational cues. I love coding and enjoy solving problems. I struggle with changing environments, having to hot desk has a huge impact on me' I am not a neurotypical person, I am what is known as 'neurodivergent'"

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways the brain can work and interpret information. It highlights that people naturally think about things differently. We have different interests and motivations, and are naturally better at some things and poorer at others.

Most people are neurotypical, meaning that the brain functions and processes information in the way society expects.

However, it is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are **neurodivergent**, meaning that the brain functions, learns and processes information differently. Neurodivergence includes Attention Deficit Disorders, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. These bring strengths as well as difficulties.

What does Neurodiversity mean?

When we describe people as 'neurodivergent', then, we are talking about people who in one or several respects have a thinking style at the edges of one or more of these continuums, with – in the words of autistic author, speaker and educator Nick Walker – a brain 'that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal'. We need to understand that there is no standard brain.

Neurodiversity is, ultimately, a biological fact of the infinite variety of human neurocognition. Now, the same term 'neurodiversity' is also being used to represent a fast-growing sub-category of organisational diversity and inclusion that seeks to embrace and maximise the talents of people who think differently. (CIPD 2018)

How can we embrace Neurodiversity in the workplace?

Neurodivergence is fairly common, so most workplaces are already neurodiverse. Yet, there is still a lack of understanding around most forms of neurodivergence, and misperceptions persist. It therefore makes sense for organisations to take steps that make their neurodivergent staff feel valued, part of the team and supported to contribute fully towards achieving the goals of the organisation.

Creating a more inclusive workplace can:

- highlight the employer's commitment to diversity and inclusion
- reduce the stigma around neurodivergence
- make staff feel safe and empowered to disclose a neurodivergence
- make it more likely that neurodivergent staff will be treated fairly by their managers and colleagues
- open the organisation up to a pool of talent that may otherwise have been overlooked
- help retain skilled staff and reduce recruitment costs.

Further Support and Training can be found at:

- ADHD Foundation - Adults section
- British Dyslexic Association - Employer section
- Dyspraxia Foundation - Adults section
- National Autistic Society - Support for employers
- Tourettes Action - Employers section
- NHS website and search for the specific form of neurodivergence

References:

CIPD Guide Neurodiversity at work , Feb 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>



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