

LETTERS

Behavioural needs in birds

Sir, Poole (*Animal Welfare* 1992, 1: 203-220) argues that mammals are unique in having behavioural needs, that is, in experiencing a need to carry out behaviour that is not necessary for immediate survival. While I very much welcome the stress his article places on good welfare being much more than just the satisfaction of health and survival needs, I am also concerned that he may have done a disservice to non-mammalian species by implying that none of them have behavioural needs comparable to those of mammals. He acknowledges that birds are intelligent and have considerable learning abilities but then argues that this does not imply the existence of behavioural needs. On what grounds, then, does he attribute such needs to mammals and not to birds?

His main argument seems to be that mammals will work for goals when there is no physiological need to do so. He cites the examples of chimpanzees working at computer games and macaque monkeys searching through woodchip litter for food even when food is freely available elsewhere in their cages. But birds, too, seem to have needs to carry out behaviour when physiological needs could be met more easily in other ways. The classic observations of Breland and Breland (*American Psychologist* 1961, 16: 661-664) showed that hens appear to have a need to groundscratch even when food could be obtained more quickly by not scratching. More recently, Bubier (DPhil thesis, Oxford 1990) has shown that hens will search through litter and

scratch in it even when food is freely available in a hopper close by. There seems to be no grounds at all for Poole's implication that only mammals deserve to have their environments enriched because only mammals have behavioural needs that should be met. It is a pity that the strong case he makes for taking into account the behavioural needs of mammals has been made at the expense of birds and with what comes over as an attempt to argue that their welfare is less important than that of mammals.

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Author's response

I would like to point out two misunderstandings in the text of Dawkins' letter. I did not argue 'that mammals are unique in having behavioural needs', but that mammals are unique in having 'psychological needs' which are 'needs of the mind' and relate to the nature of mammalian brains and survival strategies. I did not suggest that birds do not have behavioural needs.

While I acknowledged that some birds may have considerable learning abilities, I did not say that they are intelligent. Intelligence and learning ability are frequently confused because intelligent animals usually also have good learning abilities. However, while learning is a capacity of all central nervous systems, intelligence relates to the animal's concept of the world and encephalization, as I explained in the article.