

Instructions for Virtual Queer Ancestry Ritual

Queer Animals:

In your breakout room, make sure to introduce yourselves.

Your group represent all queer animals. Non-precreative sex, homosexuality, intersexism, and transgenderism are all abundant in the animal kingdom.

Take a few minutes for each person to read through one of the informational posters. Take turns paraphrasing, in a minute, what you have read to the others.

When finished, each person should share for 1 or 2 minutes:

- What are your reactions to the article titled “Culture of Zoology”?
- What are your reactions to the article entitled “Indigenous Relationship to Queer Animals”?

Imagine that you could speak to queer humans, who are both your evolutionary descendants, and co-inhabitants of a shared planet. What would you want them to know about sexuality? Gender? Queerness? What have humans forgotten that you can remind them of? You may wish to write down some of the phrases that feel the most potent to you.

The Culture of Zoology

Zoologists were almost invariably puzzled, astonished and even upset by the simple fact of animal homosexuality.

Many behavioural studies of animals operate under a presumption that all courtship and mating activity is heterosexual unless proven otherwise. The scientific literature is filled with examples of zoologists who were convinced that sexual activity they had been observing was between male and female, until confronted with clear evidence of the otherwise. To complicate matters, zoologists routinely determine the sex of animals in the field based on their behaviour during sexual activity. Of course, this automatically eliminates the chance of observing homosexual activity. Furthermore, if homosexual behaviour is observed, it is not considered "genuine" sex, but is rather seen as "mock courtship," "sham mating," or "false mounting". At times homosexual behaviour is interpreted as "practice" for future heterosexuality, other times as a case of an animal mounting same-sex by "mistake" (in cases where males and females look remarkably similar - at least to humans).

Animal homosexuality is by no means a "new" discovery by modern science. Earliest written observations date back to ancient Greece. Zoologists have often treated homosexual behaviour as strange, bizarre, perverse, abnormal or unnatural.

For example, courting and mounting between male Lions is called an "atypical sexual fixation" (1942), same-sex relations between Sandpipers are described as "sexual nonsense" (1989), while homosexuality in Spinner Dolphins, Kob Antelope and Penguins has been described as being directed towards the "inappropriate" partner. One zoologist matter-of-factly reported that he separated the two female Long-eared Hedgehogs he was studying for fear that they might "suffer damage" from their continuing homosexual behaviour.

In other cases, zoologists impute an inherent inadequacy or incompetence to same-sex relations. For example, the fact that sexual activity between female Gorillas generally takes longer than heterosexual copulation is attributed to "mechanical difficulties" - it is apparently inconceivable to the zoologist that females might be experiencing closer bonding. In Laughing Gulls, if a homosexually paired male mounts a female, it was taken by one investigator to mean that his pair-bond was unstable and that he was "dissatisfied". No such conclusion was reached when birds in heterosexual pairings sought homosexual mounts.



Indigenous Relationships to Queer Animals

To many indigenous cultures around the world, homosexuality and transgenderism are a routine and expected occurrence in both humans and animals.



A man representing the Euro-American tradition of the late 20th century states that it is impossible for him to even imagine a “queer grizzly bear... or a lesbian owl or salmon.” In contrast, a Native American storyteller of the Wintu nation describes coyote as having a homoerotic relationship with another male, guided by the spirits of “grizzly, salmon and eagle.” In a remarkable coincidence, each individual has independently singled out virtually identical animals as somehow emblematic, but with radically different interpretations (neither was aware of the other’s words). From the Anglo perspective, homosexuality is an insult to the animal’s supposed “purity” or “virility,” while from the Native perspective, such homosexuality is an affirmation of nature’s plurality, strength and wholeness.

Most Native American tribes formally recognize - and honour - human homosexuality and transgender in the role of the “two-spirit”. These people are symbolically associated with certain animals, often in creation myths and totemic symbols, which suggest the importance of queerness to the natural order of the indigenous worldview. For example, in the Nuxalk (Bella Coola) story, the first two-spirit accompanies all the animals in a journey that describes the origin of food. Among Siouan peoples, a person becomes two-spirited if their sacred dreaming involves a hermaphroditic buffalo. For the Nuuchahnulth (Nootka), among many other tribes, the left-handed bear is seen as a powerful cross-gendered figure. Incidentally, there is a higher correlation between left-handedness and queerness among humans. Among the Okanagan, coyote tricks a panther into marrying him by pretending to be a female; equating two-spiritedness with the trickster-transformer figure. Among some Sioux nations, a religious festival known as Okipa includes the ritual enactment of same-sex activity during sacred ceremonies as a way to ensure the fertility and return of buffalo in the coming season. Wielding an enormous wooden penis, a clownish spirit called the Foolish One simulates anal intercourse with the male bison by mounting each dancer and inserting his phallus under their animal hide.

As zoologists learn more about queer animals, it appears that aboriginal stories and beliefs represent systematic and careful observations of the natural world, rather than simply projections of a mythological system. Time and again, indigenous beliefs have been dismissed as fanciful “superstitions,” only to be confirmed once the technology and observations of modern science finally catch up with the age-old teachings of aboriginal peoples.



Source: Bruce Bagemihl. *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*

Kob Antelopes

Virtually all Kob females engage in some form of homosexuality.



In a direct carryover from attitudes towards human homosexuality, same-sex activity is routinely described by biologists as being “forced” on other animals when there is no evidence that it is, and a whole range of “distressful” emotions are projected onto the individual who experiences such “unwanted advances.”

Examples abound: Mountain Sheep rams “deem it an insult to be treated as a female” when mounted by another male; Rhesus Macaques are described as “submitting” to homosexual mounts even when there is clear evidence that they are willing participants (by initiating the activity); orang-utan males who participate in homosexuality are said to be “forced into nonconformist sexual behaviour” by their partners even though they display none of the characteristic signs of distress present in heterosexual rapes.

Scientists describing courtship among Kob Antelopes imply that females try to “avoid” homosexual attentions by circling around the other female or butting her on the shoulder, even though these actions are considered a routine part of heterosexual courtships.

Homosexual courtship and sexual interactions consist of a rich array of stylized movements in a fixed sequence. A female usually begins by *prancing*: she approaches another female with short, stiff-legged steps, her head held high and tail raised.

This is followed by *lip-curling*: she sniffs the vulva of the other female, who crouches and urinates while her partner places her nose in the stream of urine. Her courtship dance continues with *foreleg kicking*: she raises her foreleg and gently touches the other female between her legs from behind. The other female responds with *mating-circling*: she circles tightly around the courting female, sometimes nipping or butting her hindquarters. This leads to *mounting*: the first female stands on her hind legs and climbs on top of the other from behind, as in heterosexual mating. Sometimes the mounting female gives a single vigorous pelvic thrust, similar to the thrusting a male makes when he reaches orgasm.

The two females may also engage in what is known as *inguinal nuzzling*: the female who was mounted adopts a special posture with her hind legs spread wide, tail raised, back arched, and her neck extended. The other kob licks her partners vulva and udder from behind and then concentrates on licking two special “inguinal glands” located in the same region. Occasionally, a female will defend her mate against courting males by attacking the males head on - no small feat, considering that she does not have the horns that most males use for this purpose.

