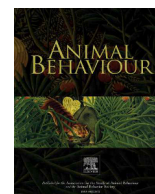




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Book Review

***The evolution of cetacean societies: Uncovering the social complexity of whales and dolphins.* Edited by Darren P. Croft, Andrew D. Foote, Ellen C. Garland & Stephanie L. University of Chicago Press (2026). Pp. 320. Price \$135 hardback, \$50 paperback.**

It's hard to imagine that the hippopotamus, which is surprisingly fast when running on land, is the closest living relative to all cetaceans (whales and dolphins). Unlike the behaviour of most terrestrial animals, whale and dolphin social behaviour is much harder to study because individuals spend most of their lives below the surface of the water. In *The evolution of cetacean societies*, we are given a window into the rich social lives of these enigmatic sea creatures. Published a quarter century after the classic text *Cetacean societies* (Mann et al., 2000), the first real social synthesis in this group, this new book provides an up-to-date account of the social lives of whales and dolphins, one that benefits from new technologies such as digital photography, drones and biologging, as well as genomics, Bayesian statistics and more.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 explores 'The evolutionary history and genetic composition of cetacean societies'. In addition to detailing the hippopotamus at the base of the family tree, it discusses how cetaceans can be divided into the toothed and baleen whales, with the latter evolving from the former to take advantage of abundant new food sources. We also see how genomics is used to examine geographical history and kinship within social groups.

Part 2 expands deeper into 'The socioecology of cetacean societies', and Part 3 introduces us to 'Reproduction, cooperation, and conflict in cetacean societies'. These two sections explore the diversity of social structures in whales and dolphins, as well as the concepts of social complexity and cooperation. Different chapters contrast the importance of social bonding, female–female relationships in some species and male alliances in others. Other chapters describe the social lives of dolphins, killer whales and baleen whales among other species. We learn about menopause and reproductive senescence, which is observed in a handful of

cetaceans and only a few other animals, as well as the concepts of identity signalling and social learning, highlighting the cognitive capacity of cetaceans.

In Part 4, we delve even deeper into 'The cultures of cetacean societies'. The idea of cetacean culture was controversial when *Cetacean societies* (Mann et al., 2000) was published. Since then, however, whales and dolphins have provided some of the best support for the idea that behaviour can be socially learned and transmitted across individuals or generations, rather than just genetically inherited. Not only are we introduced to some of the positive aspects of cultural transmission of behaviour such as acoustic signalling, but also some of the negative aspects, including sharing of harmful foraging behaviours that lead to human–wildlife conflict.

Finally, Part 5 discusses the interaction between 'Humans and cetacean societies'. We learn about the history of whaling, as well as some of the cooperative hunting relationships between cetaceans and people. The final chapter discusses the state of diversity and inclusivity in marine mammal research.

The evolution of cetacean societies provides a rich overview of social behaviour in whales and dolphins. While many chapters review particular topics or species, in others whale or dolphins are used as a model to explore broader concepts in social evolution. Ultimately, this book is not just for those researching marine mammals; it will be useful for those studying primates where parallels abound, as well as those broadly interested in social evolution.

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