

BOOK REVIEWS, NOTES AND COMMENTS

Edited by

Federica Napolitani Cheyne**IL PAPPAGALLO DAL VENTRE ARANCIO****Un'intelligenza animale**

Renato Massa. Milano: Jaka Book; 2010. 166 p.
ISBN 978-88-16-40932-3. € 16,00.

MANUAL OF PARROT BEHAVIOR

Andrew Luescher (Ed.). New York: Wiley-Blackwell; 2006. 352 p.
ISBN 978-0-8138-2749-0. € 78,00.

The extraordinary abilities of parrots to repeat words and voices of the human language and the flashy plumage colors of many species of them have made these birds among the most popular pets of the *Aves* taxonomic class. We like them because they are social creatures, yet we frequently keep them as solitary birds so they will redirect their affection toward us. However, our relationship with parrots has changed greatly over time. Once considered as exotic and instinctive jesters unable to understand the meaning of words and actions they produce mechanically, actually many studies have shown their remarkable cognitive abilities (abilities that have ensured them the epithet of “avian primates”). Although scientific interest in parrot behavior is growing, knowledge in this area is still limited.

Massa's book reflects the romantic experience of an intuition. The text proposes, with considerable expertise, the autobiographic story of a naturalist who wants to demonstrate his idea about the human monopoly on the complex use of abstract communication: “...animals think and parrots, when they speak, they know exactly what they say”(...)“My project is to record and analyze the voices of different species, to interpret the meaning of the main sounds in the various circumstances of

life from different individuals (for example alarm, lure, courtship, demand for food, etc.) and then to compare them with each other to see if they are modified only with the evolution of different species or even with the cultural evolution within each species”.

With a wealth of details the author tells about his travels around Africa and he describes his work with the *rufiventris* specie observing their daily habits both in wild (Tarangire) and in captivity (Milan). Comparing behavioral and bioacoustics data from parrot pairs this research suggests how their sounds are composed by singular syllables, or different combinations of them, that are used as ideograms in their simple communication.

Previous studies in the 1980's had already demonstrated the surprising cognitive abilities of an African grey parrot. The American researcher Irene Pepperberg and her colleagues have tried to show that Alex was able to differentiate the meaning and syntax, so that its use of voice was different from the relatively rigid forms of communication “instinctive” which is popular in the animal kingdom. Results obtained from Massa's research seem to confirm what has been observed earlier by broadening the question to other parrot species and to the wild context. In addition, the text provides information about the phylogeny of different African parrot species, especially for the *Poicephalus* taxonomic genus, their geographical distribution and ecological needs, becoming a potential manual for breeders and lovers of these species. Advancement of knowledge about their behavior has an important role in management of protection of wild endangered populations as to improve their welfare in captivity.

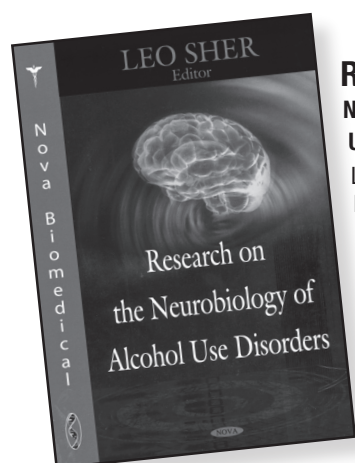
Andrew Luescher has collected and edited in 2006 (Blackwell Publishing) the researches and experiences of some from the top experts on parrots. His book *Manual of Parrot Behavior* (first edition) is the first of its kind and provides a comprehensive view of behavioral and clinical aspects of this taxonomic order (*Psittaciformes*) of birds. “Bringing together a host of international experts on avian behavior, *Manual of Parrot Behavior* explores the many facets of *psittacine* behavior, both normal and abnormal. The book not only provides readers with a solid understanding of the basic principles of *psittacine* behavior but also offers useful techniques of diagnosis and treatment for specific problems” (from the back cover). The chapters supplement the practical owner's experiences with logical and well thought-out explanations as to why parrots react and behave the way they do. Would highly recommend to anyone who owns (or is thinking of acquiring) a parrot, since they require far more attention than more conventional pets (such as dogs and cats).

The problem of captive parrots welfare is actually an important and highly topical ethical issue. In fact, the trade in parrots has grown enormously in recent decades and more and more animals being requested and popular as pets. In light of this interest, ensure a good level of well-being in captivity is not an easy target. Individuals of larger species can live for over 70 years in captivity and their environmental needs, as opportunity of social interaction, may become cause of serious illnesses if not satisfied and cause the occurrence of abnormal and self-injurious behaviors. In the wild, parrots exploit their cognitive and physical abilities to adapt to their dynamic environment. The captive condition is very different from that experienced by animals in wild. For example, a resource such as food is easily accessible and always available because it is provided regularly by farmers. The nesting site is required by farmers which also create “artificial” groups of them and remove predators. When compared with the wild, the captive environment is most limiting in terms of space, complexity and behavioral opportunities. This “paradox of life in captivity” is causing a conflict between parrot and environment.

The comment of D. Donovan (editor and senior reviewer of *California Bookwatch*) about this book is quoted here: “Any veterinary library or holding specializing in pets – even at the public library level – will want to have *Manual of Parrot Behavior* in the collection: it is the first detailed reference of its kind to provide a survey by international experts on parrot behavior under one cover. Here are keys to both normal and abnormal parrot behavior, techniques on treating common problems, and checklists of tameness and other scores. Invaluable”!

These two books are important because parrots are increasingly used in Europe and in other western countries as pets. Therefore any translational effort aimed at implementing welfare regulations for them (already enforced for vertebrate experimental and farm animals) is therefore advisable.

Giovanni Polverino and Enrico Alleva
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Roma
enrico.alleva@iss.it



**RESEARCH ON THE
NEUROBIOLOGY OF ALCOHOL
USE DISORDERS**

Leo Sher (Ed.).
New York: Nova Sciences
Publishers; 2008.
ISBN 978-1-60456-197-5
372 p.

The book highlights the remarkable evolution of research on alcoholism in the last years, focusing on the importance of neurobiology of alcohol

biological effects. It is edited by Leo Sher professor of Psychiatry at the Columbia University in the city of New York, whose areas of expertise include the diagnosis, treatment and neurobiology of depression, bipolar disorder, with particular attention to psychobiology of alcoholism, suicidal behaviour and post-traumatic stress disorder. Leo Sher is editor of several books about these topics and in this book he collected the contributes of different international experts to describe the neurobiological mechanisms of alcohol abuse and dependence and to provide information on the recent researches. Neurodisorders deriving from alcohol exposure are treated including cognitive aspects of prenatal alcohol damage, and the book offers a broad perspective presenting different aspects related to epidemiology, clinical handling and pharmacological treatment, psychiatry and neurophysiology, genetics, gender-related problems and synergy alcohol/environment. Alcohol use is not new and humans have consumed alcohol for thousands of years. Alcohol drinking is part of a long history of remedial, recreational and ceremonial functions and, representing one of the most ancient traditions in western countries, it has been part of people life from many generations. Unfortunately, alcohol use has significantly risen since World War II and nowadays new models of life, modifying cultural traditions and drinking patterns (e.g., alcoholic beverages are consumed in non-traditional context and together with new forms of commodities and foods) lead to an increasing spread of alcohol damage and make alcohol-related problems as a social and health alert. The burden of alcohol damages is significant for the society and public health even for two epidemiological evidences: the decreasing age of first alcohol use and the increasing number of problematic drinkers among women. Both these factors may be predictive of long-term problems since neuro-researches demonstrated that early alcohol use favours alcohol abuse in adults; furthermore women drinking enhances the risk of prenatal alcohol exposure and consequent permanent brain damages in children exposed to alcohol in utero. Over the last 40 years much has been achieved in highlighting and treating the health effects of alcohol specially on the liver. More recent alcohol studies have been improving knowledge about alcohol-related brain damages which play a fundamental role in alcohol warning. In fact the long-lasting effects on the brain are deeply deleterious for individuals and, consequently, for the whole society. The conditions that lead to excessive alcohol use in some individuals and not in others are very complex and involve interaction between genetic, psychosocial, neurobiological and environmental factors.

The recent remarkable evolution of the neurobiological research on alcohol suggested the publication of this book that proposes a structured collection of studies about alcohol effects. The volume is organized into eighteen chapters, each one written by leading experts in different field of alcohol use disorders, to give a comprehensive picture of neurobiology of alcohol abuse and dependence. This text will be a use-

ful tool for biomedical researchers and clinicians who are interested in the mechanisms of addictive disorders. Actually the rapid acceleration of new discoveries in neurobiology due to human and animal studies is yielding important information for neurobiologist every day and a book that highlights some of the main topics benefiting from this new information, may be a good starting point to deepen the studies on neurobiology of alcohol disorders and to ameliorate the clinical handling of alcoholic patients.

Rosanna Mancinelli

*Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy
rosanna.mancinelli@iss.it*



L'ADOLESCENTE PRENDE CORPO

Paola Carbone (Ed.).
Roma: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore; 2010. 283 p.
ISBN 978-88-490-0321-5.
€ 22,00.

Troubled adolescents constitute the norm in our society and, despite all the efforts to preserve them from injuries, diseases and mental disturbances, many of them still face difficult situations during the transition between infancy and adulthood. Many of these difficulties stem from the abrupt and sudden bodily modifications that, orchestrated by the rising levels of pubertal hormones, take place during adolescence. In this book, Paola Carbone, psychoanalyst, psychotherapist and associate professor at the University of Rome "Sapienza", collected several contributions aimed at clarifying the role of the growing body in the exhibition of age-specific disorders during adolescence. The outcome of this initiative is a comprehensive book on the multifaceted and continuous interactions between the adolescent body and the adolescent brain. The book is subdivided into two main segments: a general introduction and a case study-oriented section.

In the general introduction, the authors introduce several fundamental concepts related to the function of the body during adolescence and to the idiosyncratic nature of psychotherapy conducted with such a specific patient cohort. To give but few examples, in Chapter 1 the authors describe the pivotal function of the body as a mirror of the mental turmoil characterizing the adolescent brain; Chapter 3 deals

with the communicatory role of the adolescent body: the meaning of voluntary physical modifications (ranging from tattoos to lesions) is interpreted within such framework; Chapter 5 tackles the specific requirements of the psychoanalytical setting during adolescence; finally, Chapter 6, which we found exceptionally clear, cogent and well-written, integrates adolescent psychological underpinnings with anthropological, evolutionary and physiological grounding. This chapter offers the reader a comprehensive view on the morphological changes that occur during adolescence and sets the frame for the entire book. We would suggest the reader to start from this Chapter and then delve into the more specialist-oriented chapters characterizing the entire volume.

Whilst the first section is principally aimed at offering a broad theoretical framework, the second section presents a series of explicatory clinical case studies describing four core features of adolescence: self-provoked injuries; gender identity; emergency room accidents; psychosomatic diseases and major illnesses. We generally found the second section much more reader-friendly than the first one. Specifically, the extensive use of case studies allows the reader to easily anchor the theoretical background to everyday adolescent troubles. Particularly interesting did we find Chapter 7, where the authors highlight the need to tutor the personnel of the setting to which the adolescent is first referred in case of self-provoked injuries. Specifically, it is herein underscored the need to inform the personnel as to how integrate the adolescent brain into an emergency room setting (*e.g.* what to do in case of the first encounter). Chapter 8 is also particularly relevant whereby it first distinguishes between self-provoked injuries and harmless physical modifications, and then investigates the mental processes underlying these processes through a systematic survey. Chapters 10 and 11 address the role of the adolescent body in the formation of individual gender identity both from a functional and a dysfunctional view. Homophobia, within the convincing frame introduced by the authors, is originally described as a form of pathology. Chapter 12 then describes the extremely important "Sportello-Giovani" experience: an initiative prompted by a group of therapists aimed at offering psychological support to adolescents referred to the emergency room in case of accidents.

Many of the topics discussed in this book are both interesting and extremely relevant. However, the multi-author nature of the book presents both advantages and disadvantages. Just as the variety of perspectives certainly constitutes a real strength, so also it sometimes results in a slightly unbalanced and fragmentary description of topics. Thus, whilst some chapters appear accessible to any reader, some others seem to be directed to a highly specialized readership.

Simone Macri

*Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy
simone.macri@iss.it*