Bret on Crocodile Love (from January Patreon Q&A) (192kbit\_A...

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**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

crocodile, cats, poisonous snakes, island, mother, dogs, babies, beeping, living, people, point, offspring, canal zone, relationship, hatch, picture, maverick, mariel hemingway, love, nest

**SPEAKERS**

Bret, Heather

**Heather** 00:04

Next question which animals can feel love? How would you characterize the difference in bonding and feelings the cats and dogs have with each other or with humans? To me, cats seem to have less emotion.

**Bret** 00:17

So let's say a couple of things that I think are pretty clear. One that the love thing starts with, with maternal love of offspring, that this will be separately evolved in birds and mammals and possibly other things. You know, you have the potential for it in something like a crocodile. But any place where parents take care of offspring, you could, I'm not saying they do. I'm saying they

**Heather** 00:46

could just never, never, never considered it before.

**Bret** 00:49

Well, the one time I raised a crocodile, I wondered if it would develop an affection for me and it did not matter. You may I guess, all right. Well, this is awkward, and it's about to get even more awkward. But anyway, all I'm saying is that you've got the potential for love any place where a parent must be devoted enough to offspring to raise them to adulthood, and crocodiles are possible, but I've never seen any evidence of that emotion. But in birds, you'll see it. Oh my god. All right. Well, you weren't explained before. Yes. Put it up first. Yeah, once you put it up. So all right. This is weird. Yeah. Okay, here we have

**Heather** 01:31

right at the age of I don't know. 24.

**Bret** 01:35

Yeah, that's a that's a picture of me when I was younger, but they all are and he

**Bret** 01:39

has his firstborn in his mouth. First hatched only hatch doesn't matter. We'll take it down from there. I'll put it back here for you to explain.

**Bret** 01:54

No, not really. Oh, no. Okay, well look, obviously anybody who knows anything about crocodile ecology and behavior knows that in order for a crocodile to get a proper start in life, you got reflection you need to tilted if you want to see it. In order for a crocodile to get a proper start in life and someone better the crocodile must make it from the nest to the water. And the way its mother will accomplish that is to transport them in its mouth. And so here's the style guide. How did we end up here?

**Heather** 02:31

I was living said mammals have love its maternal love birds of a separate evolution and maybe crocodiles. Yeah, we have this picture in the next room. If you're going to bring up crocodiles and love in the same sentence I did it to myself is what you're saying. Okay, totally. Here's the story of do this on the main live stream right now do this to anyone who shows up.

**Bret** 02:51

Okay. I was working on barro Colorado island in the Panama Canal there. Colorado island was a hilltop in the Canal Zone. And when the canal was filled in 19 1314, it was isolated it became an island. And I think it was Frank barber was a biologist who realized that this was a fantastic opportunity to study the ecology of a tropical habitat because this habitat was about to become completely isolated. We are going to know exactly when it happened. And so he convinced the Smithsonian which of course, this was the Canal Zone so the Americans had governance rights over it. He convinced the Smithsonian to take over this island and they built a research station which exists there to this day. It's the most studied piece of tropical habitat on earth and it's a marvelous place and it has infrastructure that allows you to live there well. So anyway, I lived there. Actually, if you look at a book called The tapirs morning bath by Elizabeth right you will find a discipline chapter is dedicated to me and my bad work back when I was just a pup

**Heather** 03:54

she calls you back into grad school days. The Maverick scientist

**Bret** 03:57

Maverick scientist Weinstein Yeah, she was she was playing off Bret Maverick, which probably you all are too young to even know what Bret Maverick is.

**Heather** 04:03

I actually didn't know that now. I don't know what it Bret Maverick is either it was

**Bret** 04:09

it was I don't think it was a wild west thing but anyway, so I was living there. And the people who live there all you know, Goofy field rats, they're all obsessed with some organism or other and they're all cool people is a really exciting place to live.

**Heather** 04:24

Some of them are actually obsessed with field rats when we were there Yeah, spiny

**Bret** 04:27

rats. Yeah. But anyway, so we all traded Natural History stories. Oh, there's this thing out at the end of you know, barber trail you can go see and you know, anyway, so that was just part of the culture with Lance. Right? Actually, none. They're not fair to lenses on BCI proper.

**Heather** 04:45

Not. That's right, right. No, no Viper, no

**Bret** 04:48

poisonous snakes at all. And even though the little islands in the Canal do have them and the thought is that BCI is big enough to have peccaries which stamp out the poisonous snakes and so anyway, There's no way

**Heather** 05:00

you said that it sound like we're still looking for the Packers. No, it's no piggeries Yeah, but it's the idea is that the packers are actually the reason

**Bret** 05:09

the reason that there are no poisonous snakes on this island and otherwise much more diverse than the little and

**Heather** 05:13

perhaps that they actually intentionally kill the snakes. You know, pigs are smart, and that they find poisonous snakes and they kill them.

**Bret** 05:20

Yep. Okay, so it became known at the point that a crocodile buried a nest full of eggs on the island where the nest was, and so we were all paying attention to this nest, which didn't look like anything. It just looked like a piece of beach at this one spot. And then one night, the thing happens that happens, which is the little crocodiles are ready to hatch and so they start beeping. There's this beeping noise that they make, and it's adorable. But anyway, you know, the beach starts beeping in this place, everybody

**Heather** 05:52

sounds like the beach is backing up, does a lot

**Bret** 05:55

like that, as a matter of fact, anyway, so I was, you know, very into photography. And this is going to be a once in a lifetime opportunity and set up my camera and got ready and they started hatching and the mother was carrying them to the water and she stopped. And that's

**Heather** 06:11

how that's what a mama crocodile looks like. While he carries them in her mouth,

**Bret** 06:15

her mouth to the water and then they group somewhere and the mother hangs out with the babies. And so you can see in certain places, if a mother has a nest we'll have babies that have hatched, you know, under some overhanging plant somewhere. If you go out there at night, you'll see a large pair of crocodile eyes. Right. Very cool. So cute. But anyway, she stopped picking the babies up from the nest and we thought that our photographing her there with some other people. Yeah, we thought that we had driven her off and that the babies were going to die. And so I took one of these eggs, which was not opening and I decided but it was beeping. I it was hard to tell what was beeping I thought this egg was ready to hatch. Yeah, it did not hatch and I thought that we had driven the mother off and therefore we're going to have killed these crocodiles. So I opened this egg to free and I was going to take it to the water and wish it Good luck. And when I opened the egg It was not done developing which meant its belly was open and there was a big yolk sac sitting there. And I decided oh shit now What have I done? And I took the animal and I made a a tub that I put in the bathtub in my decrepit I was living I was the last resident of Kodak. Kodak dormitory is one of the original, you know 1913 structures on the island. Anyway we're there

**Heather** 07:39

because you preferred it in part because it was more private but it also had no AC and so you didn't every time you walked in you didn't you did you'd never you didn't get the climate control so you slept hotter Yeah, but you also didn't constantly lose your acclamation to the tropical environment which you were doing your work

**Bret** 07:55

well then there was the best part about it, which was so the lab clearing was down near the dark, everything comes in by boat. And so the modern buildings are all down there. Kodak was in the old lab clearing which is a couple 100 stairs. But basically you're up in the forest. And so I you know, I love the forest and going to sleep with the forest, making all of its forests noises outside your window every night was great. And it meant that I saw things when I you know, went home in the evening I saw cool animals. And anyway it was just a much better way to live. And it was certainly worth living living with termites, which was really the only downside. But so I had a bathtub and I outfitted it for this crocodile and decided to see if I could get it to maturity. I got it to the point that it had absorbed all of its egg sack and had sutured up and and it was clearly ready to go. It never developed anything like affection for me. I could it did not seem to have that capacity. And I decided

**Heather** 08:56

it was time I didn't it was also not hostile.

**Bret** 08:59

No, it was not hostile. It was indifferent to me as far as I could tell. But anyway, one day I decided it was time to set it free. Mariel Hemingway, of all people happened to Ireland is a place where celebrities sometimes come to do little photoshoots and tropical places and things. Anyway, she was there for what reason? I don't remember. And then like assigned to her be like you'd be the biologist who who does no other or i think i think what it was was certain people knew I had this crocodile that I was raising Shelly was renamed. And I was trying to take Shelly to the water. I didn't want to release her right off of BCI because I didn't know if I would behaviorally have disrupted her. So I wanted to release her somewhere where there were no people. And anyway, I carried her to the boat that I was going to take I had a Panama Canal boat license at the time. And I took Shelley to the water in my mouth just because I wanted to make it as normal as possible and then you know, that's pretty much Looking. Yeah. And anyway, Mariel Hemingway got wind of the fact that we were going to be releasing a crocodile. So me and Marissa hunt Mariel Hemingway, and a couple of my friends went to an adjacent Island and released jelly. And that's all I know. And it actually made the stride newsletter. Oh, nice.

**Heather** 10:19

Yeah. So the the powers that be it's dry. We're, we're okay with all this.

**Bret** 10:25

I don't frankly, remember how many rules I was breaking. You know, I was a long term resident and I was trusted. So yeah, you

**Heather** 10:33

were there for like 19 months. And so you know, I was there with you for a couple of months. But at this point, I think I was in Madagascar doing my own research. Yeah. So yeah, once you're there for a while, they start giving you a little more leeway.

**Bret** 10:46

So anyway, I think the moral to the story is yes, that picture looks almost inexplicable. But when you think about it, it's actually got a perfectly normal explanation.

**Heather** 10:55

I guess the part of the I didn't know some of those details, but I knew most of them. I don't remember how it is that we ended up with a poster of

**Bret** 11:03

my good friends to seal took that picture out years later actually sent us this poster. Yeah. Okay. So that's how we ended up with a cool, that's the seal is watching. But if you are hey,

**Heather** 11:15

yeah, it's pretty late there. She's in Germany. Yes. Yeah. So we didn't ask the question. I mean, we kind of did, which animals can feel love you started there. Right, the question. So So cats versus dogs and, and love and cats having less emotion.

**Bret** 11:32

So I would say, the basic substructure of love is about maternal love that gets brought in into all kinds of things, including romantic love, and fraternal love and all of these things.

**Heather** 11:44

And this is indeed the through line of the two or three chapters in our book on sex and gender relationship, and parenthood and childhood, you know, love starts as this, this mother baby bond, and then gets bigger and bigger and bigger until you have such abstractions as love for country, right?

**Bret** 11:59

And it's basically the the best approximation of what it is, is a willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others as you would on behalf of yourself. Yeah, right. So mothers have to sacrifice on behalf of offspring. Now, with respect to dogs and cats. realize that there is an asymmetry in the cat love relationship, which probably accounts for what you're detecting that does not necessarily exist in the dog relationship. Dogs have been with us for something like 30,000 years, I think, the longest to domesticate, by far, and the reason for that is because they were our hunting partners, and everything else we've domesticated has to do with farming, which is only the last 10,000 years or so. So dogs are ancient partners of ours, cats are very new partners, I think it's more like 3000 years or something like that.

**Heather** 12:46

I don't actually know, I know, it's less, it's a lot less, I don't know. But

**Bret** 12:49

the point is, cats were domesticated, as basically guardians of grain stores, whereas dogs are domesticated as partners in lots of things. And so the willingness to sacrifice on behalf of you is something that is wired into the dog very deeply. And adult cat doesn't have the same relationship with its owner. So yes, cats are capable of love. But the love that a mother cat has for her baby cats means that the wiring is there. But the relationship between the baby and the mother isn't, you know, it is not necessarily the structure of the universe that babies should sacrifice for their mother, the mother because the whole point is future generations should actually train them out of that so

**Heather** 13:36

but one of the pieces of evidence that cats even as adults when they're domestic cats effectively have a relationship with us that is akin to we are their mothers, is that in the wild non domestic cats those cats that per not all cats per but those pieces of cats that per never per as adults, they they lose the ability, and obviously domestic cats retain their purring. And it seems to be a indication of sort of imagined relationship with with parents sure

**Bret** 14:04

that they lose it completely as adults, even when injured. They don't.

**Heather** 14:08

That is what I that is been a while since I've gone back to, to check on that. But that is what I understood to be the case. When I was first thinking about this. That's probably 1015, even 20 years ago at this point. Yeah, I'd want to go back and actually check for sure.

**Bret** 14:22

The other thing that I think is a reliable result is that cats don't talk to each other. But they do talk to us, which is interesting and suggests that they you know, baby cat mewing sending signals to its mother about its location and its state.

**Heather** 14:37

They'll also vocalize sometimes if they're fighting, right, like you can tell like cute cats when they're well but not even like two cats when they're play fighting. You know, it's fine until they start making guttural vocalizations. At which point like someone may be about to get hurt. And yeah, our guy two of our guys do this a fair bit, but they don't sit around talking to each other whereas they'll talk to us.

**Bret** 14:57

It's not obvious because you're generally there when they're talking So you think they do it all the time, but you can document this, you know, with cameras. They don't meow each other.

**Heather** 15:06

Hey guys, that was a clip from our monthly private q&a that you can get access to at my Heather, hirings Patreon. And you can also get access there to all of the past paid subscriber content. So please consider joining us there.

**Bret** 15:20

Did you mention that these private q&a s are the key to living a better life and living to tell the tale

**Heather** 15:25

I forgot to do that these private Q and A's are in fact the key to living a better life and what living to tell the tale living to tell the tale. Go ahead live to tell the tale. Join us there. See ya.