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The Evolution of Sex

Create Project Summary: **Rings against Darwin's Theory of Sexual Selection**

Darwin's theory of sexual selection makes several claims that have been overturned and falsified in recent years. When it's broken down into its different claims, it is easy to see why Darwin's sexual selection theory is inadequate to explain the many phenomenon that occur in the natural world as we know it. There are several examples of natural occurrences that counter the claims of Darwin, including the existence of more than two genders, the idea that "sperm are cheap", and the consequences of that thought, and the idea that females choose males based on physical characteristics, in hopes of their offspring having "good genes", rather than with the hope of getting a little bit of paternal help with the kids [3]. The three examples of counter-Darwinian traits that I addressed are homosexuality in the animal kingdom, sex for non-reproductive purposes, and the gender-role reversal in certain species, in regards to the rearing of offspring.

One of the first stories of animal homosexuality to make big news was the story of Roy and Silo, a pair of chinstrap penguins at the Central Park Zoo. Roy and Silo are both males, and their story brought up the question of homosexuality in animals, an occurrence that is quite popular in the animal kingdom, especially in captivity [2]. It is believed that homosexuality occurs in animals in order to ease social tensions, relieve stress, and maintain sexual functioning. In the case of Roy and Silo, they were able to incubate a previously abandoned egg, and raise the young chick successfully, as any heterosexual parent couple would. Homosexuality completely counters Darwin's theory of sexual selection, but it obviously does have several functions in the animal world. The two penguin rings are meant to be worn facing each other, on two fingers, so that their faces touch affectionately.

Dolphins are known to engage in homosexual behavior as well, with males willingly copulating with other males, through penetration of the genital slit, anus, or even blowhole [1]. Males practicing homosexuality are often very affectionate with each other, though aggressive behavior, including coercive sexual intercourse has been seen in bottlenose dolphins. Similar to humans and bonobos, dolphins frequently have sex for pleasure and to maintain positive social interaction, a fact that was neglected by Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which states that the purpose of mating is almost strictly for the transfer of sperm, rather than to establish and maintain social relationships [3]. The dolphin rings are intended to be worn on the same finger, overlapping to represent the idea that dolphins, like humans, enjoy sexual interaction with each other (the physical positioning of the dolphin rings together is not intended to show the actual position of sexual intercourse, which would be rather impossible in the dorsal-ventral position).

In black swans, not only is homosexuality prevalent, but the typical idea of the male gender-role, according to Darwin, is often reversed. Long-term matings occur between male black swans quite frequently, and the result is usually more successful than a heterosexual pairing, as two males are bigger and stronger than a male and female pair. A pair of male mates will occasionally form a temporary three-party relationship with a female, in order to acquire eggs, driving her from the nest almost immediately after she lays them [1]. The two males then raise the offspring by themselves, a role usually placed on the female, as she incubated the offspring. This occurrence is represented in the set of swan rings, which show one male with the two cygnets, while his male partner chases away the female.

Works Cited

1. Bagemihl, Bruce. Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity. New York, N.Y.: Library of Congress, 1999.
2. Driscoll, Emily V. "*Bisexual Species*." Scientific American Mind. June/July 2008: 68-73.
3. Roughgarden, Joan. Evolution's Rainbow. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004.

