

Book Review:  
“Rewinding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and  
Coexistence”

Marc Bekoff (2014) New World Library, Novato CA.

A. Matamonasa

I met author Marc Bekoff and had the opportunity to hear his plenary address at the Minding Animals Conference in 2012 in the Netherlands. This reviewed work was in progress at that time and I was struck by the number of times he used the term *paradigm shift* in his address. Bekoff is a prolific writer with over twenty-six books and hundreds of scientific essays to his credit and many students and scholars within HAI are familiar with his work. He is an evolutionary biologist and animal activist whose work on animal intelligence and sentience includes collaboration with the legendary Jane Goodall. This work, his latest book (2014) in many ways captures the heart of his conference address, in fact *paradigm shift* also appears throughout this book.

In “Rewilding...” he dives deeper into the area of conservation psychology by examining the need for, and potential impact of reconnecting with the natural world. He describes in detail his theories on *rewilding* as a process of re-establishing our innate connection to nature and animals in order to develop a greater capacity for awareness of non-human animals and their suffering, issues of extinction and loss of biodiversity and global climate change. The foreword is written by author and journalist Richard Louv who is best known for his books *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2005) and his recent work focused on the same premise with adults, *The Nature Principle: Human*

*Restoration and the End of Nature Deficit Disorder* (2011).

HAI is a highly multidisciplinary field and this book, even more so than his other works, reflects this in that it has relevance to ethics, psychology, ecology, veterinary medicine, social justice and social activism. Bekoff writes in a relaxed style, yet manages to convey a number of complex and often profound concepts. His use of personal story and anecdote is appealing to non-scholars and those entering their respective fields at the undergraduate level. The book is multilayered and his use of excellent sources and the concepts he addresses could also provide for much more sophisticated discourse for graduate and post-graduate scholars in HAI.

In the introduction he describes his ideas regarding *rewilding* and the challenges of leaving behind the status quo and evolving into newly constructed cultures or societies that extend care and concern to all non-human animals and the natural world. “It is not easy to change the entrenched practices of industry, businesses, science and society” p 2. He addresses the contemporary dilemmas of animal exploitation, climate change, over-population, extinction and loss of bio-diversity and suggests that personal awareness and individual paradigm shifts can impact the larger society in a powerful and positive way.

In chapter 1, Bekoff begins with global problems and while understanding the scope of these problems that are essential to

his message, this could have the unintended impact of being overwhelming to those readers new to ecopsychology. Bekoff is optimistic and passionate (particularly in the Afterword “Rewind as You Go” if readers can avoid shutting down emotionally by the enormity of the ecological crisis (a common dilemma in teaching ecological studies or animal ethics) and continue on with the other chapters. Chapter 2 provides an introductory overview of the concepts of human exceptionalism and his list of what makes humans unique as a species is both humorous and poignant.

We are the only species who cooks food.  
 We are the only species who makes and uses fire  
 We are the only species with a written language.  
 We are the only species who engages in mass murders and wages global wars.  
 We are the only species who has farting contest or tries to light farts.  
 We are the only species to hold bake sales.  
 We are the only species who wears raincoats, hats or running shoes.  
 We are the only species who uses condoms.  
 We are the only species who tattoos themselves  
 We are the only species who uses modes of transportation other than our bodies.  
 We are the only species who uses computers, Twitter or Facebook.  
 We are the only species who has tried to leave the planet.  
 We are currently the only species whose lifestyle and reproductive capacity impacts and damages every ecosystem on the planet.

(Bekoff, 2014, p. 50)

In chapter 4, Bekoff briefly examines the role of media in social and cultural constructions of nature. This has not been

extensively written about in the literature to date, but given our media saturated world, particularly in Western countries, this is a topic worthy of much attention in HAI and these fields in general. Chapter 5, looks toward the future, our children, future generations and the role of play and humane education. The impact that formal education has on shaping our social and cultural constructions of non-human animals and the natural world is a rich area for even deeper exploration in our field.

In the afterword, Bekoff addresses the issues of discouragement, stress and burnout and the ways in which the problems facing our world and the suffering of non-human animals in every part of the world are sobering and overwhelming. The scope of these problems can lead activists or those in the field to debilitating anxiety and burnout and eventually, inaction. Bekoff credits his years in the field and continued activism without burnout and anxiety to constant and continual rewinding (p. 143). This is such an important concept that I found myself wishing this had a more front and center focus rather than appearing at the end of the work. He summarizes the central principles of rewinding (also discussed in chapter 3) as it relates to activism:

1. Think positively. Don't let people or “bad” situations get you down. I'm not a 100- percent blind optimist, but negativity is a time and energy such. Remind yourself of the good things that are happening and rekindle your faith from time to time Take deep breaths and do something you enjoy. The bottom line is take care of yourself. This is the most important thing to remember otherwise you won't have the energy to continue.

2. Caring for animals, nature or our planet is not radical and does not make you the “bad guy.” You don't have to apologize

for feeling compassion or working for a better world. In fact, fighting to end callous indifference and needless harm to animals and the Earth is heroic work.

3. Seek to find areas of common ground. It is imperative that we work together as much as possible in the ways we can. To coexist with other species and retain the integrity of ecosystems, humanity must act as a unified collective. Often there aren't quick fixes or individual solutions.

4. Be vocal and have the courage to speak out. We need to encourage everyone to act as concerned citizens and responsible stewards. We must lead by example.

5. Be proactive. Look at your life, or what is happening in your community, and actively change what can be changed. Look at what can be improved. Don't simply run about always "putting out fires" that have started.

6. Appeal to compassion with compassion. Be nice and kind to those with whom you disagree and move on if necessary. Sometimes it's better to let something go or agree to disagree. In other

words, pick your battles carefully, and don't waste finite and valuable time and energy on people or situations you can't influence or that won't change. Some people love to fight and have no interest in finding solutions. Instead of engaging them, turn your attention to another way to help animals and the Earth.

(Bekoff, 2014, pp 144-145)

Readers and students will find this book an enjoyable and deep dive into our re-connection with nature and non-human animals. The concepts in each one of the chapters can be entire courses of study in themselves, but it is Bekoff's commitment, passion and optimism that shines through and makes this a worthwhile read in the field of HAI.

#### Reference

- Louv, R (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. New York: Algonquin Books.
- Louv, R. (2011). *The nature principle: Human restoration and the end of nature deficit disorder*. New York: Algonquin Books.