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Frans de Waal (1948-2024) editor-in-chief of behaviour

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Obituary

Frans de Waal (1948–2024): Editor-in-Chief of *Behaviour*

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It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Frans de Waal, who served as Editor in Chief of *Behaviour* from 2011–2024.

Frans de Waal is one the most influential biologists of his generation. His work on primate behaviour and evolution not only revolutionized the way scholars thought about nonhuman animals within the field of behavioural biology but also profoundly shaped other scientific fields extending to ecology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and economics. His comparative approach to the study of behaviour among chimpanzees, bonobos and humans led to clear insights into the fundamental basis of human nature and the evolution of a moral code. In contrast to the way people like to see themselves, humans are not rational beings and often make decisions on the basis of emotion. Further, he showed that nonhuman animals can be a lot more rational than people presumed they were. De Waal studied various aspects of the social lives of our closest living relatives, including dominance hierarchies, conflict resolution, cooperation, empathy, and reconciliation.

His influence transcended the walls of academia. Frans de Waal effectively communicated his work to general audiences through a series of popular books and speaking engagements. Some of his notable books include *Chimpanzee Politics*, *Our Inner Ape*, *The Age of Empathy* and *Mama's Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What They Tell Us about Ourselves*. His impact was felt so widely that *Time* magazine listed Frans de Waal among the top 100 most influential people in 2007.

De Waal's contributions to the field of primatology have been widely recognized, and he has received numerous awards and honors for his work. These include the Distinguished Primatologist Award from the American Society of Primatologists and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Science and Technology.

Reviews of his life and career highlights are appearing in many locations, including his academic home at Emory University, *Science* (Brosnan, 2024), *Nature* (Whiten, 2024) and major news outlets such as the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *Economist*, and the *Washington Post*. Two of our own Associate Editors, Marcela Benítez and Tom Roth, have written a tribute in this issue about Frans de Waal's life work and the impact his work has had on

the field through testimony from individual primatologists (Benítez & Roth, 2024).

Frans de Waal accepted our invitation to be Editor in Chief of *Behaviour* in 2011 because of his long-standing interest in behavioural biology, and because of his long-standing interest in the prominent role that Dutch scientists have played in the establishment and growth of the field since the mid 1900s. Frans de Waal was born in 's-Hertogenbosch, North Brabant, Netherlands on 29 October 1948, the same year that his fellow countryman Nikolaas Tinbergen co-founded the journal *Behaviour* with William Thorpe. Tinbergen was later awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1973 along with ethologists Karl von Frisch and Konrad Lorenz, a few years before Frans de Waal completed his dissertation from Utrecht University under Jan van Hooff in 1977.

De Waal's approach to the study of behaviour drew from two Dutch ethologists, Niko Tinbergen and Adriaan Kortlandt. Kortlandt approached the study of animal behaviour as a way to understand the underlying mechanisms driving all behaviour, including the behaviour of humans. This brought Kortlandt into conflict with his more famous contemporary Niko Tinbergen, who approached the study of behaviour as a trait that evolved in response to ecological selection and constrained by phylogenetic inertia. As a result of this conflict, Kortlandt switched from studying the behaviour of birds to studying the behaviour of primates for the remainder of his career. As described by Benítez & Roth (2024), Frans de Waal drew from both perspectives in his approach to the study of behaviour, while maintaining a strong interest in the role of Dutch scientists in the history of ethology. It was soon after the publication of Frans de Waal's Kortlandt obituary that *Behaviour* Managing and Technical Editor Paul Albers and then Senior Acquisitions Editor for Brill (Publisher of *Behaviour*) Michiel Thijssen approached Frans de Waal to ask if he would be interested in being Editor-in-Chief of Tinbergen's journal. He agreed, and on February 8, 2011, Brill took the unusual step of issuing a press release to announce a change in the editorial board of one of its journals (note the year of founding of *Behaviour* is incorrectly stated to be 1949 in the press release, the correct year is 1948):

From: Els van Egmond

Sent: 08 February 2011 14:24

To: Els van Egmond

Subject: Dr. Frans de Waal appointed as Editor-in-Chief for Brill's journal *Behaviour*

MEDIA ALERT – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dr. Frans de Waal appointed as Editor-in-Chief for Brill's journal *Behaviour*

Leiden, 8 February 2011 - Brill is pleased to announce that **Dr. Frans de Waal** has accepted the position of Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Behaviour*. Upon his appointment, which becomes effective per 1 March, 2011, Dr. De Waal commented, "What a great honor to follow in the footsteps of Niko Tinbergen and Gerard Baerends, and become editor of a founding journal of ethology."

Dr. De Waal will lead this long established journal devoted to behavioral biology, which was co-founded by Nobel Prize winner Niko Tinbergen in 1949. "We are delighted to have such an eminent scientist in charge of one of Brill's flagship journals", said Michiel Thijssen, senior acquisitions editor for Science & Biology.

About Frans de Waal

Dr. Frans B. M. de Waal (1948) is a Dutch primatologist and ethologist with a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Utrecht (1977). He is the Charles Howard Candler professor of Primate Behavior in the psychology department of Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia, and director of the Living Links Center at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center. His research centers on primate social behavior, including conflict resolution, cooperation, inequity aversion, and food-sharing. He is internationally known for his writing on the origins of culture, politics and morality in books, such as *Chimpanzee Politics* (1982), *Our Inner Ape* (2005), and *The Age of Empathy* (2009). He is a Member of the (US) National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. In 2010, he was knighted to the Order of the Netherlands' Lion by the Dutch Queen.

About Behaviour

Started in 1949, *Behaviour* publishes original research pursuing [Tinbergen's four questions](#) and questions resulting from the interrelationship among the four. In addition, the editorial board encourages reviews of behavioral biology that illuminate emergent trends and new directions in behavioral research. *Behaviour* is published in 14 issues per year and all back volumes are also available online. It offers an online manuscript submission and tracking system, allowing for rapid communication between authors, editors and referees, as well as FastTrack (advanced online publication) to enhance the speed of publication. Authors of *Behaviour* have the option to make their articles freely available online in Open Access upon publication (Brill Open). For more information, visit www.brill.nl/beh.

About Brill

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During Frans de Waal's tenure as Editor in Chief of *Behaviour* he was instrumental in recruiting and appointing new associate editors to the editorial board, and promoting several special issues. He will be sorely missed.

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