

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Science (First Year)

Subject: Zoology

Paper Code: ZOG 102

Paper Title: Animal Behaviour

Unit: Patterns of Behaviour

Module Name: Habituation

Name of the Presenter: Ms. Swizel Quadros

Notes

HABITUATION

Habituation is a simple form of learning, in which an animal, after a period of exposure to a stimulus, stops responding. The most interesting thing about habituation is that it can occur at different levels in the nervous system.

Lack of continued response to strong odours is a common example of sensory habituation.

Habituation to complex stimuli may occur at the level of the brain; the stimulus is still perceived, but the animal has simply decided to no longer pay attention. Habituation is significant in sifting the large amounts of information gathered from the environment. By habituating to fewer important signals, an animal can focus its attention on the most important features of its environment. An animal can conserve energy and save time by habituating to unimportant stimuli.

For example, Prairie dogs, give alarm calls when mammals, large birds or snake approach. Individual prairie dogs are particularly susceptible to becoming food for a hawk or rattlesnake but collectively they are quite well-defined as their alarm calls enable escape in burrows.

When Prairie dog towns are located near trails used by humans, giving alarm calls every time a person walks by is a waste of time and energy for the group.

Characteristics of habituation

1. With repeated stimulation the response strength decreases. This is called response decrement.
2. If the stimulus is withheld and then re-presented, the organism will react to the stimulus. This is called spontaneous recovery.
3. The response is less when there are repeated series of stimulus.
4. Similar stimuli may exhibit habituation when presented.
5. Dishabituation is a form of recovered or re-established behavioural response wherein the reaction towards a known stimulus is enhanced, as opposed to habituation.