ASPECTS OF SCHOOLING BEHAVIOUR OF FISH

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Birds flock together when they are not engaged in any other activity. They consider, therefore, that there is a partially independent general social motivation in some birds, comparable to incubation motivation, in which the consummatory situation, as with flocking, consists of being in a certain relation to objects in the environment.

The question of whether there is a separate schooling instinct can be answered tentatively in the affirmative. Schooling behaviour of fish clearly has some of the characteristics of an instinctive activity, although evidence for the presence of some other features is inadequate. There is, however, no superordinated, mystical "social centre" which is at a higher level than other centres and which controls all other types of behaviour. Schooling should probably be placed at a low level in the organization of behaviour because, while some instincts (feeding, escape and others) influence and make use of schooling, the latter does not directly influence other instincts.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to present a hypothesis on the nature of the schooling behaviour of fish based on an ethological investigation of schooling. Recognizing the disadvantages of a limited amount of data and of the use of different species for different parts of the study, the following tentative picture is suggested.

Schooling may be considered an instinct as defined by Tinbergen and is at a relatively low level in the hierarchical organization of behaviour. A single fish separated from its school searches until perceiving a group of fish. It then approaches the group. In most cases vision is the only sense involved in this approach. If more detailed specific stimuli are then perceived (possibly through any of the sense organs) the fish ceases searching and remains with the school; if not, it soon leaves, and appetitive behaviour continues until the appropriate consummatory situation (being in a school of the same species) is attained. This hypothesis is based on the following points:

1. A school of fish is an aggregation formed when one fish reacts to others by remaining near them.

2. Typical features of Gasterosteus aculeatus and Scardinius erythrophthalmus schools are: performance of the same activity at the same time by all fish, lack of aggressiveness between members and equality of rank of all members.

3. Blinded Scardinius fail to show typical schooling but remain in an area where odours from other Scardinius can be detected. This response may keep schools of this species from scattering widely at night.


5. When presented with two different-sized schools of their own species single Gasterosteus, Scardinius and Leuciscus rididii prefer the larger to the smaller group.

6. A small Gasterosteus prefers six large to six small Gasterosteus.

7. A single Gasterosteus prefers a school of its own species to a school of Rhodeus amarus but shows no consistent preference when either Hypoglossus punctatus or Leuciscus are presented together with Gasterosteus.

8. A single Pristella prefers a school of unoperated Pristella to a school with amputated dorsal fins. The dorsal fin with its conspicuous black patch is jerked more
rapidly after alarm. This structure and its special movement may be considered a
social releaser.

9. Increased feeding motivation leads to limited dispersal of a school of Gasterosteus.
The head-down feeding posture is a signal attracting others in a school to a source of
food.

10. Alarm causes an increase in density of a school of Gasterosteus.

11. With increasing reproductive motivation male Gasterosteus cease schooling and
try to hold territories. Females disperse to a limited extent.

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