



Can you call it love?

Clip: Liz Bonnin interviews Prof Kurt Kotrschal. (Animals in Love, BBC One, 2015)

LIZ BONNIN:

The story of Tariq and Judith really is heart-warming and raises many intriguing questions. If it was simply a matter of survival, then why didn't Tariq just stay with his new partner? Why was he so compelled to be with Judith? Could it possibly have been love? Professor Kurt Kotrschal from the University of Vienna has spent decades studying the long-term bonds between greylag geese.

I want to find out if he thinks there's an emotional side to Tariq and Judith's relationship. Do geese have emotions, then?

PROF KURT KOTRSCHAL:

Well, it's a difficult thing to know because, as a scientist, I'm not supposed to project something into a goose.

But what we know is that kind of six basic emotions are common to mammals, to birds. Anger, fear, falling in love, sexual arousal, play. And we have these kind of erm...

A pedative system, being interested in something. That's one of the basic emotional systems.

LIZ BONNIN:

I didn't realise that falling in love was considered a basic emotion. I thought that was quite a complex one and one that most people are loath to draw analogies about when it comes to humans and other animals.

How controversial was it to come up with this? And how long has it been since it's been pretty much accepted within the scientific community?

PROF KURT KOTRSCHAL:

People didn't want to hear about it because they liked to be special.

There was this deep trench generated over the centuries. And now we know. The last ten, 20 years we have produced increasing evidence that the trench between humans and animals is not as deep as many people would want it to be.

The part of the brain responsible for the basic mechanisms are the same in humans and geese. The hormones involved are the same. The behaviour we see is the same. So, there is a lot of parallels.

What we cannot say, of course, is how they are feeling. Whether the human feeling of falling in love is the same that the goose feeling of falling in love. But it's not unlikely that it's really the same.