



## **The State of Comparative Psychology Today: An Introduction to the Special Issue**

**Charles I. Abramson<sup>1</sup> and Heather M. Hill<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Oklahoma State University, U.S.A.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Mary's University, U.S.A.*

Comparative psychology has long held an illustrious position in the pantheon of psychology. Depending on who you speak with, comparative psychology is as strong as ever or in deep decline. To try and get a handle on this the *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* has commissioned a special issue on the State of Comparative Psychology Today. Many of the articles in this issue were contributed by eminent comparative psychologists. The topics are wide ranging and include the importance of incorporating comparative psychology into the classroom, advances in automating, comparative cognition, philosophical perspectives surrounding comparative psychology, and issues related to comparative methodology. Of special interest is that the issue contains a listing of comparative psychological laboratories and a list of comparative psychologists who are willing to serve as professional mentors to students interested in comparative psychology. We hope that this issue can serve as a teaching resource for anyone interested in comparative psychology whether as part of a formal course in comparative psychology or as independent readings.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* addresses the state of comparative psychology today. The issue was stimulated by an article asking where our next generation of students will come from (Abramson, 2015a, 2005b). The original article generated a wide range of responses and garnered over 5,700 views as of this writing. The tone of the article was rather gloomy and cited several arguments that suggested that comparative psychology is on decline. These arguments include few graduate programs, only one textbook, few courses in comparative psychology, and lack of meaningful coverage in introductory psychology texts. One person who read that article was Dr. Heather Hill and she thought a special issue on the current state of comparative psychology would be appropriate.

The 13 articles in this issue represent a wide range of topics and can be grouped into several categories. The main grouping of articles may be best characterized as focusing on the methodology used in comparative psychology. Here, Hill et al. discusses problems of replication in the False Belief Task; Smith et al. examines the challenges a psychologist faces when designing comparative experiments; Eaton et al. suggests that comparative psychology places too much emphasis on the “top down approach” where animal behavior is compared to human behavior rather than species specific abilities; Craig and Abramson advocate the need to analyze the data of individuals rather than group data as group data can often be misleading when applied to individuals; Beran discusses the advantages of pre-registering experimental designs; and Varnon and Abramson discuss the importance of automation in comparative psychology and discuss the Propeller Experimental Controller.

In addition to articles focusing on comparative methodology, a second set of articles focus on applied aspects of comparative psychology. Kieson discusses the role of comparative psychology in providing much

Please send correspondence to Charles Abramson, Oklahoma State University, U.S.A. (Email: [charles.abramson@okstate.edu](mailto:charles.abramson@okstate.edu))

\* Dr. H. M. Hill acted as action editor on this paper for the special issue.

\*Please note that Dr. R. Walker, Associate Editor, handled the submission of this introductory piece.

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needed data on the effectiveness of equine therapy; Highfill and Yeater discuss their experiences in using undergraduate students in zoos to collect data on enrichment use and guest experiences.

Other articles focus more on philosophical and theoretical questions surrounding comparative psychology. Zentall provides several examples where the comparative method can help provide a theoretical framework to better understand human behavior. Wasserman revisits the role of comparative psychology in the philosophy and application of artificial intelligence in today's world.

The final grouping of papers are related to teaching. Krause discusses several ways in which comparative psychology can be incorporated into undergraduate psychology program and outlines a strategy where a comparative psychology course can be mapped onto the guidelines established by the American Psychological Association for psychology majors; Zucker discusses ways that comparative psychology can be incorporated into a history and systems course; and Abramson provides a reading list that he has found to be effective for anyone interested in comparative psychology either as a formal course or for general interest. He also provides data on the decline of comparative psychology entries in the *Annual Review of Psychology* series and the decline of comparative psychology textbooks.

Our special issue concludes with both a listing of laboratories that have an interest in the comparative analysis of behavior and the names of comparative psychologists who can serve as mentors and/or resource persons for those interested in comparative psychology.

In closing we would like to note that, unlike many other journals, the articles in this special issue, as in all issues of the *International Journal of Comparative Psychology*, are free to everyone. As such, we would encourage our readers to share this issue with colleagues in other countries and indeed, to anyone that might have an interest in comparative psychology. We believe that the articles in this special issue provide a good representation of the issues facing contemporary comparative psychology. We would like to thank each author for their contributions.

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