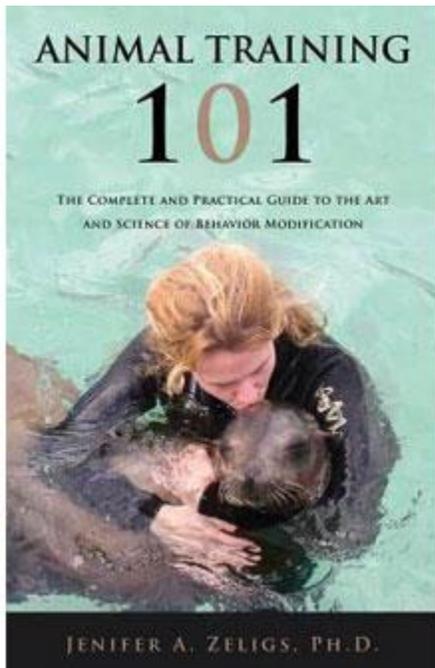


Off The Shelf

Reviewed by John Widick | Compiled by John Widick | Volume 41, Number 3 — Third Quarter 2016

Animal Training 101: The Practical Guide to the Art and Science of Behavior Modification

By Jenifer A. Zeligs, Ph. D.



It makes sense that the collection of books about training should grow. The body of writing on positive reinforcement intended for pets may have widened to a sufficient size by now, but there is a different audience that needs more to read. Professional trainers at zoos and aquaria need at least a full shelf worth, maybe two. *Animal Training 101: The Practical Guide to the Art and Science of Behavior Modification* is a book intended for the audience of animal training professionals, the demographic that once upon a time primarily included marine mammal trainers, but now has swelled into a bigger, ampler family of people who work with every kind of learning living thing.

The level of sophistication of *Animal Training 101* is just right. If *Don't Shoot the Dog* is the ideal intro to the field, then *Animal Training 101* is the ideal introduction to nuance. Every new trainer has to discover the ambiguities of the craft for themselves, but this book can make those discoveries less daunting, and guide intermediate trainers through them, especially in work environments that have only adopted positive reinforcement training halfway, and where guidance can be lacking.

One of the bolder decisions of the book is to address those topics that have become controversial within the field. These are not the big ethical controversies that form a tremendous ideological

rift between caretakers and... *others*, but controversies with a lowercase “C.” Dr. Zelig does not shy away from discussing end of session stimuli, for example, or the occasional times when baiting may be a useful tool. Many professional trainers like to pretend these options don’t exist, but rather than teaching an opinion Zelig chooses to *teach the controversy*, acknowledging drawbacks to these techniques, but shining light on them and salvaging them from the pure mystery.

Animal Training 101 certainly covers the basics of operant conditioning, and experienced readers will tread some old ground. That said, it will certainly elucidate the finer points that many trainers perceive, but don’t fully grasp. It’s recommended for new trainers who are very thirsty for knowledge, as well as those who are ready to swim in the deep end.