

Rebecca Ring  
PhD Candidate, Philosophy  
York University, Toronto  
ringr@yorku.ca

## Cultural Heritage in Non-human Animals: Recognizing it in Practices

Some non-human animals have culture. Some good examples are the orca populations that live in the Northeast Pacific. If we accept a *prima facie* account of culture as information or behaviour that is socially transmitted between animals and persists over time, then these orca populations constitute culturally distinct groups. They exhibit group-specific, socially transmitted patterns of behaviour that include diet, unique vocal dialects, social structure, foraging practices and more that have been passed on for generations. If culture is a “second-inheritance system” (Whiten 2017), then these orcas have cultural heritage (‘heritage’ from here on). But what does it mean to have heritage? How might heritage be maintained without shared narratives and accounts of history? I argue non-human animal cultural heritage is co-created and maintained in performance, identity, intangibles, place and present. First, I argue that culture is constituted in social meanings in virtue of experiencing subjects making sense of the worlds they inhabit. Where meaning is social, subjects are situated in normative social worlds. Second, I draw on research in critical heritage studies that shows human cultural heritage consists in on-going meaning-making practices that go beyond the material, monumental, aesthetically pleasing and past. Instead, qualitative and ethnographic research reveals heritage in performance, identity, intangibles, place and present. I argue that some non-human animals can maintain heritage in these same ways. Evidence includes beach rubbing practices unique to Northern Resident Killer Whales (NRKW). This orca community engages in multigenerational persistent practices of visiting specific beaches and rubbing their bodies on the pebbles. It is social behaviour, socially learned, and demonstrates affiliative intersubjective affect. Perhaps it is a group bonding activity or hygiene, or both. Regardless of the instrumental values, this tradition is culturally inherited and maintained, constituting cultural heritage.