

**Evolution of Communicative Flexibility**

**Complexity, Creativity, and Adaptability in Human and Animal  
Communication**

**edited by D. Kimbrough Oller and Ulrike Griebel**

**The MIT Press  
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London, England**

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## Preface

Understanding the evolution of human communication presents one of the fundamental challenges of the future of biological science. As far as can be told, humans communicate in vastly more complex ways than any other animal, both in content and in form. The evolutionary roots of this human capability have long been shrouded in mystery, but recent comparative research has begun to shed light on the possible origins of human communication. The key first step in that evolutionary history seems to have been the establishment of basic communicative flexibility—specifically, the ability to vocalize freely along with the capability to coordinate vocalization with communicative intent.

We have been fortunate to have been provided with a magnificent setting and support system for the exploration of the origins of communicative flexibility. The Vienna Series in Theoretical Biology, published by MIT Press and developed through the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research in Altenberg, Austria is dedicated to fostering growth in understanding of evolution of cognitive capabilities, one of which is communication. The series is based on workshops conducted with small numbers of selected international figures in their respective fields. The workshop on which the present volume is based follows a prior workshop (volume 4 in the series) with the same organizers/editors (Oller and Griebel, 2004, *Evolution of Communication Systems*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) that laid groundwork for the present effort. The workshop on which the present volume is based included an extremely lively and informative exchange over two and a half days at the Konrad Lorenz Institute, which is housed in the Lorenz mansion. All of the primary contributors were participants in the workshop and also served as reviewers for manuscripts upon which the chapters are based.

We wish to thank the Konrad Lorenz Institute, both administrators and staff, for the support of the workshop and the volume. The experience of the workshop was a genuine pleasure as was the work that preceded and followed it. We hope this product will provide further inspiration for research and theoretical development to help deepen our understanding of the origins of language.

**Reference**

Oller DK, Griebel U, eds. 2004. *Evolution of Communication Systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.