



The Kingdom of the Grey Mice

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Somewhere on an island, I have forgotten the name, in the Pacific Ocean live a special type of mice. All mice on that island are born pink. Nothing special, but during growing up their colour changes: some become grey, others black. Although the cause of this colour transformation is not yet known, biologists claim to observe a clear difference in behaviour in relation to the colour at adulthood.

The grey coloured mouse is barely in the open and slips away at the smallest disturbance. You must look for him (or her for that part) in the quiet centre of a colony, usually well shielded from the outside world. The grey mouse manages his nest as clockwork. He seems to manage this complex micro society as smooth and efficient as possible. Each member performs what is expected of him. In short, a grey nest is a model of peace and control.

You don't have to search for a black mouse. He will find you. You feel his presence when he's around. He's personally involved in everything he does. In his nest, the mice are very driven. They are, as it were, inspired and committed in order to achieve something. The nest is usually located at the borders of a colony and is a hive of vibrant passion. If you approach a black nest, you risk being attacked by a small group of mice. A black mouse does not flight from difficulties or danger; he faces it heads-on, very often supported by the co-habitants of his nest.

Biologists were not only puzzled by the colour transformation, but also by the ratio between the two colours. Although inhabitants of black nests are clearly better off, they discovered that the grey mice forms by large the majority. At first sight, black mice are better adapted to the environment, but it was found that the grey seem to 'thrive' nevertheless. Only after long and accurate observations could this apparent, Darwinian contradiction being explained.

As told, all mice are born pink. It can be stated that there is, not taking the natural environment into account, an equal chance to transform in black or grey. However, it was observed that the grey colour dominated in a protected nest. The social behaviour of these rodents specie may explain the colour anomaly. The grey mice stimulate their flight behaviour by a complex system of rewards and punishment. Experimenting and making mistakes are almost immediately punished. Sometimes by mutilating or even killing the offender. After reaching this conclusion, the biologists were no longer surprised that a lot of potential adventurous black mice never reach their full dark colour, but turn into the safe grey.

The individuals who leave the nest with a black colour are not out of harm's way yet. As long as they have no own nest, they are considered by their colleague-mice as outsiders. Although most of the grey feel safe in the environment of an adult black mouse, they punish him almost immediately if something goes wrong. This happens frequently, because a black mouse takes initiative and does not run away if something goes wrong or if normality is disturbed. Sometimes, a black mouse is simply kicked out of the colony.

Trying things and taking responsibility, also ensures that a black mouse very rarely leads a colony. In fact, most of the grey mice want a quiet and calm colony. Their nest is what counts, for the rest they want as little disturbance as possible. Black mice do not sit quietly but want to expand, improve, do things ... and that means change. A thing grey mice thoroughly hate.

External factors also contribute to a lower ratio of black mice. They nest at the edge of a colony, where existence is more challenging. If things are really going bad, black nests may be completely destroyed. If the colony is attacked by predators, the black mice are the ones defending it. Of course, a successful counterattack sometimes means victims under the black mice.

After these observations the biologists wondered how to explain the existence of black nests. If everything was against them, how could they even survive? And have nests? The answer was cruelly simple and became clear by accident.

At the end of the observation period, it began to rain. Finding food in the environment became difficult. After a few days of bad weather, the colony began to realize that something had to be done, a disaster was in

the making. The grey mice became more and more nervous, but nothing happened. Even the first victims from starvation did move them into action. Much nervousness, no decisions.

Until a few black mice took over and moved with a few companions to a better place. They tried in vain to convince grey mice to go with them. The grey mice that stayed in the colony all died of starvation, while those few that left created new, successful colonies.

When, after some time, the group of biologists returned to the island to study the new colonies, they did again a strange discovery. The new colonies, which originally had a high ratio of black mice, were now prosperous but predominantly consisted of grey mice. The ratio was again in favour of the grey mice. The black mice, although they saved the species, were again nesting at the edge of the colony. Probably until the next crisis.

Some thought that the individuals in those colonies were stupid. They should cherish and treat their black mice with respect. However, evidence points to the conclusion that those colonies always turn predominately grey until the next disaster. Evolution knows no direction, no purpose. It is a 'blind' process, not good, not bad. Not smart, not stupid. Purely a form of change. A thing biologists only can observe.

The question is whether we want our organisations to follow this purposeless evolution. Do we prefer to wait for the next crisis in the hope that there are still enough black mice to save us? Or do we want to transform?