

Ape's war with humans displays advanced thinking

What do a chimp's aggression and a whale's compassion have in common? Both are evidence that animals are more intelligent than we ever thought. Is it time for a new approach on animal rights?



SCIENCE
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Santino the chimp is at war with the humans. For at least four years, Santino has been mining loose concrete from the walls of his enclosure in a Swedish zoo. Complacent passers-by who stray too close are pelted with makeshift missiles.

Perhaps not entirely admirable behaviour. But it *is* remarkably intelligent: Santino's attacks require forward planning, while the stones he excavates are basic tools.

Now researchers have found that his schemes are even more sophisticated than first thought. Santino has taken to stockpiling his weaponry under a pile of hay. Until a target is in range, he feigns indifference; then, without warning, he grabs a concealed missile and launches it.

For millennia, intelligence has been thought of as a uniquely human quality. In 1686, for instance, philosopher René Descartes mocked the idea that animals



DOLPHINS



ELEPHANTS



CHIMPANZEE



CROW

were capable of thought. But a growing body of evidence now suggest that Descartes was wrong.

All sorts of animals show signs of higher thought. And some might approach, or even match, human levels of intelligence. Dolphins, for example, can solve bewilderingly complex puzzles. They speak an advanced and varied language and can even learn human grammar – those in captivity may understand our talk better than we do theirs.

And it is not only higher mammals whose mental powers we may have underestimated. Crows can design simple tools like hooks. They can recognise human faces, and even distinguish between the work of different artists.

It is not just about cold logic: animals can be playful, inquisitive and even compassionate. Last week, a group of humpback whales were filmed desperately trying to save some gray whales

from being attacked by a pod of orcas. It is almost unheard of for animals to help members of species other than their own.

THE RISING APE

Language, logic, compassion: one by one, the qualities we think of as uniquely human are being detected all over the animal kingdom. Surely, animal rights activists say, we can no longer behave as though we are lords of the earth. We must recognise that we are one species among equals, and treat animals the way we expect to be treated ourselves.

'What head-in the clouds nonsense!' reply less sentimental types. Naturally we are interested in the minds of other animals; but the mere fact that we are having this conversation shows how much more sophisticated we are. What animal has anything to compare to aeroplanes, iPads, Shakespeare or YouTube? None, they say: humans are special.

Q & A

Q How do we know that animals have conscious intelligence? Couldn't they just be instinctively reacting to situations?

A The short answer is that we don't: until we can accurately simulate the experience of being inside a monkey's head (unlikely ever to happen), we will never know for

sure whether they are conscious. Then again by the same argument, you can never know *for sure* that your best friend is truly conscious.

Q Okay, but within reason...

A Here's what we know for sure: animals can envisage future situations and plan for them. They can work in teams to solve problems that are impossible for individuals. They can empathise with other animals

and even humans. That does not necessarily mean they are conscious – but as far as we can measure, there is nothing to say that they are not.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'There's no point worrying about animal rights until we've sorted out our own species' problems.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

▶ Ape's war with humans displays advanced thinking

WORD WATCH

Forward planning – This is often seen as a sign of sophisticated intelligence, and even consciousness, because it requires an animal to envisage an imaginary future. Smart animals like whales, apes and elephants have all proven that they are capable of this – even when faced with a situation they have never encountered before.

René Descartes – Descartes was a 17th Century French philosopher who famously coined the phrase, 'I think, therefore I am.' He believed that this was the first thing that we could conclude for certain about the world, without any preconceptions. The second most famous thing he did was to shut himself in an oven while thinking the phrase up. He believed that humans' bodies were separate from their souls – but did not think the same was true of animals.

Human grammar – When a dog learns over a hundred words, that is impressive enough. But dolphins can be trained to obey complex sentences like 'put the ball between the buoy and the man.' That is an enormous leap up, and implies sophisticated language comprehension.

Orcas – The proper name for a killer whale, which in fact is not a whale at all. Rather, it is a species of dolphin. The collective noun for orcas (and whales) is 'pod'.

YOU DECIDE

1. If a goat and a human were equally intelligent, would you treat them as equals?
2. What is the most important trait that distinguishes humans from other animals?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a story about a major event from the perspective of an onlooking animal. How do you think their thoughts and perceptions might be different from those of a human?
2. Design an experiment to test for animal intelligence.

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 **NOTES**

