

SCIENCE!

Learn From Lemurs: Boast Brainpower to Make Friends

BY [STEPHANIE MLOT](#) 04.06.2018 :: 3:45PM EST

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lemurs with a new skill become more popular the more they practice it (via InspiredImages/Pixabay)

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There isn't much about life we can't learn from the ring-tailed lemur—including how to win friends and influence people.

New research from Princeton University suggests that lemurs with a new skill become more popular the more they practice it.

“We were able to show clever lemurs—some of our earliest primate relatives—increasing their social centrality as the result of their problem-solving,” senior study author Daniel Rubenstein, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, said in a statement.

It's no secret that primates learn new skills more rapidly by observing others. But, it turns out, the opposite is true, too.

When presented with a new challenge—what to do with a single grape inside a glass box, accessible only via a drawer—the *Lemur catta* showed their true stripes.

In two groups of 20, the first to open the container was an adolescent—a female in one faction and a male in the other. (The animals' age and sex don't seem to have any bearing on the final results.)

Several lemurs observed the grape retrieval technique, some so bold as to open the drawer themselves. Researchers monitored which ring-tails solved the problem, focusing not on the critters' will to win, but on how the animals treated those that succeeded.



A fruitful fetch increased the amount of positive attention a lemur receives (via manfredrichter/Pixabay)

A (forgive the pun) fruitful fetch increased the amount of positive attention a lemur receives; flaunting intelligence earns support and affection from others.

“I was quite impressed that the frequently observed lemurs received more affiliate behaviors, such as grooming, without adjusting their own social behavior,” Ipek Kulahci, first author on the paper, said.

“In most primate species, grooming tends to be mutual; it relies on reciprocity between the groomer and the individual being groomed,” she continued. “So it is a pretty striking pattern that the frequently observed lemurs received lots of grooming without providing more grooming to others.”

In the wild, a high IQ could mean the difference between life and death: Successful animals learn about their environment and apply that knowledge to finding food and avoiding predators.

Befriending the brainy types, meanwhile, provides more opportunities to observe and master new skills.

In the Princeton study, even after scientists removed the box, perceived “expert” lemurs continued to be groomed more regularly than before.

“Animal behavior is far more rich and flexible than we generally tend to think,” Kulahci said. “Our study shows that animals learn not only about their physical environment ... but they also learn about each other and use this information to make flexible social decisions when forming social relationships.”

The research—described in [a paper](#) by Rubenstein, Kulahci, and Asif Ghazanfar—was published this week in the journal *Current Biology*.

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