

# NATURE WORLD NEWS

## SECTIONS

### Lemurs Yak When They Know Others: Social Inheritance from Primates

By **Catherine Arnold** Dec 14, 2015 06:06 PM EST

Making small remarks or calling out to one another -- making chitchat, essentially -- is something lemurs do as a social-bonding tool, says a new study from Princeton University. It turns out that when humans do this, it may be passed down from primates.

Maybe just as importantly, the ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) in the study tossed out these vocalizations to keep in touch with animals they already know, not just everyone, it turns out. The research was recently reported in the journal *Animal Behavior*.

Basically, when lemurs call out, they're doing so with others that they groom most frequently; their vocalizations serve as "grooming at a distance" for keeping in touch when they are separated from intimately known group members while foraging for food or involved in other activities, said study first author Ipek Kulahci in [a release](#).

"Our results indicate that when animals respond to each other's vocalizations, they are in fact also working on maintaining their social bonds," Kulahci said in the release. Co-authors on the study included Asif Ghazanfar and Daniel Rubenstein, Princeton staff members.

"This social selectivity in vocalizations is almost equivalent to how we humans keep in regular touch with our close friends and families, but not with everyone we know," Kulahci added in [a statement](#).

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Contrary to existing theories of language evolution that say vocal exchanges had their evolution based on group size, in this study the lemurs vocalized regardless of group size. While the animals groomed more in larger groups, they did not necessarily chitchat more. The study found that there is a connection between the familiarity brought by grooming -- and vocalization.

Mainly, the research found that talking, even casually, is a tool for growing closer.

"Talking is a social lubricant, not necessarily done to convey information, but to establish familiarity," Ghazanfar said in the statement. "I think these vocalizations are equivalent to the chitchat that we do. People think that conversations are like exchanging mini-lectures full of information. But most of the time we have conversations and forget them when we're done because they're performing a purely social function."

The research was conducted with lemurs living at Duke University's Lemur Center and on St. Catherines Island in Georgia.

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