

CREATURE CULTURE



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3×50 min. 4K, 5.1 and Stereo



We often think of "culture" as uniquely human but now realise that this isn't the case. We've known for some time that primates have a shared culture but are beginning to understand how widespread it is throughout the animal kingdom. So today we should no longer ask whether animals have culture - they do. So, are humans different from other animals?

hat do we mean by "culture"? In this series, we refer to the sharing and passing on of learned behaviours. Culture existed long before us humans and is certainly not unique to Homo sapiens. New research shows that cultural heritage can be a driving evolutionary factor throughout the animal kingdom, just like genetic heritage.

Series concept:

With fantastic shots of never-before-seen behaviors, episode I will provide an overview of culture in the animal kingdom and episodes 2 and 3 explore two specific areas: the culture of song among animals and the use of tools.

Episode 1: WE ARE NOT ALONE

What is culture and how can it be understood among animals? We define the concept of culture and show how we can find it everywhere in the animal kingdom, not just in humans or great apes – it's widespread among countless vertebrates, and even invertebrates. Fruit flies warn each other if parasitic wasps are nearby but scientists found the flies can learn the dialects of other fruit fly species to share the information. In the UK, word quickly got around that fine cream can be found under the foil lids of milk bottles that are delivered on the doorstep, and birds like blue tits learned from each other how to do this. Meerkats use something like initiation rites: to introduce young animals to the art of hunting scorpions, they first give the little ones victims who've had their poison sting removed. Only when the young animals have learned to handle them, will they be left with poisonous scorpions. Other examples include the sophisticated courtship dances of some birds of paradise, flight routes of cranes and the special selection of prey for bonobos. Hundreds of traditions have now been discovered in great apes alone.

Episode 2: SING WITH ME

Sparrows were among the first animals to be recognised as having culture by scientists, nearly 60 years ago. They sing with regional dialects that even change over time, a tradition now found in many songbirds today. Since animal sounds and songs can now be recorded by high quality audio equipment in the wild, researchers can make detailed studies of their songs and wherever they look in the animal kingdom, culturally influenced songs surround us all over the world like a polyphonic concert. We just have to learn to listen. Not only on land, but also under the surface of the oceans – humpback whales are famous for their songs, the meaning of which we still don't fully understand. The males, who "stand" upside down in the water in a very specific position while singing, sing with passion – not only songs that they invent themselves, but also sounds that they've heard from other whales. Over the course of a year, a "summer hit" is created, which wanders halfway around the globe and is passed on from whale to whale, from community to community.

Episode 3: USING TOOLS

It's been known for some time that primates not only use tools but pass on the skills to others. How chimpanzees in the Congo originally came up with the idea of "cutlery" remains their secret, but they learn this from more experienced chimpanzees – long thin sticks are good for a certain species of ants, short thick sticks are suitable for eating honey as they can be used to fish out honeycombs from tree hollows. And like humans, different families have different customs: While chimpanzees of the Ivory Coast can handle hammers and anvils to crack nuts, others in Tanzania don't even try. Yet other animals have come up with this idea – New Caledonia's b shape twigs to poke beetle larvae out of tree stumps. The crows know exactly what they need to do, the leaves, petioles and branches of two specific tree species are the best for making tools, long enough to reach the larva. And dolphins also use tools. In Australia, bottlenose dolphins wear sea sponges on their snouts while they rummage around the coral and seabed to stir up the fish they eat. It's thought that the sponge protects the delicate beak, and mothers pass on the trick to their children, mainly to their daughters. This seems to lead to a social connectedness, a subculture of "Spongers".



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