Magic tricks for crows: how animals experience the world

Perform a magic trick for a member of the crow family and it will show how startled it is by the unexpected. Crows are known for being the Einsteins of the avian world, but what about the animals that feed us, clothe us, entertain us – what is the nature of their intelligence? Will our growing realisation that animals may be experiencing the world around them in ways that would surprise us, reframe our understanding of animal welfare? Tune in for some ideas.

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Insights and ideas
Research conducted back in 1995 established that a pigeon can tell a Picasso from a Monet. Now studies are showing young bumblebees will go out of their way to play with balls for no reward other than what seems to be ‘the fun of it’. Surprised? What else have we yet to discover?

As we understand more about animal sentience, what are we doing about our relationship with them – what developments are coming down the line to support animal welfare on farms, for example? Octopus farming is becoming a reality – can we farm atypical species to high welfare standards if we don’t understand how they experience the world?

This episode is exploring what we mean by ‘sentience’ and how that needs to be incorporated into the way we act.

Jonathan Birch is an associate professor at the London School of Economics’ Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science. In 2021, the review he led into the sentience of invertebrates resulted in the amendment of the British government’s Animal Welfare Bill to include octopuses, crabs and lobsters. He coordinated the ASENT project.

Associate professor at the University of Leuven’s Animal and Human Health Engineering Unit, Tomas Norton leads research on sustainable precision livestock farming through projects such as AutoPlayPig. He is particularly interested in the interface between animal health, welfare and productivity.

Nicola Clayton is a fellow of the Royal Society and professor of Comparative Cognition in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cambridge. Coordinator of the CAUSCOG project, Clayton is particularly interested in the processes of thinking with and without words, comparing the cognitive capacities of corvids, cephalopods and children.

Happy to hear from you!

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Keywords

CORDIScovery, CORDIS, ASENT, AutoPlayPig, CAUSCOG, sentience, animal welfare, crows, pig, octopuses, invertebrates, farming, cognitive capacities

Related projects
AutoPlayPig

Automatic detection of play behaviour in young pigs as a measure of positive affective states.

13 June 2022

ASENT

Foundations of Animal Sentience

12 November 2022

CAUSCOG

Tool Use As A Tool For Understanding Causal Cognition In Humans And Corvids

10 September 2015

Last update: 21 November 2022
Record number: 442595


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