Dogs succeed while chimps fail at following finger pointing

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Dogs are better than chimps at interpreting pointing gestures, according to a study published in the online journal *PLoS ONE*.

Katharina Kirchhofer, of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany, led a team in the investigation of 20 chimps and 32 dogs presented with the same task: retrieving an object the experimenter wanted, as indicated by the experimenter pointing. The researchers found that the dogs performed well, but the chimps failed to identify the object of interest. These results emphasize the difference in chimp response to human gaze, which they have been shown to be good at following, versus gestures.

"The fact that chimpanzees do not understand communicative intentions of others, suggests that this may be a uniquely human form of communication. The dogs however challenge this hypothesis. We therefore need to study in more detail the mechanisms behind dogs' understanding of human forms of communication", says Dr. Kirchhofer.

More information: Kirchhofer KC, Zimmermann F, Kaminski J, Tomasello M (2012) Dogs (Canis familiaris), but Not Chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes), Understand Imperative Pointing. *PLoS ONE* 7(2): e30913. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0030913

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