

Animals learn predators' foot movements

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Canadian scientists say they've discovered animals' brains are "hard wired" to recognize a predator's foot movements.

Queen's University researchers say the reason people can approach animals in the wild more easily by car than by foot may be due to an innate "life detector" tuned to the visual movements of an approaching predator's feet.

Psychologist Niko Troje said, "We believe this visual filter is used to signal the presence of animals that are propelled by the motion of their feet and the force of gravity." Troje is Canada Research chairman in Vision and Behavioral Sciences.

The scientists suggest the low level locomotion detector is part of an evolutionary old system that helps animals detect quickly -- even on the periphery of their visual field -- whether a potential predator or prey is nearby.

Conducted with Dr. Cord Westhoff from Germany's Ruhr University-Bochum, the study was funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the German Volkswagen Foundation.

The research appears online in the international journal *Current Biology*.

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