

Study: Chickens are smarter than thought

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Australian scientists have discovered chickens are far more sophisticated in communicating than has been thought.

Chris Evans and his wife, Linda -- both from Macquarie University -- played food calls to adult golden Sebright bantam hens. Rather than simply celebrating the discovery of food, the equivalent of a "hooray", the scientists discovered the high-pitched sound the birds uttered means "here is some food" -- setting an example of representational signaling, The London Telegraph reported.

In tests on 17 birds, the researchers also discovered the hens have nuances for a given call, producing them at a higher rate if the food is highly preferred.

"To the extent that our attitudes toward animals are shaped by their perceived mental life, such findings should be thought-provoking," Chris Evans told The Telegraph, noting the cleverness of chickens goes further than the 20 or more calls they can make. For example, he said chickens live in stable social groups and can recognize each other by facial features.

The study appears in the journal *Biology Letters*.

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