

Evolution of animal personalities studied

June 5 2007

A team of Dutch, German and Swedish scientists studying the evolution of animal personality has found animals differ strikingly in character and temperament.

Although only recently has it become evident that personalities are a widespread phenomenon in the animal kingdom, scientists have already described personality differences in more than 60 species, including primates, rodents, birds, fish, insects and mollusks.

Now research led by Max Wolf of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, who is currently at the Santa Fe Institute, is offering an explanation of the evolution of animal personalities.

Wolf -- along with Franjo Weissing of the University of Groningen, Olof Leimar of Stockholm University, and Santa Fe postdoctoral fellow Sander van Doorn -- says in many cases personalities are shaped by a simple underlying principle: the more an individual stands to lose (in terms of future reproduction) the more cautiously it is likely to behave in all kinds of situations and consistently over time.

The research is detailed in the current issue of the journal *Nature*.

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Citation: Evolution of animal personalities studied (2007, June 5) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

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