

Chimp's stone throwing at zoo visitors was 'premeditated'

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Researchers have found what they say is some of the first unambiguous evidence that an animal other than humans can make spontaneous plans for future events. The report in the March 9th issue of *Current Biology*, a Cell Press publication, highlights a decade of observations in a zoo of a male chimpanzee calmly collecting stones and fashioning concrete discs that he would later use to hurl at zoo visitors.

"These observations convincingly show that our fellow apes do consider the future in a very complex way," said Mathias Osvath of Lund University. "It implies that they have a highly developed consciousness, including life-like mental simulations of potential events. They most probably have an 'inner world' like we have when reviewing past episodes of our lives or thinking of days to come. When wild chimps

collect stones or go out to war, they probably plan this in advance. I would guess that they plan much of their everyday behavior."

While researchers have observed many ape behaviors that could involve planning both in the wild and in captivity, it generally hasn't been possible to judge whether they were really meeting a current or future need, he added. For instance, when a [chimp](#) breaks a twig for termite fishing or collects a stone for nut cracking, it can always be argued that they are motivated by immediate rather than future circumstances.

And that's what makes the newly described case so special, Osvath said. It is clear that the chimp's planning behavior is not based on a "current drive state." In contrast to the chimp's extreme agitation when throwing the stones, he was always calm when collecting or manufacturing his ammunition.

Osvath said he thinks wild chimps in general, as well as other animals, probably have the planning ability demonstrated by the individual described in the study. Indeed, experiments conducted recently with other captive [chimpanzees](#) have shown they are capable of making such plans. (Some have argued, however, that those findings could be the result of experimental artifacts.)

"I think that wild chimpanzees might be even better at planning as they probably rely on it for their daily survival," Osvath said. "The environment in a [zoo](#) is far less complex than in a forest. Zoo chimps never have to encounter the dangers in the forest or live through periods of scarce food. Planning would prove its value in 'real life' much more than in a zoo."

Source: Cell Press

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