

Study sheds light on squirrel psychology

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Grey squirrels learn from observing others, according to a new study.

(PhysOrg.com) -- The ability of grey squirrels to learn from observing others is highlighted in a new study. The research shows how squirrels can quickly learn from watching their peers, particularly if it relates to stealing food. The research adds to growing evidence that animals are primed to learn quickly about what is most important to their survival and that they learn by observing others. It is the first study to test the ability of grey squirrels to learn from observation.

The research team tested the squirrels' ability to learn to choose between two pots of food after watching another squirrel remove a nut from one of the pots. One group was rewarded for choosing the same pot as the previous squirrel, the second group was rewarded for targeting the other pot. Those that were rewarded for choosing food from the other pot learned more quickly than those that were rewarded for choosing the same pot. This suggests that grey squirrels learn more quickly to

recognise the absence of food.

The study was repeated, but instead of observing another squirrel, the animals were trained with the use of a card. In this test, the squirrels showed no significant difference in their ability to learn to choose the same or opposite pot.

The study suggests that squirrels are primed to recognise other squirrels as potential food thieves. It also shows that they learn more quickly from real life observations.

Corresponding author Dr Lisa Leaver of the University of Exeter, said: "Our study is significant because it is the first to show that grey squirrels learn from observing others. It adds to growing evidence that all kinds of animals, from humans and other primates to many species of birds, learn from observation and that they have evolved to learn quickly about those things that are most important to their lives - in the case of grey squirrels, gathering and storing [nuts](#)."

The research team now hopes to conduct further studies into the psychology of grey squirrels to learn more about how the [animals](#) learn from - and possibly deceive - one another.

Source: University of Exeter ([news](#) : [web](#))

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