

Wolves are able to follow a human's gaze

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This undated picture provided by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) shows a Grey Wolf at an undisclosed location in Montana.

Following others' gaze direction is an important source of information that helps to detect prey or predators, to notice important social events within one's social group and to predict the next actions of others. As such, it is considered a key step towards an understanding of mental states, such as attention and intention.

Many animals will follow the gaze of others into distant space. Following a gaze around a barrier, which is considered to be a more cognitively advanced task, is much less common.

Friederike Range and Zsofi Viranyi at the University of Vienna have now observed this behavior in [wolves](#), a behavior previously only observed in birds and [primates](#).

Their findings are published on Feb. 23 in the online journal [PLoS ONE](#).

The researchers found that hand-raised wolves readily detoured an obstacle in order to check where a conspecific or human demonstrator was looking, indicating that gaze following around a barrier is not restricted to primates and corvids. The wolves, however, quickly stopped responding to repeated looks if they found nothing interesting on the other side of the barrier.

On the contrary, they did not habituate to repeated looks of a human demonstrator into distant space, supporting the idea that the two gaze following modalities have different underlying cognitive mechanisms. These new data shed light on the evolutionary origins of gaze following abilities and allow scientists to hypothesize about the selective pressures shaping such fine-tuned attentional coordination in social animals.

More information: Range F, Virá'nyi Z (2011) Development of Gaze Following Abilities in Wolves (*Canis Lupus*). *PLoS ONE* 6(2): e16888. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016888](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0016888)

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