

Meerkats acquire novel behavior using nine different social and asocial mechanisms

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A novel methodology shows that Wild meerkats engage in nine separate learning processes during foraging, and this method may provide general insight into learning mechanisms for groups of animals and culture development.

The full report is published Aug. 8 in the open access journal [PLOS ONE](#).

The researchers, led by William Hoppitt of the University of St. Andrews in the United Kingdom, presented wild meerkats with a novel foraging TASK to investigate the animals' learning mechanisms.

They found that the meerkats engaged in a wide variety of social and asocial behaviors to learn to solve the task, and that in general the [social factors](#) helped draw the [meerkats](#) into the task, while the asocial processes helped them actually solve the task.

Based on these results, they propose a model for characterizing social learning mechanisms in the field that may also be more broadly applicable and can be used to investigate the relationship between social learning mechanisms and so-called "behavioral traditions" that together can constitute a culture.

More information: Hoppitt W, Samson J, Laland KN, Thornton A (2012) Identification of Learning Mechanisms in a Wild Meerkat Population. PLoS ONE 7(8): e42044. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0042044](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0042044)

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