

Study suggests dogs have lost ability to reconcile after violent conflicts

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A team of researchers with the University of Vienna's Messerli Research Institute has found that wolves tend to reconcile shortly after conflicts but dogs do not. In their paper published in the journal *Royal Society*

Open Science, the group describes their study of captive wolf packs and dogs from a rescue shelter and what they learned.

Wolves, as most are aware, live in packs. Such packs, prior research has shown, tend to have rules of behavior to ensure survival of the pack. There are rules regarding dominance, eating, mating and apparently, as the researchers in Austria found, rules regarding how to behave after a conflict. Dogs are also still considered a pack animal, but as the researchers also found, have lost an important pack trait—the ability to make up after fighting.

To learn more about how both wolves and [dogs](#) behave after conflicts, the researchers studied four captive [wolf](#) and dog packs, paying particular attention to how they behaved in the minutes after a scuffle.

The four wolf packs were formed by wild wolves that had been captured and kept in captivity. Being new to one another, the researchers report, led to a lot of [conflict](#)—on average, once an hour. But they noted, the conflicts tended to be short-lived and the combatants tended to make up almost immediately thereafter. After 10 minutes, they would often be seen playing together. The four dog packs were formed by taking in dogs from a shelter. They, too, were new to one another, which led to occasional fighting (but less often than the wolves). But in sharp contrast to the wolves, the researchers note, the dogs tended to fight one another more viciously, and avoided one another after fighting, rather than reconciling.

The [researchers](#) suggest quick resolution to conflicts is important for pack survival in [wolves](#), which would explain the behavior they observed. Dogs, on the other hand, have lost many of their pack survival skills over thousands of years of domestication. Getting along after fighting appears to be one of those lost skills. In their new role as man's best friend, it is more important that they get along in a human

environment and behave independently regarding others of their kind.

More information: Simona Cafazzo et al. The effect of domestication on post-conflict management: wolves reconcile while dogs avoid each other, *Royal Society Open Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1098/rsos.171553](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.171553)

Abstract

Highly cooperative social species are expected to engage in frequent reconciliation following conflicts in order to maintain pack cohesiveness and preserve future cooperation. By contrast, in social species with low reliance on cooperation, reconciliation is expected to be less frequent. Here, we investigate the pattern of reconciliation in four captive wolf packs and four captive dog packs. We provide evidence for reconciliation in captive wolves, which are highly dependent on cooperation between pack members, while domestic dogs, which rely on conspecific cooperation less than wolves, avoided interacting with their partners after conflicts. Occurrence, intensity, latency, duration and initiation of wolf reconciliations appeared to vary as a consequence of a compromise between the costs (e.g. risk of further aggression) and the benefits (e.g. restoring relationship with opponents) of such interactions. Our results are in line with previous findings on various wolf packs living under different social and ecological conditions, suggesting that reconciliation is an important strategy for maintaining functional relationships and pack cohesiveness. However, current results on dogs are in contrast to the only other study showing that reconciliation can occur also in this species. Therefore, the occurrence of reconciliation in dogs may be influenced by social and environmental conditions more than in wolves. Which factors promote and modulate reconciliation in dogs needs to be further investigated.

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