

Just like humans, giraffes prefer to dine with friends, study finds

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When it comes to meal times in the animal kingdom, giraffes have been found to be just like us and prefer the company of their friends, according to new research by the University of Bristol.

While already known that giraffes display preferred choices of

companions within their [social group](#), until now it has not been clear what drives these and whether these choices are just some, or all of the time. This study, published in *Animal Behaviour*, aimed to explore what factors drive specific interactions in giraffes, and whether behavioural state or disturbance by humans and predators had any effect on [social relationships](#).

The [research team](#), led by Bristol Ph.D. graduate Dr. Zoe Muller, spent almost two years studying giraffes in the Great Rift Valley region of Kenya, to analyse association patterns in wild populations.

Through photo-identification data the team were able to determine individual giraffes and then observe them in a range of different habitats. Using the data gathered, the team found that many pairs of giraffes would spend a high proportion of their time together when they were searching for food and eating.

Dr. Zoe Muller, the study's lead author, suggests this behaviour is displayed because eating with known and selected friends offers benefits to the individual. She says: "It is presumable that if you are with a 'known' partner, they may be reliable at alarming you if a predator is around, or it may be that you both share the same meal requirements, and so your foraging and eating behaviour is complementary."

The findings offer completely new information about the social preferences of giraffes, and an insight into some of the possible evolutionary mechanisms which have shaped social groups today.

Dr. Muller added: "The dynamic nature of animal societies often hides multiple layers of complexity. Our work highlights the complex and dynamic nature of the [giraffe](#) social structure, which could have far-reaching implications for conservation, and guide the process of how giraffe populations are managed in the wild."

More information: Zoe Muller et al. Giraffe social preferences are context dependent, *Animal Behaviour* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.anbehav.2018.10.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2018.10.006)

Provided by University of Bristol

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