

Pigs observed using tools for the first time

October 8 2019, by Bob Yirka



A team of researchers affiliated with several institutions in France has found evidence of pigs using tools—a first. In their paper published in the journal *Mammalian Biology*, the group describes multiple instances of Visayan warty pigs using sticks and bark to assist with nest building.

There was a time when scientists believed humans were the only animals that used tools—a skill that set us apart from the other creatures of the

Earth. But such assumptions have long been laid to rest as multiple research efforts have shown that many [animal species](#) use tools in their own unique ways. Crows have been observed using sticks to hook prey, for example; otters use stones to crack open shellfish; elephants have been observed moving rocks and logs to cover watering holes. Tool use has long been a sign of intelligence, which has led researchers to wonder why no one had ever seen [pigs](#) using tools of any kind. They are, after all, considered to be among the smartest animals. As it turns out, at least one kind of pig does use a [tool](#)—the researchers observed several of them at a Parisian zoo using sticks and lengths of bark to dig out a [nest](#).

The researchers report that their discovery was inadvertent—one of the team members just happened to see a pig use a stick to dig a pit while visiting the Menagerie, a zoo in Paris. Intrigued, the researcher formed a team to study the behavior in the pigs. They found that the pigs only used tools during the time when the female was building a nest (digging a pit) to house her offspring.

The researchers were able to capture on video multiple instances of the pigs using tools to dig in the dirt floor of their enclosure. In all, over the course of three years, they observed 11 instances of the pigs using tools—all but one were female. They report that they also gave the pigs spatulas to see if they would use them—they were only used only twice. The researchers note that it was not clear why the pigs were using the tools because it did not seem to give them any advantage in digging their nest pits.

More information: Meredith Root-Bernstein et al. Context-specific tool use by *Sus cebifrons*, *Mammalian Biology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.mambio.2019.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mambio.2019.08.003)

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