

Exotic cats' ability to recognize familiar human caregivers' voices

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In a recent *PeerJ* study, Professor Jennifer Vonk from Oakland University presents compelling evidence that exotic cats possess the remarkable ability to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar

human voices.

The article—"Catcalls: Exotic Cats Discriminate the Voices of Familiar Caregivers"—delves into the often-overlooked realm of voice recognition among Felidae [species](#). While much attention has been paid to domestication and early experiences in understanding animals' ability to differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar humans, few studies have explored this phenomenon in the feline family.

Using carefully designed experiments, Professor Vonk's graduate student, Taylor Crews, and her team investigated whether non-domesticated Felidae species could recognize familiar human voices. The results had some key takeaways.

The researchers found consistent evidence of [voice](#) recognition across pilot and main studies involving 25 cats from various species, including lions, tigers, and cheetahs. Cats responded more quickly, intensely, and for longer durations, to familiar voices compared to unfamiliar ones, regardless of the use of their names or rearing history.

The findings suggest that close human contact, rather than domestication, is associated with the ability of cats to discriminate between human voices. It also challenges the notion that less social species lack sociocognitive abilities comparable to more gregarious species.

Professor Vonk explains, "Non-group-living animals can exhibit social cognitive abilities such as heterospecific vocal recognition, so we should not neglect the study of social cognition in less highly social species."

The implications of this study are profound, particularly considering the widespread housing of cats of all species in human care. Understanding their capacity to differentiate familiar from unfamiliar human voices

could have significant implications for their welfare and interactions with caregivers.

This study adds to the growing body of work challenging stereotypes about cats as aloof creatures. It underscores the importance of recognizing the cognitive abilities of all species, even those traditionally considered less social.

More information: Catcalls: exotic cats discriminate the voices of familiar caregivers, *PeerJ* (2024). DOI: [10.7717/peerj.16904](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.16904)

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