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Investigating indirect and direct reputation formation in dogs and wolves

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Abstract

Reputation is a key component in social interactions of group-living animals. Considering dogs' dependence on humans, it may benefit them to form reputations of humans to choose an appropriate partner with whom to associate. It is also unknown whether this ability is an effect of domestication or inherited from their ancestor, wolves. This study investigates whether dogs and wolves can form reputations of humans through indirect and/or direct experience in a begging situation.

7 wolves and 6 dogs participated in an experiment that comprised three parts: baseline, observation, and testing. In the observation phase, the subject saw a dog interact with two people – one generous and one selfish. The observer could then choose which person to approach in the test. The subjects were also tested after direct experience with the two people.

Preliminary results suggest that dogs and wolves cannot form reputations of humans through indirect or limited direct experience.