

The evolutionary roots of innovativeness: Tracing the phylogeny of human curiosity

Initiative: Freigeist-Fellowships

Bewilligung: 17.01.2021

Laufzeit: 5 Jahre

Humans deliberately innovate, even in the absence of any problem to solve. This desire to know and learn i.e. curiosity seems to set humans apart from other species. Historically, being good innovators allowed humans to colonize the entire planet and up to date, innovations are the driving force behind any achievements in industry, science and art. Being curious has powerful consequences on the individual level. Through increased innovation rates, curious individuals transform their cognitive capacity into skills and knowledge faster than uncurious individuals. As such, curiosity may be a key psychological trait that makes cognitive potential visible for natural selection. Therefore, to fully understand cognitive evolution, aside from external actors, it is crucial to take key psychological motivations and their development within individuals into account. The research group will investigate the interplay of curiosity, cognition, and skill repertoires in humans and great apes across different settings. The planned projects will explore which immediate factors suppress and trigger curiosity, and which foster its development. Understanding the interplay of curiosity and cognition across species will shed light on what sparked curiosity during human evolution and on the evolution of humans' unique cognition. Understanding what underlies innovative tendency will also allow us to foster innovations in our society.

Projektbeteiligte

Dr. Caroline Schuppli

Max-Planck-Institut für Verhaltens-
biologie
Radolfzell

Open Access-Publikationen

Ecological, social, and intrinsic factors affecting wild orangutans curiosity, assessed using a field experiment