

IFAS Matters



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IFAS Matters - April 2014

Posted on April 18, 2014 by Jack Payne

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A Mind of Their Own

It turns out that there *is* a *scientific basis* to our anthropomorphic tendencies of ascribing human intelligence and characteristics to animals. Scientists have argued for decades over whether wild creatures, including birds, show genuine intelligence. However, humanizing animals dates back to the biblical whale that retained the prophet Jonah for three days to 21st century anthropomorphisms such as the cocky little gecko extolling the competitive benefits of car insurance to a Latino bumble bee advising us on seasonal allergy relief.

Anthropomorphism also has provided us with an examination and interpretation of humanity in literature such as *The Tales of Beatrix Potter*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *Winnie-the-Pooh*. And in movies like *Bambi*, *Babe*, *Finding Nemo*, *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*, *Ratatouille*, *Lady and the Tramp* and *The Incredible Journey* where two dogs and a cat, left behind when their family goes on vacation, set out on a

Videos

Plant Improvement



The UF/IFAS Plant Innovation Program conducts human sensory analysis to find out what aspect of fruits, vegetables and flowers humans like best, then use that information to fuel their research.
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Flavorful Food



Healthier processed food? Essence of strawberry could be the key.
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Conference

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[America's Watershed Initiative \(AWI\)](#)

[ACES: A Community on Ecosystem Services](#)

Awards & Announcements

[Frazer named director of UF/IFAS School of Natural Resources and Environment](#)

[UF/IFAS names Calvin Arnold to lead Southwest Florida Research and Education Center](#)

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[Academy of Distinguished Teaching Scholars adds two UF/IFAS members](#)

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journey across America to find their family.

And now there's the IFAS version of *The Incredible Journey*, featured in this month's **IFAS Matters**, in which Frank Mazzotti, a UF/IFAS wildlife ecology and conservation professor, and a team of researchers, have discovered that the behemoth Burmese Pythons that have invaded Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve can find their way home even when moved more than 20 miles away. So far, it's not clear what gives them this internal compass, but I know that it's quite an accomplishment considering the terrain and there are some people who can't even find their way out of the mall. The findings will change how researchers understand pythons' behaviors and intellect.

There is additional research on animal intelligence and behavior that indicates that humans don't have an exclusive claim on intelligence. Across the animal kingdom, all sorts of creatures have performed impressive intellectual feats. Here are a few non-anthropomorphic facts:

- In multiple tests of cognitive and behavioral sophistication, chickens outperform not just dogs and cats, but four-year-old human children in their ability to think, draw inferences, apply logic and plan ahead.
- Crows are highly adept at recognizing human faces and use their keen perceptive abilities to distinguish between what they consider to be good and bad humans, forming opinions that can last for years.
- There is a lot of evidence that dogs feel emotions, can learn hundreds of words, and might well be smarter than a toddler.

Some still consider the human mind to be unique, with animals capable of only the simplest mental processes. But a new generation of scientists believe that creatures, including birds, can solve problems by insight and even learn by example, as human children do.

Is it time to rethink our human-centric viewpoint? If only we could talk to the animals.

Check out the video: [A Green Heron Fishes with Bread Bait](#)

-Jack



Pythons

New study finds Burmese pythons have homing sense.

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UF/IFAS study: Computer model can help coastal managers with nourishment decisions.

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Nitrogen



To the root of the matter – keeping nitrogen out of small streams.

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Water Use



UF/IFAS web tool successfully measures farms' water footprint.

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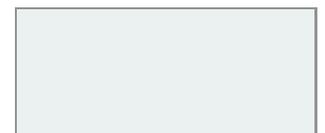
Pine Genome



UF/IFAS researchers on team that sequenced, assembled, and annotated loblolly pine genome.

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Flies





Food safety

UF/IFAS finds way to reduce E. coli in cows.

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Springs

Water management district, UF/IFAS and UF Water Institute team up to examine springs.

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UF/IFAS research demonstrates improved appeal of crop-saving sterile flies.

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