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Captive hyenas think 'outside the box'

Posted By [Layne Cameron-Michigan State](#) On January 8, 2013 @ 11:41 am In [Science & Technology](#) | [3 Comments](#)

MICHIGAN STATE (US) — The creativity of hyenas in captivity make them better puzzle-solvers than their counterparts in the wild.

Testing animals' ability to solve new problems has been historically conducted on captive animals, but applying lessons learned from them to those living in the wild is potentially problematic because they may not accurately portray how wild animals respond to new challenges.

Straight from the Source

[Read the original study](#) ^[1]

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Only recently has a shift been made to put animals in their natural habitat to the test. A new study appearing in the journal [Animal Behaviour](#) ^[1], finds vast differences in the problem solving skills between the two groups.

"We have to be careful when interpreting results from captive animals, as there may be extreme differences between how animals behave in captivity and in the wild," says lead author Sarah Benson-Amram, a former zoology graduate student at Michigan State University who is now a research fellow at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

"An animal that is successful at solving problems in the comfort of its cage may be unwilling to engage in similar problem-solving behavior in the wild."

For the study, Benson-Amram gave wild and captive spotted hyenas the same novel problem—a

steel puzzle box containing meat. Captive hyenas were significantly better at opening their boxed meals than their wild counterparts. The encaged mammals also were less afraid of the manmade puzzle, and they also were more creative, trying a variety of solutions.

"It doesn't appear that these differences result from captive hyenas having more time or energy," Benson-Amram says. "We conclude they were more successful because they were more willing to tackle the problem and were more exploratory."

Benson-Amram teamed up with Kay Holekamp, Michigan State zoologist and co-principal investigator at the BEACON Center for the Study of Evolution in Action, and Mary Weldele with the University of California, Berkeley. The research was funded in part by the National Science Foundation.

Source: [Michigan State University](#) [2]

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[1] Read the original study:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0003347212005131>

[2] Michigan State University: <http://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2013/captive-hyenas-outfox-wild-relatives/>

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