

Captive Hyena Figures Out A Meat Puzzle Faster Than Its Wild Cousin

Studies of captive animals may not accurately reflect how they act in the wild.

By [Rebecca Boyle](#) Posted 01.08.2013 at 11:01 am



Hyena Problem-Solving Sarah Benson-Amram studies hyenas' puzzle-solving skills. *MSU*

When animal behaviorists want to study animal skills, they often work with animals living in the nation's zoos and aquariums, testing problem-solving and other traits. But a new study suggests this may **not paint an accurate picture**. Animals in captivity act much differently than animals in the wild, and their ability to face new problems is no exception.

Researchers at Michigan State University found dramatic differences in how wild and captive spotted hyenas figure out a puzzle problem. Sarah Benson-Amram, who led the study when she was a grad student, tested wild and captive hyenas on the same food puzzle. They were presented a steel box with some tasty meat inside, and they had to figure out how to open it.

The captive hyenas bounded into their enclosures and had no problem biting, chewing and opening the steel cages to get the treats. They were very creative, according to the study, trying various possible solutions. But the wild hyenas were much more timid. They approached the cage and sniffed it cautiously, looking around nervously before interacting with it at all.

The authors say the captive animals were more successful because they were more exploratory, and more willing to tackle the problem. They don't think it was because the captive animals had more time or energy to figure it out. Could it be that they were bored and welcomed a challenge for once? That's not clear, but the results do show that captive animals are not necessarily a useful analogue for studying their wild counterparts.

[via [National Science Foundation](#)]

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Space

01/08/13 at 11:35 am
I wish I could own ONE or Two!

.....
See life in all its beautiful colors, and from different perspectives too!

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democedes

01/08/13 at 12:09 pm
If the goal is to test the intelligence of the animal, then I would think tests on the captive animal would be more relevant than test on wild animals.

The captive Hyenas are used to smelling and getting food from humans. So they have no reason to question the puzzle, or the food inside.

A wild hyena is not less intelligent, but understandably more cautious.

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Space

01/08/13 at 12:23 pm
The potential for higher intelligence could have been there all long from the belief perspective human. When given a less stress free life, positive encouragement and intelligent stimulating new environment for the Hyena, might appear more intelligent to the human, because now the human instills upon it more things in common, they both could relate to, then gages the animal to be more intelligent. When in fact, biologically nothing really has change in the Hyena.

Besides, in the wild an animal always has to worry about being eaten itself. If you remove this stress, it then opens up more time to concentrate more on solving problems.

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See life in all its beautiful colors, and from different perspectives too!

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StoStatus

01/08/13 at 2:52 pm
I agree with Democedes, the animal in the wild will be more trimmed due to more danger in the wild. Duh!

[Link to this comment](#)