

Prospective planning: Are humans the only animals capable of preparing for the future?

It was, for a long time, assumed that humans were the only animals capable of prospective planning. We can foresee that we will be hungry tomorrow and save some of the food; we realise that it will be cold and windy in winter and build ourselves a shelter well in advance. We sow and we harvest. Humans live in their [dreams](#) and plans – notions that carry them away, but also give them perseverance. This applies to all kinds of distant [goals](#): to earn a degree, to build a house, to write a book, to be with the one you love, and so on. [Imagination](#) is our strongest driving force.

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Yet much of what animals do seems to be planning for the future: birds building nests, squirrels gathering food for the winter, among other things. But these behaviours are only instinctive. Most animals seem to have no idea of the future – they just follow their urges.

The hypothesis that only humans can plan prospectively can, however, no longer be upheld, in the light of recent experimental results. Great apes are able to outcompete current drives in favor of future ones as well as being able to envision future events. An example is that in Furuvik Zoo, in Sweden, the male chimpanzee Santino has been observed calmly collecting stones in a pile in the morning, and later in the day throwing them at visitors that he becomes angry with.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)