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Travelling chimps use tools more often

Chimpanzees were first discovered to make and use tools by the zoologist Jane Goodall in the 1960s – now new research gives us some clues as to what stimulates them to do so.

18th July 2016

James Fair

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Dr Thibaud Gruber and two chimps in Uganda's Budongo Forest. © Nina Hänninen

A study published last year found a positive correlation between the creativity of people working for fashion labels and the amount of time they had spent working or living abroad.

Travel, it seems, really does broaden the mind. And not just for humans.

Some chimpanzees, for example, can be quite nomadic, wandering a distance of 10km or more in a single day.

Others stay closer to home, going no more than 2km.

But the amount a chimp travels appears to be directly related to the probability that it will use tools, according to new research.

"Our results show that travel fosters tool use in wild chimpanzees, and it may also have been a driving force in early technological evolution by humans," said the person who led the study, Dr Thibaud Gruber from University of Geneva.

Specifically, Gruber believes that travel imposes "extra energetic costs" that increase the chimps' "motivation to engage with a foraging problem that requires tool use."

To arrive at this conclusion, Gruber deployed the 'honey-trap experiment'.

In the territory of the Sonso community of chimpanzees living in Uganda's Budongo Forest, Gruber drilled a hole into a log that he partially filled with a small amount of the

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Sonso chimps engage with the honey-trap experiment – using your hand won't work... © Andrew Bernard

A total of 21 instances of tool use were recorded in 11 chimps, out of 52 individuals that visited the log. They then reviewed this data against other information they had on the chimps, such as how much they moved about on a daily basis and the quantity of ripe fruit they ate.

"We didn't expect travel to be that important and were surprised that it had an even greater influence than if they fed less on their preferred food of ripe fruits," said Gruber.

Research carried out elsewhere supports what Gruber has unearthed. Gorillas and most orangutans rarely use tools and also travel much smaller distances than chimps.

Bonobos, on the other hand, cover roughly the same distances as the Sonso chimps and use a similar set of tools, while modern hunter-gatherer humans walk up 11-14km in a day and utilise a much wider set of tools than any of our great ape cousins.

Dr Thibaud Gruber's research is published in the journal [eLIFE](#)

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