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DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MAMMALS AND INANIMATE OBJECTS IN AN ORANG-UTAN (PONGO PYGMAEUS) USING THE PREFERENTIAL-LOOKING PARADIGM

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Vonk and MacDonald (2004) showed that specific training enabled orang-utans to discriminate mammals from inanimate objects. However, it is still unclear whether untrained orang-utans discriminate between them. In this study, we examined the issue of discrimination in an oran-utan using a preferential-looking method, a non-training, nondirective paradigm used in infant cognitive research. The participant was a 52-year-old female orang-utan reared in the Tama Zoological Park in Tokyo for over 50 years. In this experiment, we presented 16 colour photographs within a session, which consisted of mammals and inanimate objects (furniture and vehicles), to the orang-utan on a laptop computer monitor for 15 seconds. We conducted five sessions consisting of 16 trials and each trial was presented randomly. The looking behaviours in each trial were recorded with a pinhole camera located below the monitor. The recorded video was divided into pictures at 30 frames per second, which were used to measure the looking time of the orang-utan. The results showed that her looking time for mammals was much longer than for inanimate objects, indicating that the orang-utan discriminated mammals from inanimate objects. The time course of her gaze duration also showed rapid habituation for inanimate objects, as compared to mammals. Our results suggest that untrained orang-utans have an ability to discriminate mammals from inanimate objects.

Keywords: orang-utan, visual discrimination, preferential-looking paradigm, time course of gaze duration