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RECIPROCITY IN GREAT APES

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The aim of this symposium is to discuss the evolution of reciprocity by bringing together the newest generation of researchers investigating this topic on our closest living relatives, the great apes. Apes are long lived social species who do not cooperate exclusively with kin. Therefore they are excellent candidates for the observation of reciprocity – perhaps even calculated reciprocity. There is substantial evidence that chimpanzees often exchange social attention and support symmetrically across social relationships. However, what is less clear is the proximate mechanisms that underlie the symmetrical relationship patterns that have been observed. For example, are reciprocal relationships in nonhuman apes maintained with memory of previous social interactions, punishment, and reputation or are there simpler mechanisms at work? While there has been substantial attention to studying reciprocity during the natural interactions of primates there has been little experimental work exploring whether apes have the cognitive skills necessary for calculated reciprocity. Moreover, there has also been relatively little work with bonobos and orangutans examining their potential for reciprocal relationships. Therefore, in this symposium, we will discuss how, when and why (rather than simply whether) reciprocity occurs in great apes. We focus on great apes to facilitate intensive discussion. To promote diversity of opinion we will bring together researchers from six countries representing both observational and experimental studies, who will present their most recent findings on the cognitive skills in orangutans, chimpanzees, and bonobos related to maintaining reciprocal relationships.

Keywords: reciprocal altruism, cooperation, social intelligence, comparative cognitive science