Saratoga Library English Conversation Club
Animals Want Pets Too?
October 29, 2026

A few weeks ago we discussed how pets can make a difference to our mental well-being and our health in general. This week we will discuss a study that researched the behavior of animals toward other animals that were of a different species. First, discuss the warmup questions then review the vocabulary.

Warm up Questions:

- What do you think are the main differences between humans and other animals? Is it in how we form relationships?
- Was it important for early humans to develop bonds with other animals in order to survive?

Vocabulary Preview: Read these words and match them to their meanings.

1. **ancestor** (AN-ses-ter)	A. a point of view or a particular way of thinking about something
2. **archaeological** (ahr-kee-uh-LOJ-i-kuhl)	B. relating to the gradual process of change and development in living things over thousands of years
3. **clue** (kloo)	C. a difficult question, problem, or toy designed to test a person's knowledge or skill
4. **to document** (DOK-yuh-ment)	D. a habit of acting or thinking in a certain way, or a likelihood of behaving a specific way
5. **evolutionary** (ev-uh-LOO-shuh-ner-ee)	E. relating to the scientific study of past human life and activities by looking at bones, tools, and the ruins of ancient buildings
6. **primate** (PRY-mayt)	F. to look at, examine, measure, or question something carefully to gather information
7. **puzzle** (PUHZ-uhl)	G. a piece of information or an object that helps solve a mystery or puzzle
8. **standpoint** (STAND-poynt)	H. a person in your family who lived a long time ago, such as a great-great grandparent
9. **to survey** (ser-VAY)	I. a member of the group of mammals that includes humans, apes, and monkeys
10. **tendency** (TEN-duhn-see)	J. to record information in writing, photos, or video to create a permanent record

Answers: 1-H; 2-E, 3-G; 4-J; 5- B; 6- I; 7-C; 8-A; 9 – F; 10 – D

Dialog 1: Family History, Part 1
Setting: A local coffee shop. Andi and Tess are sitting at a table when Sal walks in.

Art: Betty, how is your family tree project coming along? Have you found any more information on your **ancestors**?
Betty: It has been a massive **puzzle,** Art. But I finally found a drawing from 1860! It's a wonderful **clue.** It helps **to document** what they looked like.
Chuck: That's fascinating. From my **standpoint** and experience, **surveying** local church records from that era are the best place to look for information.
Art: Family letters are important too. My **ancestors** had to work hard just for me to be here today.
Betty: Exactly. In the photos I've seen, my family has a **tendency** to look sad! They had a hard life.
Chuck: People took things very seriously back then! And it was not the custom to smile for photos.

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Dialog 2: Archaeology and Human Evolution

Chuck: Hey, did you see the news about that **archaeological** dig downtown?
Art: I did! The scientists uncovered a 300-year-old trash pit near the old docks.
Betty: All that trash tells us exactly what people ate back then and the type of work they did.
Chuck: It's amazing how much we can learn about the **evolutionary** timeline of humans and cities.
Art: It really is. Speaking of evolution, I saw a **documentary** yesterday about **primate** evolution.
Betty: I saw it too. Primates evolved all over the world. It's incredible how diverse they are.

Oxford Primate Study Reveals Monkeys Nurture Pets Across Species
by Hyewon Moon, 2026.08.19, DongA Science



New research suggests that non-human **primates** also care for animals of other species and form attachments to them, much like humans and their pets. Monkeys and apes have been seen gently stroking mice and apparently adopting and raising marmosets. This raises the possibility that the **evolutionary** roots of human pet keeping may go back to a common **primate ancestor**.

According to a report in the New York Times on August 18, 2026, a research team at the University of Oxford in the UK published the results of a study in which **primates** interacted with animals of other species in both wild and captive environments.

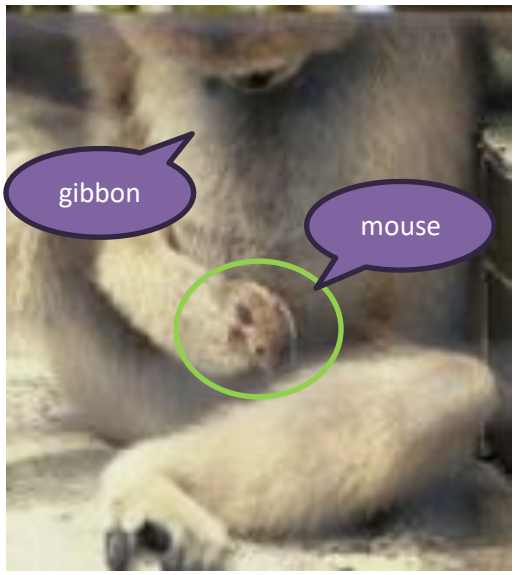
The behavior of keeping and caring for pets has long been considered an **evolutionary puzzle**. Hal Herzog, a psychology professor from North Carolina who was not involved in the study, said, "From an **evolutionary standpoint**, it makes no sense at all."

Researchers wonder why one species would devote so much time and many resources to another species that offers no evolutionary benefit to them. Previous studies suggest that humans keep pets for a variety of reasons. Some people seek companionship or social bonding. Other people keep pets to signal someone's social status.

Why humans first began keeping pets remains unclear. One theory is that animals were useful for hunting or protection, while another is that humans have a general **tendency** to care for other living beings and form bonds with them.

The oldest **archaeological** evidence that humans kept pets dates back about 14,000 years, from a grave in Germany where a man, a woman, and a dog were buried together. Experts believe it is highly likely that the relationship between humans and pets formed much earlier than this.

The lead author of the study, Cyril Grueter, a professor at the University of Oxford, was inspired



to conduct the study because of an experience he had as a master's student. At Shanghai Zoo in China, he had witnessed a female **gibbon** catching a small mouse and, instead of attacking it, she carefully placed it on her hand and stroking it.

"The gibbon took very good care of the mouse," Grueter recalled, adding, "The mouse also seemed comfortable resting on the gibbon's hand." Grueter suggested that analyzing such interspecies interactions, like the one he observed between the gibbon and the mouse, could offer clues to why humans keep pets.

Because interspecies interaction cases are perceived as curious but of limited scientific significance, they have rarely been systematically **documented** in academic papers. Grueter and his team set out to collect such cases in an organized way. By examining media reports and existing scientific literature and surveying primatologists, they compiled 427 cases involving 88 primate species.



Analysis of the collected cases revealed that monkeys and apes interacted not only with primates of other species but also with a wide range of animals, including lizards, birds, deer, dogs, and squirrels. The most common behaviors were playing together and grooming.

In Uganda, two young eastern chimpanzees were observed approaching a red-tailed monkey, stroking its tail, and grooming its fur. Given that chimpanzees typically tend to attack other monkeys, this behavior was considered highly unusual.

There are also cases in which macaque monkeys formed strong social bonds with chickens. One group of capuchin monkeys reportedly adopted a young marmoset, nursed it, and cared for it over several months.



The way primates treated animals of other species was like how they treated members of their own species. Young primates often played with other animals, while adult

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females tended to nurse and care for infant animals. Adult males were generally indifferent and sometimes displayed aggressive behavior.

Most interspecies interactions were short-lived, but in some cases the relationships lasted long enough to be comparable to adoption. Why **primates** engage in close behavior with other species is still unclear. The research team suggested that loneliness or a desire for closeness may play a role. Just as humans seek contact with other people or animals to ease loneliness, primates might fulfill their social needs by stroking or snuggling with other animals.



The researchers emphasized that the behavior of non-human primates cannot be regarded as identical to human pet keeping. "There is no non-human primate behavior that is completely identical to humans keeping pets," Grueter said. "However, these behaviors may provide clues to how human pet keeping evolved."

Discussion Questions about Friendship,
Human and Animal Behavior, Empathy, & Helping Others

NOTE: As you discuss these questions, you can begin your sentences with these phrases:

- *"In my opinion, a true friend is someone who..."*
- *"I would prefer to have a small group of friends because..."*
- *"If my friend and I had a disagreement, I would..."*
- *"I agree/disagree with [Classmate's Name] because..."*

1. **Animal Kindness:** In the story, a gibbon took care of a tiny mouse instead of hurting it. Do you think animals can feel true kindness and love for other species, or are they just acting on instinct? Explain your answer.
2. **The Recipe for a Friend:** The text shows that different animals can develop a social bond (like monkeys and chickens). In your opinion, what is the most important thing needed to form a strong bond or friendship? Can two completely different people or animals be best friends or at least very good friends?
3. **The Meaning of a Friend:** What is the difference between a "friend" and a "best friend"? What makes a best friend special? What is the difference between a friend and an acquaintance?

4. **Quantity vs. Quality:** Is it better to have one or two close, loyal friends, or a large group of popular friends? Why do you think so?
5. **First Impressions:** Think about your closest friend. How did you first meet? What was your first impression of them, and did it change later?
6. **Boy, Girl, and Age Roles:** The study found that young primates like to play, adult females tended to care for the other animal, and adult males are often aggressive or didn't care. Do you see similar patterns in human families or schools? Are these roles natural, or do we learn them from society?
7. **Pets as Status Symbols:** The article mentions that some people buy pets to show off their social status (wealth or popularity). What do you think about this? Is it okay to use a living animal to make yourself look good to others?
8. **Handling Disagreements:** All friends and family members argue sometimes. What is the healthiest way to resolve a fight with a friend or someone close to you? Is it better to talk immediately or wait until everyone cools down?
9. **Being a Good Listener:** When you are upset, what do you look for in a friend? Do you want someone who gives you advice, or do you just want someone who listens to you?

References

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