Comparative Cognition Research Group

We are interested in the origins and mechanisms of the mental capacities of humans and non-humans. Towards this end, we use experimental methods, where we provide comparable puzzle solving situations for humans and non-human animals.

Since we have gathered evidence that type of culture (there are indeed several types) is probably one of the main differences between human and non-humans, we usually test human children – for whom cultural influences are smaller than they are for human adults.

Current projects include studies that aim to identify the type(s) of culture(s) that great apes possess, the ways in which they learn from each other, the circumstances in which they do and how all this compares to the way in which humans transmit and transform culture. Other topics include exploring the reasons for chimpanzee group hunting and whether altruism in great apes is more apparent than real. In the past, we have also tested if and how dogs learn from one another.

While any answers to the above questions are interesting in themselves, we also hope to use our data to elucidate the evolution of cognition in early hominins. In other words: we hope to understand how humans became what they are today: mostly friendly; living in complex and diverse cultures.