Beat: Lifestyle

Great apes also experience midlife crises, study finds

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USPA News - Chimpanzees and orangutans can experience a mid-life crisis just like humans, according to a team of international researchers who have studied hundreds of great apes in recent years. It is the first time animals have been shown to experience midlife crises.

Led by economist Professor Andrew Oswald from the University of Warwick and psychologist Dr Alex Weiss from the University of Edinburgh, the international team of researchers discovered that the well-being or happiness of chimpanzees and orangutans follows a pattern that is similar to humans. "We hoped to understand a famous scientific puzzle: why does human happiness follow an approximate U-shape through life?" said Oswald. "We ended up showing that it cannot be because of mortgages, marital breakup, mobile phones, or any of the other paraphernalia of modern life. Apes also have a pronounced midlife low, and they have none of those." The results are based on the observations of 508 great apes which are housed in zoos and sanctuaries in the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia and Singapore. The apes` well-being was assessed by keepers, volunteers, researchers and caretakers who knew the apes well, and their happiness was scored with a series of measures adapted from human subjective well-being measures. The study showed the well-being of both humans and great apes follows a U-shape and is high in youth, falls in middle age, and rises again into old age. The researchers believe it shows that the pattern of human well-being over a lifespan may have evolved in the common ancestors of humans and great apes. "Based on all of the other behavioral and developmental similarities between humans, chimpanzees, and orang-utans, we predicted that there would be similarities when looking at happiness over the lifespan, too," said Weiss. "However, one never knows how these things will turn out, so it`s wonderful when they are consistent with findings from so many other areas." The researchers, however, do not rule out the possibility that economic events or social and cultural forces contribute part of the reason for the well-being U-shape in humans. However, they highlight the need to consider evolutionary or biological explanations as a possible cause or factor.

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