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New Caledonian crows and the evolution of cognition without miracles

Thursday 8 November 2012 1pm

Professor Russell Gray School of Psychology, University of Auckland

Gould Seminar Room (Room 235) Gould building, 116 Daley Road, ANU



Debates in the study of animal cognition often oscillate between over-hyped claims of “human-like” cognitive abilities and deflationary “killjoy” accounts. In this talk I argue that studies of cognitive evolution should follow studies of morphological complexity and seek incremental Darwinian accounts rather than postulating miraculous cognitive leaps. Our focus should therefore be on studies of intermediate cognition rather than all or nothing claims about our pet species possessing some complex human cognitive ability. I will use our work on tool manufacture in New Caledonian crows to illustrate how quite complex behavioral traditions might have evolved without miracles.

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