

PRESS RELEASE

Listening to the calls of the wolves

Neuchâtel, June 11 2025. Klaus Zuberbühler and Gwendolyn Wirobski from the University of Neuchâtel are exploring communication and cognition in wolves and dogs as part of the NCCR Evolving Language, along with researcher Friederike Range from the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna. Their project has just been rewarded substantial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Austrian Science Fund, totaling 1.4 million Swiss francs.

Press release from the NCCR Evolving Language

Wolves are very social and cooperative animals, which is why science has been paying close attention to their howling for so long. *“But surprisingly little is known about the subtle vocal and visual signals wolves use to cooperate successfully, such as facial expressions,”* says Gwendolyn Wirobski, lecturer at the Comparative Cognition Laboratory at the University of Neuchâtel. Through their work, the researchers aim to learn more about the evolutionary roots of language, stepping away from the usual primate-centered perspective.

Zoos and natural parks

Thanks to this grant, called WEAVE, they will be able to combine observations in zoos and wild parks affiliated with the new Comparative Intelligence Research Infrastructure (CIRI) network of the NCCR Evolving Language with an experimental approach at the [Core Facility Wolf Science Center](#) in Austria. *“This grant will allow us to kickstart our work on canids, wolves and dogs in particular, following the creation of the Special Interest Group (SIG) Canid Cognition within the NCCR Evolving Language last year,”* shares Gwendolyn Wirobski.

To solve problems

The first research focus is on the ontogeny of communicative abilities in canids, i.e. how the capacity to communicate develops during a wolf or a dog’s life (see the video below of a newly born pup). The second is to understand how adult canids communicate before, during and after they solve a problem, to coordinate time and space, recruit cooperators and negotiate the outcomes of their actions. *“In addition, we will compare wolves to their domesticated cousins, dogs, to learn more about how the domestication process and their life experience socializing with humans may have impacted their communicative abilities,”* the scientists add.

More information

NCCR Evolving Language: <https://evolvinglanguage.ch>

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