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NWRC Spotlight - Innovative Problem Solving in Raccoons

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We always knew raccoons were smart. How else could they successfully open locked trashcans?

NWRC and University of Wyoming researchers set out to see just how smart these critters are.

NWRC and University of Wyoming researchers gave 20 captive raccoons a multi-access puzzle box to evaluate the animals' abilities to innovate, learn from previous experiences, and to stop behaviors that were previously successful, but are no longer useful for solving new problems. Twelve of the raccoons tested not only were capable of innovative problem solving, but also of repeated innovations during a novel foraging task. The majority of the raccoons in the study found two or three solutions to the multi-access puzzle box.

Researchers also found that an individual animal's level of persistence, unique exploratory behaviors, and fear associated with the puzzle box impacted its innovative behavior and the degree to which it showed repeated innovations.

These findings may aid in the development of future oral rabies vaccine baiting devices and strategies targeting raccoons.

For more information, please contact nwrc@usda.gov.

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