

Conferenza

Insights from a culture of object play in monkeys

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**Viale del Giardino Zoologico, 1
Ingresso pedonale di Villa Borghese
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La conferenza sarà in lingua inglese

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Over the past two decades, animal behavior researchers have reported numerous behavioral traditions (or cultures) in a wide range of species from various taxa, including fish, birds, rodents, cetaceans, and primates. After providing a definition of culture that suits a comparative approach, I will provide an overview of the diversity in the cultural repertoires in different species. Applying this definition to Balinese long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis fascicularis*), I will show that, over the past 15 years conducting field research in Bali, we have compiled behavioral data suggesting that this primate species display forms of material culture across the following behavioral domains: object play (e.g., stone handling, “bottle game”), foraging-related tool use (e.g., object-assisted water-scooping), sex-related tool use (e.g., object-aided genital stimulation), social tool use (e.g., object-assisted eye-covering), and symbolic tool use (i.e., token-mediated bartering). Finally, I will highlight the implications of cultural primatology for the welfare and conservation of primate populations. Previous research showed that animal culture can be an index of behavioral, socio-demographic, and genetic diversity, flexibility, and adaptability; it is also a metric of population welfare and environmental viability. I will argue that this may be particularly true for questionably adaptive cultural behaviors, such as object play and comfort-related tool use, whose fundamental characteristics (i.e., hedonism, autotelism, quirkiness, redundancy, arbitrariness, and latent potential) may contribute to assessing individual health, populational evolvability, and species-level conservation status.

Short bio

Jean-Baptiste Leca is a cultural primatologist: he is interested in the mechanisms and evolution of cultural behaviors in primates (including humans), with an emphasis on material culture. One of his main research objectives is test to what extent (and how) object play facilitates the development and evolution of tool use in macaques and in children. His ultimate research goal is to better understand the roots of human material/technological culture by looking at our evolutionary cousins: monkeys.