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Lemurs Link Familiar Voices To Smells, Study Finds

By [Ben Guarino](#)

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<P>DAVID DENNIS</P>

A variety of animals species, including crows, monkeys and dogs, can match voices to familiar faces. But lemurs go one sense further: smell. When these raccoon-sized primates recognize a female lemur's call, they can follow their noses to where that lemur last left her scent.

Lemurs rely on both sounds and smells to identify each other as they scrounge for food in the dense Madagascar rainforest. Using a gland near their genitals, the primates unleash scent signatures made up of hundreds of odor molecules.



[A lemur rubs on a tree trunk to leave a unique scent behind. Credit: Ipek Kulahci]

A team of scientists at Princeton and Duke wanted to see just how well these markers worked as pungent name tags. They recorded a female lemur's call and placed a swab of her scent, along with that of another lemur from the same troop, in an enclosure. When lemurs entered the enclosure and heard the recorded call, they marked the spot where the researchers had swabbed the female lemur's scent.

Lemur Links Voice To Scent



Princeton biologist Ipek Kulahci believes that, because odors stick around longer than the animals' howls and hoots, smells can help lemurs find each other in the jungle. And if they catch "a whiff of a familiar female" that's still in earshot, Kulachi [says](#), "she can't be far." By adding scents and sounds together, the scientists conclude, a lemur can form an overall picture of a friendly individual without ever taking a glance.

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