

JOSHUA PLOTNIK, PhD

CONSERVATION APPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE COGNITION: AN ELEPHANT CASE STUDY

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The study of elephant cognition has important implications for understanding the evolution of human and non-human animal intelligence. But how can understanding the mind of elephants also potentially help us protect them from extinction? In this talk, I will discuss my own research on elephant behavior and cognition, focusing on the elephants' physical and social intelligence as well as their use of smell in the decision-making process. I will highlight how this research can help us better understand the evolution of similar cognitive capacities in evolutionarily distant species, but also how it can be applied to conservation efforts, specifically in terms of human/wildlife conflict mitigation and childhood education.

Joshua Plotnik, Ph.D. is a comparative psychologist and conservation behavior researcher who has studied elephant cognition since 2005. Recently, Josh has been working in Thailand to understand how research on animal thinking can be applied directly to the mitigation of human/wildlife conflict. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and the Animal Behavior and Conservation Program at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He is also the founder and executive director of Think Elephants International, a U.S. non-profit charity working to bridge the gaps between research, education, and conservation by using elephants as a conduit. Dr. Plotnik was previously a Newton International Fellow at the University of Cambridge, and has earned degrees from both Emory University (M.A. and Ph.D) and Cornell University (BS.).