

KAREN McCOMB, PhD EXPLORING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS IN MAMMALS

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Playing back vocalisations and presenting visual images can give important insights into animal social and emotional lives, providing an important tool to explore their relationships not only with conspecifics but also with humans. In this talk I will discuss how we have used such techniques in the wild to investigate factors affecting social knowledge in African elephant populations and also to determine what elephants know about potentially dangerous predators – both lion and human. I will also talk about our recent work on emotional awareness in horses. Here the focus will be on the emotional discriminations that horses are capable of when dealing with conspecifics and humans around them and what they potentially understand about the consequences of others' emotions. I will end by briefly outlining some of our in progress research relating performance in emotional awareness tests to social relationships that horses have in the field, and how understanding the ways in which emotional responses link to natural social behaviour could add an exciting new dimension to the study of animal social worlds.

Karen McComb took her first degree in Zoology at University of Edinburgh, and her PhD at University of Cambridge. She became a lecturer at University of Sussex in 1993 and is now Professor of Animal Behaviour and Cognition there. Her research has spanned roaring and sexual communication in red deer, roaring and social behaviour in African lions, social knowledge in elephants, communication between companion animals and humans, and emotional awareness in horses.