

## Fish and Tools

**Fishes aren't the ignoramuses we take them for.**

Posted: January 18, 2010

I read an interesting article headline last week, "Clever Stingray Fish use Tools to Solve Problems."

This intrigued me, and I read the article. It seemed to be suggesting that the idea cartilaginous fishes are capable of problem solving using tools is especially novel and hasn't been widely assumed in the past.

This position struck me as odd. Scientists have directly observed tool use in a wide variety of fish species, from the archerfish's use of water to capture prey and pufferfish jetting to stir up tasty morsels to African cichlids using sand and other rubble to build spawning mounds.

There are many examples of bony fishes working together (or even with other species) to solve problems.

But because these rays are cartilaginous fishes, rather than bony fishes, some might argue this research is especially groundbreaking. It is somewhat groundbreaking in that this particular behavior hasn't been quantified or studied before (at least, as far as I can tell), but I don't think it's especially surprising.

If you have time, google "shark intelligence." With some searching, you should find references to several experiments conducted recently that suggest sharks aren't the mindless eating machines we make them out to be. Of course, sharks are cartilaginous fishes. Should we really be so surprised rays display similar "tool-using" behavior?

Sharks can be trained to activate switches to receive a treat. According to one article I found, there are reports of some sharks being able to run a maze for a reward. Sure, it isn't rocket science, but for a group of fishes generally thought to be totally mindless, I think it's progress.

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