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Hosted by Associate Prof Frank Rheindt

The rise and spread of innovation in animal societies: implications for behavioural responses to a rapidly changing world



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When innovations arise in human societies, they can spread rapidly through social networks to form new adaptive cultures—a vital component of our success as a species. A long history of research has now established that other animals can also express innovative behaviours and exhibit long-lasting cultural traits. But can these be similarly important determinants of responses to novel and changing environments? My work uses approaches that include wild experiments, citizen science, and GPS- tracking to ask how behaviour spreads through social networks and establish as new cultural traits, and how these cultures can change in response to social and environmental drivers. Here, I summarize how my research has addressed these questions, comparing and contrasting two avian systems, great tits (*Parus major*) and urban sulphur-crested cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*). I finish by discussing how these processes can promote successful adaption to urbanisation, but can also give rise to human-wildlife conflict.

Dr Lucy Aplin currently holds joint positions as a SNSF Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies at the University of Zurich, and as an Associate Professor at the Research School of Biology at the Australian National University. She leads the Cognitive and Cultural Ecology (CCE) Group, which studies the interaction between cognitive ecology and social systems in birds. She currently heads the SERI (ERC awarded) project CULTURES ADAPT, which uses urban sulphur-crested cockatoos as a model to examine how the rise and spread of innovative behaviours to form new 'urban cultures' can promote adaptive flexibility in long-lived, large-brained animals.

Dr Aplin studied for her PhD jointly at the Australian National University and the University of Oxford. Prior to her current positions, she held positions as a Max Planck Research Group Leader at the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour, a Junior Research Fellow at St John's College, University of Oxford (UK), and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Australian Museum Research Institute, Sydney.