

**Embargoed until: 15 February: 7am EST / 12pm UK / 1pm CET**



*PeerJ – the Journal of Life & Environmental Sciences*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### ***MEOW or ROOAAAR* - Exotic Cats' Ability to Recognize Familiar Caregivers' Voices**



In a recent *PeerJ Life & Environment* study, Professor Jennifer Vonk from Oakland University presents compelling evidence that exotic cats possess the remarkable ability to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar human voices.

The article - "Catcalls: Exotic Cats Discriminate the Voices of Familiar Caregivers" - delves into the often-overlooked realm of voice recognition among Felidae species. While much attention has been paid to domestication and early experiences in understanding animals' ability to differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar humans, few studies have explored this phenomenon in the feline family.

Using carefully designed experiments, Professor Vonk's graduate student, Taylor Crews, and her team investigated whether non-domesticated Felidae species could recognise familiar human voices. The results had some key takeaways.

The researchers found consistent evidence of voice recognition across pilot and main studies involving 25 cats from various species, including lions, tigers, and cheetahs. Cats responded more quickly, intensely, and for longer durations to familiar voices compared to unfamiliar ones, regardless of the use of their names or rearing history.

The findings suggest that close human contact, rather than domestication, is associated with the ability of cats to discriminate between human voices. It also challenges the notion that less social species lack socio-cognitive abilities comparable to more gregarious species. Professor Vonk explains "Non-group-living animals can exhibit social cognitive abilities such as heterospecific vocal recognition so we should not neglect the study of social cognition in less highly social species."

The implications of this study are profound, particularly considering the widespread housing of cats of all species in human care. Understanding their capacity to differentiate familiar from unfamiliar human voices could have significant implications for their welfare and interactions with caregivers.

This study adds to the growing body of work challenging stereotypes about cats as aloof creatures. It underscores the importance of recognizing the cognitive abilities of all species, even those traditionally considered less social.

For media inquiries or to request an interview with Professor Jennifer Vonk, please contact: [vonk@oakland.edu](mailto:vonk@oakland.edu)

## Full Media Pack of article PDF, images

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1luyCzEt6Esu14e0S8NukfOwVj-WxXcpZ>

All media is CC BY 4.0. Photo/video credits are included in the filename.

**EMBARGOED - Embargoed until: 15 February: 7am EST / 12pm UK / 1pm CET**

**LINK TO THE PUBLISHED VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE:** <https://peerj.com/articles/16904/> The link will ONLY work after the embargo lifts. Your readers will be able to freely access this article via this URL.

## Cite this article

Crews T, Vonk J, McGuire M. 2024. Catcalls: exotic cats discriminate the voices of familiar caregivers. *PeerJ* 12:e16904 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.16904>

###

**About:**

[PeerJ](#) is an Open Access publisher of seven peer-reviewed journals. PeerJ's mission is to give researchers the publishing tools and services they want with a unique and exciting experience. All works published by PeerJ are Open Access and published using a Creative Commons license (CC-BY 4.0). PeerJ is based in San Diego, CA and the UK and can be accessed at [peerj.com](https://peerj.com).

In 2022 PeerJ is celebrating its first decade of publishing and innovation.

*PeerJ* is the peer-reviewed journal for Biology, Medicine and Environmental Sciences. *PeerJ* has an Editorial Board of over 2,000 respected academics. PeerJ Media Resources (including logos) can be found at: [peerj.com/about/press](https://peerj.com/about/press)

###

**Media Contacts**

For the authors:

Professor Jennifer Vonk, please contact: [vonk@oakland.edu](mailto:vonk@oakland.edu)

For PeerJ:

Euan Lockie: [press@peerj.com](mailto:press@peerj.com)

*Note: If you would like to join the PeerJ Press Release list, please email your details to:*  
[press@peerj.com](mailto:press@peerj.com)