How intelligent are elephants?

Abigail Ogunsanwo - 2026-04-18 - [Comments (0)](#) - [Elephants](#)

Elephant cognition

is [animal cognition](#) as present in [elephants](#). Most contemporary [ethologists](#) view the elephant as one of the world's most intelligent animals. Elephants manifest a wide variety of behaviors, including those associated with [grief](#), [learning](#), [mimicry](#), [playing](#), [altruism](#), [tool use](#), [compassion](#), [cooperation](#), [self-awareness](#), [memory](#), and [communication](#).[1][2][3] They can also exhibit negative qualities such as [revenge](#) towards those perceived to have harmed them or their families. "Duncan McNair, a lawyer and founder of conservation charity Save The Asian Elephants, told *Newsweek* that ... although gentle creatures, elephants can be 'dangerous and deadly'."[4]

Evidence suggests elephants may understand [pointing](#), the ability to [nonverbally communicate](#) an object by extending their multi-purpose trunks.[5]

An elephant brain weighs around 5 kg (11 lb), which is about four times the size of a [human brain](#) and the heaviest of any [terrestrial animal](#). It has about 257 billion [neurons](#), which is about three times the number of neurons as a human brain. However, the [cerebral cortex](#), which is the major center of cognition, has only about one-third of the number of neurons as a human's cerebral cortex.[6] While elephant brains look similar to those of humans and other mammals and has the same functional areas, there are certain unique structural differences.[7]

The intelligence of elephants is described as on par with [cetaceans](#)[8][9][10][11] and various [primates](#).[9][12][13] Due to its higher cognitive intelligence and presence of family ties, researchers and wildlife experts argue that it is morally wrong for humans to kill them.[14] [Aristotle](#) described the elephant as "the animal that surpasses all others in wit and [mind](#)."[15]