

Cats' Memories Are Short-Lived

A study conducted by the University of Alberta in Canada reveals that cats remember better with their bodies than their eyes.

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Cats can remember certain types of information for 10 minutes, according to the results of a recent study at the University of Alberta in Canada. Researchers studied cats' working memory of their recent movements, comparing that to the cats' visual memories. They found that cats remember better with their bodies than their eyes in situations where they encounter an obstacle placed in their path, LiveScience.com reports.

"Animals, including humans, unconsciously keep track of the location of objects relative to the body as they move," said Keir Pearson, one of the researchers. "This tracking is largely dependent on signals associated with movement of the body."

Researchers expanded on this known association, trying to determine how a cat remembers to lift up its hind legs after the front legs have cleared an obstacle. They stopped cats after their front legs had cleared an obstacle, but before their hind legs went over. Then they distracted the animals with food and removed the object. Researchers found that the cats remembered having stepped over the obstacle for at least 10 minutes after the front legs cleared the object.

In comparison, the cats' visual memory of obstacles did not last nearly as long. Researchers repeated the obstacle experiment, but stopped the cats just before they stepped over the object. After being distracted (at which time the researchers removed the obstacle), the cats continued walking without making any effort to avoid the object previously placed in their path.

"We've found that the long-lasting memory for guiding hind legs over an obstacle requires stepping of the forelegs over the obstacle," Pearson said. "The main surprise was how short-lasting the visual memory on its own was—just a few seconds when animals were stopped before their forelegs stepped over the obstacle."