

Transcript

Kangaroo friendships

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Emily Best:

Our approach has to be very cautious. It's like playing a big game of What's the Time, Mr. Wolf. You approach them when their back is turned. And then as soon as they're watching you, you stand still and look the other way and pretend you're not interested in them, that you've seen something fascinating on the horizon instead.

We've been working with these kangaroos for about five years now, looking at friendships, or strong social bonds. In humans, strong social bonds are really important aspects of our social behaviour. Recent studies have found individuals who have lots of good strong friendships actually have better health outcomes. People who are poorly socially connected tend to have poorer health outcomes.

Studies have begun to look at animals as well. But most of these studies are on species with really complicated social behaviours. Kangaroos are much simpler. They didn't have any of these complicated behaviours, but really interestingly, they still have these strong social preferences and friendships. So we're just asking the question, why do they have these friendships?

At the moment, you can see there are two quite large groups of kangaroos, and these actually belong to two different social community groups. So you can tend to get groups of about 50 kangaroos. These two communities overlap in their home ranges, but even though they both use this area, they choose still to be separate when they're feeding. So you've got the group on my left, which tend to live up on the hillside, and the ones behind us live down the fields.

Kangaroos live where there's either a lot of food, or there can be very little food around. It's a real boom-and-bust type environment, and so their reproductive behaviour is really keyed into this. So they can produce a lot of young very quickly when there's good conditions and lots of food around. And then when conditions are much harsher, they often actually chuck out their babies from their pouches. So the babies develop very slowly for the first few months in the pouch, so there's less cost as opposed to abandoning their young and starting again once the conditions improve.

[MUSIC PLAYING]