

How to 'Speak' Capuchin

Capuchin monkeys have a wide range of vocalisations, but they also communicate with a variety of visual signals and social behaviours. This guide lists some of them and how they are used by the monkeys. However, the meaning can also depend on the context of the behaviours!

Visual Signals and Behaviours



Submissive Grin

Scientists also call this the 'silent bared-teeth display'. The lips are apart, and the corners of the mouth are down-turned. Capuchins use this face to say they are not a threat, or as part of courtship.



Open Mouth Grin

Scientists also call this the 'open mouth silent bared teeth display'. This is a submissive face like the submissive grin in meaning, but is clearer and may signal fear.



Scalp Lift

Raising the eyebrows can be a friendly or submissive signal between capuchins, often used by females to court a male. Don't confuse with a 'threat face', which also uses raised eyebrows.



Head Tilt

The head is tilted to one side while gazing at the monkey they are communicating with. This gesture is often combined with a 'submissive grin' and can be used in courtship.



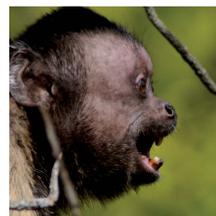
Play Face

Scientists also call this the 'relaxed open mouth display'. This means 'I want to play' and capuchins will often use it while they are play fighting or chasing each other.



Threat Face

Capuchins often use this threat face with flattened ears when they are scared. It differs from the 'scalp-lift' in the angle of the head and the staring eyes. The monkey may also raise its fur and tail.



Open Mouth Threat Face

For more serious threats the capuchin monkey will open its mouth and call. The eyebrows, fur and tail will be raised, and the monkey will stare at the monkey or predator it is threatening.



Lip Smack

Older capuchins will often say hello to young or baby monkeys by smacking their lips, opening and closing them rapidly. It is a very friendly signal, and the baby may respond by reaching out.



Reunion Display

This is a special display performed between adult males after they have been apart for some time. They may be using this display to reinforce the social hierarchy and their alliances.



Urine Wash

Capuchin monkeys, especially older males, wash their hands and feet with their own urine. This gives them an individual odour, that they leave everywhere they walk!



Beg

Scientists call this 'food solicitation'. One monkey holds its hands under another's while it is eating. Their friend might then drop pieces of food into their waiting hands.



Social Groom

Grooming is a very social activity, and monkeys typically groom their close friends and relatives most. The alpha male usually gets groomed a lot by the females.



Mount

A monkey might hug another monkey from behind. This is often done in play, but can also be a signal of dominance or sometimes be used as part of a male 'reunion display'.



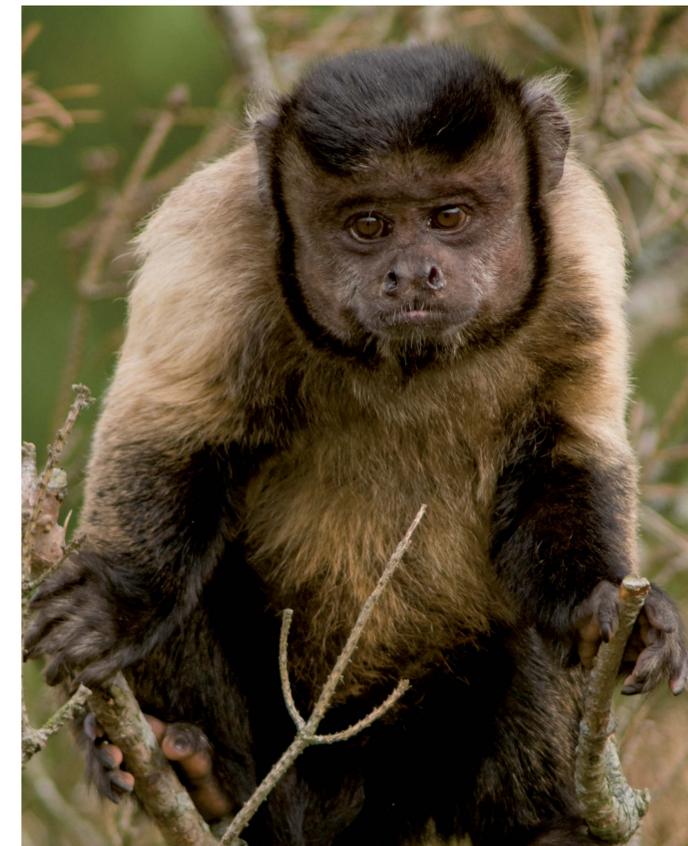
Branch Shake

Adult male capuchins shake branches to show other monkeys how strong they are, and sometimes do this when they are annoyed. They also shake branches to scare away predators.



Touch and Run

Female capuchins are very proactive about courting the alpha male. One way they attract the male's attention is to touch him and run away, as if they are playing tag.



Living Links Teaching Resources



Capuchin Monkey Social Behaviour Guide
Part of the Living Links 'Measuring behaviour teacher pack'

For further information and more resources go to www.living-links.org

 University of St Andrews | 600 YEARS |
Scotland's first university | 1413 - 2013

 THE ROYAL ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND

 EDINBURGH ZOO

Supported by
welcometrust