



A Sulawesi crested black macaque pulls one of several funny faces during its own photo shoot, seemingly aware of its own reflection in the lens. Despite the howling posture, the macaque was silent throughout, suggesting to me some form of fun and artistic experiments with its own appearance.

EXHIBIT 4



SELF-AWARENESS

It's long been believed that animals don't recognise themselves in reflections. The famous spot test - a spot placed on an animal's forehead tests if the animal sees itself in a mirror and tries to touch it - alleges to show that animals are not self-aware. Dogs bark at a mirror because they supposedly see the mirror creature as another threatening animal. My experience of these monkeys suggested that they were not just highly intelligent but were also aware of themselves.

A monkey had been looking at itself in the reflection of the lens when it grabbed my camera. The noise of the shutter excited it and was reluctant to hand the camera back, and in the ensuing re-possession the shutter was pressed by the monkey. My intent had been to get a full face portrait using the wide angle lens with a monkey looking directly into the camera. They were reluctant to do so with me behind the lens because it amounted to staring me in the face, something that monkeys feel is bad manners. So I mounted the camera on a tripod and encouraged them to touch the camera and a cable release I had added.

Now more confident to move closer to the camera, they became over-joyed by their appearance in the lens.

It was only a matter of time before one pressed the shutter resulting in a photo of herself. She stared at herself with a new found appreciation, and made funny faces - in silence - just as we do when looking in a mirror. She also, importantly, made relaxed eye contact with herself, even smiling.

Are the mouth shapes an imitation of the noise? She was certainly excited at her own appearance and seemed to know it was herself.



Above: Posing to take its own photograph, unworried by its own reflection, even smiling. Surely a sign of self-awareness?