

3. What are animals thinking? They feel empathy, grieve, and seek joy just like us.

As humans, we still think of ourselves as exceptional beings, fundamentally different from other animals. Over the past half century, though, scientists have amassed evidence of intelligence in many nonhuman species. New Caledonian crows snip twigs to fish insect larvae from tree trunks. Octopuses solve puzzles and shield their dens by placing rocks at the entrance. We no longer doubt that many animals possess impressive cognitive abilities. But are they more than just sophisticated automatons, occupied solely with survival and procreation? A growing number of behavioral studies, combined with anecdotal observations in the wild—such as an orca pushing her dead calf around for weeks—are revealing that many species have much more in common with humans than previously thought. Elephants grieve. Dolphins play for the fun of it. Cuttlefish have distinct personalities.

4. The Alps' magical ice caves risk vanishing in our warming world

Caves form most often in Limestone and Dolomite—rocks that are particularly dissolvable. Over hundreds of thousands of years, water seeping down from the surface washes out shafts and branching corridors and cavernous rooms that may be large enough to hide rivers and lakes. Minerals sometimes precipitate out of the water that drips into the caves, forming stalactites that hang from the ceiling and stalagmites rising from the floor. Stretches of the Alps are rich in such caves—and some are cold enough for ice to grow inside instead of stone. No one knows exactly how many ice caves there are, but they undoubtedly are more numerous here than anywhere else: About 1,200 have been found in Austria alone, and several hundred more in northeastern Italy.