**Element Video Abstract Transcript**

Hello! I’m Marta Halina and am an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge.

Some of you may have heard the story of the crow and the pitcher, one of Aesop’s Fables. The story goes like this:

One day a very thirsty crow finds a pitcher of water. But the pitcher has a narrow neck and the crow can’t reach the water. The crow tries and tries to reach the water but can’t. Then he comes up with an idea. He starts picking up pebbles and dropping them into the pitcher. This causes the water level to rise until finally the crow can drink the water.

This strikes us as a smart thing for a crow to do. Why? Well, to solve this problem, the crow seems to draw on his general understanding of how the physical world works. Namely, the fact that stones are heavy and will sink in water. And that sinking objects displace water, causing it to rise in a container.

As it turns out, animal cognition researchers have studied how real crows and other animals approach this problem. Some of these studies suggest that crows do in fact have a sophisticated understanding of the causal world around them. For example, when crows are given objects that look the same, but have different weights (some being heavy and some being very light), the crows prefer to drop the heavy objects (rather than the light ones) into a container of water. They seem to understand that the objects need to sink (rather than float) to solve the problem of making the water level rise. By the way, in this version of Aesop’s fable, the crows re not thirsty, but can see a tasty treat floating on top of the water.

In this Cambridge Element, I examine how nonhuman animals see the world. Do they view the world in terms of properties that are not directly observable, such as weight, force, and gravity? Do they reason about the unobservable internal states of other agents? Humans are good at reasoning about what other humans think and feel. Are animals good at this too? Does your dog know what you want? These are not easy questions to answer. By examining the challenges involved in answering these questions, we gain insight into how best to study animal minds.

Animals play such an important role in our lives. They are close companions not only at home, but in work and sport. Understanding animals helps us better understand ourselves—how we evolved and what we have in common with other species. It also helps us appreciate the wildly different forms that minds can take in the world and perhaps the universe, helping us recognise that the human perspective might be only one among a great many.

For all of these reasons, it’s important that we get the study of animal minds right. This book contributes to that goal, while also making the science of animal minds accessible to a general audience.