Before man had attempted to reach space, scientists were unsure if living creatures could survive in a microgravity environment. Animals were originally sent into space to see if manned spaceflight could be pursued, and still today they are sometimes used for research purposes. Should animals be used in spaceflight testing?

In the 1940s, scientists needed to investigate the effects of space travel on living organisms. From the late 1940s to 1960s, the U.S. launched into space fruit flies, mice, and monkeys of various species so scientists could monitor their vital signs and reactions to microgravity and radiation. Also, Russia conducted similar tests with dogs, including stray dog Laika, the first animal to enter orbit in 1957.

It could be said that it is wrong to send animals into space. First and foremost, some people would argue that animals (particularly monkeys) are meant to exist in colonies and families, consequently it is wrong for them to be sent to space on their own. Additionally, going to space is a dangerous experience for humans let alone for a species that cannot communicate or signify stress and unhappiness. Therefore, if something did go wrong an animal would not be able to share their discomfort with ground control. Fortunately, scientists prefer to research with computer models, or by involving astronauts directly.

However, because of the success of animal flights, humans have been able to explore the depths of space. NASA was able to send Alan Shepard into space just three months after learning from the successful spaceflight of Ham the chimpanzee in 1961. Animal research has helped scientists understand motion sickness, the effects of microgravity, and more. In addition, many discoveries have been made about animals’ instinctive behaviors while in this unfamiliar environment. Animals are only sent to space when absolutely necessary. When animals do go to space, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Community helps provide the safest, gentlest solution for their care. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal Welfare Act and the Public Health Services Policy Act also help protect animals traveling in space.

**What is your opinion? Should animals be used for spaceflight research? Are any other alternatives available?**