

Chimpanzees of the Budongo Forest, Uganda

Author: McGrew, William C.

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Book Review

Chimpanzees of the Budongo Forest, Uganda

Review of *The Chimpanzees of the Budongo Forest: Ecology, Behaviour, and Conservation* by Vernon Reynolds. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 297pp. ISBN: 0-19-851546-4. Paperback: US\$ 69.50. 2005.

Here is the latest addition to a very specialized genre: books about chimpanzee field-sites that are titled “*The Chimpanzees of...*” It is at least the fifth such book, following those by Ghiglieri (1984), Goodall (1986), Nishida (1990), and Boesch and Boesch-Achermann (2000). If the title is derivative, the subtitle is more revealing of the contents, and here (to quote Meatloaf), “Two out of three ain’t bad!”

Chimpology is full of interesting practitioners, but even among such a colorful bunch, Vernon Reynolds stands out. He was one of a trio of pioneers (Jane Goodall and Adrian Kortlandt being the others) who founded field studies of chimpanzees in the 1960s. He (and wife Frankie) did the fieldwork, wrote his book (Reynolds 1965), and moved on to other things. Then, after an interlude of almost 30 years, at a stage of career when most primatologists have already retired to the armchair, he decided to return to Budongo, impelled by an incident that exemplified the accelerating threat to the existence of our nearest living relations in Africa. The paramount status given to conservation in this book is what makes it stand out among its counterparts.

Four of the book’s 12 chapters are devoted to human-ape interaction in or around the Budongo Forest, a medium-altitude, semideciduous block of 435 km². This most northerly of the major forested areas in western Uganda is a forest reserve (but not a national park). Its history of timber extraction in various forms goes back to colonial times, and even today one of the chief problems with conservation is illegal pit-sawyer-ing for mahoganies.

The most pointed threats to the chimpanzees are snaring and trapping. One-third of the individuals beyond infancy in the Sonso study community are crippled from snare injuries. If this proportion is generalized to the Budongo population as a whole, almost 200 unfortunate apes are suffering at any one time, and this figure omits those who die in pain from such

injuries. The chapter on snaring makes for excruciating reading at times, but also talks pragmatically of the pros and cons of measures taken to tackle the problem. It is the best treatment in print on this vexed topic.

Another telling chapter is a case study of a relict community, Kasokwa, of only 13 chimpanzees, hanging on in a nearby 73-ha riparian forest. Their situation is perilous, and Reynolds gives all sides of the story, from the viewpoints of the apes, local people, and researchers. The problem is not just deforestation and agricultural incursion, but also the choice of sugar cane as the preferred crop, which is an irresistible temptation to crop-raiding. Here, as elsewhere, Reynolds is frank in his assessments, and in his recounting of the successes and failures of attempts at conservation intervention.

Finally, the book is the best yet on emphasizing in detail the various types of human-ape interaction that have implications for the latter’s morbidity and mortality. Exemplary cases of rapid veterinary response, either in the case of disease outbreak or for necropsy, are described in full. Parasites are given their due. The Budongo Forest Project is a standard-setter in how to implement a modern field study.

The behavioral aspects of the book are more uneven, with an emphasis on unusual events. There is, for example, an entire chapter on infanticide but only two paragraphs on play. An intra-community killing gets a useful whole chapter. Most of the usual topics, from sex to grooming to dominance struggles, are covered in enough detail to allow comparison with other populations elsewhere. Notably, like other Ugandan populations, the Budongo chimpanzees show little tool-use.

Ecology is given shorter shrift. For example, there is no list of sympatric fauna beyond primates, and although predators are referred to, none are named. Other primates are consigned to an appendix, where a major competitor, *Papio anubis*, gets only two paragraphs. Feeding ecology gets more space, but inexplicably three rankings of dietary preference are never inter-correlated, leaving the reader to wonder which to follow. Apparently, the most fed-upon species of plant is *Broussonettia papyrifera*, an exotic introduced in the 1950s (which recalls the dependence of the Gombe chimpanzees on another introduced species, the oil palm).

The findings of the book are well documented, and Reynolds is generous and meticulous in giving credit for results

to his extensive team of Ugandans and expatriates. However, this inclusiveness also poses a problem: 37% (98 of 360) of references listed are to unpublished theses, dissertations, reports, abstracts, etc. Having not gone through the rigors of scientific peer-review, it is not clear how much stock can be put in their data or conclusions, however timely and ingenious are the topics tackled.

Overall, the book is an effective blend of science and conservation. More than any of its predecessors in the genre, it takes seriously and unflinchingly the challenges of long-term protection of apes in African forests. The book's purchase price is not cheap, but it deserves as wide an audience as possible among primate conservationists. We can all be glad that Vernon Reynolds chose to return to Budongo.

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Reviewed by:

William C. McGrew

Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies
Department of Biological Anthropology
University of Cambridge
Pembroke Street
Cambridge CB2 3DZ, UK