

Primate Behavior and Ecology

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Source: Primate Conservation, 22(1) : 145

Published By: Conservation International

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1896/052.022.0116>

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Book Reviews

Primate Behavior and Ecology

Review of *Primate Behavioral Ecology* by Karen B. Strier. 3rd edition. Allyn and Bacon, Boston. 452 pp. ISBN: 0-205-44432-6. Paperback: US\$65.00. 2007.

Some textbooks quickly come to be established as the ‘gold standard’ for their particular area of enquiry, and this is often indicated by the speed with which new editions appear, presumably in response to a buoyant market. Such is the case for the behavioral ecology of non-human primates, as this third edition follows hard on the heels of its predecessors in 2000 and 2003. (Contrast this with its equally worthy counterpart in primate ecology, *Primates in Nature*, by Alison F. Richard, which appeared in 1985, but was never revised. What a pairing it would make with this volume!)

Karen Strier is a distinguished primate behavioural ecologist at the University of Wisconsin, best known for her exemplary long-term studies of the marmoset (*Brachyteles*) in Brazil. Equally, she is known for her overall grasp of the field and her ability to take primatology to a wider audience (for example, Strier, 2003). Both of these virtues are repeatedly expressed in this latest edition.

Happily, she has not tinkered with the general structure of the book, which retains its twelve key chapters: Introduction to Primate Studies; Traits, Trends, and Taxonomy; Primates Past and Present; Evolution and Social Behavior; Evolution and Sex; Food, Foraging and Females; Female Strategies; Male Strategies; Developmental Stages through the Life Span; Communication and Cognition; Conservation. Each of these has been bolstered by new material, to varying extents, matching the appearance to new findings in the field. For example, I checked point-by-point the four-page section on ‘tool use’; the newer version has the same four photographs but nine new references cited, and about 10% more text. This is a bit more than the overall increase in the number of pages, which has gone from 422 to 452, as has the number of reference sources cited in the bibliography (both at +7%). A new feature is a more user-friendly, 12-page Appendix of primate names, which now includes geographic regions and numbers of subspecies. Also, to the subject index has now been added a separate author index, making it easier to track the work of particular primatologists.

The strengths of the book remain, in that it is firmly embedded in the real world of primates in the wild, though with some, admittedly selective reference to their captive

counterparts, especially in the section on cognition. The judicious and apt use of topic boxes to develop specific, instructive points is retained, e.g., primates and parasites, hybrid baboons, etc. The mix of evidence and ideas remains sensibly balanced, and examples are used tellingly to illustrate key points. Strier occasionally uses anecdotes and personal experiences to flesh out topics, but never enough for this reader, who would like even more.

Why should a conservationist specialising in non-human primates buy this book? First and foremost, it is the most comprehensive and comprehensible treatment of the topic available. Furthermore, it is timely (although the date of publication is given as 2007, it appeared in 2006, and the literature referenced covers up through 2004). When the final chapter on conservation is reached, it is solidly grounded in basic science, as is the chapter itself: it covers such threats to primates as habitat disturbance and hunting pressure, conservation policies in relation to economic incentives, public awareness, and NGOs. It also examines non-invasive research, from genetics to reproductive biology. There is an earlier section, on rehabilitation, reintroduction, and sanctuaries, and on the ethical treatment of primates. Finally, although the list price of the book is a bit expensive, even new copies can be bought on line for less than \$10.

All in all, whether student or professional, any person in primate conservation should have this book close to hand on their shelves, and, even better, a spare copy to lend to colleagues. A thoroughly admirable and practical aim would be to arrange somehow for mass shipping of this book to Third World conservationists, who day-by-day are working ‘in the trenches’ and would find the book invaluable.

Literature Cited

- Richard, A. F. 1985. *Primates in Nature*. W. H. Freeman and Co., New York.
Strier, K. B. 2003. Primate behavioral ecology: From ethnography to ethology and back. *Am. Anthropol.* 105: 16–27.

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