

2009 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Primatologists

Titi-totes (<http://proyectotiti.com>) and sunglasses in hand, this year's participants gathered in sunny San Diego, CA for the 32nd Annual Meeting of the American Society of Primatologists from September 18–21, 2009. Boasting more than 420 registrants, one of the largest attendance records in recent history, the conference offered a diverse array of topics, from cognition and language to field experiments, neural and endocrine systems, and conservation. Participants were also invited to attend a variety of workshops on topics including statistics for primatologists, implementing and evaluating conservation education programs, and grant writing for postgraduates.

ETHICS IN FIELD PRIMATOLOGY

Among the most intriguing, and perhaps the most relevant to field primatologists today, was the field-work symposium organized by Erin Riley (San Diego State) and Katherine MacKinnon (Saint Louis University), in which long-term field biologists were asked to present their experiences and evaluate both the costs and benefits of long-term field research. Linda Fedigan (Calgary) opened the session, enumerating the many ways in which field-based primatology differs from lab-based studies and explaining that Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) standards need be modified to suit the generally less invasive standards that are currently implemented in the field (for example, fecal collection in lieu of blood sampling). Fedigan proposed that members work together to exchange the current “three R’s” (replace, reduce, and refine) of lab-based study for the “three Ps” (presence, protocols, and people). She fur-

ther stressed that we need a code of ethics that all field primatologists can agree to adhere to. Any such code is currently lacking in the society's guidelines. Following suit, Karen Strier (University of Wisconsin, Madison) stressed that, as in other businesses, primatologists must conduct a “risk analysis,” in which we consider both the costs and benefits of long-term field work. In the short term, researchers may provide, for example, financial stability to local people, protection to primates, and preservation of land. However, we must consider what happens when the research ends and the benefits of long-term field work, such as habituated animals, extensive footpaths, and an economy that is dependent on research, become potential liabilities. Luckily, many primatologists have already taken these concerns into consideration. As Randall Kyes (University of Washington) demonstrated, one key to helping maintain ethics in field work is to give back to local communities. By initiating field schools throughout the world, including countries in Asia, Africa, and North and Central America, Kyes has begun to empower local people via community outreach education for children, collaborative training programs, and capacity building, which is vital to research, conservation, and successful long-term collaborations. Similarly, Paul Garber (Illinois) spoke about “putting the community back in community ecology,” in which he described his efforts at La Suerte Biological Research Station in Nicaragua. While maintaining a long-term research presence at the site, Garber has also made great strides toward community-based initiatives, finding that efforts were most successful when directed toward educating

young children and students. Patricia Wright (Stony Brook) described a similar success story in Ranomafana National Park in Madagascar, where she has conducted research for more than 20 years. Wright's initiatives have grown into an impressive network of community-based programs in and around the park, empowering local people and inspiring Madagascar's citizens to take pride in the great biodiversity lying just beyond their doorsteps.

INTEGRATING EXPERIMENTS INTO FIELD RESEARCH

Other progressive talks were given at the Field Experiments Symposium, chaired by Lynne Miller (Mira Costa College). These talks focused on using tools such as feeding platforms, predator models, and playback experiments to evaluate questions related to predatory-sensitive foraging, cognition, and both feeding and intergroup competition. In a study on wedge-capped capuchins, Lynne Miller used mobile feeding platforms and snake models to assess whether individuals weighed risk (presence of snake) and/or vulnerability (assessed by group size) when making foraging decisions. As expected, individuals were less likely to forage in the presence of the snake; however, group size turned out not to be a factor. Orin Neal and Marilyn Norconck (Kent State) also used experimental methods to investigate predator-sensitive foraging. Using playback experiments to simulate the presence of harpy eagles, they found that sympatric primates in Suriname responded to the call of the eagles by moving to areas with increased canopy cover. Anja Deppe

(Stony Brook) used trapping followed by playbacks, predator models, and predator odor cues to evaluate predator recognition by mouse lemurs. She found that lemurs responded to models and some odors, but largely ignored playbacks, suggesting that individuals relied on visual and olfactory cues to detect predators. In an alternative use of playbacks, Michelle Brown (Columbia University) simulated intergroup encounters (IGEs) in mangabeys and evaluated hypotheses for male and female involvement in IGEs. Surprisingly, she found that the presence of neither estrus females nor infants influenced male involvement, while the strongest predictors of female involvement were the presence of infants, the feeding value of the site, the size of the group relative to its simulated neighbor, and the degree of intrusion perceived from the location of the simulated caller. Finally, in a series of feeding platform experiments conducted on commensal bonnet macaques, Sandra Chacko (University of California, San Diego) simulated high, middle, and low feeding competition conditions, finding support for higher rates of aggression but not rates of displacement and depletion in the most competitive condition. Taken together, the talks delivered in this symposium served as excellent examples of how experimental work can be conducted in wild populations, particularly in relation to questions involving predation and intergroup encounters, events difficult to observe naturalistically.

PRIMATE REPRODUCTION

In addition to organized symposia, the open sessions offered a wide variety of research topics. Primate reproduction was a prominent theme throughout the conference, addressed in several sessions, including those on neural and endocrine systems, maternal behavior and infant development,

ecology, and breeding and reproduction. Toni Ziegler and Shelley Prodom (Wisconsin Primate Center) investigated the role of prolactin in weight changes in male marmosets that carry multiple infants from birth. They found that weight decreased as male carrying progressed but that weight loss increased with experimentally lowered prolactin; no weight loss occurred with experimentally elevated prolactin. These results suggest that natural increases in paternal prolactin during their mate's pregnancy buffers subsequent weight loss associated with paternal infant care. Michael Jarcho and colleagues (Davis) also studied hormone levels in a species with male care. They analyzed estrogen and pregnanediol in maternal titi monkeys to determine whether levels of these hormones and maternal care behavior could predict success in infant survival. Estrogen levels (but not pregnanediol levels or maternal behaviors), were good predictors of infant survival, suggesting that variable maternal parenting styles were potentially overcome through the added contribution of male care.

Several studies presented data on primate life histories. Julienne Rutherford (Northwestern) found that in common marmosets an individual's litter size predicts several life-history parameters. Triplets had lower birth weights and higher perinatal mortality risk but, if they survived, they reproduced earlier and longer than did twins or singletons. This apparent benefit has its costs, however, because a mother's own litter size predicts her offspring's likelihood of being stillborn, where risk increases with maternal litter size. Also focusing on life histories, Carola Borries (Stony Brook) posed the question, "Are folivores slow?" Using long-term data from Phayre's leaf monkeys, Borries and colleagues investigated the effects of nutrition and food availability on leaf monkey life-history parameters, comparing them with the corresponding parameters of other Asian colobines and more

frugivorous macaques. Finding no effect of diet or food availability, the authors concluded that the predicted effects of folivory do not seem to hold. In fact, with the exception of gestation, folivores and frugivores share similar life histories. Finally, in contrast to studies on parental care, James Fuller and Marina Cords (Columbia) discussed results from their study examining the likelihood of infanticide by wild blue monkey males. They compared infanticidal and non-infanticidal males from the same population and determined that, while males committed infanticide less often when infants were older or females entered estrus earlier, individual male identity best determined whether an infant would be killed. In all, these talks provided a broad synthesis of the impressive body of work being amassed on the topic of primate reproduction and highlighted exciting new avenues for future research.

As in previous years, the conference concluded with a banquet, where Stephen Suomi (NICHD) was awarded the Distinguished Primatologist award for his outstanding work on biobehavioral development in nonhuman primates. The next meeting will be held in June 2010 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Andrea L. Baden
Interdepartmental Doctoral Program in
Anthropological Sciences
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, NY 11794-4364
andrea.baden@gmail.com

Amy Lu
Department of Psychology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Stacey R. Tecot
Department of Ecology and Evolution
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, NY 11794

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Published online in Wiley InterScience
(www.interscience.wiley.com).
DOI 10.1002/evan.20230