Book Review – Buchbesprechung – Livre nouveau

H. Albrecht and S. C. Dunnett: Chimpanzees in Western Africa. Piper, Munich 1971. 138 pp., 100 fig.; DM 24.-.

This short monograph is a competent account of a 6-month field study of wild chimpanzees in the Republic of Guinea. Chimpanzees are by now one of the better-documented primate species, and there are no surprising new revelations in this book, but it is nevertheless worth reading particularly by any intending primate field worker. Nissen, and then Reynolds followed bands of chimpanzees on their forest travels; Goodall habituated them to her camp and artificial feeding posts; each method yielded good data of different kinds. Kortlandt, who found the sites used in this book, has always watched from hides, but his own field studies have mainly been aimed at experimenting with chimpanzee reactions to leopards and other objects. Dunnett and Albrecht give an idea of the potential for the observation of normal behaviour by using hides sited in places chimpanzees are known to visit regularly. The excellent photographs alone are a splendid advertisement for the method – they make a neck-straining forest-walker like me green with envy.

The authors saw the same kinds of social interactions and communicatory gestures, and categorise them in similar ways, as other field workers, and by now I am beginning to think it is time primate field workers found a more precise method of analysis for describing social behaviour and social systems. But this is a general point and does not reflect on Albrecht and Dunnett in particular.

These authors themselves felt that the grouping patterns and daily routines they saw at their sites differed slightly from those reported by Goodall. However, this could only be substantiated by a much longer field study at these sites, to include at least a full year, as I know from my own experience how variable chimpanzee band composition and movement patterns are according to the seasonal distribution of fruiting trees.

Which brings me to my final point. Albrecht and Dunnett state at the end of their monograph that they themselves cannot undertake further field work at present. The site is a good one both for chimpanzees and for field workers' convenience. They feel there may be some 'cultural' differences between their population and others studied elsewhere. They appeal for field workers who can undertake a study of at least 16 months duration (and presumably with their own sources of financial backing) to make use of this opportunity. Maybe some student reading this review in this journal will take up the challenge. If so I would suggest that he writes to the authors, care of the publishers.

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Erratum

C. P. Groves: Gorillas. The World of Animals. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1970. 96 pp., 76 fig. (16 colored). The price of this book, reviewed in Folia primat., vol. 15, pp. 313-314 (1971), is in fact E 1.25 (not E 12.25 as erroneously given).