Book Review · Buchbesprechung · Livre nouveau

Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy *The Langurs of Abu*

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In 1971, Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy went to India, particularly to the famous Mount Abu in Rajasthan, to study the strange phenomenon of 'infant killing' by adult male langurs, which had at least been suspected by Sugiyama (1965) at his study site Dharwar and directly observed by Mohnot (1971) near Jodhpur. 4 years later, after 1,500 observation hours in the field, she had collected enough data to write a really fascinating book on reproductive strategies of both sexes of the most adaptable species of colobine primates, *Presbytis entellus*. This extraordinary book presents in a thoughtfully organized and nicely readable form the descriptions, analyses, and theoretical interpretations of the social structure and dynamics of the Abu langur population, of infanticide, of infant sharing among females, of male social and reproductive strategies and female counterstrategies, of competition within and between both sexes. The strength as well as the weakness of the text lies with the fact that the immense volume of observational data has been interpreted exclusively in view of the sociobiological theory of 'inclusive fitness'. It is always tempting to find all the necessary long-term explanations, why particular behaviours or social strategies should be advantageous to the acting animals (respectively their gene reproduction) within the frame of one single comprehensive theoretical concept. However, it should be kept in mind that in spite of those finalistic explanations almost nothing is known about the actual and immediate causes, e.g. the motivational processes as well as the external releasing factors, which lead the individual to behave under certain circumstances just as it does. Ethologists, however, are always requested to search for these actual causations of particular behaviours. Furthermore, it should be stressed that many of the observations (and in consequence their interpretations) of Blaffer-Hrdy cannot be generalized to all other habitats or localities within the range of *P. entellus*. For instance, 'infant killing', in spite of the assurance of Blaffer-Hrdy, is not a regular phenomenon accompanying male takeovers in all *hanuman* langurs: even in Jodhpur, the site from which the first direct observations of infanticide had been published by Mohnot, it does not occur regularly, as we can derive from our recent 2 years study in this region. In spite of extensive field research it has never been observed in *P. entellus* of the Himalayan ranges, where social organization is remarkably different from the Rajasthan conspecifics. Anyway, *The Langurs of Abu* should be highly recommended as a really fascinating and stimulating book, not exclusively for primatologists.

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