

Book Review

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Alan F. Dixson

**Primate Sexuality
Comparative Studies of the Prosimians, Monkeys, Apes, and
Humans, 2nd ed.**

Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012
808 pp.; GBP 120.00
ISBN 978-0-19-954464-6

In the foreword, Robert Martin uses the very apt adjectives ‘monumental’ and ‘accurate’ to describe Alan Dixson’s book. The second edition of *Primate Sexuality* is indeed an authoritative, up-to-date summation of our knowledge of sexual and reproductive behaviour across the primates, presented and interpreted by one of the leaders of the field. It forms a comprehensive mine of well-written and illustrated information that will ensure its well-deserved place as a turn-to-reference for established researchers, postgraduates, lecturers and students alike. The book’s greatest strength is in Dixson’s comparative approach: detailed evidence from all 6 primate superfamilies is brought together and used critically to examine theories of primate, both non-human and human, sexuality. Given this approach, it is fitting that an introduction to primate classification and evolution is provided in chapter 2 immediately after the book’s context has been clearly outlined both in terms of the importance and historical perspective of our understanding of sexual behaviour. In the subsequent 12 chapters, Dixson examines comprehensively the function, evolution and explanations for the many facets of sexuality from mating systems and tactics, sexual behaviour and response, sociosexual and homosexual behaviour, sexual selection, sperm competition, the evolution of genital shape, the development of sexually dimorphic behaviour and the influence of hormones including the effect of social rank on sexual behaviour, before closing with a chapter on human sexuality from a primatological perspective. Human studies are skilfully used throughout the book to examine our understanding of sexuality in the wider Primate order, and vice versa.

The second edition of *Primate Sexuality* is no less up to date than you would expect from its author. Dixson makes full use of the information in the 14 years since the original book was published. For example there has been much recent interest in the mechanisms causing or underpinning sexually differentiated behaviour, from its neuro-anatomical basis to the use of 2nd- to 4th-digit ratios as postnatal markers of prenatal hormonal events that may influence adult behaviour, in bi- and homosexual behaviour, and the mating systems of humans. These, and other advances, are critically considered and presented as part of the wider, unfolding picture of primate sexuality. This book will be of interest to a broader audience than just primatologists due to the importance of sex and reproduction.

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