

A Guide to the Cultures of Chimpanzees

In an effort to catalogue variations among chimpanzees, we asked researchers working at six sites across central Africa to classify chimpanzee behaviors in terms of occurrence or absence in seven communities. (There are two communities at Mahale.) The key categories were customary behavior, which occurs in most or all members of one age or sex class; habitual, which is less common but which still occurs repeatedly; present; absent; and unknown. Certain behaviors are absent for ecological reasons (eco): for example, chimpanzees do not use hammers to open coula nuts at Budongo, because the nuts are not available. The survey turned up 39 chimpanzee rituals that are labeled as cultural variations; 18 are illustrated below. -A.W. and C.B.

Hammering nuts

To crack open nutritious coula nuts, chimpanzees use stones as rudimentary hammers and anvils.



Pounding with pestle

With stalks of palm trees acting as makeshift pestles, chimpanzees can pound and deepen holes in trees.



Fishing for termites

Chimpanzees insert thin, flexible strips of bark into termite mounds to extract the insects, which they then eat.



Wiping ants off stick manually

Once the ants have swarmed almost half-way up sticks dipped into the insects' nests, chimpanzees pull the sticks through their fists and sweep the ants into their mouths.



Eating ants directly off stick

After a few ants climb onto sticks inserted into the nests, chimpanzees bring the sticks directly to their mouths and eat the ants.



Removing bone marrow

With the help of small sticks, chimpanzees eat the marrow found inside the long bones of monkeys they have killed and eaten.



Sitting on leaves

A few large leaves apparently serve as protection when chimpanzees sit on wet ground.



Fanning Flies

To keep flies away, chimpanzees utilize leafy twigs as a kind of fan.



Tickling self

A large stone or stick can be used to probe especially ticklish areas on a chimpanzee's own body.



BOSSOU	TAI FOREST	GOMBE	MAHALE M-GROUP	MAHALE K-GROUP	KIBALE	BUDONGO
customary	customary	absent	absent	absent	absent (eco?)	absent (eco?)
customary	absent	absent	absent (eco?)	absent (eco?)	absent (eco?)	absent (eco?)
absent	absent (eco?)	customary	absent	customary	absent (eco?)	absent (eco?)
present	absent	customary	absent	absent	absent	absent
customary	customary	present	absent	absent	absent	absent
absent	customary	absent	absent	absent	absent	absent
present	habitual	absent	absent	absent	present	absent
absent	habitual	present	absent	absent	absent	habitual
absent	absent	habitual	absent	absent	absent	absent

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BOSSOU	TAI FOREST	GOMBE	MAHALE M-GROUP	MAHALE K-GROUP	KIBALE	BUDONGO
customary	customary	customary	customary	absent	present	present
absent	present	present	absent	absent	customary	absent
customary	customary	absent	customary	customary	habitual	customary
present	absent	habitual	unknown	unknown	absent	absent
absent	absent	present	unknown	unknown	absent	customary
absent	customary	present	absent	absent	absent	absent
absent	habitual	absent	customary	customary	customary	absent
present	customary	habitual	customary	customary	absent	absent
absent	habitual	customary	customary	customary	customary	habitual



Throwing

Chimpanzees can throw objects such as stones and sticks with clear – though often inaccurate – aim.



Inspecting wounds

When injured, chimpanzees touch wounds with leaves, then examine the leaves. In some instances, chimpanzees chew the leaves first.



Clipping leaves

To attract the attention of playmates or fertile females, male chimpanzees noisily tear leaf blades into pieces without eating them.



Squashing parasites on leaves

While grooming another chimpanzee, an individual removes a parasite from its partner, places it on a leaf and then squashes it.



Inspecting parasites

Parasites removed during grooming are placed on a leaf in the chimpanzee's palm; the animal inspects the insect, then eats or discards it.



Squashing parasites with fingers

Chimpanzees remove parasites from their grooming partners and place the tiny insects on their forearms. They then hit the bugs repeatedly before eating them.



Clapping arms overhead

Two chimpanzees clasp hands above their heads while grooming each other with the opposite hand.



Knocking knuckles

To attract attention during courtship, chimpanzees rap their knuckles on trees or other hard surfaces.



Rain dancing

At the start of heavy rain, adult males perform charging displays accompanied by dragging branches, slapping the ground, beating buttress roots, and pant hooting.