The Care and Management of Captive Chimpanzees Workshop: Managing Social Behavior

Stephen R. Ross & Kristen E. Lukas

Published online: 04 Jun 2010.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327604JAWS0404_07

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
With the movement to house chimpanzees in more species-typical social groups, issues pertaining to the positive and negative consequences of managing larger, multimale, and mixed-sex groups have become increasingly relevant. The 24th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Primatologists, August 2001, provided an opportune forum for a workshop aimed at reviewing empirical data on the social management of large groups with the ultimate goal of improving psychological well-being of captive chimpanzees. Mollie Bloomsmith, Zoo Atlanta; Linda Brent, Southwest Biomedical Foundation; and Kate Baker, Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center, organized the workshop. Representatives from biomedical facilities and zoological parks were invited to present recent research findings and participate in guided discussions to review current literature on the management of socially housed chimpanzees in a variety of settings.

The first topic of discussion was the management of aggression in larger social groups of captive chimpanzees. There was general consensus that although social conflict may at times cause distress for animals and caretakers alike, attempts to eliminate aggression in group-housed chimpanzees are virtually impossible and potentially detrimental. Opportunities for social interaction and conflict resolution...
are what make group living so continually stimulating and enriching for chimpanzees. Aggression is seen at measurable rates in wild chimpanzees (Goodall, 1986), and we should therefore expect it to occur in captive situations. However, efforts to reduce unnecessary physical and psychological stress resulting from high levels of aggression have found varying degrees of success at diverse institutions. Factors such as housing, quantity and quality of human interactions, and positive reinforcement training programs were reviewed as important considerations in managing large chimpanzee groups.

Another topic of discussion involved the effect of appropriate rearing environments on social competency in captive chimpanzees. Although rearing concerns are less relevant today than they were 15 years ago because of the breeding moratorium for National Institute of Health-sponsored institutions, a need still exists to determine what rearing factors play a critical role in appropriate social development of chimpanzees. Although the optimum strategy includes leaving infants in species-typical groups until the natural age of maturity or immigration, many cases remain in which this is not possible—poor mothering skills, illness, scientific protocols, and genetic management. Nursery environments are increasingly more stimulating, but documented behavioral problems associated with nursery rearing remain. Stereotyped behavior such as rocking and self-sucking has been associated with nursery rearing (Pazol & Bloomsmith, 1993), and some behavioral abnormalities can persist throughout an animal’s life. Nursery rearing has also been associated with social deficiencies when individuals eventually move on to group living conditions. Nursery-reared individuals have been shown to be less successful in social introductions (Bloomsmith & Baker, 2001) and experience more wounding in complex social groups (Baker, Seres, Aureli, & de Waal, 2000). These and other facts suggest that lifetime well-being of captive chimps can be compromised when inadequate nursery-rearing practices are used. Nursery interventions such as intensive rearing—in which human interactions are based on emulating chimpanzee maternal behavior (Bard, 1995)—and alternative companions such as dogs (Pazol & Bloomsmith, 1993) have been successful in reducing some behavioral problems associated with nursery rearing.

The final, and probably most highly anticipated topic of discussion, was formation of large social groups. Although most chimpanzee introductions are successful, participants were eager to discuss management methodology that would further reduce the risk of harm to animals. Varying strategies were discussed and debated. Not surprisingly, no consensus was reached on an infallible approach. Factors that may improve the success rate of social introductions included the ability to preintroduce individuals across a mesh barrier and separation of introduced males from maximally tumescent females. Although clearly no “formulas” guarantee success, there was consensus that successful management plans implemented flexibility, teamwork, and communication.
As part of the workshop, participants were provided copies of *The Care and Management of Captive Chimpanzees* (Brent, 2001), which covered many of the issues discussed in the workshop. Although it is clear that a myriad of questions deserve further study, significant progress is being made toward a better understanding of captive chimpanzee management. Not long ago chimpanzees were considered too volatile to be kept in large groups, but today the question is no longer if but how chimps should be socially housed. The workshop provided an excellent opportunity to review current literature, discuss new developments, and exchange ideas to increasingly create social situations that promote well-being of captive chimpanzees.

**REFERENCES**


