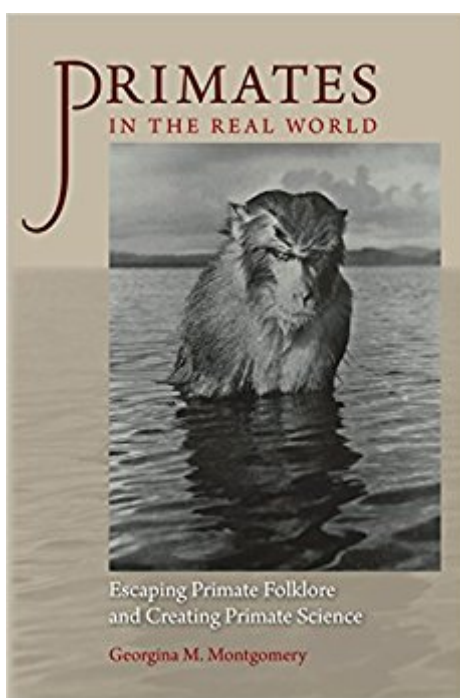


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Primates In The Real World: Escaping Primate Folklore And Creating Primate Science



Synopsis

The opening of this vital new book centers on a series of graves memorializing baboons killed near Amboseli National Park in Kenya in 2009--a stark image that emphasizes both the close emotional connection between primate researchers and their subjects and the intensely human qualities of the animals. *Primates in the Real World* goes on to trace primatology's shift from short-term expeditions designed to help overcome centuries-old myths to the field's arrival as a recognized science sustained by a complex web of international collaborations. Considering a series of pivotal episodes spanning the twentieth century, Georgina Montgomery shows how individuals both within and outside of the scientific community gradually liberated themselves from primate folklore to create primate science. Achieved largely through a movement from the lab to the field as the primary site of observation, this development reflected an urgent and ultimately extremely productive reassessment of what constitutes "natural" behavior for primates. An important contribution to the history of science and of women's roles in science, as well as to animal studies and the exploration of the animal-human boundary, Montgomery's engagingly written narrative provides the general reader with the most accessible overview to date of this enduringly fascinating field of study.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Montgomery argues that the general public's ravenous interest in primate research (and what it might or might not tell us about being human) provided scientists with both a boon and a burden. Public fascination created a ready audience for primatologists' research findings but also

necessitated a constant struggle against popular myths. In her cogently argued, highly readable book, Montgomery explores this dual nature through a series of engaging episodes from Darwin to the present. (Erika Lorraine Milam, Princeton University, author of *Looking for a Few Good Males: Female Choice in Evolutionary Biology*) Lucidly and incisively Georgina Montgomery charts the creation and transformation of the science of primatology through the twentieth century and on up to the present. Her cast of actors is rich, and she offers an inspiring and astute analysis of the ways in which the boundaries and hierarchies between and among them have changed or even dissolved as the science of primatology developed. Women scientists became leaders in the science, field scientists demonstrated the crucial importance of their practices along with the practices of the lab scientists, indigenous observers emerged as integral participants in long-term, transnational investigations. Meanwhile, the "boundary" between human and non-human primates has become ever more elusive. All those who are intrigued about how humans have come to make sense of their closest animal relatives should welcome this book. (Richard W. Burkhardt Jr., Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, author of *Patterns of Behavior: Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and the Founding of Ethology*) [A] most illuminating and well-written book. I highly recommend *Primates in the Real World* to everyone interested in the interaction between science and popular culture, the spatial aspects of knowledge making, and the changing Western perceptions of nonhuman animals. (ISIS)

Georgina M. Montgomery is Associate Professor of History at Michigan State University and the coeditor of *Making Animal Meaning*.

This is a quite good book that will probably have a narrow appeal. It's a fast read, gracefully written and the photos (mostly of the people mentioned in the text rather than of primates) are helpful. The book is really a sort of account of the history of primatology from Yerkes on, with some figures that will be recognized by readers interested in science and nature, including George Schaller, Diane Fossey and Jane Goodall. The history of science can be amazingly dry but this book is not, perhaps because it is a young science or perhaps because the more influential people who helped develop it were lively and not caught up in academic hierarchy. Montgomery herself is in the field, so she has been part of the field as it has developed. This is a rather short book, so in some ways it is a sketch, particularly of the general background. The public has long been interested in primates, and popular interest has been sustained, not least by movies such as *King Kong*. Much of the book describes how primatology has countered popular assumptions with science. Part of the success has been by

researchers that became very popular and influential, specifically Fossey and Goodall. Montgomery does not much consider the controversies surrounding use of primates in medical studies and animal rights issues, perhaps because these are somewhat peripheral. She does include some quite remarkable people, such as Rosalia Abreu, a very wealthy Cuban woman with a sizable collection of gorillas (in Havana) she allowed Yerkes and others to study. An important theme is the gradual opening of the field to diversity. There has been an influx of women into the field, starting several decades ago. Now there is increasing recognition that field studies absolutely must involve local people as active participants. American researchers visiting Kenya for field work may do good work, but it cannot be considered successful without local participation, which also allows essentially 24/7 field work utilizing trained local peoples. Ultimately they will become equal partners in the research as trained assistants obtain doctorates.

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