

CO-DOMINANT FEMALES LEAD GROUP MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES IN A WILD POPULATION OF WHITE-HANDED GIBBONS

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Forming groups is an advantageous strategy, but close spatial proximity comes with costs, as increased competition between individuals over limited resources, and conflict among group members over decisions concerning where to search for food or which individual(s) is allowed to first access a food source. As a result, the outcome of such competition might directly affect group coordination. How this conflict is solved in sexually monomorphic species, such as gibbons, is the topic of this study. Since female reproductive burdens may arise in seasonal environments, female' reproductive status may motivate females to lead groups in order to gain priority of access to food resources. This study investigates group leadership in a gibbon population at Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. Thirteen groups of wild white-handed gibbons were examined, seven were pair-living and six multi-male. Leadership tendencies in the context of group movement, travel order, access to food resources and feeding priority (i.e. monopolizing/sharing a food patch) were taken into account. As predicted for sexually monomorphic species, clear inter-sexual dominance does not exist in this gibbon population. However, only adult females lead travel movements by consistently maintaining the front position. They also tended to feed alone when food resources were limited and female reproductive status appeared to influence their motivation to lead. Cycling females led movements more frequently than did pregnant and lactating females. Although appearing co-dominant, gibbon females seem to assume a greater leadership role in coordinating group activities than males.

Keywords: leadership, gibbons, *hylobates lar*, feeding priority