

NEWLY OBSERVED BEHAVIOR OF SOLITARY WESTERN LOWLAND GORILLAS

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We have habituated a group and several solitary males of western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) in the Moukalaba-Doudou National Park (Gabon) since 2004. During the process of habituation, we have observed several types of behavior which have not been reported in western lowland gorillas. A solitary male was observed to feed on ants (*Crematogaster* sp.) on the ground. He held the nest of ants with both hands and tapped it with each hand alternatively, probably to lure ants away from the nest. After tapping, he ate ants on the palm of his hand. This behavior may be based on elaborated hand use, as observed on mountain gorillas when feeding on thorny nettle. Another observation was made when two solitary silverbacks encountered each other. The larger male on the ground gave hoots, chest-beats and rushed repeatedly around a tree in which the smaller male was. The smaller male frequently glanced at the other, and moved ca. 50 m between trees. He defecated several times and caught almost all diarrhetic feces with hands and fed on them. Then he descended on the ground and ran away. The larger male chased him persistently for more than 8 minutes. This aggressive interaction suggests dominance/subordinate relationships between two solitary males and that the stressful interaction may cause the coprophagy of gorillas. Adding other new findings on the behavior of solitary males to these observations, behavioral characteristics of western lowland gorillas are discussed in comparison with those of mountain and eastern lowland gorillas.

Keywords: Ant feeding, Coprophagy, Solitary male, *Gorilla gorilla gorilla*