

JAPANESE PRIMATOLOGY: ITS UNIQUE SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

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Japanese primatology is characterized by a unique history among mammalian studies in Japan. After World War II, Kinji Imanishi started his field studies to consider the evolution of human society through comparisons with other animal societies. He conducted field studies on non-human primates by identifying each individual and naming it, which were essential for illustrating social interactions among individual animals. The first generation of Japanese primatologists thought that social structure was not a mere reflection of individual survival or reproductive strategies but reflected a norm of species-specific sociality. In the late 1950s, they started a survey of wild gorillas to elucidate the origin of the human family. To date, Japanese scientists have conducted long-term field studies of gorillas in various study sites across Equatorial Africa. The accumulated data on their social ecology provides a remarkable contrast with those of chimpanzees living allopatrically and sympatrically with gorillas. Gorillas also show a high degree of ecology and social flexibility in response to habitat alterations caused by human disturbances. I will try to reconsider the social ecology of gorillas along with the scope of Japanese primatology and discuss ways how we can support their survival with us.

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