

LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY: EVIDENCE OF SPECIFIC BED-SITE RE-USE IN WILD CHIMPANZEES

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A recent study has demonstrated the re-use of sleeping sites by savanna chimpanzees over time (Hernandez-Aguilar, 2009), expanding on previous work by Sept (1992) who first proposed chimpanzee sleeping site re-use as a referential model for early archaeological site formation. Fruth and Hohmann (1994) expanded the time depth of bonobo beds as archaeological signs in the landscape by noting that bed-building may leave long-lasting scars in the growth patterns of the trees used. The current study investigated the presence of these scars of previous chimpanzee beds beneath fresh beds in order to determine whether these scars indicate a more specific level of re-use and site formation than previously proposed by Sept. Detailed study of bed structures was conducted at two sites: Fongoli, Senegal, October 2007 - April 2008, and Issa valley, Ugalla, Tanzania, October 2008 - October 2009. In order to investigate the prevalence of old bed scars, old breaks, bends, detach points, and dead or detached frame branches were recorded. In each site over 105 beds were accessed and scars were found in 78% of beds. In Issa, for a subset of 32 beds, a randomly selected potential bed location within the nest tree was accessed and scars recorded. In only 18% of these locations were scars found. These results indicate that chimpanzees re-use specific sleeping sites within trees, perhaps due to the creation of ideal support structures and supple new-growth for mattress material with successive use locations over time.

Keywords: Chimpanzee, Nest, Bed, Savanna