

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHIMPANZEE? EXAMINING VARIATION BETWEEN AND ACROSS SUBSPECIES

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Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) can be generally described as large-bodied, mainly frugivorous apes that live in large social groups with a fission-fusion organization. However, the specificities of their socioecology have been shown to greatly vary across populations. Additionally, the types of habitats in which chimpanzees live and sympatric faunal species differ among study sites. It is becoming clear that the description of “chimpanzee” needs to be contextualized in order to be scientifically informative, but using what context? Here, I consider one possibility, that of subspecies classification. For example, are eastern chimpanzees (*P.t. schweinfurthii*) clearly different from western chimpanzees (*P.t. verus*)? Or is there too much variation within these categories, thus making a socioecological description by subspecies just as ineffective as a general one? Data comprising geographic location, rainfall, seasonality, food resources, sympatric fauna, and behavioral variables from numerous chimpanzee study sites were compiled from the existing literature and compared. Not surprisingly, when examined individually, the variables of sympatric fauna and vegetation cluster sites according to subspecies, since this designation is closely tied to geographical and thus environmental factors. However, study sites with similar cultural variants are not necessarily of the same subspecies. When these and other variables are combined, the delineation between subspecies becomes less clear. Therefore, while referring to “eastern”, “western”, “Nigerian”, or “central” chimpanzees might be more meaningful, this classification can obscure some variation within a population, perhaps making site-name based referencing nomenclature a better option.

Keywords: *Pan troglodytes*, behavioral diversity, sympatric fauna, habitat distribution