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HISTORICAL BIOGEOGRAPHY OF CHIMPANZEES BY CONTRAST WITH HUMAN/ELEPHANT POPULATION MOVEMENTS IN XIXth AND XXth CENTURY KAKANDE COUNTRY (NORTHWESTERN GUINEA)

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Research in primate ethology is traditionally conducted inside parks and protected areas. This spatial bias results from our scientific conceptions, taking environments within these boundaries as “outdoor laboratories” in which behaviors are studied as archives of the evolution of species. The growing number of works outside of these areas, most often stimulated by the imperative to reconsider conservation policies, is an incentive to emphasize a historical perspective on primate habitat, biogeography and behavior. I propose to review the kind of data and methods available for this approach by focusing on written sources concerning Kakande chimpanzees (Northwestern Guinea), where fieldwork was also conducted in 2003-2005 and 2009. The low frequency of chimpanzee quotations in XIXth and early XXeth scientific works and travel narratives can be interpreted mainly as a consequence of the species' marginal status in colonial trade, rather than of low population numbers. Chimpanzee historical biogeography is analyzed in comparison to that of the more frequently quoted elephant in these early texts. These analysis show that comparative approaches, both at interspecific and interregional scales, are an efficient tool for the study of human/nonhuman primate population imbricated movements over space and time.

Keywords: chimpanzee, elephant, historical biogeography, human/animal interactions