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ONTOGENY OF PLANT SELECTION RELATED TO NUTRITIONAL AND MEDICINAL PROPERTIES IN PRIMATES

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Early learning about edible food is a critical survival task for infant and juvenile non-human primates. Individual and social learning processes seem to be related to the slow growth of young primates and extended juvenile period that offers ample opportunities for seeking food information. Plant selection seems also to be correlated with the close observation displayed by the young and directed toward the elders whereas mothers rarely interfere with infant's plant selection. Concerning nutritional values, only a few studies have been carried out with captive monkeys. Ontogeny of plant selection according to their medicinal properties is a very new theme of research and little documented for adult primates. The current symposium aims at discussing new results on plant selection by young non-human primates of different taxa related to their nutritional values and medicinal properties from captive and field studies. Results confirm that synchronized consumption with adults and observational learning is responsible for the food transmission preferences and information in the different species studied. In Japanese macaques, young selected their food according to crude protein content, and the ease of processing food could play a more important role than previously expected. Concerning plants with medicinal properties, it appeared that neophobia is variable among apes species. The consequence of a strong conservative and neophobic feeding behavior acquired through social learning would be an important issue to consider for conservation of species threatened by habitat disturbance.

Keywords : Ontogeny, Nutrition, Plant selection, Zoopharmacognosy