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052179109X - Primates Face to Face: Conservation Implications of Human-Nonhuman Primate Interconnections

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Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology 29

Primates Face to Face

Conservation implications of human–nonhuman primate interconnections

Human and nonhuman primates share intertwined destinies. As our closest evolutionary relatives, nonhuman primates are integral elements in our mythologies, diets and scientific paradigms, yet most species now face an uncertain future through exploitation for the pet and bushmeat trades as well as progressive habitat loss. New information about disease transmission, dietary and economic linkage, and the continuing international focus on conservation and primate research have created a surge of interest in primates. Focus on the diverse interaction of human and nonhuman primates has become an important component in primatological and ethnographic studies. By examining the diverse and fascinating range of relationships between humans and other primates, and how this plays a critical role in conservation practice and programs, *Primates Face to Face* disseminates the information gained from the anthropological study of nonhuman primates to the wider academic and non-academic world.

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To all the primates (human and nonhuman) struggling to survive in a
rapidly changing world

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Foreword

The intersection of anthropology and primatology is a complex one where our knowledge of human and nonhuman primates meet. Contributing to its complexity are the different sets of theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches that culturally-oriented anthropologists and biologically-oriented primatologists tend to bring to their studies. The different ways in which ethnographic and ethological findings are usually reported further increases the intellectual distance that anthropologists and primatologists alike must travel in their search for common ground.

There is also a curious asymmetry between anthropology and primatology that has developed along with the peculiar intellectual traditions of each. For example, although humans are primates, anthropologists who study humans rarely regard themselves as primatologists. Instead, primatologists, particularly in the social sciences, learn early on in their careers to respond to the persistent question of what primatology contributes to anthropology in terms of the comparative perspectives that nonhuman primates can provide. That this question is typically posed by scholars who focus on those aspects of cultural behavior that distinguish humans from other primates has often struck me as an odd detail because nearly all definitions of what makes humans human are implicitly or explicitly derived from comparisons.

Primatologists, for the most part, have been slow to turn the question of primatology's place in anthropology on its head. Yet, as this unique volume shows, the precarious status of so many primates makes the question, 'What can anthropology contribute to primatology?' a compelling one that primatologists concerned with conservation cannot afford not to ask.

For tens of thousands of years, ancestors of today's modern humans and primates have lived side-by-side throughout the tropics. The nature of their interactions has been mixed and subject to historical, demographic, and environmental dynamics. But whether primates are revered for religious purposes, or exploited for food and other products, or regarded as pests, there is no denying the fact that primates have long played a prominent role in the daily, if not spiritual, lives of many people. The

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diversity of past and present human attitudes toward primates affects how primates and their habitats are treated, and ultimately how effective any efforts to conserve them can be.

Unlike other primates, which are still largely restricted to the tropics and whose populations are dwindling at an alarming rate, human population expansion has led to our occupancy of much of the planet. In the past, the fates of primate populations were dependent on the behaviors, ecologies, economies, and belief systems of the local human communities that surrounded them. Now, in addition to these local influences, primates are also affected by much more far-reaching political agendas and economic forces that operate on a global scale.

As human pressures continue to grow and primate habitats to shrink, insights into the human side of human–nonhuman primate interactions have become even more critical to the development and implementation of informed conservation policies at all levels. Whether these insights come from ethnographers or primatologists is secondary to the far more urgent cause of securing a viable future for the world's endangered primates.

By assembling such an eclectic array of informative case studies about human–nonhuman primate interactions, Agustín Fuentes and Linda D. Wolfe identify a common ground where cultural anthropologists and primatologists can meet. In the process of exploring the interactions between human and nonhuman primates, they and their contributors demonstrate the implausibility of considering one kind of primate without the other, at least in those places where both can still be found.

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