

Studying Primates

How to Design, Conduct and Report Primatological Research

Primateology draws on theory and methods from diverse fields, including anatomy, anthropology, biology, ecology, medicine, psychology, veterinary sciences, and zoology. The more than 500 species of primate range from tiny mouse lemurs to huge gorillas, and primatologists collect data in a variety of environments including field sites, research facilities, museums, sanctuaries and zoos as well as from the literature. The variability in our research interests, study animals and research sites means that there are no standard protocols for how to study primates. Nevertheless, asking good questions and designing appropriate studies to answer them are vital if we are to produce high-quality science. This accessible guide for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers explains how to develop a research question, formulate testable hypotheses and predictions, design and conduct a project, and report the results. The focus is on research integrity and ethics throughout, and the book provides practical advice on overcoming common difficulties researchers face.

JOANNA M. SETCHELL is Professor of Evolutionary Anthropology at Durham University, UK, and Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Primatology*. She is an international expert in primatology with an extensive publication record. She is currently President of the Primate Society of Great Britain and has served as Vice-President for Research of the International Primatological Society. She is co-editor of *Field and Laboratory Methods for Primatologists* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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*How to Design, Conduct
and Report Primatological
Research*

JOANNA
M. SETCHELL
Durham University



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To the next generation of primatologists

Contents

Preface	page xv
Acknowledgements	xvii
1 Asking Questions about Primates	1
1.1 How Science Works	1
1.2 What It Takes to Be a Primatologist	4
1.3 This Book	8
1.4 Chapter Summary	14
1.5 Further Reading	14
2 Ethics in Primatology	17
2.1 Approaches to Ethics	17
2.2 Legal Requirements and Permits	18
2.3 Working with Captive Primates	18
2.4 Working with Wild Primates	19
2.5 Collecting Biological Specimens	21
2.6 Working with Human Participants	22
2.7 Working in the Natural Environment	22
2.8 Working Alongside Other People	23
2.9 Collaborating Effectively	24
2.10 Living in or Near Communities	26
2.11 Using Social Media	26
2.12 Reporting and Disseminating Outcomes	27
2.13 Chapter Summary	27
2.14 Further Reading	28
3 Keeping Science Healthy: Research Integrity	31
3.1 Research Misconduct	31
3.2 Review the Literature Fairly, Accurately, and Appropriately	33

viii	Contents	
	3.3	Use Blind Protocols 33
	3.4	Concentrate on Rigour, Not Statistical Significance 33
	3.5	Report Studies Honestly and Openly 34
	3.6	Admit Mistakes 35
	3.7	Use Research Funds Appropriately 36
	3.8	Respect the Peer-Review Process 36
	3.9	Assign Authorship Credit Appropriately 36
	3.10	Declare Conflicts of Interest 41
	3.11	Be Kind 41
	3.12	Chapter Summary 41
	3.13	Further Reading 42
4	Inclusive Science	45
	4.1	Gender 45
	4.2	LGBTQIA+ 46
	4.3	Ethnicity 46
	4.4	Social Background 46
	4.5	Disability 46
	4.6	Age 47
	4.7	First Language 47
	4.8	Country of Origin 47
	4.9	Intersectionality 48
	4.10	The Effects of Discrimination 48
	4.11	What Can We Do to Address Inequities? 49
	4.12	Chapter Summary 51
	4.13	Further Reading 51
5	Understanding Statistical Evidence	53
	5.1	Inferring from a Sample to a Population 53
	5.2	Variables and Distributions 56
	5.3	Statistical Relationships between Variables 57
	5.4	Null Hypothesis Statistical Testing 58
	5.5	What the p Value Means and Doesn't Mean 59
	5.6	False Positives, False Negatives, and Statistical Power 61
	5.7	Effect Sizes 62
	5.8	Confidence Intervals 62
	5.9	Alternatives to Null Hypothesis Statistical Testing 63
	5.10	Interpreting Statistical Evidence Appropriately 64
	5.11	Chapter Summary 64
	5.12	Further Reading 65
6	Communicating Ideas in Writing	67
	6.1	Start by Writing 67
	6.2	Refine Your Draft 70
	6.3	Get Feedback and Revise Your Draft 70

	Contents	ix
6.4	Write Simple, Clear, Concise English	72
6.5	Engage and Guide Your Reader	73
6.6	Write Sentences and Paragraphs	82
6.7	Use Effective Transitions	83
6.8	Use the Active Voice	83
6.9	Avoid Repetition, Redundancy, and Verbosity	84
6.10	Use Jargon Sparingly	84
6.11	Use Words Carefully	85
6.12	Use Abbreviations Sparingly	85
6.13	Avoid Logical Fallacies	85
6.14	Be Consistent with Species Names	89
6.15	Use Numbers and Units Accurately	89
6.16	Cite the Literature and Other Sources of Information Appropriately	92
6.17	Chapter Summary	93
6.18	Further Reading	94
7	Introduction to the Primates	97
7.1	Primate Distribution and Habitats	97
7.2	Primate Skeletons and Adaptations to Life in the Trees	99
7.3	Primate Diet and Dietary Adaptations	99
7.4	Primate Brains and Sensory Adaptations	100
7.5	Primate Life History and Reproduction	101
7.6	Primate Activity Patterns, Locomotion, and Ranging Patterns	104
7.7	Primate Social Behaviour	104
7.8	Primate Interactions with Other Species	109
7.9	Primate Diversity and Taxonomy	110
7.10	Chapter Summary	115
7.11	Further Reading	115
8	Why Study Primates?	119
8.1	Primates Are Interesting in Their Own Right	119
8.2	Primates Have Important Ecological Functions	121
8.3	Primates Help Us to Understand Our Own Evolution	122
8.4	Primates Are Important to Human Health	123
8.5	Primates Are Socially and Culturally Important	123
8.6	Primates Need Specialised Care in Captivity	123
8.7	Primates Are Threatened with Extinction	124
8.8	Chapter Summary	125
8.9	Further Reading	125

x Contents

9	Identifying a Research Question	127
9.1	Fundamental and Applied Research	127
9.2	General Research Questions and Specific Case Studies	127
9.3	Where We Study Primates	128
9.4	Where Do Research Questions Come from?	129
9.5	Good Research Questions	132
9.6	Developing a Research Question	133
9.7	Chapter Summary	133
9.8	Further Reading	135
10	Finding Out What We Know	137
10.1	Sources of Information	137
10.2	Identifying Search Terms	138
10.3	Assessing the Quality of the Literature You Find	139
10.4	Reading Broadly	141
10.5	Choosing What to Read	143
10.6	Keeping Up with the Literature	144
10.7	Chapter Summary	144
10.8	Further Reading	145
11	Reading Journal Articles	147
11.1	General Advice on Reading	147
11.2	The title, Abstract, and Keywords	148
11.3	Reading the Introduction	148
11.4	Reading the Methods	149
11.5	Reading the Results	150
11.6	Reading the Discussion	150
11.7	Organising Your Reference Collection	151
11.8	Synthesising What You've Read	152
11.9	Chapter Summary	155
11.10	Further Reading	155
12	Formulating Hypotheses and Predictions and Designing a Study	157
12.1	Formulating Hypotheses	157
12.2	Deriving Predictions	158
12.3	Measuring Invisible Things	160
12.4	Testing for Differences between Categories	160
12.5	Testing for Associations between Quantitative Variables	162
12.6	Predictions Involving More than One Predictor Variable	163
12.7	Confounding Variables	164
12.8	Practical Constraints	164
12.9	Chapter Summary	165
12.10	Further Reading	166

13	Observing and Manipulating	167
	13.1 Good Study Design	167
	13.2 A Continuum of Control	168
	13.3 Validity	168
	13.4 Observation without Manipulation	169
	13.5 Manipulative Research	170
	13.6 Practical Constraints	173
	13.7 Chapter Summary	173
	13.8 Further Reading	176
14	Choosing Measures	177
	14.1 General Advice on Methods	177
	14.2 Are My Measures Valid?	178
	14.3 Are My Measures Reliable?	178
	14.4 Are My Measures Accurate?	179
	14.5 Are My Measures Sensitive?	179
	14.6 Are My Measures Feasible?	179
	14.7 Chapter Summary	180
	14.8 Further Reading	184
15	Planning Data Analysis	185
	15.1 Getting Started	185
	15.2 Types of Statistical Test	186
	15.3 Independent Replicates and the Perils of Pseudoreplication	188
	15.4 Choosing the Right Test	189
	15.5 Testing for Differences between Groups	190
	15.6 Testing for Differences within Subjects	192
	15.7 Testing for Associations between Quantitative Variables	194
	15.8 More Complicated Statistical Models	196
	15.9 Other Useful Statistical Methods	201
	15.10 Preparing a Detailed Analysis Plan	202
	15.11 Collecting Data in the Format Needed for Analysis	203
	15.12 Chapter Summary	204
	15.13 Further Reading	204
16	Sampling and Statistical Power	207
	16.1 Sampling Methods	207
	16.2 Statistical Power	208
	16.3 Determining an Appropriate Sample Size	209
	16.4 Determining How Precise Your Estimate Will Be	210
	16.5 Chapter Summary	212
	16.6 Further Reading	213

xii	Contents	
17	Checking Feasibility and Finalising Your Plans	215
17.1	Logistics	215
17.2	Assessing Risk and Planning for Emergencies	216
17.3	Conducting a Pilot Study	217
17.4	Making a Timeline	218
17.5	Budgeting	219
17.6	Writing and Preregistering a Detailed Project Plan	220
17.7	Chapter Summary	222
17.8	Further Reading	222
18	Writing a Research Proposal	223
18.1	Identifying Sources of Funding	223
18.2	Prioritising and Planning	224
18.3	Understanding the Funder's Priorities	224
18.4	Seeking Advice	225
18.5	Writing the Proposal	226
18.6	Factors Affecting Success	235
18.7	Handling the Outcome	235
18.8	Chapter Summary	236
18.9	Further Reading	239
19	Collecting Data	241
19.1	Keep Track of Your Progress and Your Spending	241
19.2	Be Flexible and Open to Opportunities	242
19.3	Be Prepared for the Unforeseen	242
19.4	Collect Data Rigorously and Systematically	243
19.5	Don't Peek at Your Data	243
19.6	Keep Your Data and Samples Safe	244
19.7	Working with Other People	244
19.8	Chapter Summary	245
19.9	Further Reading	245
20	Conducting Fieldwork	247
20.1	What Does Fieldwork Take?	247
20.2	Permissions	248
20.3	Logistics	248
20.4	Field Kit	250
20.5	Personal Safety	251
20.6	The Social Context and Cultural Understanding	252
20.7	LGBTQIA+ Concerns	254
20.8	Natural Hazards	255
20.9	Physical Health	256
20.10	Mental Health	259
20.11	Returning Home and Re-insertion Syndrome	260

	Contents	xiii
20.12	Chapter Summary	261
20.13	Further Reading	262
21	Analysing and Interpreting Data	263
21.1	Organising Your Work	263
21.2	Sticking to an Analysis Plan	264
21.3	Plotting Data to Check for Errors and Checking the Assumptions of Your Models	265
21.4	Running Analyses	266
21.5	Calculating Effect Sizes and Confidence Intervals	267
21.6	Interpreting the Results	267
21.7	Chapter Summary	268
21.8	Further Reading	269
22	Writing a Scientific Report	271
22.1	General Guidance	271
22.2	The Title: The Core Message of Your Report	276
22.3	The Introduction: Why You Did the Study	277
22.4	The Methods: How You Did the Study	280
22.5	The Results: What You Found	282
22.6	Presenting Your Data	284
22.7	Tables: Summarising Your Data	285
22.8	Figures: Illustrating Your Findings	286
22.9	The Discussion: What Your Findings Mean	288
22.10	The Abstract: A Concise, Stand-Alone Summary	289
22.11	The Keywords: Help Readers Find Your Article	290
22.12	Citations and the Reference List	290
22.13	The Acknowledgements	291
22.14	Appendices	291
22.15	Chapter Summary	292
22.16	Further Reading	297
23	Submitting to a Peer-Reviewed Journal	299
23.1	Choosing a Journal	299
23.2	Before You Submit	301
23.3	Publication Ethics and Misconduct	304
23.4	Highlights, Graphical Abstracts, and Lay Summaries	305
23.5	The Cover Letter and Suggesting Reviewers	306
23.6	Submission	306
23.7	The Review Process	307
23.8	The Editor's Decision	308
23.9	What to Do If Your Manuscript Is Rejected	308
23.10	Revising Your Manuscript	308

xiv	Contents	
	23.11 Resubmitting Your Manuscript	309
	23.12 Acceptance and Publication	310
	23.13 Chapter Summary	310
	23.14 Further Reading	311
24	Presenting Your Work at a Conference	313
	24.1 Conferences	313
	24.2 Preparing and Submitting a Conference Abstract	316
	24.3 Attending a Conference	317
	24.4 General Advice on Presentations	318
	24.5 Preparing an Oral Presentation	319
	24.6 Presenting an Oral Presentation	320
	24.7 Preparing a Poster Presentation	322
	24.8 Presenting a Poster Presentation	323
	24.9 Conference Etiquette	324
	24.10 Chapter Summary	325
	24.11 Further Reading	325
25	Conclusions	327
	Index	333

Preface

There are more than 500 species of primate, ranging in size from the ~30 g Madame Berthe's mouse lemur to the ~250 kg male Grauer's gorilla. Some species are arboreal, others terrestrial. Some live in large groups, others forage alone. Some species are diurnal, some nocturnal, and still others are active at any time of day or night. Primatology draws on theory and methods from diverse fields, including anatomy, anthropology, biology, ecology, medicine, psychology, veterinary sciences, and zoology. Primatologists collect data in field environments with various levels of anthropogenic influence, animal sanctuaries, research facilities, museums and zoos, and from the literature. We are motivated by discovery, conservation, and welfare. The variability in our study animals, research interests, and motivations means that there are no standard protocols or off-the-shelf recipes for how to study primates. Nevertheless, asking the right questions and designing appropriate studies to answer them are vital if we are to produce high-quality science. These are also the topics that students often find most difficult.

This book guides readers in how to think scientifically. It covers the skills needed to assess published studies critically, develop a research question, formulate testable hypotheses and predictions, design and conduct a study that will test the predictions, select appropriate measures and samples, analyse the data, interpret the results, draw conclusions about the data in relation to the original question, and report the results. I emphasise ethics and the need for honest, rigorous, and transparent science throughout. I explain common misconceptions and problems in primatology and how to resolve them. I include the difficulties researchers can face, including imposter syndrome, fieldwork in difficult environments, and reverse culture shock. I highlight **key terms** the first time I use them and use text boxes to cover issues in more depth than in the main text. Each chapter includes a summary and suggestions for further reading.

xvi Preface

This book will be valuable for postgraduate and postdoctoral scholars in primatology and allied disciplines. It will also be useful for final-year undergraduates contemplating their dissertation and for those who teach undergraduates, advise postgraduates, mentor postdoctoral scholars, and conduct their own research.

Author royalties will be donated to the International Primatological Society Conservation fund.

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This book distils what I've learnt over more than 20 years. It is based on my experience in my own research, editing the *International Journal of Primatology*, collaborating with students, and discussions with colleagues and friends. I don't claim to be a perfect scientist and this book reflects what I've learnt through what I've done, rather than what I've done. Informally, I call it *How not to mess it up*, with a good helping of *Don't be a jerk*. I hope that it will help people to do good research in primatology.

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