Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

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Mangabey monkeys follow others into the unknown

Over a period of 10 years an international team of researchers led by Karline Janmaat of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (Germany) and Peter M. Waser of Purdue University (USA) have been sharing and analysing ranging data on radio-tracked male and female mangabey monkeys in Kibale National Park, Uganda. They found that unlike predicted in earlier short-term studies, group home ranges drift very little. When monkeys do move into new areas, with the exception of young males, they do so in the company of others. Individuals follow those that are more familiar with the unknown area and may use each other's reservoir of spatial knowledge. (International Journal of Primatology, March 16, 2009).

Image: Grey-cheeked mangabeys feeding on water plants. New water ponds were discovered in the company of stranger males (Copyright: Rebecca Chacellor).

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Mangabeys feed on evanescent food patches (large fruiting trees) whose location is difficult to predict and have been described as semi-nomadic foragers. Over a period of ten years, however, most group home ranges drift very little, suggesting that memory of rich foraging areas is important.

Young males leave their natal group as they reach maturity and wander alone for long periods, gradually familiarizing themselves with an extensive area of forest. Once joining a new group, however, they use its home range even when they forage alone. If they disperse again later in life, they usually do so into groups with an overlapping home range, without exploring new areas on their own.

Females do not move between groups, but several home range shifts into new areas were observed, all associated with group fission. Both males and females can move substantial distances (>5km) over their lifetimes, but with the exception of young males they appear not to move into new areas alone. Instead, it appears that individuals follow those that are more familiar with the unknown and use each other's reservoir of spatial knowledge.

[KJ]

Original work:

Karline R.L. Janmaat, William Olupot, Rebecca L. Chancellor, Malgorzata E. Arlet, Peter M. Waser
Long-term site fidelity and individual home range shifts in grey-cheeked mangabeys
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