

Primate observation – san diego zoo essay sample



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Primates are one of the most interesting mammals on earth, not only because of their complex social structures, but because they hold so many similar characteristics to humans. Primates are often cited as our closest living relatives and on two separate occasions I observed four separate species of primates at the San Diego Zoo that can justify their use of their physical characteristics and behaviors that may be similar as well as different to the other primates and ours.

The first group of primates I mainly observed were the Bonobos, also known as the pygmy chimps to many. On this occasion a youngster running around wildly on two legs and looking back as if something or another Bonobo was following him caught my immediate attention. I sat there observing him for about 5 minutes, he wasn't paying attention at the observation windows as I was the only person there at the time, he was more focused on looking the back of him suspiciously. He was able to retain his balance and would use his left fist flat to the ground to hold his body up when looking over his right shoulder. Suddenly he climbs down from a hill area down towards the glass and I noticed something in his right hand. He was holding a brown baby bunny that seemed to be alive. He observes the mammal in his hand with one hand and looks back again at another primate, which I can only assume was his mother or another older Bonobo in the exhibit. The youngster springs into action using bipedal locomotion and his free left hand to swing from the available branches in the ground to go toward the central part of the exhibit.

Following him to the central part the youngster is found at the central cliff looking back as if the other Bonobo followed him. The bunny was out of sight as his hands were free at this point pacing in circles, as zookeepers we're

throwing fruits from a higher point towards three other Bonobos not in full view, including the one that followed the youngster. The youngster then on two legs again holds the baby bunny, which unfortunately is now lifeless and hides it in the bush then runs over to the zookeepers to retrieve his snacks. Bonobos stand about around 2 to 3 feet tall and we're very excited in nature on my visit. High eyebrow ridges defined their physical appearance, and limbs we're slender and long. On my observation, their bipedal locomotion was present most of the time when running and walking around observing. On my particular visit I found their behavior very entertaining as well as interesting. They have a large mandible and teeth shown that could've probably eaten the baby bunny in one bite, but the youngster only saw the small mammal as a toy. I also found that the youngster was afraid of the adult Bonobos finding out about his 'toy' and would keep looking back as if he we're in trouble. I feel that the behavior exhibited shows the intelligence behind the Bonobos as well as their active use of bipedal locomotion.

The next group of Primates I observed on this particular visit were the Gorillas. On a series of two separate visits I found 3 gorillas on exhibit. On my first visit I observed a silverback male gorilla relaxing against the glass eating a bunch of long leaves scattered around the floor exhibit. There was what I assumed to be a female in the upper part of the exhibit napping as well as a youngster towards the center of the exhibit in and out of view. On this visit I focused on the male resting against the glass. Long forearms and large hands that according to our text are in part of using them for knuckle walking define his physical locomotion. His posture is straight and sloped in towards the middle. He sits upright with his legs bored-out as if he we're

sitting cross legged. He takes the leaves one by one grasping it with his fist and inserts it in his mouth, not eating it but as if he has is cleaning it between his teeth.

He seems relaxed and doesn't pay attention to the crowd of people behind him. After about 10 minutes, he is abruptly bothered by the youngster who is running on his knuckles towards the male and runs back up the hill as if he is taunting him. The youngster does it about 3 more times within the next 7 minutes and perches upon the hill in the same position as the silverback, except he is bended at the knees in squat position. In my second visit, I return to the gorilla exhibit for about 10 minutes to see a female unknown if related to the previous observation in submission. She is found crouched to the floor with her elbows on the ground and hands extended out and her butt perched up. Her hind legs are also bent and position to help support her butt. Three minutes upon observation, a silverback male comes running on his knuckles from another part of the exhibit and mounts the female. He positions himself on his knuckles to provide him support and continues with the sexual intercourse, in which I conclude my observations.

Gorillas are the largest group of primates and although they are known as being bipedal, similar to humans and other primates, they often use knuckle walking to move around. On observation, they have seems to have a more robust front appearance than their hind legs and behind. Their cranium is taller than other primates and lower mandible more protruding than their snout. They also have human-like ears that are parallel to their eyes and are small in size. They have five digits on their forearms and their hind legs with a long opposable thumb. Their hands do not have as much fur/hair as the

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rest of their body, which can be caused by the knuckle walking. Gorillas although large in stature and demeaning physical appearance, we're very docile in behavior and moved a lot slower than the other primates observed. Bipedal locomotion was only observed twice on both visits, and was exercised by the youngster.

The next set of primates observed, we're on my second visit to the San Diego Zoo. These we're the reddish-orange colored primates known as the orangutans. The orangutans shared the exhibit with another species known as siamangs. On my particular visit I observed three active orangutans out of four that we're on display. A large male, which I was able to identify as Satu, according to the displayed profiles around the exhibit. He was perched on top of a jungle gym like structure used with steel poles and a series of ropes crisscrossed for them to use. He was sitting in a set resting until another orangutan, identified as Janey, leaps towards the poles using her hands to grasp the ropes and poles and swings up to wake him up. She then jumps back down with Satu following her back down. She relaxes near a ledge and is sitting in a bent posture leaned forward waiting. Satu then goes behind her and proceeds to pick at her fur as if he's grooming her and eating bugs that may be in the fur.

He uses his thumbs and index digit as if he's pinching it out and proceed to stick his hand in his mouth to lick it off. I observed this behavior for about 10 minutes with Janey leaned forward during the process. I then move to the right of the exhibit where water is flowing outside a rock in a small stream. I observe a smaller and younger looking orangutan identified as Karen. Karen was by the window entertaining the crowds through the window, which

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caught my attention when observing Satu and Janey. Karen is faced forward toward the windows on both legs playing with a young girl who is tapping on the glass. She makes faces at her for about 5 minutes and I watched her run over toward the rock with water looking at it.

She proceeds to put her hands in the water then sticks her tongue out at the flowing water. Her lower lip is pushed down allowing water to flow through her mouth and proceeds to drink the flowing water. She then proceeds to run toward the window where the girl was and entertains the large growing crowd. Orangutans are docile creatures similar to the gorillas and have long arms that are used for swinging and perching on high branches, which we're replicated by the steel poles and ropes found in the exhibit. They are much more bipedal than gorillas. They have a forward facing mandible and do not hold an obvious brow ridges like the other primates. They have larger lips than primates and undoubtedly humans and their behavior on my visit seemed to be more of a relaxed family community in comparison to the other primates.

The fourth primate observed at the San Diego Zoo were the monkeys found at the orangutan exhibit. On my particular visit, I only observed the two resident siamangs in the exhibit. I observed them since they co-habituated with the orangutans and I found it very interesting. Of the two, one was found in one of the nets in the structure restfully sleeping curled up. Another siamang was found on the ground floor of the exhibit eating what seemed to be leaves or vegetation from the exhibited. It was sitting in an upright posture with its hind legs bent similar to the young gorilla in the previous noted observation. She had abnormally long arms in comparison to the other

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primates, which is probably used for swinging. Covered in all black fur, the siamang has protruding mouth with a lowbrow ridge to characterize the front face. The fur on top of the small cranium was parted in the middle and has front facing orbitals.

Although closed, when the mouth opened when eating or howling, she had a circular opening with the teeth not present, covered by the upper and lower lips. She then proceeded to climb where the other siamang was dangling with the long arms facing towards the observation windows then proceeded to perch on top of one of the poles slouched for about 10 minutes. Siamangs are relatively small to primates and are very slender. They have smaller thumbs and the rest of the digits are significantly longer. When moving, the siamang used Quadra pedal locomotion to get on the pole structure. Their behavior was calm and matched those of the orangutans which seemed to be why they were matched up in the same exhibit.

During my observations, all four primates exhibited intelligence and behavior in their own ways that can be seen similar to humans as well as within their counterparts. On my observation, the Bonobos displayed the most activity as well as bipedal locomotion to that of humans. Three of the four primates observed displayed human traits such as a family culture and society where they interacted with each other. The only primate observed that lacked that culture were the siamangs, which can be in part due to the partner sleeping, or that their behavior characteristics and development were not to par with the much large primates. These observations can be compared to our everyday routines and cultures, because we often find ourselves calm and use taunting or tactile playful behaviors when young or need attention. I

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believe that primates are very intelligent and can be seen as our closest living relatives based on their size, intelligence, and use of bipedal locomotion. They also use their hands to grasp things with accuracy, however can also be overpowering on small mammals such as the case with the baby bunny. Primates are intelligent and I believe observing them can help bridge the gap in the evolution of primates and humans.