

FOREWORD

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The papers in this volume represent a wide range of different aspects of chimpanzee and bonobo behavior: social behavior and ecology in the field; the rich variety of cultural traditions between one population and another in various parts of Africa; behavior in captive colonies; the incredible cognitive abilities of chimpanzees in the language acquisition labs. All of this tremendously increases our understanding of chimpanzees.

Two things most particularly impress me. Both are aspects which I have thought about before, but they are driven home by paper after paper – by the Japanese, by the Dutch, by the Americans, by the British. The first is the variability of chimpanzee behavior, the richness of individuality, and the way in which individual chimpanzees have influenced not only the history of their own communities in the wild but also scientific thinking. Washoe was Washoe; if the Gardners had started off with another chimp, a less gifted chimp, a less practical chimp, that project might have died in infancy – they might have picked a chimpanzee dunce. The chimpanzees working in enriched environments (such as those provided by the Gardners, the Fouts, and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Duane Rumbaugh) are just a few individuals representing whole species. (It's like taking a handful of people to be looked at on another planet. We could all say, "My goodness, if they picked so-and-so they would have a pretty dim view of humans.") If a particular chimpanzee fails to accomplish tasks that other chimpanzees have mastered, the psychologist working with that individual cannot assume that Roger Fouts, Duane Rumbaugh, and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh have made exaggerated claims regarding the intelligence of chimpanzees in general – the psychologist may have picked a dimwit.

The second thing that impresses me is how much more there is to learn. The attempt to understand the nature of the chimpanzee is really very recent. It began with the pioneering work of Wolfgang Köhler, who has long been a hero of mine, and the work of Robert Yerkes in the United States. Yerkes gathered together a group of scientists eager to work with chimpanzees; but then, when the war broke out, the interest declined and possibilities for research became fewer. It did not pick up again