

Press release

Göttinger Freilandtage: What constitutes social complexity?

Leading biologists discuss the complexity of social groups and their origins at the German Primate Center

Göttingen, December 7, 2017. Be it a school of fish, a bee colony or the group life of primates – animals live in different social systems that are more or less complex. The factors that determine this complexity and its implementation for all animal species is not yet clearly understood, even among experts. What is social complexity and how can one distinguish between the various animal communities? This and many other questions will be discussed by 16 international experts and around 150 behavioral researchers from various countries who will be attending the 11th Göttinger Freilandtage from 12th to 15th December 2017 at the German Primate Center (DPZ) - Leibniz Institute for Primate Research. The aim of the conference is to bring together leading experts who conduct research on social systems of different animal species. From this comparative perspective, general patterns and future research directions can be acquired. A public lecture will be held on the first evening at 6:30 p.m. in the lecture hall of the German Primate Center, Kellnerweg 4, in Göttingen. Dustin Rubenstein, Associate Professor of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology at Columbia University in New York City, talks about the structures of complex animal communities and their evolutionary development.

"The term 'social complexity' is discussed in a variety of ways in the behavioral sciences," says Peter Kappeler, Head of Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology Unit at the DPZ and organizer of the conference. "While entomologists consider the well-organized bee colony to be the highest level of complexity, vertebrate experts attribute this to primates with their complex and flexible social relationships. So far, however, hardly any variables are known that can be used to record social complexity to create a multi-species comparison. During the conference, we will have interdisciplinary discussions on these topics."

Each day of the conference will have a set topic of discussion. While the second day (12/13/2017) focuses on specific patterns of social complexity in different groups of animals, the lectures on the third conference day (12/14/2017) evolve mainly around the question of how complexity arises. Communication in animal societies will be one of the topics of discussion. The focus is on the question: do animals communicate more in larger and more complex groups, or are these interactions already part of that complexity. The last day (12/15/2017) will focus mainly on the evolutionary development of complexity. Discussions on whether evolution took place from single living animals via pair bonding to large complex groups, or whether pair relationships only arose later from larger groups, will be held with the use of phylogenetic analyses. Another focus is on the anthropological perspective. The

discussion will focus on the evolution of human societies from hunter-gatherer communities to the founding of states as well as the importance of culture in our complex societies.

The Göttingen Freiländertage is an international congress where every two years a current topic on evolution, ecology and behavior is thoroughly discussed. The world's leading experts in primate and behavioral biology examine the current topic from different perspectives. The Freiländertage Congress has been organized by Peter Kappeler since 1997. Peter Kappeler is the head of the Behavioral Ecology & Sociobiology Unit at the German Primate Center and professor at the Institute of Zoology and Anthropology of the University of Göttingen.

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Members of the press are welcome to attend. The program can be found here: <http://www.freiländertage.de/index.php/program>. We will be glad to arrange individual contacts and provide a room for interviews. In order to have a better coordination, we ask you to please register here: (presse@dpz.eu).

Printable pictures are available in our [Media library](#). We kindly request a specimen copy in case of publication.

The German Primate Center (DPZ) – Leibniz Institute for Primate Research conducts biological and biomedical research on and with primates in the fields of infection research, neuroscience and primate biology. The DPZ maintains four field stations in the tropics and is the reference and service center for all aspects of primate research. The DPZ is one of 91 research and infrastructure facilities of the Leibniz Association.