

# **The Interaction Between Local People and Habituated Chimpanzees Around Kibale National Park, Uganda.**

**George Owoyesigire**

[gowoyesigire@yahoo.com](mailto:gowoyesigire@yahoo.com)

Department of Anthropology and Geography  
School of Social Sciences and Law  
Oxford Brookes University  
Oxford, OX3 0BP  
U.K.

*Awarded a BFF Grant (through PSGB) in February 2007*

## **Abstract**

In recent years, primates have been habituated with the aim of increasing sighting rates and enhancing tourist viewing experience, adding value to nature-based tourism. However, tourism and habituation activities face challenges of disease transmission and behavioural and ecological disturbances, including possible displacement of animals from their original home ranges, thereby increasing their vulnerability to violent encounters with local people. Management decision-making requires information on the implications of habituating large-bodied and potentially dangerous animals such as chimpanzees.



*Adult chimpanzee at the study site*

My study explores human-chimpanzee interaction around Kibale National Park (KNP) where three chimpanzee communities have been habituated for behavioural research and

tourism purposes. Specifically, the study assesses the interaction between local people and the Kanyantale chimpanzee community habituated for tourism. The objectives included examining conflicts and the causes and nature of them, determining the degree of support for chimpanzee conservation and assessing awareness levels of chimpanzee habituation activities within the park amongst local people and stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews were held with local people (N=106) in four parishes. Two focus group discussions were held in two sample villages. KNP staff, researchers, district and non-governmental as well as community-based organisation representatives were also interviewed. Ecological and socio-economic literature, including long-term general management plans and reports, were reviewed. Data were analysed using non-parametric statistical tests including Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U and Chi-square to generate comparisons and differences.



*Children guarding the maize crop from raiding by animals*

Chimpanzees were reported among the first five problematic animals due to crop raiding. No chimpanzee-human attacks were reported in the four sample parishes, although park records revealed six children killed since 1990 in neighbouring villages. A significant difference was observed in reported chimpanzee sighting frequency, interaction levels and numbers across the four sample villages. Fragmentation and habitat loss were observed and remain major threats to chimpanzee survival outside the park. Two chimpanzees with a clinging infant were reported to roam villages adjacent to the habituated community, destroying sugarcane and cocoa pods and they could be a threat to

children. It is not clear whether the individuals are peripheral from the habituated community. Positive attitudes and support for chimpanzee conservation is revealed amongst local people. Surprisingly however, the observed positive attitude towards the species is not a result of the widely publicised tourism benefits, but is due to the chimpanzees' resemblance to humans and their being non-destructive of crops. It might therefore be too early to conclude that the support will continue, given the observed growing level of intolerance to wildlife due to crop raiding, the denial of access to forest resources, low levels of awareness and limited conservation incentives. Over 50% of respondents were aware of habituation activity taking place inside the park.

The results form a baseline for further follow-up and systematic monitoring of chimpanzee communities outside the park. Sensitisation and awareness campaigns are recommended to thwart potential human-chimpanzee conflicts. Forest fragments outside the park are important for local people and chimpanzee survival hence the need for protection and restoration through incentive creation, alternative profitable projects and interventions which minimise crop loss. This will lead to improved relations and livelihood as well as achieve habituation, tourism and long-term conservation objectives.