**MSc thesis research topic**

**“Shared intention in chimpanzee play behaviour?”**

Keywords:

Animal behaviour, communication, cognition, cooperation, shared intention, joint action, human uniqueness

Background:

One hypothesis of what makes us human is that our species has evolved unique cooperative abilities that allow individuals to engage with one or several social partners in complex ways. This appears to be a highly adaptive trait, as it allows humans to engage in joint actions with shared goals. One manifestation of this ability is that, from an early age, human infants show special skills that allow them to recruit and maintain play partners in triadic games (involving an play object). If the partner suddenly drops out, infants try to reengage them via active communication signals. There is currently a debate whether or not this way of sharing goals is uniquely human. The hypothesis is supported by laboratory experiments that show that young chimpanzees struggle to reengage reluctant partners during triadic games. However, triadic games were played with human caretakers not conspecifics. Moreover, there is evidence that closely related bonobos are able to reengage reluctant partners, suggesting that more work is needed to resolve this important issue.

Research questions:

The goal of this study is to describe natural play interactions in free-ranging chimpanzees at our study groups in Budongo Forest, Uganda, the Sonso and Waibira communities. How do chimpanzee infants naturally recruit others into dyadic games? How common are triadic games? Do infants seek to reengage reluctant partners with communication signals? How do they terminate a dyadic or triadic play bout?

Data collection:

90 days of fieldwork distributed over 6-7 months in Budongo Forest ([www.budongo.org](http://www.budongo.org)). Data are collected via focal animal sampling, supported by high-res video recordings. Play bouts are analysed using existing protocols previously developed for captive bonobos and chimpanzees (Sinergia Project Profs Bangerter/Zuberbühler)

Time period:

Observation conditions are best during the dry season (beginning December to end of January). Data collection should start around July/August, depending on space.

Financial implications:

Field costs are in terms of station fees (GBP 350 per month), flight to EBB, visa and permits, vaccinations and antimalarial. Total field costs are around CHF 4,500. There are possibilities to apply for grant money to cover these expenses. All equipment will be supplied, including office space in Neuchatel for subsequent analysis.

Contact:

If you are interested in this possibility, please contact [klaus.zuberbuehler@unine.ch](mailto:klaus.zuberbuehler@unine.ch) or [adrian.bangerter@unine.ch](mailto:adrian.bangerter@unine.ch)

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