Intergroup Aggression in Wild Primates

Introduction

The papers presented in this Special Issue of Behaviour are the result of an invited symposium, *Intergroup Aggression in Wild Primates*, held at the XXIst Congress of the International Primatological Society in Entebbe, Uganda, June 25–30, 2006.

Intergroup aggression has long been a central topic in primate studies. Most primates live in groups, which may compete with other groups for access to resources such as territory, food, and mates. Intergroup aggression affects the spacing of social groups over the landscape, and in some species accounts for a high proportion of mortality. It has figured prominently in models of the evolution of primate social behavior, and is of interest to those seeking to understand the origins and evolution of human warfare.

Intergroup relations vary greatly among the primates. In some species, social groups may mingle peacefully, or simply avoid one another. In other species, groups exclude rivals from their territory, and in some species, including chimpanzees and humans, lethal raiding may occur. The reasons for this variation among species, and among populations of a given species, continue to be debated.

Efforts to develop and test socioecological models of intergroup aggression have yielded some points of consensus. Like aggression between individuals, aggression between groups is now widely considered to be a strategic option employed during competitive interactions, when assessment indicates that the net benefits will outweigh the costs. Benefits include access to mates, food, and protection of self, infants, and others. Males and females generally differ regarding which of these benefits limits their reproductive success, with males limited most strongly by access to mates, and females by access to food. Costs include time, energy, and the risk of injury or death, and may vary according to the number of opponents on each side, and their fighting ability and motivation. Variation among species results from an in-
This photo is from an intergroup killing between chimpanzees that took place in Kibale National Park in August 2006. The victim (on the ground) is already dead, having been killed about 15 minutes previously by a gang attack. The attacker (above the victim), delivering a kick to the victim’s chest, is a young adult male member of the Ngogo community, who participated in the coalitionary attack (Photographer: John Mitani).

Interaction among various factors, including the typical distribution of key resources.

This theoretical perspective has considerable heuristic value, but testing the relevant hypotheses has proven difficult for several reasons. In most species, intergroup encounters occur infrequently, and are often difficult to observe, due to rapid movements of multiple actors in areas of low visibility. Many studies have focused on a single habituated group. Few studies have quantified key measures, such as the abundance and distribution of food resources. Many hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, making it difficult to disentangle which factors are most important. Comparative studies have been hampered by the use of different methods for collecting and analyzing