



"The making of the monkey mind: insights into primate cognitive and social evolution"

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My research centers on the link between nonhuman primate cognition, communication, and social behavior. Combining proximate and evolutionary levels of analysis, I aim to identify how variation in cognitive performance and social behavior may arise from simpler first principles. To illustrate this approach, I will first give an overview over the diversity of baboon social systems, with a focus on our research on the westernmost member of the genus, the Guinea baboon (*Papio papio*), a species that had been little studied before. With their multi-level organization, stable bonds between males and females, as well as a high-degree of male-male cooperation and tolerance, Guinea baboons differ markedly from other baboon species and constitute an intriguing model for reconstructing human social evolution. Remarkably, despite fundamental differences at the level of the social system, the structure of baboon social signals is highly conserved. Thus, simple variation in rates of different behavior patterns may give rise to different types of relationships and ultimately different societies. In the second part of my talk, I will present the results of a study that addressed variation in social behavior and problem-solving ability across the life span in Barbary macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*). The monkeys revealed highly differentiated motivational shifts with age. In conjunction, these findings highlight the importance of motivation in primate social behavior and cognition. Future studies will further explore how social strategies and cognitive performance vary across life-history and between species, with the aim to identify the building blocks that make up the monkey mind, and the targets of selection that play a role in social evolution

Biological Labs Lecture Hall
Room 1080
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