

Excerpt from “From Altruistic Armadillos to Zenlike Zebras”

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Here is an excerpt from the entry on Bonobos, or Pygmy Chimps:

What has perhaps most captured the human imagination is the sex life of bonobos. Perhaps no other animal displays such overt, carefree, joyous sexuality. Whenever things get tense, sex is called into play. Not counting humans, I don't believe any other animal besides the bonobo engages in tongue kissing. Bonobos peer into the faces of their partners with great intensity, gauging the degree of their pleasure and involvement. Sexual relations are as frequent between two females (known quaintly by primatologists as “GG rubbing” -- genito-genital) as between the sexes. In zoos, bonobos initiate sex once every one and a half hours – more frequently than any other animal, I believe.

...In all the years that bonobos have been observed in Wamba and Lomako, no example of murder has ever been seen, even though large groups — sometimes as many as a hundred individuals — provide the perfect soil for internecine struggle. Freely offered, copious sexuality is one reason. Another is the gentle upbringing...

I wonder whether the largely frugivorous diet of the bonobos contributes to their peacefulness. While they are not strictly vegetarian, animal foods make up only about 1 percent of bonobos' diets. The more warlike chimpanzees eat a great deal more meat. Chimpanzees form hunting teams to kill monkeys and even other chimpanzees. So far as is known, such an activity is absent in bonobo society.