

Visiting *The Planet of the Apes*

Michael Cole

Guest Writer

It was like living on the Planet of the Apes, only humans were in charge.

For a Guilford College-related summer school program this year, I undertook one of the most amazing experiences of my entire life: I studied abroad in Leipzig Germany, working at a zoo. It was combined with the Wolfgang Kohler Primate Research Center, a project of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (one of the most renowned and distinguished ape research facilities in the entire world). I worked as an undergraduate research assistant. As a History major, I was not even remotely into science before my trip. It is amazing how fast my interests broadened in such a short amount of time.

With the support of distinguished Cognitive Science professor, William Irsardi, from the University of Delaware, I flew to Germany and began my work as an intern taking an independent study. I did everything from working with the most sophisticated technology available for projects, to observing and filming the wild apes with state-of-the-art Panasonic cameras used with splitters for split-screen capabilities and tripods for navigating and holding the cameras in place.

None of this, however, could even begin to compare to my work with the apes. I was given the opportunity to work with the most prominent cognitive primatology researchers, such as the brilliant Professor Michael Tomasello. While assisting with these non-invasive ethical experiments, I was able to witness up close exactly how smart these apes truly are.

During a reciprocal altruism experiment with chimpanzees (e.g. trying to find out if apes can cooperate with each other or not), a complicated trial run was set up where two tables with bananas were used to give only one slice of fruit to a chimpanzee if he performed successfully. Basic safeguards were set up on the professionally designed apparatus, with a pulley system, where when a chimp pulled on a table, the other one would go the opposite direction.

These chimps were actually clever enough to figure out a way to ingeniously manipulate the device and the pulley system design, in order to get as much food as they wanted from both tables without having to cooperate with us!

Seeing this sort of gave me a slight shudder of recollection; I kept thinking back to the incarcerated velociraptors in *Jurassic Park* that escaped and used smart problem-solving techniques to figure out

how to open doors to eat the frightened humans. Apes, of course, are much nicer creatures, if perhaps slightly uncooperative. It currently stays unclear whether chimps are willing or able to cooperate and share food with one another.

The fact remains that apes are very intelligent. While working at the center, I witnessed everything from chimpanzees forming coalitions in order to back each other up during confrontations, to others breaking up fights to maintain peace. Observing these

instances has made me question exactly how unique humans -- even with our complex societies -- truly are.

Similar to my experience watching *The Planet of the Apes*, which depicted magnificent, intelligent and often aggressive primate conquerors kidnapping human explorers, the research center filled me with a feeling of mystified amazement and awe. Unlike in the movie however, plexiglass walls, deep moats and sturdy cages protected me from any physical threats. In any case, this was an

experience that I will never forget. ☼

For more information, go to: <http://www.eva.mpg.de/psycho/files/apes.html>



MICHAEL COLE/SPECIAL TO THE GUILFORDIAN

Senior Michael Cole spent the summer in Germany studying at the Wolfgang Kohler Primate Research Center.

Got something to say?

Submit a letter to the editor by 3:00 p.m. Sunday to the Publication Suite in Founders 208.

Smoking

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the way to Bryan Jr. to smoke, which is unfair," said third-year and smoker Catherine Milner.

Lundquist has previous experience with enforcing smoke-free residence hall policies. In April 2, 2003 issue of *The Guilfordian*, she stated that while she was working at Greensboro College, "we didn't think about providing places outside for students to smoke. We know better now."

The reason there are no awnings up yet, said Lundquist, is that Campus Life is waiting to see where people congregate to smoke.

"You've gotta let people make a cow path, then lay the sidewalk. So we want to see where people are smoking," said Lundquist.

Campus Life is also looking into putting more seating where smoking is allowed, like near the rear entrance to Mary Hobbs.

"The main concern should be the health issues," said Jonathan Hatch, Assistant Professor of Mathematics and smoker. "I have yet to see a study on the dangers of second-hand smoke outside. Then again, I probably don't have all the information yet."

Bowles, in conjunction with Campus Life, is planning on bringing in a smoking cessation program in order to address some of the health

concerns. This in partial response to the incoming First Year students reporting a 14.7% smoking rate, 9.9% above the rate reported a similar colleges (CIRP, 2003).

Enforcement of the policy may remain an issue.

"I just think the policy is silly," said second-year Jeremy Bante, "There are plenty of people not following it. No-smoking in-doors is enough."

"Most people will feel like they have to smoke in their rooms, which is so much less healthy," said first-year Brittany Blake. ☼

AARON DEMOSS/GUILFORDIAN