

ARCH/BIOANTH LUNCH TALK

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SOC SCI 1, 261

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WEAVING FOOD WEBS: AN INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON PRIMATE FEEDING ECOLOGY

Animals live by two primary drivers: the need to find food, and the ability to convert that food energy into offspring. The realization of these goals fundamentally determines individual fitness, as well as population density and distribution more broadly. Competition for limited resources is thus a pervasive aspect of life, as it can limit energy input. Though decades of primate research have investigated within-species competition, far less attention has focused on how the presence and abundance of one species affects the foraging of another. Such between-species competition issue is a particularly thorny topic to study in primates because they have relatively diverse and nutritionally variable diets, making it difficult to assess the amount of food that a particular species has access to. A broader perspective of primate food-web interactions can lead to a better understanding of the suite of ecological pressures that shape primate density and distribution, and of those that our ancestors encountered as they transitioned out of forests and into the savannas. Drawing on field research with arboreal, fruit eating primates in Uganda, I propose an integrative approach that incorporates new methods for studying primate energy gain in context of large-scale ecological interactions to target the gaps that still exist in primate ecology literature.

Biography

Ronnie Bailey-Steinitz is currently a PhD student in the Integrative Anthropology Sciences program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on how energy moves through ecological food-webs, and how energy gain is shaped by the interactions within these systems. She conducted her master's research in collaboration with the San Diego Zoo – Institute for Conservation Research, studying niche partitioning in two species of rock iguanas in the Caribbean. Aside from her current work on arboreal primates, Ronnie works with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) studying bobcat prey preference in fragmented habitats in Southern California.

