

Transcript

Mating choices of Japanese macaques

Dr Michael Huffman:

What I think is special about Japanese macaques is they're the northern-most living primate, but they're also found in very subtropical regions. So there's a very diverse ecology that they have become adapted to. So it's a nice model to look at certain behaviours over different habitats, different temperature regimes, within the same species.

One of the first things that caught my attention was mate choice. The literature had always said that dominant males were the determining factor in sexual selection, who mates with whom, what are the outcomes of that? But what I was seeing is that females were very picky. They were avoiding certain males. So I began to look at that in more detail, following the females. Up until that point, most people followed the males, because they were easier to observe. But I started following the females and found quite a different picture. So it led to longer studies about just how females choose partners and what the long-term consequences are of those choices.

I never found an incident where a male who intruded upon an established consort pair was able to mate with that female. Within 72 seconds, on average, that female would always go back to the male that she preferred, and these associations would last for a few days, sometimes a few weeks, sometimes several reproductive cycles in a season, and even sometimes, over two or three years. But it's after two or three years that the female gets tired of that male and she's moving on to another male.

She never seems to go back to the same male later on. She's rotating through the males. And there's been genetic studies that have showed that the females rarely have infants from the same males over different seasons. So they seem to be seeking out a diversity in their partners, and that is expressed in the gene pool all around.

And what happens with the males, after they have mated with as many females as there are in the group, this can take several years, depending on the size of the group, but eventually, they have to leave, because they have no females within the group. And it's the females that are accepting young males from the outside to come in. And it's a long process. Sometimes the males don't make it in the central part for several years. And then they gradually work their way up into the hierarchy. But when they reach the top, when they have their dominance and access to everything, they have no access to females, so eventually they have to move out.