

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The University of Arizona Norton School goes bananas for gorilla research
Join UA faculty Oct. 2 for a special open house as they explore what near-extinct gorillas can teach us about human dads

TUCSON, Sept. 25 — "Deadbeat dad," "father knows best," "like father like son" — our culture has spun a host of colorful concepts around the father-child relationship, but do they hold up beyond our species? On Oct. 2, researchers with The University of Arizona and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International explore that question as they share findings from 15 years of field observations.

This special installment of the Frances McClelland Institute's Turbeville Speaker Series will include a banana split social (a nod to the apes at the heart of the presentation!), research demonstrations in Norton School's state-of-the-art lab and a tour of the McClelland Park building, one of the newest and most striking buildings on the UA campus.

EVENT DETAILS

Name: "Gorillas in Our Midst: What Titus Can Teach Us about Fatherhood"

What: Research presentation, open house and tour for the public and UA community

Where: The University of Arizona McClelland Park Building, 650 N. Park Ave.

When: Friday, Oct. 2, 2 to 3 p.m. (presentation); 3 to 4:30 p.m. (lab demonstration and open house)

Banana splits and other refreshments served; nearby parking at UA's Tyndall Avenue Garage (Tyndall Ave. and 4th St.) with reserved/validated parking for members of the press.

WHY GORILLAS?

Gorillas are among just a handful of species in which adult males play with and protect the young. UA faculty Dieter and Netzin Steklis know this fact well, having traveled to Rwanda nearly every year since 1991 to study family dynamics in mountain gorillas, only about 400 of which survive in the wild.

The Steklis' conduct these studies with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Int., but their research also captured the attention of Bruce Ellis, Norton Endowed Chair in Fathers, Parenting and Families at the Norton School.

"Because this kind of male behavior is so rare among our closest relatives, the great apes, research on gorilla families can help us better understand human families," Ellis said, explaining the impetus to invite the Steklises to bring their research to the Norton School. In particular, the research may shed some light on how nurturing behavior in adult males can influence offspring survival and life histories, giving us insights into how human families have evolved, Ellis said. "It is remarkable, for example, that in both human and gorilla families, the timing of female puberty onset appears to be influenced by exposure to non-father males", Netzin Steklis noted.

To surface those insights, Ellis, the Steklises and students can draw on 40 years of gorilla research and observation — a span and depth of data unmatched in research on human families. "Gorillas are genetically closely related to

us," Dieter Steklis noted, "and they represent one of a very few primate societies in which we can gather this much information on how adult male behaviors play out in families generation after generation."

The gorilla Titus, a magnificent male silverback who became a "movie star" in the recent film "The Gorilla King," offers a perfect example of the opportunity the gorilla data represents. "Titus was first observed by Dian Fossey 35 years ago as a newborn," Netzin Steklis explained, "and his tumultuous life has been captured in field notes and on video until his death only two weeks ago. We know from analyses that Titus fathered many offspring, and we can evaluate how his interactions with his young has influence their lives."

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The Steklises' work at the Norton School is one expression of the community of scholarship that faculty are working to build in Family and Consumer Sciences explained Stephen T. Russell, Fitch Nesbitt Endowed Chair and director of the School's Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth, and Families.

"Our work here hits so many dimensions of the human experience," Russell said. "The Steklises teach psychology and anthropology, but their work presents a great learning opportunity for us — not just for faculty, but for students, as well."

In fact, students are already building their own research capacity while advancing the Steklises' work by mastering best-of-breed video analysis software at the Norton School's Lang Children and Family Observation Lab. The Steklises primate research fosters cross-disciplinary collaborations, and encourages students to expand and shift their thinking to consider novel perspectives on the human condition.

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY

"The Norton School's Lang Lab — completed in 2008 — represented one of the most compelling aspects of a collaboration with the McClelland Institute", Netzin Steklis said.

"When I learned about the coding software here at the Norton School, I knew this was a win-win opportunity," Steklis said. "We have many hours of video, spanning decades, to analyze and code, and Lang Lab's software and set-up is exactly the one that researchers like us dream about."

Students will demonstrate that software and coding process at the Oct. 2 event following the Steklises' presentation, showing how computer and viewing stations running the Lab's Noldus software allows researchers to watch video and tag a synchronized timeline with notations related to behaviors, sounds and other events on screen.

In addition to the Noldus system, attendees will be treated to a tour of the Lang Lab's "subject rooms" for conducting experiments, ranging from a large classroom setting to a more intimate living room as well as standard four-walls-and-a-desk control rooms. The rooms have two-way mirrors for unseen observation, video and audio capture and technologies that detect and record physiological data, such as galvanic skin responses or changes in pulse rate and blood pressure.

About the Norton School

The John and Doris Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences within The University of Arizona College of Agriculture houses the Terry J. Lundgren Center for Retailing, the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth and Families and the Take Charge America Institute for Consumer Financial Education and Research. The Norton School offers undergraduate, masters and doctoral programs in family studies and human development as well as retailing and consumer sciences.

More information:

<http://cals.arizona.edu/fcs/>

About Dieter and Netzin Steklis

H. Dieter Steklis, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor at The University of Arizona South, as well as Professor Emeritus of Primatology at Rutgers University. Netzin Steklis is a lecturer in the UA Anthropology Department. Both are Affiliate Scientists of The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, with whom they've observed and videotaped mountain gorillas in Rwanda's Virunga Volcanoes region over the past 15 years.

More information:

<http://mcclellandinstitute.arizona.edu/Gorilla.html>

<http://www.wild-minds.org/>

About the Turbeville Speaker Series

"Gorillas in Our Midst" is the fifth event in the Frances McClelland Institute's annual Pamela Turbeville Speaker Series. Other topics in the 2009 fall series include "Understanding Parental Incarceration" and "Low-Income Families and Cancer."

More information:

<http://mcclellandinstitute.arizona.edu/speakerSeries.html>

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