

AnthroBytes

Anthropology Research Highlights

#2 Primate Behavioral Ecology at the University of Florida



Since 1997, the National Science Foundation has awarded three grants to support Prof. Sue Boinski's research on the eight monkey species and the broader forest community at Raleighvallen, an isolated site in the little known jungles of the Central Suriname Nature Reserve. This is the first and only long-term forest community study in Suriname's history, and contributed to this park's designation as a World Heritage Biodiversity site by the United Nations.



Significant Research Findings:

Male capuchin (organ-grinder) monkeys at Raleighvallen exhibit a cultural tradition of pounding sticks and large wood-husked tree fruits on large branches to demonstrate their strength, both to attract mates and to deter rivals. A healthy capuchin male may strike a branch up to 500 times in 90 minutes, and the percussive sounds resonate through the forest in a half-mile radius.

Mammals, birds, and reptiles interact with monkeys as prey, predators, and competitors for food in unexpected ways. When fruit is in short supply, for example, Cock-of-the-Rock Cotingas follow monkeys to glean insects, much as cattle egrets follow livestock in Florida. Weekly surveys of prime forest document the abundance of more than 50 species of large animals, including jaguars, giant anteaters, giant armadillos, bearded sakis, scarlet macaws and capybaras. Study of a Harpy Eagle nest, which remains in continual use since 1997, contradicts long-held assumptions of Harpy hunting, reproduction, and social behavior.

Boinski, Michael Heckenberger (UF), and Pierre-Michael Forget (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris) are using forest ecology and archaeology to demonstrate that the Raleighvallen landscape was likely transformed by pre-Columbian Amerindians, including apparent canals, fish weirs, and occupational earthworks.