

BABOON COMMUNICATION



Man: A Course of Study

Developed by Education Development Center, Inc., under grants from the National Science Foundation.

First commercial edition 1970

Disseminated and produced by Curriculum Development Associates, Inc., Suite 414, 1211 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Except for the rights to material reserved by others, the publisher and the copyright owner hereby grant permission to domestic persons of the United States and Canada for use of this work in whole or in part without charge in the English language in the United States and Canada after December 31, 1975, provided that written notice is made to Education Development Center and that publications incorporating materials covered by these copyrights contain the original copyright notice and a statement that the publication is not endorsed by the original copyright owner. For conditions of use and permission to use materials contained herein for foreign publication or publications in other than the English language, apply to the copyright owner.

BABOON COMMUNICATION

This book is based primarily on the field studies of African savanna baboons by Irvén DeVore, Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University.

THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE

We know that baboons seem to like each other's company very much. How do they show it?

How would a lone, unsuspecting baboon face a leopard?

What would happen to a baboon troop whose members squabbled continually, day after day?

The answers to all these questions show the need for baboons to communicate clearly with each other if troop life is to be successful. And they do communicate clearly. A bark of alarm from a single alert baboon is all that is needed for a troop to run to safety. When a dominant male raises his eyelids, quarreling between adult females or restless juveniles stops in a hurry. And baboons have many, many ways of expressing their emotions.



EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Baboons are not noisy animals. Baboon infants do not babble like human babies. Juveniles often race through wild games silently, and most adults go about their business quietly. A troop can easily spend a whole day with only a few soft grunts now and then breaking the silence. But even in their silence, these monkeys are always expressing their feelings about what is going on around them.



**Baboons show their feelings
by the expression on their faces,**

like baring their teeth if they are frightened,



or smacking their lips as they wait to hold a baby,



or yawning and scratching when they are unsure of themselves.



They communicate their feelings with the movements of their bodies, such as slapping the ground if they are disturbed,

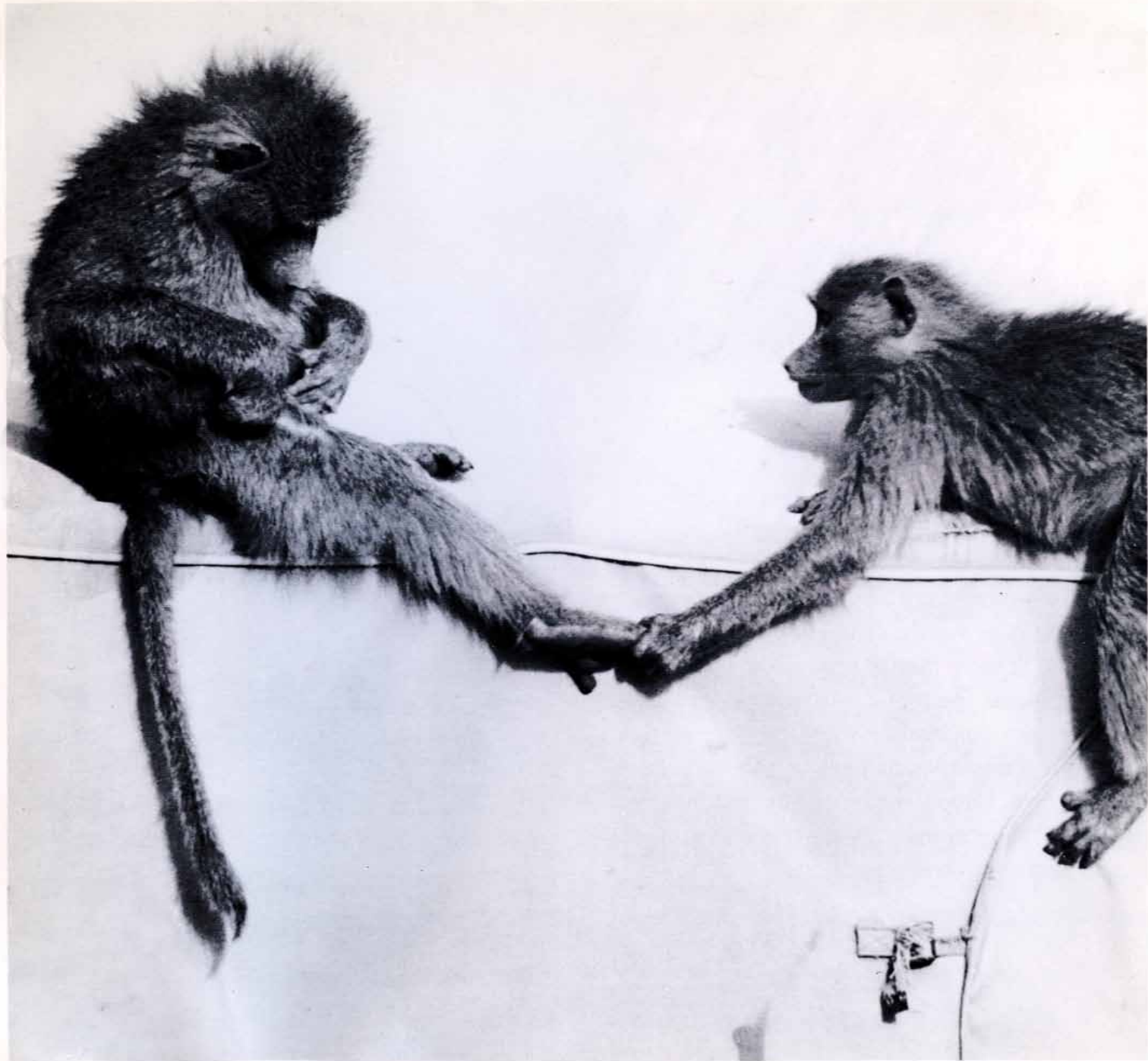
or standing on their hind legs before they run away,



or raising their tails when they are frightened.



Baboons communicate their emotions by the way they sit, or walk, and by the way they touch each other.



GROOMING AS COMMUNICATION

Baboons communicate a great deal to each other just by staying near each other, or by avoiding each other. If we watch baboons for long, we notice that some baboons are constantly grooming each other. This gets rid of dirt and bugs, but baboons groom much more than is necessary just to keep their fur clean. Think of it this way: when we get together with our family or with friends, we talk. Talking is a way humans have of showing others we like them. Baboons cannot talk, but they can groom. Their grooming takes the place of our talk in showing friendly emotions.



TWENTY CALLS

Baboons also reveal their emotions through a certain number of sounds. There are about twenty baboon calls, each of which is used in a special situation. Usually these are situations in which baboons are troubled or excited: when they are not troubled or excited they seldom use sounds.

A bark of alarm, for example, reveals to others in the group a baboon's fear that predators are near. A baboon makes this alarm call when it is frightened, whether there are other baboons around or not. This call is the baboon's immediate response to a frightening situation. It is an automatic bark, and is not intended to be a message.

There are many examples of calls used by baboons when they are troubled or excited.

lick-ooah, ick, ick, ooah, for instance, communicates to other baboons that a baboon infant is upset because it is not getting its own way. This call again comes automatically, and again is not intended to be a message. But any baboon in the troop that hears the call understands what it means.



COMMUNICATION, NOT SPEECH

Any baboon gets the message if another baboon grunts, or roars, or yaks. Yet we say that baboons do not speak.

Why? We say this mainly because baboons do not have names for things. They have a certain number of calls, but they do not have words.

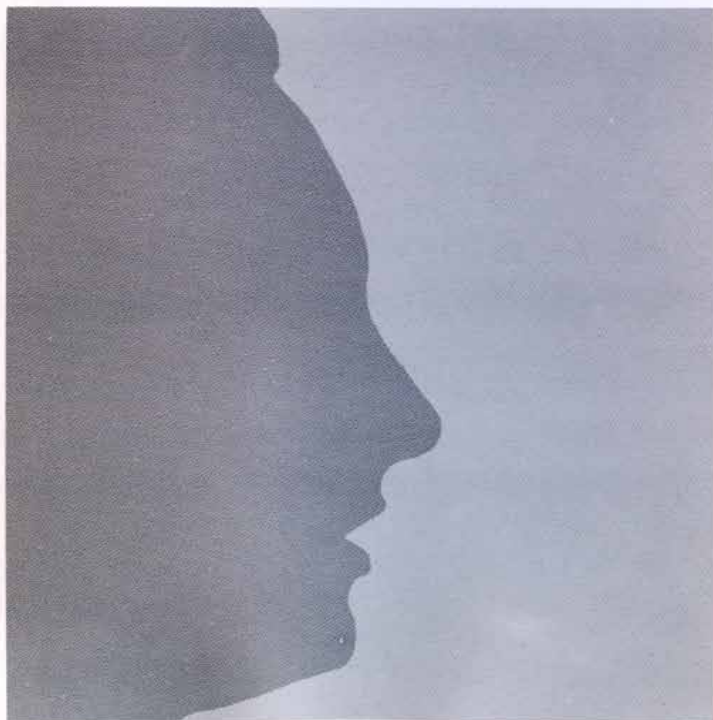
Without words how could you speak about what happened yesterday? How could you discuss plans for tomorrow?

Baboons do not have words that give names to things, or animals, or places. They do not have symbols to take the place of real things and to make talking about them easy.

And baboons do not have a way of inventing calls, as we invent words when we need them. A baboon spends its whole life repeating itself.



ONLY MAN SPEAKS



When a man yawns, or smiles, or wrinkles his brow, he is communicating his feelings through movements or gestures as baboons do. But instead of yawning, or smiling, or wrinkling his brow, a man can say: "I'm so tired," or "I like you," or "I'm not happy."

Men often use gestures to communicate, but almost never without using words to go along with the gestures. Because a man uses words, he can say almost anything he wants: "This is my lunch," or "Yesterday was a rainy Saturday." Or even, "Who, me?"

A man's message does not have to be an automatic response to a real situation. A man can tell a lie. His friend can say, also, "That's a lie!" or more politely, if not as truthfully, "I don't understand you."

AUTOMATIC MESSAGES

Misunderstanding each other causes humans a lot of trouble. A baboon, on the other hand, always understands another baboon in the troop. A baboon's gestures, together with sounds, show whether a baboon is calm, excited, or uncertain about what is happening. A baboon has no way of pretending to be excited or calm about something. A baboon cannot lie. A baboon's body, its gestures, and its sounds echo its real responses to what is happening around it.

IN A FAMILIAR SETTING WITH FAMILIAR BABOONS

Baboons rarely meet a stranger, and they are rarely in a strange environment. This allows baboons to use threats instead of aggressive behavior to get across their messages about what they want. When a dominant male shows his canine teeth, or slaps the ground, or gives a large juvenile a small bite in the neck, he gets his way. Threats communicate feelings so well there is no need for serious fighting.

Baboons are always communicating with other baboons they know well, and they are always in a familiar home range. These are two good reasons why baboons can use gesture, movement and touch to communicate with other baboons so well without words.

But what would happen if baboons had much to communicate during the night, when they cannot see each other?

What if they had to get messages through to baboons they had never seen before? or from a great distance?

Would the baboon system for communicating work well enough?