

## Of the highest order

W.C. McGrew & J.R. Anderson

**The Natural History of the Primates.** By J.R. and P.H. Napier. *British Museum (Natural History)*: 1985. Pp.200. £15. To be published in the United States later this year by MIT press.

**Primates in Nature.** By Alison F. Richard. W.H. Freeman: 1985. Pp.558. Hbk \$27.95, £32.95; pbk \$17.95, £13.50.

In 1967, the Napiers' *A Handbook of Living Primates* appeared and immediately became the standard reference source for primatologists. Now the same authors have written another, slimmer reference work. There are several similarities between the two books: in each the bulk of the text is made up of potted profiles of primates arranged by genus, although the proportion given over to these has dropped in the new book, and some of the photographs and figures are the same as before. The differences, however, suggest that *The Natural History of the Primates* is aimed at a wider, more popular audience. New features are the inclusion of colour plates, a more spacious, double-columned lay-out and use of British as well as metric measures, while there is minimal citation of sources and only a short reference list. The writing is lively and clear, and the last chapter on human evolution packs a lot into only ten pages.

But the book does not fare so well in its stated role as a textbook. The content is sometimes repetitive (for example, three times, on pp. 19, 31 and 53, we are told that marmosets have claws and not nails) and is also somewhat old-fashioned in places. Key advances in the sociobiology and behavioural ecology of primates made over the past 15 years are rarely mentioned. Thus, for example, predators on primates are described as "beneficial" in helping to maintain the prey species as a "balanced viable population". Overall, this is a book which will better serve the keen amateur than the student or professional.

By contrast *Primates in Nature* is remarkable for its breadth of approach and the depth of ecological information provided; it deserves to become a cornerstone in the primatologist's library. One of the author's aims was to treat primates "as mammals rather than as our closest living relatives", that is to illuminate ecological generalities as well as features particular to primates, as in the adaptations of certain langurs and macaques to the problems of living in seasonally harsh temperate zones. Such comparisons do not dominate the book, however. Apart from a discussion of social organization in African hunting dogs and lions, non-primates take a back seat in Chapters 4-10 which concentrate on what is and is not

known about primates: as individuals (feeding, diet, reproduction), populations (demography), groups (social organization) and communities (interspecific relationships). The final chapter compares the position of primates and non-primates in ecological communities.

Dietary constituents and their distribution in plants are described lucidly in Chapter 4, followed by accounts of the feeding regimes of various species and of some of the corresponding morphological adaptations, notably dental and gastrointestinal. Some may feel that vertebrate prey are dismissed rather casually, for example in view of known seasonal and individual variations in meat-eating in chimpanzees. The same could be said for insectivory: while specialist insectivores

IMAGE  
UNAVAILABLE  
FOR  
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REASONS

*Demidov's Bush-baby taken from Monkeys and Apes by Gotthard Berger and recently published by Arco. The price is \$24.95.*

get their fair share of attention, insect-eating by non-specialists is passed over more quickly.

The author has adopted a case-history approach in describing aspects of primate ecology, illustrating a number of topics such as reproductive parameters, demographic patterns, social organization and so on with examples drawn from a range of species. This provides a broad perspective on primates as an order, and it is good to see prosimians and callitrichids given equal place alongside their larger and better-known counterparts. Anyone studying a field-site with more than one species of primate will benefit from reading Chapter 10 on sympatry, competition and the niche.

*Primates in Nature* does not include many data on social behaviour, for instance on grooming rates and on mother-offspring interaction. But it does contain solid background reading, a glossary of ecological terms and a wealth of ideas for preparing a primate field study, all in highly readable style. □

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## Got that loving feeling

Michael Shepherd

**Aphrodisiacs: The Science and the Myth.** By Peter V. Taberner. *Croom Helm/University of Pennsylvania Press*: 1985. Pp.275. £19.95, \$22.50.

WHAT is an aphrodisiac? According to Peter Taberner, it is, strictly speaking, an exciter of lust; more generally, "anything which, by any means, increases the capacity for sexual enjoyment". With this definition he has given himself a broad canvas on which to sketch a readable, fact-filled review that roams over the wilder shores of sexuality.

As a professional pharmacologist the author is well qualified to discuss the properties and adverse effects of both the relatively small number of sexual stimulants in the medical pharmacopoeia and of the drugs of abuse which are used for their supposedly aphrodisiac properties. These constitute, however, no more than a small proportion of some 500 animal, vegetable and mineral substances listed in one of the appendices which have been or are being used as putative aphrodisiacs and to which reference is made in the text.

As its title indicates, the book is concerned with myth as well as science, with witchcraft and wormwood as well as bromocriptine and brain stimulation, with anthropology and medical history as well as the endocrinology and neurophysiology of sexual behaviour. The attainment of heightened sexual satisfaction ranks with gold, immortality and happiness as one of mankind's long-standing chimeras; as Havelock Ellis pointed out 80 years ago, "the early history of this subject is more or less inextricably commingled with folklore practices of magical origin". It still is, and Taberner has legitimately dipped into the rich fields of ancient tradition, magic, herbalism and quackery to provide many telling illustrations of human hopes and credulity, though pornography is unaccountably absent from the index.

A final chapter is devoted to aphrodisiacs of the future, and deals with such possible forerunners of a brave new world as pheromones, aromatherapy and cerebral stimulation. All a long way from the Act Two duet of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, in which the heroine Arina and the mountebank Dulcamara sing of the rival claims of love philtres and female charms, agreeing in the end that no potion is a substitute for genuine feeling. But perhaps they are singing of something other than Aphrodite. □

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