

# Midwest Primate Interest Group Newsletter

Issue 3

May 2023

## Letter from the President

Hi everyone,

It's that time of year in the Midwest when I wonder when spring will come. Summer, and then our meeting in the fall, feel an eternity away. But as far away as the fall seems, we are already starting to plan our next MPIG meeting. In that vein, I am very excited to announce that we'll be in St. Louis this fall!!!! There are so many fabulous people studying primates there, and yet, the last time we visited as an MPIG community was in 2005. We are so grateful to our colleagues there who will be hosting us. It is sure to be a fantastic meeting!! Keep an eye out for more details in the coming months.

Along the same lines, I would like to graciously thank the University of Michigan for hosting us this past fall for the first time. Liliana Cortes-Ortiz, Stacy Rosenbaum, John Mitani, and the whole UMich primatology community put on a fabulous meeting. As usual, the research was fantastic, and it was great to see old friends, celebrate those we were missing, and meet new students and colleagues.

I've probably written this before, but I'll write it again. Although there is a huge selection of conferences that pulls us in more different directions every year, for me, primate meetings always feel like home. That is particularly true for MPIG. My first real conference was MPIG at Notre Dame when I was a 1<sup>st</sup> year graduate student, about 2 months into my program. I felt welcome then, and I feel honored to still be part of this community 15 years later. A lot of things have changed, but I still remember what it felt like to be that new student standing next to my poster. I am looking forward to meeting our new students this fall.

In other news, this summer I am going to the field for the first time in 9 years. Everyone handles having children differently, and I chose to pause visits to the field. This will be a short trip to visit collaborators, but I am REALLY EXCITED. So, watch out in October... I will probably still be riding the high of seeing wild primates again. I can't be held responsible for how much I talk about it.

Until then, take care and continue all the awesome work you are doing.

Best,

Katie Amato



## Recap: MPIG 2022 at the University of Michigan



The Midwest Primate Interest Group annual meeting was graciously hosted by the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. We welcomed over 100 registered participants from across the Midwest and abroad, from all professional levels. We had a record-breaking year with over 55 submitted abstracts for poster and podium presentations! The presentations featured research from a diversity of academic departments and zoological institutions. The topics ranged across cognition, social behavior, disease, conservation, physiology, genetics, nutrition, and much more! We would like to congratulate Rachel Nelson and McKensey Miller on being the recipients of the second annual student awards for best podium and poster presentation, respectively.



The late Dr. Steve Ross was honored with the 2022 Distinguished Primatologist award. Drs. Mollie Bloomsmith, Elizabeth Lonsdorf, Katie Cronin, and John Mitani detailed Steve's achievements as a protector of wild and captive chimps and a mentor to many. The collective tribute was a testament to how many lives he touched (human and non-human primate). He will forever be missed.

If you couldn't make it to the meeting, no worries! Synopses of the podium talks can be found on our Twitter @MidwestPrimates.



## INTERVIEW WITH A PRIMATOLOGIST



Dr. Benjamin Freed is a Professor in the Anthropology and Sociology department at Eastern Kentucky University.

**MPIG:** What does your research focus on – and why did you choose this focus?

**BF:** I study how closely-related primate species interact and share the same habitat. When I first started studying crowned lemurs and Sanford's lemurs, I was struck by the amount of time the two species associate with each other and overlap in their ecology. I've been fascinated with these species ever since.

**MPIG:** When and how were you first inspired to become a primatologist?

**BF:** I was an undergraduate at Duke, and quickly found an amazing cohort of faculty and grad students at the Duke Primate Center. I think I was introduced to some crowned lemurs, and the rest is history. I found myself challenged every day not only by the lemurs, but by the staff and researchers there.

**MPIG:** Which mentor (or mentors) had the strongest influence on you in becoming a primatologist? Why?

**BF:** Bob Sussman, Ken Glander, Elwyn Simons, Linda Taylor, Jorg Ganzhorn, Tab Rasmussen, Dan Gebo... There were so many people from undergraduate through graduate days, and everyone played a role. Everyone challenged me to think in so many ways about so many things. More than anything, they came up with new questions that got my mind racing any time I see primates.

**MPIG:** In your view, what is the value in taking an anthropological approach to studying primates rather than a purely biological approach?

**BF:** As an anthropologist, I am fascinated by how the lemurs I study seemingly are not only affected by local peoples' beliefs, but have shown resilience and remarkable behavioral

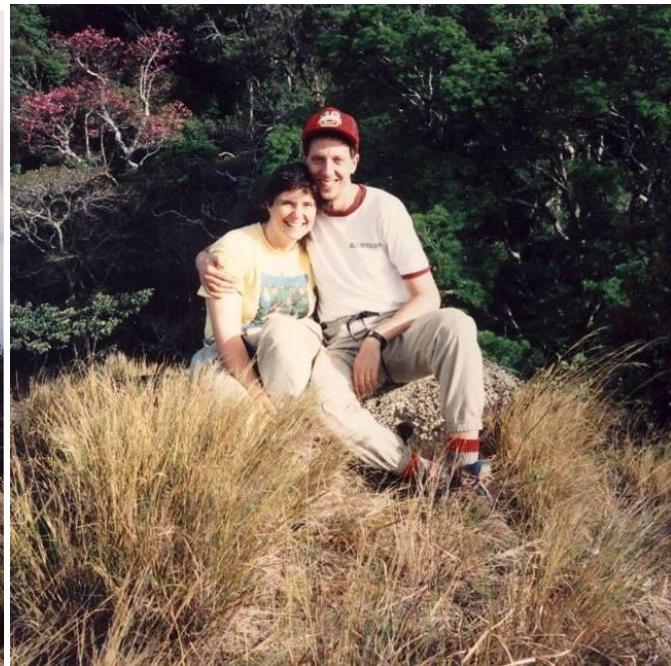
plasticity in the face of a changing human population. I think there's a growing awareness among researchers to value traditional ecological knowledge and local history. For me, I have gained more insight into the lemurs' behavior and their interaction with humans by working with cultural anthropology colleagues like Lisa Gezon and Andrew Walsh, and from local people, especially Louis-Philippe d'Arvisenet.

**MPIG:** How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way you think about primatology research and human-nonhuman primate interactions?

**BF:** It's given me even more appreciation for whatever little time we have when working in the field with endangered primates and local people. I miss the local people and the daily interactions I have with them, but at the same time, we have to recognize the limitations we have right now. Still, If I've learned one thing from work in northern Madagascar, it is to take things moramora (slowly), but appreciate every moment, and every observation.

**MPIG:** What advice do you have for undergraduates or beginning graduate students considering a career in primatology?

**BF:** Do outreach! Interact with local people both here and in source countries. Helping develop partnerships in research is important, but interacting with local people, exchanging information, and listening and appreciating diverse perspectives will bring out better conservation outcomes and a better future for everyone.



Know a primatologist that you would like featured in the next newsletter? Contact us at [midwestprimates@gmail.com](mailto:midwestprimates@gmail.com) to submit your nomination!

# MPIG 2023 – Mark Your Calendars!

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The annual Midwest Primate Interest Group meeting this year will be hosted by Washington University in St. Louis, October 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>!

Accommodations and more information will be posted closer to the conference on our website, Facebook page, and Twitter account.



## UPCOMING MEETINGS OF INTEREST

**American Anthropological Association** (virtual and in-person; Toronto, Canada; November 15-19)

<https://annualmeeting.americananthro.org/>

**Universities Federation for Animal Welfare** (virtual only; UK time zone; June 20-21)

<https://www.ufaw.org.uk/ufaw-events/ufaw-online-animal-welfare-conference-2023>

**International Primate Society** (in-person; Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo; August 19-25)

<https://ipskuching.com/>

**American Society of Primatologists** (virtual and in-person; Reno, Nevada; June 20-23)

<https://www.asp.org/asp-meetings/asp-reno-meeting-2023/>

**American Association of Biological Anthropologists** (virtual and in-person; Reno, Nevada; Online: April 3-7, 2023; Reno: April 19-22, 2023)

<https://bioanth.org/meetings-and-webinars/annual-meeting-2023/>

**Animal Behavior Society** (in-person; Portland, Oregon; July 12-15)

<https://www.animalbehaviorsociety.org/2023/>

**31st International Congress for Conservation Biology** (in-person; Kigali, Rwanda; July 23-27)

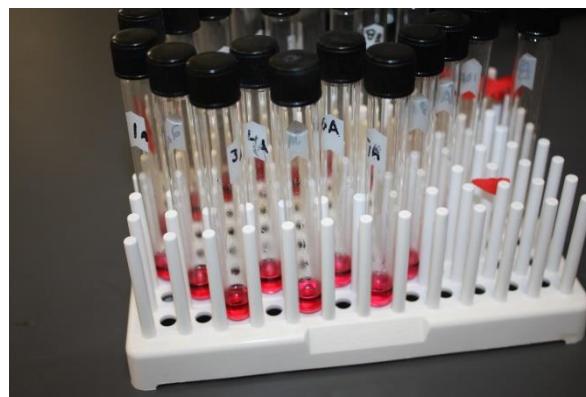
<https://icriforum.org/events/31st-international-congress-for-conservation-biology/>

**Midwest Ecology and Evolution Conference 2023** (in-person; Louisville, Kentucky; March 31-April 2)

<https://sites.google.com/view/meec-2023/home?pli=1>

## CALLING ALL LAB PIs!

For the benefit of furthering the research capacity of our student members, MPIG is creating an online repository of the available laboratory services and equipment found within the region. Our hope is to create a space where students and others can find pertinent information needed to better develop projects, work out methods, and potentially build collaborations. Working on a regional scale helps reduce travel time and costs, and promotes partnerships between MPIG members.



If you would like to participate and be listed on the MPIG website, please submit the following information using the example format: PI name, lab specialty, location, analysis capabilities, types of equipment, costs/fees, preferred contact information, and any other pertinent information you feel is appropriate (lab name, website, etc). Below is an example submission:

**PI name:** Mitch Irwin

**Lab specialty:** nutritional analysis of primate foods

**Location:** Northern Illinois University

**Capabilities:** crude protein, available protein, simple sugars, lipid content, fiber (NDF/ADF/lignin),

tannins

**Equipment:** Leco nitrogen analyzer, ANKOM fiber analyzer, ANKOM Daisy incubator, ThermoScientific Spectrophotometer

**Fees:** project dependent, please contact

**Contact:** [mirwin@niu.edu](mailto:mirwin@niu.edu)

**Website:** <https://www.niu.edu/anthropology/about/faculty-directory/irwin.shtml>

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Dr Stephanie Spehar, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

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Interested in joining the team? Email [midwestprimates@gmail.com](mailto:midwestprimates@gmail.com) for more information!

