

Primates of the World – An Illustrated Guide

By Jean-Jacques Petter and François Desbordes (Translated by Robert Martin). 2013. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 186 pages, 29.95 USD, Cloth.

Princeton has taken a French book and expanded the audience by publishing it in English. Normally such translations suffer from odd phrases that identify the translator as a non-naturalist. Robert Martin has created and excellent translation that reads smoothly and is easy to comprehend. There are some idiomatic peculiarities, but I did not find these interfered with the sense or my enjoyment.

The author covers the evolution of the first mammals and the arrival of the earliest primates. This starts with lemurs of Madagascar and their likely path to diversity. Lemurs are the author's speciality so this group tends to bias the discussions. Following the primate evolutionary path is a little eerie as so much seems to relate to us humans. The author summarises the biology of primates as a whole, giving note to their feeding and breeding habits. He examines the role of predators (and the occasional predatory actions of primates). He particularly relates the role of forests in primate development. Although short the section on communication and intelligence are quite revealing.

The author discusses classification of primates and start with a family tree diagram. They then tabulate by Family the species of primate. I noticed that the Western Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) is placed in its currently accepted genus of *Hoolock*. This change was made when the species was split into Eastern Hoolock (*Hoolock leuconedys*) and Western based on differences in facial and genital hair. Yet the Eastern

Hoolock is not mentioned nor is the genus *Hoolock* in the index. However in this classification section it notes there are two species, but lists just one. So I looked at the other genera and found there were other species missing. Among the macaques I realised Northern Pig-tailed Macaque, *Macaca leonina*, Siberut macaque, *M. siberu*, Gorontalo macaque, *M. nigrisicens* and Arunachal macaque, *M. munzala* had been left out. Only two of the eight species of Woolly Lemurs are included. In fact the book covers just over 50 per cent of the non-human primates.

The discussion and classification sections are illustrated with coloured sketches. These are like the artist's field notes and are a bit more rudimentary than I like. The illustrations of the individual species, however, are superb. They are accurate in a photographic sense, but are far more than a photo. They give the "feel" of the animal; its posture, furriness, facial expression etc. These are about the best mammal paintings I have seen. Congratulations to France Desbordes.

For each genus there is a basic discussion of characteristics of the group opposite each plate. This section is arranged by geographic region; Madagascar, South America, Asia and Africa. The range maps are easy to interpret and will be most useful. The book ends with Gorilla, Chimpanzee and Bonobo – our closest relatives.

This book is a combination of values. The first part is a readable text that can be enjoyed at leisure. The

last half is a reference volume for the species most travellers are likely to encounter. The whole book gives a fascinating insight into this intriguing and intelligent group of mammals. It is good value for the price.

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