Social party initiation, proximity maintenance, and affiliation in wild Bornean adolescent female orangutans in Gunung Palung National Park

Caitlin A. O'Connell and Cheryl D. Knott

In an effort to understand orangutan sociality and what benefits might be gained from socializing for a semi-solitary ape, we explore the details of the social lives of the most gregarious orangutan age-sex class - adolescent females. From 1994-2016 adolescent females in Gunung Palung National Park spent 50% of their focal follow days with at least one social association, and 31% of their focal follow time with at least one other independently ranging individual. Adolescent females are the party responsible for initiating their social associations with other age-sex classes 86% of the time. The percentage of approaches performed by adolescent females within dyadic associations is significantly predicted by the age-sex class of their social partner (F=4.086, p=0.02), with adolescents performing most of the approaches in associations with adult females (70%), and a more mutual responsibility for proximity maintenance when they associate with flanged males (46%) or unflanged males (56%). These findings, in combination with rates of agonistic interactions with adult females and affiliative behaviors with unflanged males, indicate that adolescent females actively seek social opportunities with all age-sex classes, but the benefits and risks associated with socializing vary based on the age-sex of their social partners. We discuss the importance of sociality at this life stage for orangutans, and the potential that there are meaningful social bonds beyond the mother-offspring dyad in the wild.