

# Motivating a new generation of primatologists: Lincoln Park Zoo's **- Exploring Ape Behavior -**

EV Lonsdorf, MW Foster, SA Linick, MS Milstein, KE Wagner, SW Margulis, and SR Ross  
Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes  
Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago, IL 60614 (mfoster@lpzoo.org)

## - INTRODUCTION -

Participatory science education offers promise for engaging non-scientists and encouraging them to learn about and appreciate the utility of the scientific method for answering questions. Great apes are an ideal taxon with which to build a science education program.

Approximately 90% of visitors reported visiting the apes during their visit to Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, Illinois. Therefore, Lincoln Park Zoo designed a new program to offer adults and children aged 12+ a unique opportunity to learn about the value and utility of the scientific method through a participatory great ape behavioral research program: **Exploring Ape Behavior.**



Fig 1: Visitors attend a lecture on ape behavior and observation techniques

## - METHODS -

Participants are given a lecture on great ape research and behavioral methodologies by a member of the research staff. Following the lecture, they are trained to identify individual animals and to collect quantitative behavioral data on apes housed in a specialized off-exhibit yard. Data is collected using an iPod Touch® with customized web-based software (Fig. 2) which wirelessly transmits their observations to a central database.

Participants are then led through some simple data analysis where comparisons are made between the participant's data versus the long-term data from trained observers, as well as covering concepts such as inter-observer variability.

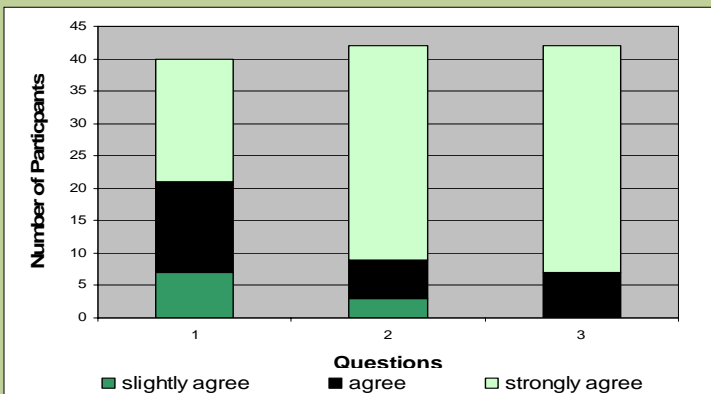
In the summer of 2006, Lincoln Park Zoo hosted several preliminary educational sessions to gauge the success of this program.



Fig 2: iPod Touch as data collection unit

Among those surveyed (n=42), there was an overwhelming enthusiasm for the program. Participants not only showed high interest in the program, but additionally expressed surprise in the level of scientific research happening at a zoo. Perhaps most importantly, participants showed the highest level of interest in similar programs with other animals.

## - RESULTS: PRELIMINARY EVALUATION -



- 1) I learned more about ape research than expected
- 2) I found this program informative
- 3) I would be interested in similar programs with other animals at the zoo

## - CONCLUSION -

This unique program motivates a new generation of primatologists by exposing audiences to the excitement and challenges of biological science. Through experiential learning, zoo visitors have the opportunity to step into the shoes of scientists for a day and gain a better understanding of ape behavior and basic scientific principles.