

CHRISTOPHE REMEMBERED

Supplementary personal remembrances to the obituary for **Christophe Boesch (1951 - 2024):
Primatology pioneer with a long-term vision for research and conservation**

Gustl Anzenberger

After Hans Kummer had to give up his long-term field research on Hamadryas baboons due to the war in Ethiopia (1974 – 1991), he accepted Christophe Boesch and me as new students. We were his first students not working on baboons and our research covered a wide range of taxonomy and methods, namely one studying chimpanzees in the wild and the other marmosets in captivity. We both received our PhDs in 1984, and spent time together in Zurich, which included jogging once a week, often followed by a nice French like dinner.

Hans Kummer certainly was impressed by Christophe's focus and determination. However, Christophe with his diploma thesis from the University of Geneva (based on a census work on mountain gorillas) had to complete all lectures and courses in Animal Behavior in only three semesters. At the same time, he worked on a grant proposal to study the Tai chimpanzees. His grant was approved. In 1984, I spent one month at the Tai field camp together with Christophe, Hedwige and baby Lukas (see photo 1). At that time only chimpanzee males were habituated. It was very impressive for me, that without direct observation and using only frequencies and sounds of nut cracking, Christophe could tell whether the nutcracker was a female or a male. These and other outstanding findings about tool use, teaching, hunting, and culture resulted in many publications of scientifically objective and carefully interpreted research, following our scientific education from Hans Kummer.



Photo 1.
Christophe, his wife Hedwige and baby Lukas in 1984 on the terrace of North Camp (photo courtesy of Gustl Anzenberger)

Dear Christophe, you achieved a stunning scientific career, but I always had the impression that you did this “only for your” chimpanzees. And, the WCF proves and continues this. I feel blessed to have been friends with you and Hedwige. Thanks! Allow me one more note. At your field camp, there were these small oranges with very thin skins and thus very hard to peel. I saw that you cut them into quarters, turned them inside out and ate them. Since 1984, I have done the same and during the orange season, you are often with me.

Mimi Arandjelovic

When I joined the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology's Department of Primatology, I had no field experience. I was a lab person and at that time, the two did not mix. But Christophe let me go to Tai anyway so that I could see the forest and the chimps. Specifically because he thought it would make me a better scientist. And it was indeed life changing. When he joined me in the forest a month after I had been there he was able to show me so much more than I had been seeing. I saw the forest through his eyes, I hadn't been seeing the things I was looking at. His knowledge and passion were absolutely magical, and I am so very sad that I won't get to be with that again.

During that trip, in a time before GPSs, he kept trying to teach me how to use my map and compass and find the trails at Tai. No matter how many times I screwed it up though, he was so encouraging when I succeeded. As if I had done it on the first try. I was also not the most agile primate ever to enter the Tai forest either, and there were a lot of snickers from the field assistants every time I tripped and fell to my face AGAIN on the forest floor. And I remember at some point in the afternoon, Christophe casually said to one of the assistants, but loud enough so that I could hear, “even though she falls a lot, she gets up really well”. And At the time, I mainly thought this was a kindness. a way to motivate me forward, to make sure I was still going to collect my data.

But now when I think about it, I think it was actually an overarching metaphor for how Christophe approached things and inspired people. Do your best, you may fail, try again, try again, don't get discouraged, keep fighting, don't let the snickers of others keep you down, keep trying to figure it out. You will get there.

Simone Ban Dagui

Prof. Christophe Boesch, when you first heard that there was a black female student who wanted to study the chimpanzees of Tai, you couldn't believe it, but you gave me a chance. Fate decided that my first encounter with the chimpanzees would be with you, to give me my first lesson on how to navigate the forest with a compass and a few rules to follow...

Things went well, and you wanted to continue the adventure with me all the way to the PhD. By your side, I learned a lot and became stronger, more confident, and mature in my work. I enjoyed

working with you. You are a role model who inspires me, I will always remember you; your name evokes respect, rigor, relevance, simplicity, intelligence...

Christophe, we will miss you a lot... Your departure is already being felt

Thank you for everything. You can leave in peace, knowing that you have left a mark on me and on each of your students and collaborators to continue your commitment to the protection of chimpanzees and nature in general.

Thank you for everything, and rest in peace the great warrior.

Claudia Barelli

I met Christophe back in 2000 when I first joined the MPI-EVA as a research assistant and later as a PhD student of his working on wild gibbons in Thailand. I obviously was not a “chimp student” but, nonetheless, he greatly supported my work over the years. I vividly remember the many discussions we had struggling to find challenging topics for my PhD! I will always be very grateful to his fascination and passion for field work and his love for nature. The years spent at the MPI were great and highly formative for all of us, but his motivation and attitude made those memories even more special.

Gaëlle Bocksberger

When I came to the MPI as a botanist, I didn't know the first thing about chimpanzees or any Great Apes for that matter. Thanks to Christophe's dedication and the wonderful crowd of people he had gathered around him, I feel now connected to those fascinating cousins. Christophe constantly led us towards discoveries with a kind and sharp mind. I think his boundless passion for the chimps made me a better person. I will forever keep an image of him with his laughing eyes and wiggling mustache. Let us hope that together we can fill in for the void his absence leaves in chimpanzee conservation.

Thomas Breuer

Christophe, you have been a hero for primate conservation and without you, the MPI would have never evolved in such a support to conservation. I was your PhD student (albeit on a gorilla) and with all your students, you have managed to always select the most interesting research topics. While doing our research you never forgot the link and support to the field. We students all loved you for that and this has strongly impacted my own pathway. You have transformed a whole generation of great ape conservationists and primatologists. Your legacy is already living all over the African forest. We all owe you a big part of our careers.

Catherine Crockford

Dear Christophe, mein Doktorvater, before you I was a speech and language therapist at St. Thomas' hospital in London. You gave me the chance to change my life, to shift from studying language disorders to language evolution. Before committing to taking me on as a PhD student with no zoological or field experience, your only criteria was that I should come to the Tai Forest and check that I could handle the remoteness and toughness of the field site.

I managed to get a lift all the way to camp from the Parks Board. I waited in an empty camp during a torrential downpour, from which you and Roman emerged after nesting the chimpanzees, looking – and smelling – like drowned rats. The first, unforgettable sighting of my future husband. You were both astounded that I made it all the way to camp without needing to be picked up. First test passed.

That week, and many after, were gifts in learning the incredible nature of chimpanzees. As many others have said, your ability to observe and then predict what would happen next in chimpanzee society was unparalleled. One moment is particularly vivid. We were watching Goma deftly crack panda nuts with a weighty stone hammer. Her infant was by her side, intently examining each move her mother made. After a good meal, the little family rose and left. Rather than following, Christophe said, 'Now you sit there and try'. I sat exactly where Goma had sat. I placed a panda nut in the same indent on the wooden root that Goma had used as an anvil, and lifted the heavy stone. I used my arms to bring the hammer down and the nut did not crack. I mentally replayed exactly how Goma had done this and tried again, this time letting the weight of the stone drop, like an ax. The nut cracked open perfectly. I had just learnt from a chimpanzee. In this moment, I felt the six million years since we last shared a common ancestor with chimpanzees melting away. For me, there was no turning back.



You will always be my mentor.

Tobias Deschner

I first met Christophe in Abidjan in October 1995 during the turmoil of the pending elections. All roads being blocked, you recommended returning to Taï during the night. It was one of the most adventurous trips to Taï I ever had. And this was exemplary for the next 29 years we spent together; they were a never-ending adventure. Christophe, I owe you so much, without you, I would not be the person I am today. Your intuition when observing chimpanzees was unparalleled, and your enthusiasm for their conservation truly contagious.

When you came into my office, I could tell by the language you spoke, what it was about. English meant science, German meant administrative issues, but when you started in French, you just wanted to be silly and crack some jokes. So often you started in French....

I feel honored and privileged for having had the opportunity to work and share my life with you for so many years. Your courage and your inexhaustible enthusiasm helped and keeps on helping me and a lot of others among your students to continue the work at the various field sites and conservation projects that were founded under your guidance and with your support.



Photo 3. 40 years of research at the Taï Chimpanzee Project was celebrated in 2019 with a symposium over 3 days and Christophe's retirement party the evening of the last day. Everybody came to celebrate with him. His department was once more the gravity center of the chimpanzee world. What an achievement! © MPI EVA, TCP

Julia Fischer

As a postdoc, I spent almost four years at the MPI for evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. I was a fence-sitter, being part of Mike Tomasello's group, but mostly hanging out with the people from Primatology. Christophe generously welcomed me into his group; he shared his passion for field work and was an ardent supporter when we started our own field research in Senegal (albeit we are "only" studying baboons). Christophe had so much to give, for his students, for the people in the countries where he worked, and above all, for the conservation of the chimpanzees. He was an activist scientist in the best sense and he will be missed for his enthusiasm, his endurance, and his love and appreciation of nature.

Cristina Gomes

I still vividly remember my first encounter with a wild chimpanzee in Taï Forest, as I stood beside Christophe at the base of a large tree. It was dawn when a black shadow descended, marking a pivotal moment in my life. As a young, enthusiastic, yet inexperienced scientist who arrived at Christophe's doorstep straight from Venezuela, I was clueless about primates and unsure how to

pursue a PhD. Christophe generously offered me an opportunity. I learned so much about chimpanzee behavioral ecology with him in the field. He fostered in me a profound respect for the forest and its wildlife. Through his own actions, he taught me the importance of balancing life with work, and he provided me with deep compassion when I needed it most. But perhaps most importantly, he taught me to always prioritize the chimpanzees' needs over any research questions or personal career ambitions I might have. I am immensely grateful for this. It led me to a career in conservation that I love, deepening my understanding of myself and the interconnectedness of all life. Thank you, Christophe, for being an exemplary role model, a leader in chimpanzee conservation and a kind and compassionate human. Your legacy will endure through the chimpanzees you helped protect and the researchers and conservationists who follow in your footsteps.

Zoro GONE BI

Dear Christophe,

Thanks to you, I joined the Tai Chimpanzee Project in 1996 to prepare for a Diploma of Advanced Studies (DEA, equivalent of Master Thesis). Christophe, you offered me the opportunity to do a PhD thesis, making me your first Ivorian and African student. You then welcomed me to the Max Planck Institute for almost two years, where you protected and pampered me by putting everything at my disposal so that I could succeed. Your office has always been open to me, always listening. Your wife Hedwige made sure I didn't lack anything, she always brought me Ivorian ingredients for my cooking. You were also president of my thesis jury, while you were my thesis supervisor. When I returned to Côte d'Ivoire, you offered me my first job at the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation, instilling in me the virus of conservation, science and the love of chimpanzees. From a botanist, I have become a primatologist. Christophe, you've done so much for me that I can't write everything here. You're just a father to me. The void you leave in my life can never be filled. Christophe, go in peace, you have done your part of the work on earth. Watch over us from where you are.

Laura Hagemann

I admire Christophe for his passion, his strong mindedness and his will to keep pushing forward against all obstacles. He might even be able to move mountains with his mind. Working with him during my PhD had a big impact on me and I personally owe him a lot. He made all the life-changing experiences possible, sent me repeatedly to the field and kept believing in the project even in the beginning when it did not look too bright. In addition he brought together an amazing group of people and created a sense of being part of something special. I still can not believe that he is gone and it is very hard to imagine a world without him. Somehow it was always reassuring to know Christophe was there taking care. He is leaving a giant hole behind and now it is on us to keep his legacy alive and continue the fight for great ape conservation.

Ilka Herbinger

Christophe has accompanied and mentored me during my master and PhD studies and as the president of the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation for what can be surely counted as my most exciting and formative years of my life. He saw and made me grow as a scientist, a conservationist, danced at my wedding and held my first son in his arms in Côte d'Ivoire. This is what fathers usually do and he was indeed much more than my PhD father (or Doktorvater as you say in German)!

We had so many funny and hilarious moments, be it in Africa or elsewhere, but one that I really like to remember is being at a gas station in Côte d'Ivoire on our way to the Taï forest. The young man who served us, heard us speaking in French and when we paid, he said to Christophe...your daughter speaks French really well, even better than you! Christophe (who's mothertongue is French) looked at me (who learned French in the forest, speaking it with a very strong Ivorian dialect) and just thought...how can her French sound better than mine!

Christophe, I will keep my endless memories awake as will all the people and chimpanzees you have encountered in your far too short life.

Claudia Herf

I had the pleasure and honor of working for and with Christophe Boesch for almost 20 years. Charismatic, funny, a crisis manager for his chimpanzees as well as lost students, authentic and lovable. To understand better, he took me into his world, into the rainforest, to his chimpanzees. And those of enthusiastic outdoor researchers who have shaped my life. His footprint in my heart is large and I am filled with gratitude to have known him.

Cleve Hicks

I owe Christophe Boesch so much. 15 years ago, I was buzzing with ideas about the Bili chimpanzees, whom Christophe, being the pioneer that he was, had visited and briefly investigated 2 years before me. Alas, I had little idea of how to proceed. Christophe and his team generously 'took me under their wing' and gave me the scientific guidance and perspective on nonhuman great ape culture that I needed. It was such an honor to work with him, given that I had already read his and Hedwige Boesch-Achermann's classic book about the Tai chimpanzees several times, like a Bible, before ever seeing a chimpanzee in the African forest. Without his support I could not have succeeded. Christophe, you are a legend! And you will be sorely missed by panins and hominins everywhere.

Karline Janmaat

In 2001, in Taï, I talked to Christophe about a comparative study on the foraging cognition of mangabeys and chimps. He told me bluntly that my idea to also map trees that were not visited by the monkeys was a waste of time. With that, our conversation ended. Christophe was not really into trees. He was more into chimps I concluded. Seven years later he asked me to join his department. Without any interview, nothing, he told me I could join his department three months later. Surprised, I said yes, and stayed for 10 years. I felt at home, was encouraged to speak my mind and nothing in his eyes was impossible. He loved it when we would go to the field to observe the chimpanzees and one time, when I asked him for funding for another field trip he said: "It's about time, you are growing fat!" We both laughed. He liked to tease and the fact that the other could handle it. Christophe was a great advocate of observational studies. He enabled us to follow one chimpanzee for 53 consecutive days and in three subsequent years while mapping 15,000 feeding trees in her territory - a huge endeavor to get into the mind of a chimpanzee. Later he asked me to study the BaYaka, to expand our knowledge of what makes us human. It could have been career suicide, comparing African people with chimpanzees. But Christophe gave me the necessary

courage to do it. No scientific challenge was impossible for me in his presence.

Photo 3. Christophe, with Karline, Simone and their team in Taï (from left to right, top: Simone, Jonas, Christophe, Karline, Arsene; bottom: Valentin, Roger, Louis-Bernard)



Haneul Jang

Dear Christophe,

Thank you for everything, for having been who you are, for having been there for all of us and for all the wild chimpanzees in the world. Thank you for visiting the forest people in the Republic of

Congo– the BaYaka hunter-gatherers, for pursuing research there yourself, and for giving me an opportunity to go there and live with them for my PhD, which has completely changed my life. Thank you for raising me as a researcher who can also think of how to protect the forest, the home of the BaYaka people. I remember our countless discussions. I am incredibly lucky that I could learn your passion and faith to make the world a better place. Christophe, you lit a candle to this world, for chimpanzees, people and the forest in Africa. Now all of us behind you will keep fighting to keep the candle that you lit. You are my hero, our hero, forever, and ‘papa mondele’ forever to our BaYaka family in Congo.

Jessi Junker

Dear Christophe,

I am not a person of many words. But I want to thank you for making my dream of studying and protecting wild great apes in Africa become a reality. You have been such an inspiration in my life and I will always remember you for what you have done for me and others and most importantly, how you have devoted your life to the protection of these amazing animals.

Rest in Peace.

Yours, Jessi

Ammie Kalan



I will never forget the first time I met Christophe, when he was interviewing me for starting a PhD. He was testing me with his questions, as was the norm for him, and seemed to stare right into me with his deep eyes and crinkled white mustache when he asked,

“What is your dream project?”. I had no idea that that would be the beginning of a most fulfilling PhD and post doctoral career at the MPI-EVA. He was a larger than life kind of person and I consider myself incredibly lucky to have had his support and guidance as my Doktorvater. He told

me, on more than one occasion, how I was stubborn and I always took that as a compliment from him because he was one of the most stubborn persons I knew, albeit bold and brave at the same time, a perfect combination for someone who fought so hard to protect wild chimpanzees. He was also incredibly warm, funny and loyal though, and encouraged me to keep going whenever I felt like I was stuck. I owe the most fondest of memories of my entire career to Christophe and I will forever be grateful to him. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, we will miss you.

Honora KAPAZAHI

Je raconte ici ma petite histoire que j'ai vécu en forêt avec le patron Christophe Boesch.

C'était la première fois que je suivais les chimpanzés de plus près. Ce jour-là j'étais en forêt avec l'étudiant Andréa Kurt, nous suivions BRUTUS comme target. Après quelques heures de suivi, Andréa et moi avons malheureusement perdu de vue BRUTUS. Le patron Boesch étant proche de nous, il nous demanda : « qui cherchez-vous ? ». Nous lui avons répondu que nous cherchions BRUTUS. Le patron nous a alors dit de suivre les tambours et les cris, puis il nous montra la direction à suivre, il nous a dit « les cris et les tambours que vous entendez sont ceux de Brutus ». Nous nous dépêchâmes et nous arrivâmes et nous constatâmes que c'était effectivement Brutus. Ce jour pour moi, fut un jour formidable et merveilleux. C'est un jour que je n'oublierai jamais. Partant de là, je voulais qu'il m'apprenne à distinguer les différentes vocalisations de certains individus du groupe du Nord, sans que ceux-ci ne soient dans mon champ visuel. Mais il ne m'a pas montré sa méthode, il m'a tout simplement dit que cela viendrait tout seul avec le

temps. Il faut dire que j'étais déçu de sa réponse, mais après trois ans, je lui donnais raison. Je pouvais désormais différencier les vocalisations et les tambours de certains individus du groupe. Ce qui m'a permis de travailler avec Cathy, la femme du patron Roman, pour sa thèse. Ils (Roman et Cathy) s'en souviendront sûrement. C'était mon histoire. Je vous en remercie infiniment.



Photo 5. Christophe with his two oldest field assistant, Gregoire (left) and Honora (right), during the 30 year anniversary party of TCP in Tai .

Inza KONE

My early career was profoundly shaped by my time at Tai National Park, contributing to the Tai Monkey Project. Although not directly involved in the adjacent Tai Chimpanzee Project led by Christophe Boesch, my privileged interactions with him and his students profoundly influenced my interest in chimpanzees. In 2001, during the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques (CSRS)' open days, I, then a PhD student, had the honor of presenting our wildlife research. Christophe, present as an observer, commended my understanding of his work on chimpanzees, a moment that left a lasting impact. Christophe's support continued the following year when he allowed me access to the Max Planck Institute's library, a significant resource for an African scholar. Christophe's mentorship and encouragement have been instrumental throughout my career, his words "we are here to push the future generations" resonating with me. His influence extends beyond personal interactions, shaping the field of primatology and leaving a legacy.

Fabian Leendertz

I remember well when I met Christophe the first time at the newly founded MPI-EVA in Leipzig in 1997. What I did not know was that he gave me a task which will take my entire professional life to complete: "Find out what kills the chimpanzees, where it comes from and what we can do to stop this. And – while you are doing so - please also find out which disease matter for all the other species in Tai". These questions opened up an entire new research field, developing into something we call One Health these days. I also remember well how well he reacted to each of the – sometimes unpleasant – findings, for example when we showed that in fact WE are the source of several of the nasty outbreaks. He asked if we should stop all research to avoid such death. He was serious about this. We did not stop research but together developed hygiene measures to reduce transmission risk, serving as a role model for many other sites.

Christophe was a scientific father for me and many others, an amazing driver of science and conservation, creating futures for wild chimpanzees (and all the other animals around) but also people – like me. We will miss you.

Julia Lehmann

As for so many others, Christophe gave me a chance to become a primatologist, even though my PhD was on a very different biological species. He hired me in 2000, originally as statistician - but I soon started working on the very first Tai chimpanzee database instead. Being part of Christophe's team at the MPI was an unforgettable experience! I remember how my own trip to the Tai forest with Christophe, Mike Tomasello and Fabian Leendertz (all of us new to the forest, apart from Christophe) showed me that I was far from fit, totally unable to 'cluck' loud enough to be heard by anyone and that I got lost more than ones in the forest - but what an amazing time

this was! Thank you, Christophe, for having faith in me, for allowing me to be part of this and for letting me get to know the Tai chimps in person! You will be dearly missed - but i am sure that your work will carry on, as you have left such a rich legacy!

Dieter Lukas

Even though I was technically Christophe's PhD student, my interactions with him were limited because he left us who were working with other supervisors a lot of freedom. But I always felt that he knew what was going on and that he kept an interest and was looking out for me. When I was thinking about the next step after finishing the PhD, he called me to his office to talk about academic careers. He told me to watch out to not get exploited by supervisors or outside expectations to just push out scientific articles. Instead, his advice was to think about the questions I would be passionate about and feel that mattered, and do my best to answer those. To me, this captured Christophe's own approach, driven by passion, curiosity, and a deep engagement into the whole of what he was studying.

John Mitani

I met Christophe in 1990 at Gombe. He was studying the hunting behavior of the chimpanzees there, and I was returning from my first stint at Mahale. He was an extraordinarily keen observer of chimpanzee behavior, and we had much to discuss. During a memorable visit to Ngogo in 2002, the chimps, perhaps sensing his presence, hunted the first two days. When I asked him what he wanted to see on his third and final day he replied, "A massacre!" Unfortunately for the red colobus monkeys, the chimpanzees obliged. Christophe transformed the discipline as Director of the Department of Primatology at MPI-EVA, and his legacy will live on with the many students, postdocs, and colleagues he trained and helped. But his most important contribution may be the tireless work he did to protect chimpanzees in the wild. His untimely passing leaves a massive void that will be difficult to fill.

Roger Mundry

In 2006 Christophe (together with Mike Tomasello) hired me as a statistical consultant for their departments. What was originally a two-years contract with a possible three-years extension, finally turned into a position for 13+ years. These years were the most challenging, but at the same time also the most fun of my life. What was in the beginning a relatively distanced relationship between two strangers (what Christophe and me were to one another), developed over time into a very trustful and good working relationship. As a scientist, Christophe was very passionate and scrutinizing, and he had all my respect for that. But what contributed even more to my respect for him was the person I experienced: always very kind, supportive, open minded, and tolerant (for instance, he never complained about the 'soundtrack of the primatology' which almost constantly was broadcast from my office into the hallway and which he certainly could

sometimes hear in his office). Christophe managed to gather a very diverse and nice crowd of, in part, excellent scientists in his department and created an atmosphere encouraging free and critical discussions. I admired Christophe for his patience, allowing people to make mistakes and to learn from them.

Christophe and the members of his department made every single day of the 13+ years I worked with them a challenge, but all of them and particularly Christophe also made me feeling very home and safe there. A few years after I began working there, I knew that I could totally count on Christophe's support in any kind of crisis, and he had become a friend. I owe him an awful lot. Without Christophe I wouldn't be the statistician, the kind-of-primatologist, and the person I am today.

I could probably continue endlessly with how much I enjoyed co-supervising his PhD students with him or the many discussions with him about all sorts of projects. But I want to finish this with an anecdote: once, in the middle of just another tough day, I needed a break. I decided to have some loud music and juggle a bit. The music playing was something like this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HejFfbliU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zNYjH-bzrQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucFmUNAxI08>

While I juggled, this playing loudly with my office door open, Christophe passed by my office while walking down the hallway, and, as he always did, he glanced at what was going on there. When he saw me, he smiled at me very kindly... Christophe, I miss you, your critical and open mind, your kindness, and your humor. You were a really cool guy and you meant a lot to me. Rest in peace.

Emmanuelle Normand

Christophe, I met you 20 years ago while you accepted me for a master thesis for a start, then I did my PhD with you, helped with the Tai Chimpanzees operations and then supported the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation. The confidence you've placed in me over the years allowed me to get stronger and more creative. It all started with my thesis project on chimpanzee cognition, which was off the beaten track, but you immediately supported the idea with enthusiasm. Then, during one of your visits to the Tai research camp, we discussed the threats to the nearby classified forests, and you directly offered me to initiate discussions with loggers and the authorities on behalf of the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation... You've put your trust in me over the years and I'm eternally indebted to you for this.



Photo 6. Christophe during an audience with the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassana Ouattara. Beside him Emma and the Swiss Ambassador.

Julia Ostner & Oliver Schülke

Christophe's support was instrumental for getting us to the MPI at Leipzig in 2005. We hugely benefited from his generosity when he invited our small research group to associate with his department and to join into its activities as much as we liked. His passion for primate research in natural habitats was inspirational, and he encouraged and supported us during these early days when we established our own long-term study in Thailand. We are beyond grateful for the opportunity to share the environment Christophe created at the Primatology Department at Leipzig.

Samuel Pereira Dias

J'ai vu Christophe faire ce que peu de personne, à ma connaissance, ont réussi à faire : créer un parc national hébergeant 12% de la population de chimpanzé d'Afrique de l'Ouest (République de Guinée). J'ai eu la chance, avec d'autres, d'être témoins de son génie, énergie et stratégie au service de la nature. L'expression de ce dévouement sans faille fut, est et restera un exemple à suivre. Regret de ne pas avoir pu te reparler depuis toutes ces années - pouvoir t'exprimer ces

quelques mots, et certainement d'autres aussi. Souvenirs de marche en forêt, discussions passionnées, repas partagés, sourires échangés. Reposes en paix, ta mission est plus qu'accomplie. Pensées émues pour la famille.

Simone Pika

Christophe, my way to you involved many detours...I had my first PhD-interview in your department but was unsuccessful. The same day, I also introduced myself to Mike Tomasello, who directly offered me a job. Years later, you were still not really amused that I, as we say in German, "had danced on several weddings". But then we were already friends and you had infected me with your visionary view that we need to study different chimpanzee populations in their natural environments to understand their behavioral diversity, and cognitive skills.

I also did not learn my chimpanzee field skills from you but from John Mitani during wonderful days at Ngogo, Uganda. However, in these early precious field days, I also wanted to know whether I, like you, could differentiate the males by their pant-hoots, whether Eastern chimpanzees, like your Brutus, use drumming to convey specific information to group members, and which role conspecifics have on learning and transmission of behaviors.

Especially during the last years, when the survival of the Loango Chimpanzee Project was severely threatened, you stood by my side and our project...strong, loyal, brave, always hopeful, ready to fight, and with your charming smile. Back then, I did not know that time was precious and that things could get even worse. Thanks, dear Christophe for everything, I'll carry your hope and bravery with me.

Anna Preis

I was a Masters and then PhD student in the Primatology department and was lucky enough to work in the chimpanzee research and conservation projects initiated by Christophe in Gabon, Ivory Coast and Guinea.

I remember with joy the last field trip we made together in Guinea. We were on our way to the north of the Moyon Bafing National Park. Christophe insisted on driving the car in the park area and managed to get us stuck in the mud twice. Probably because of this delay, we were lucky to encounter chimpanzees a few kilometers before our destination. Christophe, Eric and I were able to approach them and watch these uninhabited chimpanzees feeding in a tree. Being in the field with Christophe was always an adventure and I am very grateful to have been able to spend this precious time with him and learn from his immense experience.

Christophe, without you I would not be the person I am today. I am forever grateful for your endless support and will always carry you in my heart.

Jill Pruetz

Each time I was fortunate enough to talk with Christophe about our projects, I was struck by his genuine interest and passion for chimpanzees. Those moments left a great impression on me, and they are really what I recall when I think about Christophe. Despite his larger-than-life standing as a scientist, conservationist, and primatologist, he made time to talk about chimpanzees on a very personal level. Pant hoots to you, Christophe.

Eric Reteno

Mon cher Christophe, je me souviens de la première fois où nous avons travaillé ensemble dans le parc national de Loango. Tu voulais que nous traversions un grand marécage à Pandanus dans lequel il était vraiment impossible de s'aventurer et dont nous ne pouvions même pas voir l'autre côté. Toi devant, nous te suivions. Quand nous sommes arrivés au milieu du marais, tu as conclu que ce n'était pas possible, alors nous avons fait demi-tour, et tout le monde était en colère contre toi, mais nous n'osions pas le dire. C'est là que j'ai compris que je travaillais avec un homme qui aimait la nature et pour qui les choses impossibles n'existaient pas.

Christophe je suis choquée, la triste nouvelle de ton décès me laisse sans voix, Christophe toi qui croyais à ma valeur toi qui m'a donné une chance d'aller travailler ailleurs que le Gabon, (Guinée Conakry) Christophe vraiment merci pour tout, tu as été un grand guide de la conservation et grand gardien des chimpanzés, merci de t'avoir connu va en paix je ne t'oublierai jamais. Ton Eric du Gabon.

Julia Riedel

Christophe, you are one of my favourite persons. I admire you - the restless optimist. Like a perpetual motion machine forever moving and working. We are still realising our latest project and you are already one-step ahead and planning several new projects. With you, it is always forward, onwards, not letting yourself be beaten down and setting goals that are too big rather than too small. "We can do it!" was a phrase I often heard from you.

One last memory of you will stay with me forever. A few weeks ago, I visited you to talk about work and I did not want to disturb you for long, but you really wanted to show me your new favourite project. You spent weeks watching and analysing countless camera trap videos to study the forest elephant population of the future Pinselli-Soyah-Sabouyah National Park in Guinea. You identified every single elephant and gave them names and detailed recognition descriptions. Just as you taught me in 2003 for the chimpanzees during the habituation of the East group in Taï National Park. Your eyes lit up and you were so proud to show me the most beautiful elephant matriarchs. I often felt and admired your scientific zeal and enthusiasm. It is contagious, today, so many Boesch-students place science and nature conservation at the centre of their lives.

Now you leave a big gap that we cannot fill, but thanks to you, we are a big WCF family and we have many good friends from your primatology department who want to support us so that we can continue your work and dreams. All for nature and the chimpanzees who lost their best friend far too soon.



Photo 7. Christophe and Hedwige together with former students and colleagues from the Primatology department in Julia's garden in summer 2023

Liran Samuni

I first met Christophe when starting my PhD in his department in the MPI, where I took on the challenging task of following in his footsteps to study cooperation in the Tai chimpanzees. Christophe welcomed me with an open mind, challenged me when needed, and inspired me to become a better observer and scientist.

Christophe was a true visionary. He insisted on following females at times when most chimpanzee research focused on male dominance and aggression, to eventually reveal the central role that females play in chimpanzee societies. His observations on hunting, food sharing, and adoption

propelled our knowledge of chimpanzee cooperation dynamics, back when many had argued that they only cooperate out of selfish interests. He appreciated the immense behavioral diversity and flexibility exhibited by our evolutionary cousins and as such critically formed our understanding of how culture shapes their lives. But most importantly, Christophe was a passionate advocate of chimpanzee conservation, with a rare ability to understand chimpanzees and his endless persistence to improve their outlook, has substantially reshaped chimpanzee conservation in West Africa. Together so many of us mourn his loss, yet together we can honor his legacy by following his footsteps. He already paved the way.

Giulia Sirianni

I remember the day of my PhD interview. I was so scared. I crossed you in the entrance hall while I waited. You were limping, and I thought you would have been injured by a leopard in the forest or something like that... so adventurous your life looked to me... :). Years later, during one of our Christmas institute dinners, I told you this story and you laughed at it (what a charming and contagious laugh!) and you confessed that you had just fallen while stepping off the tram car. By choosing me as one of your PhD students you gifted me with all that bunch of adventures I was looking for (including a quick encounter with a leopard), allowing me to meet chimpanzees and share with them many days of my life... Such a life-changing experience. Endless scientific discussions went on in your office, whose door was always actually and symbolically open. We exchanged opinions, we fought, we laughed, we agreed, we disagreed, I cried, we laughed again.

Virginie Vergnes

Cher Christophe, Chère Hedwige, merci de m'avoir accueillie dans la famille WCF depuis 2010. Cheminer avec vous pour la défense des chimpanzés et de leur habitat, fut une mission fantastique. Le choc de ta disparition, Christophe, fut brutal et intense, et m'a fait replonger dans nos derniers souvenirs en Guinée. Le dépassement de soi et de tous les obstacles pour la création du Parc national du Moyen Bafing. Le temps jouait, il fallait rassembler tous les partenaires et placer les jalons de ce Parc, tu y croyais et nous n'avons rien lâché (merci au gouvernement Guinéen !). Je t'ai vu Guerrier ! Guerrier de la conservation des chimpanzés, et j'ai compris que « tout était possible » ! Merci pour cela, ta détermination contagieuse, ta vision de « l'acceptable ou non » quand il s'agit d'enjeu de protection de la nature. Je sais que tu aideras dans l'invisible, et de là-haut, tu nous souffleras tes stratégies. Que ton âme soit en paix.

Erin Wessling

Christophe's impact goes well beyond those of us he carried along with him. He had this uncanny ability to jump in to any scientific argument and find the Achilles heel that could tear a theory down with a single question. He was a sharp observer both in and out of the field, and this intuition guided his science and conservation work. Christophe saw the catastrophic declines of

chimpanzee populations and habitats and rose to the call to fight to save this species. He was innovative (and effective) in his approach and there's no accident that his science and conservation work go hand in hand – they are equally impactful.

To our staff in Moyon Bafing, Christophe will forever be revered as the guy who wasn't too shy to wear shorts to the field and brave enough to try the algae that the chimpanzees love, even though it made him sick for days afterwards. We can only hope to leave a reputation behind us that was as celebrated as Christophe's. We should all be so brave as to be so diligent in our fight for the chimpanzees we love and as fearless and creative in our approaches to see them thrive.

Anja Widdig

I came to the MPI in 2006, when Christophe invited me to start my Emmy Noether group at the Department of Primatology. During this period and also after I took over the professorship at the University of Leipzig, Christophe always supported me, provided helpful advice and encouraged me to keep going especially in difficult situations. However, I think the biggest lesson I learnt from Christophe was that just being fascinated by primate behaviour is not sufficient without getting active to protect them in their natural environment. He showed us that this is only possible when involving the local people. I think this is what we should train the current and future generations of students. Thank you, Christophe! You will be missed in our efforts to protect primate populations.

Roman Wittig

I will always remember Christophe's passion for chimpanzees. I met Christophe for the first time



during the International Primatological Society conference in Strasbourg, 1992. There he presented his research on communication and drumming and I was sitting in the first row on the floor in one of the seminar rooms. Suddenly, when he explained pant-hoots and drumming, he jumped on the desk in front of him, drummed on the tabletop and leaped with a climax scream and arms stretched out wide – reenacting the chimpanzee behavior - towards the

bewildered, but totally spellbound, audience. This is when I told myself, I want to study with him. It took me another four years before my dream became true and I traveled to Tai for my PhD.

Christophe, you have changed my life when you accepted me to join you in Tai. You have formed me as a scientist, with your credo that the chimpanzees will teach us anything, if we carefully observe them. Without you, I would have never met my wife Catherine in the Tai forest and my family would not exist. In 2012, you entrusted me with your precious Tai Chimpanzee Project asking me to take care of the chimpanzees. Christophe, you have inspired me with your dedication to science and protection of wild chimpanzees. Your legacy will live on and continue to inspire countless new students and researchers.

Doris Wu

It seems like a different lifetime joining MPI as a PhD student and feeling incredibly intimidated by such a force of a department. Christophe came to greet me in the banana hall—making a joke I can't remember and tugging my ear as he laughed. He later called me into his office before going to Tai to share advice on fieldwork, chimpanzees, and catching mosquitoes pulling some books from his shelf to read. And after coming back, sharing stories of climbing trees. I think he could feel my nervousness, making jokes or mischievous remarks to put me at ease. I am forever grateful for the time spent in the department he built, instilling curious minds with a devotion not just to chimpanzees, but to a larger view of protection and coexistence of people, land, and animals.

Klaus Zuberbühler

The two of us drove down to San Pedro, summoned by a new GTZ crowd in charge of Tai National Park. Poaching was rampant, and none of these people ever bothered to show up on site. We arrived at their headquarters, were put in a waiting room - air-conditioned, paint-smelling, report-copying secretaries, brand-new Toyotas outside.

Eventually, we were called into the office, and the man started to explain that our research camps were illegal within the National Park - to be dismantled by the end of the year. Shellshocked, we pleaded with him and explained that this meant the end of our research programmes. But the man was unyielding and uttered more threats and factual nonsense.

And then I saw tears in Christophe's eyes. We eventually walked away, no solution, and agreed that we should just throw their computers out the window.

Soon after, civil war broke out, all GTZ people left – and our research camps are still there.

Thank you Christophe, for your laughter, for your thoughts, for your force and for the time I could share with you. I will hold you dearly in my mind.