SEXUALITY AND SOCIALITY: OBSERVATIONS OF A MATING PAIR OF CAPTIVE BORNEAN ORANGUTANS (PONGO PYGMAEUS PYGMAEUS) AT UTAH’S HOGLÉ ZOO

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Many anthropologists would acknowledge that the great apes serve as life history analogs for humans, which is useful for testing hypotheses surrounding hominid evolution. Orangutans are of particular interest to anthropologists for several reasons. First, as a closely related great ape species, orangutans share many characteristics with humans including a life history pattern marked by long interbirth intervals, a gestation period approaching nine months and an extended period of offspring provisioning. Orangutans are also relatively long-lived, with adult life spans exceeding fifty years. Second, orangutan’s penchant for gregariousness is seemingly unsuited for a species characterized as “solitary” in the wild. My research will be to observe the social interactions of a mating pair of captive Bornean orangutans at Utah’s Hogle Zoo. The possible pregnant status of one of my research subjects presents a unique opportunity to collect data on a primiparous mother and her infant. Data collection investigating gregariousness in captivity will have implications for unraveling the principles behind primate social organization and may add credulity to the idea that social complexity was an important factor in our evolutionary past requiring higher intelligence among primates and especially great apes. Finally, the endangered status and the relative lack of data on orangutans in captivity underlines the pressing need for this and similar research.