

## ARBORETUM CLIPPINGS CHEER DEPRESSED ZOO GORILLAS

**A**PES ARE CONSIDERED to be among the most intelligent of animals, perhaps second to only man and dolphins. In the wilds there are plenty of real-life situations occurring that tend to keep the average gorilla busy, certainly not bored. But pity the captive gorilla.

According to Laine Courtney, an official ape observer at the Los Angeles County Zoo, gorillas are easily bored and can drift into a state of listless depression. Imagine, they almost never leave their constant living quarters, never interacting normally with other animals.

Zoo officials are currently experimenting to see if a more varied diet would lift the apes' spirits and various plants have been tried in an attempt to determine the most appealing delicacies. Mrs. Courtney said that impressive results have been recorded since the program began six months ago. Data are constantly being compiled not only in areas such as the types of food the apes prefer but their favorite colors as well. This is where the Arboretum plays a major role.

It was Mrs. Courtney who initially approached Director Francis Ching with a proposal to collect plant cuttings to see if the apes liked the different new tastes. Mr. Ching was delighted that the Arboretum was asked to participate and promised full cooperation.

One reason that the Arboretum was selected over other noted botanic gardens is mostly because the zoo cannot use any plants or trees that have been treated with systemic chemicals. The Arboretum doesn't use toxic chemicals on the vegetation in question.

So each Wednesday morning a zoo representative stops by the Arboretum and picks up from one to four large plastic bags full of clippings collected by Arboretum gardener

Kenji Tokushige.

Lately the gorillas have sampled passion vine, roses, banana and grape leaves (but not the fruit) and their favorite, paperleaf mulberry, said Mrs. Courtney.

"They really go for the diversity, all the different tastes. Our youngest gorilla is seven years old and he prefers roses. Not just the flower, but the stem, the thorns, the whole thing," she added.

Another of the more interesting results of this study was in the field of color preference and differentiation. "When we first started experimenting we were kidding around to see if they preferred leaves and flowers of any particular color. Now that we've observed them for awhile we definitely think that they do indeed prefer certain colors to others,

especially yellow and certain whites," she explained.

An experiment with regard to the psychological effect of different colors on the apes is still just an unproven hypothesis. The theory, if proven, would state that apes are affected by certain colors in much the same way as humans. It is now generally accepted that red aggravates humans while blues tend to induce a calm, peaceful state of mind in most people.

Thanks in part to the Arboretum, these and many other experiments will provide previously unknown answers to questions about apes and other primates. As an understandably pleased Laine Courtney puts it, "So far, it's a very surprising experiment that's working out very, very well."



LuAnn Munns

*Apes at the Los Angeles zoo will soon be munching on the twigs that Kenji Tokushige is gathering from a strawberry tree (Arbutus unedo).*





1985. "Arboretum clippings cheer depressed zoo gorillas." *Garden* 9(3), 4.

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