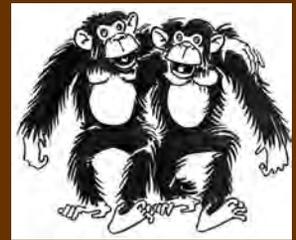




FREDDY

Adoption



In my first few months of my stay in the Tai Chimpanzee Project, a breath-taking story unraveled before me. It was here, deep in the forest of Tai National Park, that I met a very young chimpanzee who had been orphaned just days before. His mother's untimely death had left him abandoned at only two and a half years old. As chimpanzees are not weaned until about five years of age, his mother's absence left this orphan with very little chance of survival. It was not the first time I was seeing a young chimpanzee orphan and I knew that, without the milk of their mother, they normally die of starvation within a few weeks. However, a few days later, we witnessed a miraculous event. Freddy was seen carrying the orphan on his back. This was unusual for such a high ranking male, as Freddy was not related to this infant and males rarely care for infants. Over the next seven months, Freddy was always seen with his adopted son. Freddy carried him for long distances, protected him from predators, shared his nest at night, and even shared his food by cracking nuts, opening seedpods and dividing meat. One day in February 2010, I saw how Freddy shared 75% of the hundreds of tasty nuts he cracked open during the 6 hours I was with them in the forest. Freddy was as generous with this little one than the most generous mothers I have seen. There is no doubt that the orphan would have died without Freddy's care and protection. This was a remarkable and highly invested adoption. From the start we all knew that this was an extraordinary relationship, and we were so thankful that it was being recorded for the world to see.



Although as scientists, we may question why Freddy chose to adopt this unrelated orphan, perhaps as humans we should reflect on our own society. We have the ability to break down barriers and social conventions in order to help each other and to improve our community.

Studying Freddy, a chimpanzee, can teach us how to be better humans.