

E-mail from Sonya Pashchevskaya

One wet morning, I find Bandi (adult male of East community) soon after they had left the nests, and start my running marathon. Yet, I am happy to find him comfortable with my presence as he is my focal individual for today. As the morning progresses, we head East and reach a thigh-deep stream. Marta (another assistant), I and the whole group stop on the bank and stare at Bandi who crosses by the means of lianas to enjoy some petioles. Bracing myself up,



I dive into the mud for the fear of losing Bandi should he move on and as soon as I am out of the water, all the bonobos turn around and leave, Bandi following his pals arboreally, and me, well, swimming back through the mud, anticipating a new batch of hookworms. But little should I have worried about the stream. Once Lambert (local assistant) joins me for the afternoon shift, we head east again. Passing through more water, more mud, more hook worms, we end up in a patch of wild ginger growing, and this was where Lambert confessed to having forgotten his headlamp. The way back thus promises to be fun. After the ginger patch bonobos checked out Annonidium trees, ran quite a bit, and when I was completely exhausted, one hour before nesting, Bandi, my focal individual, left the group for some extra tours. At last, they nest and festive thunder leading to emboldening rain, Lambert and I head back. Following the light of the head lamp we cross tree falls and muddy ravines before reaching our home forest. Now, camp, food, and my tent are only seven kilometer away.

Still in camp, curing the two Annapurnas of my ulcers but surely ready to go out, maybe even tomorrow, thanks to the double dosage of Penicillin and my Russian liver to cope with it. Throughout these days I have done a great amount of microscopy and thanks to Gena the Generator living up to my standards of benign workaholism. Thus, while my husband somewhere in Chicago is forgetting how I look like, I am developing a mild crush on Gena's uniform chatter heard through accords of classical music I am healing my stressed brain with. This, by the way, has led to some unwanted associations: Bach and Debussy will never be the same.

On days I stay in camp, I do miss bonobos very much, even the East community which in the recent weeks has made it their daily goal to inflict pain on my guts. It is mostly my nests-to-nests when they cross the endless swamps. I am happy to mention that I am finding east bonobos to be at ease with me. I remember how important it is not to over-habituate them as has been the case with west. First couple of months I did feel that they were still getting used to me, and I was trying to find the balance between giving them space and not sacrificing data collection. Finally, I have managed to earn their trust, and even Litono about whom others had warned me, didn't mind me following him on his lonesome journeys. This means a lot to me, and it also allows me to go for a full day focal with him or with Bandi, another young and very active male. I still remember the days when the males would be glancing at me with a sort of a vigilant air.