

## Professor Toshisada Nishida, a pioneer and a leading scientist in Primatology

© Japan Monkey Centre and Springer 2011

### An inspiration for academic research and conservation

#### Colin A. Chapman

The world is mourning the passing of Professor Toshisada Nishida, who died at the age of 70, on June 7, 2011, in Kyoto, Japan. People who knew Professor Nishida will remember him in a variety of positive ways. Many will remember him for his achievements that he brought to the world through his long-term research on chimpanzees, which he started in the Mahale Mountains of Tanzania in 1965 when he was only 24 years old (Nishida 1968). It was partially this research program that led him to receive a great number of honours and to hold positions of extraordinary significance. For example, he was the director of the Japan Monkey Center; was the president of the International Primatological Society; was appointed to the position of Senior Program Officer of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science; became a special “Great Ape Envoy” for the Great Ape Survival Project (GRASP); and was Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Primates*. His achievements in these positions brought him respect and great recognition: he received the Jane Goodall “Global Leadership Award” in 1990, and in 2008 he received both the L.S.B. Leakey Foundation Prize and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Primatological Society.

I first got to know Professor Nishida on a more personal level when I became a member of Advisory Board for the journal *Primates* in 2001 and subsequently as an Associate

Editor for the journal. Through interactions primarily at meetings I began to understand the important role he was playing in conservation and to appreciate what a difference academics could make to conservation efforts. For example, Professor Nishida was instrumental in establishing the Mahale Mountains National Park, in Tanzania. In 1967, only 2 years after beginning his research through Kyoto University and at the age of 26, Professor Nishida and his colleagues petitioned the Wildlife Division of Tanzania to establish a game reserve in the Mahale Mountains. As with the vast majority of conservation efforts, immediate success did not come, but a second petition in 1973 led the Tanzanian government to request Japan to send experts from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, which ultimately helped in the development of the Mahale Mountains Wildlife Research Center. Professors Itani and Nishida raised 18 million Japanese yen to promote the protection of the area and launched letter-writing campaigns to seek help from the Japanese government. Such activity ultimately contributed to the gazetting of the Mahale Mountains National Park. His activities did not stop with this success. In 1994, he collaborated with Professor Hosea Kayumbo to establish the Mahale Wildlife Conservation Society. This society’s goals were not only to conserve the wildlife of Mahale, but to conduct community-based conservation, which ultimately led to the establishment of a primary school and subsequently a dispensary. This strategy of establishing a research site in conjunction with community-based initiatives has since been shown to represent a generally effective strategy for conserving tropical rain forest parks (Struhsaker et al. 2005).

In 2008, Professors Nishida and Nakamura formally expressed their views on the value of long-term research

---

An earlier series of tributes was published on *Primates*, Volume 52, Number 3, 301–307, doi:10.1007/s10329-011-0262-6.

and stated that “long-term research is important from the viewpoints of conservation, science and culture, and helps the local economy”... “long-term research creates new values for wildlife”... and “If there had been no long-term research at Mahale there would have been no Mahale Mountains National Park” (Nishida and Nakamura 2008). From my own experiences in Kibale National Park, Uganda, I am confident these statements are true and broadly applicable.

His remarkable achievements in the Mahale Mountains facilitated his scaling up his conservation efforts to the global level, and in 2001 he was appointed as one of the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) Special Envoys for Great Apes. He later served as a patron of the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) and, along with people like Professor Richard Wrangham, from Harvard University, worked towards establishing the great apes as the world’s first “World Heritage Species”.

My conversations with Professor Nishida and subsequently exploring the true depths of his conservation efforts clearly illustrated to me that academics can make significant conservation impacts and help protect the animals we are so devoted to studying. These impacts can take very substantial forms such as the creation of national parks, like Mahale, to education of in-country scientists, and the mentoring and encouragement of primatologists at one’s home institution. This work can have a tremendous positive impact on the lives of people living in close proximity to these parks as well, often taking the form of education, medical aid, financial support, and protection of ecosystem services. These positive impacts of academics do not always come easily and often require the dedication and perseverance so evident in an individual like Professor Nishida. I have used Professor Nishida’s inspiration as a means to guide my own efforts, and I think that there are many lessons that primatologists just starting their careers can learn by studying the career of this inspiring individual.

## References

- Nishida T (1968) The social group of wild chimpanzees in the Mahali Mountains. *Primates* 9:167–224
- Nishida T, Nakamura M (2008) Long-term research and conservation in the Mahale Mountains, Tanzania. In: Wrangham R, Ross E (eds) *Science and conservation in African forests: the benefits of long-term research*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 173–183
- Struhsaker TT, Struhsaker PJ, Siex KS (2005) Conserving Africa’s rain forest: problems in protected areas and possible solutions. *Biol Conserv* 123:45–54

## On a Cessna plane flying over the rain forest of the Congo Basin, where Professor Nishida carried out a first survey on wild bonobos

August 15, 2011

**Takeshi Furuichi**

I felt so sad when I realized that Professor Nishida had a limited time to live. He was my supervisor during my post-doc period, and he was the one who supported my first several trips to Wamba for the field study of bonobos. Beyond those personal memories, he had been a really active researcher and a leader of Japanese primatology until shortly before death, and I could not imagine how we could do all the important work for promotion of primatology without him.

When I was preparing grant proposals during my post-doc period, I once asked his opinion about the title of a proposal. The title of his suggestion was an interesting one, but to me it sounded a bit too popular and not scientific. When I hesitated to accept his suggestion, he immediately told me to throw it away if I did not like it. Of course I did accept it, and it was the first success of my grant application. Although he did not give me much advice on each of my studies on bonobos, I learned from him much about what real scientific work should be, and how we should express the meaning of the work to the general public.

Professor Nishida was very straight about saying what he thought. He always expressed his ideas without hesitation when he thought something should be done or not be done. Therefore his words were sometimes very severe to me. However, he encouraged and supported me on all possible occasions throughout my academic career. He was the one who gave me a chance at my first teaching position, and he always encouraged me to challenge higher levels of the work.

During the funeral services for Professor Nishida, I spoke briefly with Ms. Haruko Nishida, his wife, about our experiences during his last days. During this conversation, she abruptly asked me if I had known that he had always brooded on what he had said to somebody and how those people had felt about his words. No, I did not know that, but now I know why I was always feeling that I was continuously supported by him.