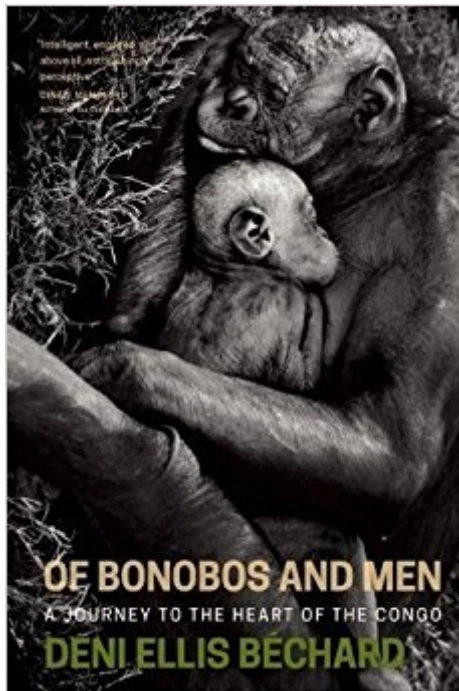


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# Of Bonobos And Men: A Journey To The Heart Of The Congo



## Synopsis

Bonobos have captured the public imagination in recent years, due not least to their famously active sex lives. Less well known is the fact that these great apes don't kill their own kind, and that they share nearly 99% of our DNA. Their approach to building peaceful coalitions and sharing resources has much to teach us, particularly at a time when our violent ways have pushed them to the brink of extinction. Animated by a desire to understand bonobos and learn how to save them, acclaimed author Deni Ellis Béchard traveled into the Congo. *Of Bonobos and Men* is the account of this journey. Along the way, we see how partnerships between Congolese and Westerners, with few resources but a common purpose and respect for indigenous knowledge, have resulted in the protection of vast swaths of the rainforest. And we discover how small solutions found through openness, humility, and the principle that 'poverty does not equal ignorance' are often most effective in tackling our biggest challenges. Combining elements of travelogue, journalism, and natural history, this incomparably rich book takes the reader not only deep into the Congo, but also into our past and future, revealing new ways to save the environment and ourselves.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Milkweed Editions (September 29, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1571313451

ISBN-13: 978-1571313454

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.9 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,917,356 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Travel > Africa >

Democratic Republic of Congo #262 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals

> Apes & Monkeys #267 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology >

Primatology

## Customer Reviews

In the great-ape category of endangered species, gorillas and chimpanzees have so far received the bulk of media attention, mostly due to celebrity zoologists such as Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall championing their cause. Hence, until recently, one unusual "and endangered" primate,

the bonobo of the Congo rain forest, had been comparatively overlooked by photojournalists and TV nature-show producers, perhaps because the animals' penchant for promiscuous sex would make filming a tad risky. Fortunately, a nongovernmental organization called the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI) has been quietly but effectively protecting bonobos' habitat and convincing their human neighbors to stop hunting them. For this absorbing report on the BCI's innovative methods, renowned journalist Richard M. Leakey mingled with Congo villagers and BCI fieldworkers, observing how the conservationists forged alliances with villagers to build new schools and create jobs. In a country torn by unremitting military strife and rapacious mining, BCI's work has also helped slow rain-forest destruction. Richard's masterful, adventure-driven reporting delivers an inspiring account of an all-too-rare ecological success story. --Carl Hays --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

• Intelligent, engaged, astonishingly perceptive. • Dinaw Mengestu • A seed of hope in our time's garden of despair. • Dale Peterson • This adventure reveals not a heart of darkness but a rich world of light, shade, and imperiled life, a connection between the human and the great circle of being. • James Engell

While this book focuses more on humans than bonobos, it presents a deep understanding of the politics of the Congo region that is helpful in understanding how to partner effectively with Africans to respond to the urgent need for conservation - of species and habitats.

Wonderful book not only about the Bonobos but about their fate and those who are trying to save them.

Empty Hands, Open Arms provides a compelling insight into the history and evolution of bonobo conservation in the Congo. There are lessons within for all of us who are trying to save our planet.

Very interesting study.

Empty Hands, Open Arms is a highly engaging read. Bechard smoothly moves from page-turning anecdotes to well researched narrative in a way that keeps the reader intrigued and immersed in the subject. This is the kind of book that anyone will find appealing because it covers a surprisingly wide-range of issues but never strays too far from intimate, human stories. From

colonial history to human and ape evolution, this is one of those books that will change how one sees the world and our relationship with our closest primate cousins. It was fascinating to learn how different bonobo societies are from chimps and other great apes. Learning that bonobos have a matriarchal social structure and live together in relative harmony is pretty intriguing and somewhat provocative. Also, it was fascinating to learn more about the Congo rainforest "the earth's second lung" and its crucial importance to global warming issues. This book helped me better understand international conservation issues. I am familiar with the intricacies of my local environmental issues but, like many, know of only a few massive, international conservation organizations (NGOs). *Empty Hands, Opens Arms* will help anyone who cares about conservation to get familiar with the important and unique role small NGOs play in the international arena. For example, I was surprised to learn how and why some indigenous people may see large conservation groups as imperialists and more destructive to their way of life than industrial corporations. This was eye opening to say the least. One more thing I loved about this book is the way Bechard brought to the fore the compelling human stories of those working to save bonobos and those living in closest proximity to them. In short, I found this book to be worthy of the accolades it has earned.

I have been watching the evolving and the tragic story of the bonobos for years. This is not only the best book on the subject, but also a fascinating journey through the "small history" of one project into the "Big History" of humanity as a whole. The blend of personal biographies, conservation politics, local lore, and evolutionary recaps is most enlightening. This story is hugely important for us symbolically. I have long held a view that were it not for the bonobo genes in us which get expressed occasionally when times or environments are "good" for the human ape, we would have long ago exterminated ourselves. The whole bonobo saga right now does not imbue me with any sense of hope (I have just come back from China and I can tell you, the majority of mankind does not give a hoot (I hope Jane Goodall will forgive) about endangered tigers or hippos or bonobos. But books like *Empty Hands* allow us to hold a mirror to ourselves, just like Rachael Carson's *The Silent Spring* did for me, inspiring years of conservation broadcasts. Not much has changed on the ground since the 60's, except maybe for the worse, what with the population growth and the general consumer frenzy that is also built into the genes of the short-sighted, ecocidal, pleasure seeking, twittering human primate. However, I was absolutely awed by the courage, dedication, humility and selflessness of the BCI staff and their local collaborators, paid and unpaid. I worked in Lebanon and the Caucasus for the NGOs but Congo seemed really daunting to me. I also

appreciate the dedication, the courage and the objectivity of Deni BÃ©chard, the author of this book. I hope this book will be taken seriously by the various conservation groups and the NGOs around the world, as it espouses the only effective "participatory" model of conservation, not the glory, kudos, and grant-seeking path pursued by many large groups and foundations. Unfortunately, the only radical "solution" to the problem of ecocide practised by humanity on ever-larger scale I see (I have written a "science truth" novel Project Nirvana along these lines), is reducing human population by at least 50% (that will give a breathing space of maybe 25-50 years) and then working towards creating a bonobo/photosynthetic hybrid. Of course, I present this "solution" with a bit of wry smile :), as a literary satire. Get to work, folks! Time HAS run out...

This book appears to be the same as "Of Bonobos and Men" by the same author. Either way, a great read and wonderful documentation of why and how development and conservation must be done with inclusion of the affected people in order to have long term success. Having travelled and worked in the DRC, I can say this was portrayed realistically and with understanding of the complex issues of the area. I am newly inspired to keep working on my own projects there as well as share them with organizations like BCI, the subject of this book.

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