



Researchers in the Republic of Congo have found that chimpanzees will use clubs and even a “tool kit” of sorts to bash open beehives for the honey inside. | LINCOLN PARK ZOO

## Chimps use special tools to raid hives for honey

LINCOLN PARK ZOO RESEARCH | Animals go wild for the sweet stuff

BY STEFANO ESPOSITO

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Humans like honey.  
Chimpanzees like honey.  
Humans flip open the cap and squeeze.

But chimps, living in a remote and steamy African forest, have been observed for the first time using specially designed “tool kits” to extract honey from beehives, often glued to branches more than 50 yards above the forest floor.

The chimps are “unbelievably strong,” said researcher David Morgan, speaking by satellite phone last week from his tent camp inside the Republic of Congo’s Goulougo Triangle. “They hang upside down with a large pounding club” to get at the honey. “We saw one female who pounded over 1,000 times in the course of a

single morning.”

Scientists have long known that chimps use tools — typically a slender stick — to try to raid beehives, but for the first time, researchers have observed chimps using a range of tools to get at the sweet stuff. The findings were recently published in a study funded in part by Lincoln Park Zoo.

Morgan and his team have been observing Congo chimps — with the help of hidden video cameras — for the last 10 years, he said. The region is also home to gorillas and elephants, but there’s no evidence humans ever lived there, Morgan said.

Chimps go to amazing lengths — often risking their lives — just to get a taste of honey, Morgan said. During a single outing, a chimp may use up to five different tools, including a club to bash open

a hive or a more delicate tool to dip into the hive. Scientists observing chimps elsewhere in Africa haven’t reported seeing such complex tool kit use, Morgan said.

What isn’t clear is why chimps go crazy for honey. Nutrition doesn’t seem to have much to do with it, Morgan said.

“We know that a sweet tooth is very possible,” Morgan said. “We know that when they get to the honey, they are very excited. They will vocalize and push other individuals out of the way.”

Although he has been observing the Congo chimps for a decade, he has never seen one of them use the clubs to attack possible enemies.

“They have [tossed] broken branches down on top of us when we first encountered them,” he said.

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