



## In Quest of the Sacred Baboon

By Hans Kummer

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In a tale that begins at a zoo in Zurich and takes us across the deserts of Ethiopia to the Asir Mountains in Saudi Arabia, Hans Kummer recreates the adventure and intellectual thrill of the early days of field research on primates. Just as Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey introduced readers to the fascinating lives of chimpanzees and gorillas, Kummer brings us face to face with the Hamadryas baboon.

With their furry white mantles and gleaming red hindquarters, the Hamadryas appear frequently in the art of the ancient Egyptians--who may have interpreted the baboons' early morning grooming rituals as sun-worshiping rites. Back then, Hamadryas were thought to be incarnates of Thoth, the god of wisdom; today they are considered to have one of the most highly structured social systems among primates, very close, in some respects, to that of humans. In the 1960s, Kummer, after conflicts with nomadic warriors, managed to track down these elusive baboons near the Danakil Desert, and then followed them from dawn to dusk on their treks from one feeding place to another. His scientific account of this period reads like a travel memoir as he describes his encounters with the Hamadryas and the people with whom they share the desert.

Winding his way through cliffs and stubble, Kummer records the baboons' social life, from the development of pair relationships to the way an entire group decides where to march each day. Much like the human nomads who cope with the harsh demands of the desert environment, the Hamadryas maintain a society that is strict and patriarchal in its details but multilayered and flexible in its largest units. We learn, for example, of the Hamadryas' respect for possession that protects family structure and of the cohesion among family leaders that lessens the threat of battle. At the same time, clear-cut personalities emerge from Kummer's account, drawing us into the life stories and power struggles of individual baboons. Whereas this rich detail holds many implications for natural scientists, the colorful way it comes to life makes for a compelling book bound to entertain and educate all readers.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

Ethologist Kummer revisits his 30-plus years of hamadryas baboon field research previously covered in his books *Social Organization of Hamadryas Baboons: A Field Study* (University of Chicago Pr., 1968) and *Primate Societies* (Aldine, 1971). Writing in a conversational style, he intertwines observations and theories of baboon behavior and social structure with biographical sketches of life in Ethiopia. His format, previously used by orangutan researcher Birute Galdikas in her *Reflections of Eden* (LJ 12/94), makes for a fascinating and accessible delivery of hard science to lay readers. Though many primate studies have been conducted since Kummer began in 1961, he holds that "the hamadryas baboon stands out among the other species with respect to three characteristics: the rigid, hierarchical social structure, the perfection with which the males lead their harums, and the [baboon's] decision process." For academic and larger public library science collections. --Raymond Hamel, Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Ctr. Lib., Madison. -- decision process." For academic and larger public library science collections. --Raymond Hamel, Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Ctr. Lib., Madison

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#### From Booklist

Biologist Kummer's chronicle of his experiences studying the hamadryas baboon in the wilds of Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia is a welcome addition to the literature of primate specialists, which includes Birute Galdikas' wonderful *Reflections of Eden: My Years with the Orangutans of Borneo*. Although Kummer isn't quite as open and entertaining a storyteller as Galdikas, his history of the "dog-head" baboon, a sacred figure in ancient Egypt, is as rich in anecdote as it is in observation. Kummer first encountered the hamadryas baboon in the Zurich zoo during the 1950s while he was still a graduate student. It was fascination at first sight, and Kummer eventually traveled to Africa to conduct pioneering field studies of this unique creature. The hamadryas baboon occupies a precarious niche in the sparse ecosystem of the desert and has evolved a complex and aggressive patriarchal society involving elaborate social tactics and long-term sexual relationships. Kummer brings the hamadryas baboon so vividly to life it's easy to see why the Egyptians believed that this extremely intelligent fellow primate was the incarnation of Thoth, the god of science and writing. *Donna Seaman*

#### Review

"This is a book for everyone. The author describes vividly the burning sands and rugged cliffs of Ethiopia, and the fierce wild people who make their home in the unrelenting desert. There is danger and excitement. And there are the hardy and utterly fascinating baboons, with their red faces and silver mantles, the sacred Hamadryas of ancient Egypt. Kummer's scientific talent for observation, his love for his subjects and his magnificent prose make this a powerful and unforgettable book. For the sake of the Hamadryas baboons, please buy it!" --*Jane Goodall*

"From the arresting first page of the preface, which takes the reader straight into the bush, to the moving final paragraph that will resonate with long-term field workers, it is compelling. . . . The thoughtful, personal disclosures are uncommonly telling and deserve wide attention." --*W. C. McGrew, Nature*

"A book that encompasses the full body of a remarkable research project. [This] is an extremely satisfying book to read and will appeal to all. It is scientifically valuable, emotionally powerful, and spiritually rejuvenating."--**Conrad Brain, *New Scientist***

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#### **Bernice Fugate:**

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#### **Mary Davis:**

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition info. Even you love In Quest of the Sacred Baboon, you can enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

#### **Nathan Weaver:**

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#### **Shari Villa:**

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