



Concept Note

First meeting of the IRL ChiMP4IC Online Symposium Annual Series

2026 theme: Primate cultures, human evolution and conservation: building a collaborative research agenda for West Africa

Proposed date: 21 October 2026, 15:00-18:00 Paris time (3 hours, online)

Organized by: International Research Laboratory (IRL 2041) **ChiMP4IC** (CNRS–CSRS)

With simultaneous English-French translation

1. Background

West Africa harbours an exceptional diversity of non-human primates, including several of the world's most threatened primate species. Beyond their remarkable genetic diversity, these populations display rich behavioural variation, including socially transmitted traditions, ecological adaptations and locally evolved behavioural repertoires that are increasingly recognized as expressions of **non-human animal cultures**.

Humans are themselves primates. Comparing the behavioural diversity of non-human primates with that of humans provides a unique opportunity to better understand the evolutionary origins of human culture, technology, social organization and our capacity to adapt to changing environments. Equally important, non-human primates have profoundly influenced human societies throughout history through mythology, beliefs, traditional ecological knowledge, art, language and conservation values. Exploring these reciprocal relationships between humans and other primates is therefore essential to understanding both our evolutionary heritage and the cultural significance of biodiversity.

Unfortunately, many unique behavioural traditions of non-human primates are disappearing before they have even been documented. Habitat loss, hunting, climate change, disease emergence and increasing human pressures threaten not only populations and species, but also the cultural knowledge and behavioural adaptations that have accumulated over generations.

The International Research Laboratory (IRL 2041) ChiMP4IC was established to investigate the origins, diversity and evolution of behavioural variation in both non-human primates and humans. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining behavioural ecology, evolutionary anthropology, conservation biology and the social sciences, the IRL seeks to understand how ecological and anthropogenic factors shape behavioural diversity, how interactions between humans and other primates have influenced both human and non-human cultures, and how this knowledge can contribute to more effective conservation strategies.

This inaugural online symposium will bring together leading African and international researchers to present recent advances on primate behavioural diversity, cultural evolution and human-primate interactions. It will also examine how these scientific insights can inform the conservation of non-human primates and support the development of collaborative research across West Africa through the IRL ChiMP4IC network.

2. Objectives

2.1. Objectives of the IRL ChiMP4IC Online Symposium Series

The **IRL ChiMP4IC Online Symposium Series** is conceived as an annual scientific forum dedicated to advancing interdisciplinary research at the interface of **primate behaviour, human evolution and conservation**. Over time, the series aims to:

- showcase cutting-edge research on behavioural diversity, culture and adaptation in non-human primates;
- promote comparative research on humans and non-human primates to improve our understanding of the evolutionary origins of human behaviour and culture;
- explore the reciprocal relationships between non-human primates and human societies, including their influence on traditional knowledge, beliefs, cultural practices and conservation values;
- promote the integration of behavioural and cultural diversity into conservation science, policy and management;
- strengthen scientific collaboration among African and international researchers working in behavioural ecology, evolutionary anthropology, conservation biology and the social sciences;
- support the development of a new generation of African primatologists through networking, mentoring and opportunities for postgraduate students and early-career researchers;
- stimulate interdisciplinary and international research collaborations within and beyond the IRL ChiMP4IC partnership; and
- contribute to positioning West Africa as a leading region for innovative research on primate cultures, human evolution and biodiversity conservation.

2.2. Objectives of the 2026 Inaugural Symposium

As the first event of the series, the 2026 symposium will lay the foundations for this long-term vision by pursuing the following specific objectives:

- introduce the scientific vision, research priorities and collaborative opportunities of the IRL ChiMP4IC;
- review the current state of knowledge on primate cultures, human-primate interactions and conservation across West Africa;
- identify priority research questions and opportunities for collaborative projects aligned with the three research axes of the IRL;
- strengthen connections among researchers, institutions and long-term field sites working on chimpanzees, monkeys and human-primate interactions in the region;
- initiate a network of postgraduate students and early-career scientists interested in interdisciplinary primate research;
- promote the sharing of research methodologies, datasets and behavioural monitoring protocols; and
- establish a roadmap for the development of the **West African Network for Primate Behaviour, Culture and Conservation**, including priorities for future symposia, collaborative publications and joint funding initiatives.

3. Target Audience

The symposium is expected to attract approximately **300 participants**, including:

- primatologists;
- behavioural ecologists;
- conservation biologists;
- graduate students and postdoctoral researchers;
- wildlife managers;
- protected area authorities;
- NGOs;
- IUCN Specialist Groups;
- conservation donors and development partners.

4. Symposium programme

The symposium will explore how research on non-human primate behaviour and culture can advance our understanding of human evolution, improve conservation strategies, and foster regional scientific collaboration. Reflecting the scientific vision of the IRL ChiMP4IC, the programme is organized around three complementary themes corresponding to the Laboratory's major research axes.

Opening Session (20 minutes)

Welcome and institutional remarks

Welcome address: Representative of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) (5 min)

Welcome address: Representative of the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques en Côte d'Ivoire (CSRS) (5 min)

Introducing the IRL ChiMP4IC: Prof. Inza Koné (5 min)

Presentation of the vision, scientific objectives, research axes and partnership opportunities of the International Research Laboratory ChiMP4IC.

Setting the scene: Dr Roman Wittig (5 min)

Presentation of the objectives of the symposium and why understanding primate behavioural diversity, culture and human-primate interactions matters for science and conservation.

Session 1 (50 minutes): Primate behaviour and the evolutionary roots of human culture

Guiding question: What can non-human primates teach us about the origins of human cultures?

Setting the scene (10 min): Dr Tatyana Humle (IUCN-ARRC, Re:wild)

Topics include:

- behavioural diversity across primates
- social learning
- innovation

- traditions
- cumulative culture
- implications for understanding human evolution

Panel presentations: Four presentations (5 min each)

Proposed topics

- **Prof. Kathelijne Koops (University of Zurich, Switzerland)** : From tool use to culture: what Western chimpanzees reveal about the evolutionary origins of human technology
- **Prof. Julia Fischer (University of Göttingen, Germany)**: From social intelligence to social norms: what baboons reveal about the evolution of human culture
- **Dr Catherine Crockford (Taï Chimpanzee Project / CNRS / IRL, France)**: The social mind: communication, cooperation and the foundations of culture
- **Dr Karim Ouattara (Taï Monkey Project / CSRS/ Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire)**: Beyond apes: monkey communication and the evolutionary building blocks of human language and culture

Panel discussion (20 min):

Possible discussion questions

- Which behavioural traits are most informative for understanding human evolution?
- How do ecological and social factors shape behavioural diversity?
- Which knowledge gaps remain in West Africa?
- How can comparative research across species advance evolutionary anthropology?

Session 2 (50 minutes): Human-Primate interactions: cultural connections and anthropogenic change

Guiding question: How have humans and non-human primates shaped one another across evolutionary and cultural timescales?

Setting the scene (10 min): Dr Vincent Leblan (IRD, France)

Possible topics

- primates in traditional ecological knowledge
- primates in myths, beliefs and local cultures
- cultural ecosystem services
- tourism
- provisioning
- behavioural adaptation to humans
- coexistence

Panel presentations: Four presentations (5 min each)

Proposed talks

- **Prof. Kimberley Hockings (University of Exeter, UK):** Living together in changing landscapes: behavioural flexibility and human–chimpanzee coexistence
- **Dr Didié Armand Zadou (Université Jean Lorougnon Guédé, Côte d'Ivoire):** Beyond conflict: local knowledge, livelihoods and cultural relationships with chimpanzees in Sierra Leone
- **Mr Pacifique Kizila (Wild Chimpanzee Foundation, Guinea):** Chimpanzees, people and cultural values in West africa: an African conservation perspective
- **Prof. Edward Debrah Wiafe (University of Environment and Sustainable Development, Ghana):** When monkeys and people share landscapes: cultural values, crop-raiding and pathways to coexistence

Panel discussion (20 min)

Possible discussion questions

- How do human cultures influence primate behaviour?
- How have primates shaped human cultures?
- Can traditional knowledge improve conservation?
- How should conservation integrate cultural values?

Session 3 (50 minutes): From behavioural diversity to conservation action

Guiding question: How can behavioural research improve primate conservation?

Setting the scene (10 min): Prof. Crickette Sanz (Washington University St Louis, USA) (To be confirmed)

Proposed topics

- conserving behavioural diversity
- conservation of animal cultures
- implications for protected area management
- priorities for West Africa

Panel presentations: Four presentations (5 min each)

Possible topics

- **Prof. Papa Ibnou N'diaye (Université Cheick Anta Diop, Senegal):** How can behaviour tell us that conservation problems are emerging?
- **Prof. Anderson Eloi Bitty (Taï Monkey Project / CSRS / Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire) :** From behavioural, ecological and socio-economic data to conservation actions: lessons from Côte d'Ivoire
- **Dr Rachel Ashegbofe Ikemeh (SW/Niger Delta Forest Project, Nigeria) :** From priority populations to regional action: building collaborative conservation across West Africa

- **Dr Lydia V. Luncz (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Germany):** What exactly should we conserve? From behavioural variation to cultural conservation units.

Panel discussion (20 min)

Proposed Topics

- Should behavioural diversity become a conservation target?
- How should behavioural data inform protected area management?
- What research is most urgently needed?
- What opportunities exist for collaborative conservation across West Africa?

Closing Session (10 minutes): Launching the IRL ChiMP4IC collaborative network

Moderators: Inza Koné and Roman Wittig

The symposium will conclude with the presentation of the IRL's vision for a collaborative West African research network dedicated to primate behaviour, culture and conservation. Participants will be invited to contribute to future collaborative initiatives, including:

- harmonized behavioural monitoring protocols;
- shared databases and data standards;
- graduate student exchanges and joint supervision;
- collaborative publications;
- joint funding proposals;
- annual thematic symposia under the IRL ChiMP4IC;
- development of a regional research agenda linking behavioural ecology, evolutionary anthropology and conservation biology.

6. Expected Outcomes

The symposium is expected to generate both immediate scientific outputs and longer-term collaborative initiatives. Specifically, it will:

- strengthen the scientific identity and international visibility of the **IRL ChiMP4IC** as a leading platform for interdisciplinary research on primate behaviour, culture and conservation;
- establish a collaborative network of researchers working on chimpanzees, monkeys, human-primate interactions and conservation across West Africa;
- provide an overview of ongoing research, major study sites and existing datasets relevant to the IRL's research themes;
- identify priority scientific questions and opportunities for collaborative research across the three research axes of the IRL;
- promote the harmonization of research methodologies and behavioural monitoring protocols across study sites;
- stimulate the development of joint research proposals, student exchanges and interdisciplinary collaborations among African and international institutions;

- lay the foundations for a shared directory of researchers, long-term field sites and research infrastructures across West Africa;
- encourage collaborative scientific publications, including review papers, special journal issues and policy-oriented knowledge products; and
- produce recommendations on how behavioural and cultural diversity can be better integrated into conservation planning and evidence-based policy making for West African primates.

7. Why this symposium matters

The International Research Laboratory **ChiMP4IC** was created to advance interdisciplinary research at the interface of **behavioural ecology, evolutionary anthropology, conservation biology and the social sciences**. Its ambition is not only to improve our understanding of the diversity of non-human primate behaviour, but also to explore how interactions between humans and other primates have shaped both human cultures and non-human primate societies, and how this knowledge can contribute to more effective conservation strategies.

Although numerous scientific meetings address primate behaviour, human evolution or biodiversity conservation independently, few provide an integrated platform that explicitly connects these disciplines. This symposium therefore represents a unique opportunity to bridge fundamental and applied research while fostering dialogue among scientists working across different taxa, disciplines and countries.

By bringing together researchers studying chimpanzees, monkeys, human-primate interactions and conservation throughout West Africa, the symposium will help establish a regional scientific community around one of the IRL ChiMP4IC's central questions: **how behavioural and cultural diversity emerges, evolves and responds to environmental and anthropogenic change, and how this knowledge can be translated into more effective conservation policies and practices.**

Beyond the scientific discussions, the symposium will serve as a launching point for a long-term collaborative network that promotes data sharing, methodological harmonization, capacity building and joint research initiatives. In doing so, it will contribute to positioning West Africa as a leading region for innovative research on primate cultures, human evolution and biodiversity conservation.