

Dr. Michelle Goldsmith

Scientist-in-Residence Emerson College

April 22 at 4:00 in Anthropology 340

**Practical and Ethical Implications of Field Research and Ecotourism
On Wild Great Ape Populations**

Everyday great ape numbers dwindle due to shrinking habitat, hunting, warfare and other human pressures. Ecotourism, one of the fastest growing global industries, has been touted as the savior for many of these populations. An important prerequisite for tourism is habituation – the acceptance by wild animals of human observers as neutral elements in their environment. For nearly half a century we have also been habituating great apes for our field studies to help promote our understanding of these animals and ourselves. For the past four years, I have been examining the costs and benefits of habituation on a group of mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. The goal of my research is to determine how habituation influences habitat use, diet, and ranging behavior. Results demonstrate that this gorilla group spends most of its time outside the boundary of the national park in and around agricultural and cattle grazing fields. As a consequence, they raid farmer's crops such as banana and eucalyptus plants. Their nesting and ranging behaviors are also affected. During this lecture, I will present preliminary findings of this long-term study and will discuss the ethical implications of habituating great apes for research and tourism.

Dr. Goldsmith is Scientist-in-Residence at Emerson College, and formerly Assistant Professor in the Center for Animals and Public Policy at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine. She holds degrees in animal behavior, biology, and physical anthropology from Bucknell University and the University at Stony Brook. Prior to her position at Tufts she was a McKennan Postdoctoral Fellow at Dartmouth College. In 1992, as a Fulbright Scholar, she began her career as a great ape field biologist with research on the poorly known western lowland gorilla. After three years in the Central African Republic she then began studying mountain gorillas in Uganda. Presently, as a National Geographic Researcher, she examines the impact of ecotourism on the behavioral ecology of this highly endangered gorilla subspecies. She is interested in conservation and ethical issues surrounding all animal species, and is Co-Director of the Board of the Great Ape World Heritage Species Project, an international initiative to protect all great apes. She recently co-edited the book *Gorilla Biology: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* published by Cambridge University Press. Her work is also published in peer reviewed journals and has been featured in newspapers such as the *Boston Globe* and in TV documentaries such as *WildThings* and *National Geographic Today*.