



## Daily Life in the Jungle

West Africa, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, not far from the border to Liberia: the camp of the Max Planck researchers is sited in the middle of the Taï National Park rain forest, a 12-hour drive from the port city of Abidjan and three hours along a dirt road from the nearest village. For several years now, a team of scientists headed by Christophe Boesch has been observing three neighboring chimpanzee groups with a total of around 100 animals.

These animals are so used to the presence of humans that they practically take no notice of them – as if the researchers are merely a part of the surroundings. Achieving this usually takes many years of the scientists carefully and gradually approaching the primates. The actual research can begin only when, even in the presence of people, each chimpanzee behaves as it normally would when alone.

The scientists follow the chimp groups everywhere they roam and observe their day-to-day life, making sure, however, that they behave in a completely neutral way in the animals' presence: they don't feed them, don't eat in their presence, don't play with the young chimps – even when the latter are curious and seek out the humans' company. And the researchers never come into physical contact with the animals. This last point is crucial for the health of the primates: even a seemingly harmless cold can wipe out an entire chimpanzee family. Consequently, there are strict rules of behavior and hygiene measures: every person who enters the camp must be vaccinated against numerous diseases; in addition, he or she must initially spend five days in quarantine in the camp's outstation. Anyone who shows even the slightest symptoms of an infection is forbidden from entering the forest in the vicinity of the apes. On site, each observer must maintain a distance of at least seven meters from the animals – and always wear a protective mask, which can become quite uncomfortable at 95 percent humidity and temperatures that often exceed 30 degrees Celsius.