
< LETTER TO EDITOR >

**Bilia as an Authentic
Vernacular Name for
Pan paniscus.**

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Since its recognition as a new morph (1), *Pan paniscus* has been variously called pygmy

chimpanzees (2), bonobos (3,4), and bonobo chimpanzees (5). In the early 1970s when field study on pygmy chimpanzees started (6, 7, 8, 9), pygmy chimpanzees and *chimpanzé nain* were the terms most frequently used. However, since it was found that *P. paniscus* was no smaller than at least the eastern subspecies of *Pan troglodytes* (10), many people discarded the term pygmy chimpanzee and instead began to prefer the term bonobo. The term bonobo had more merits than pygmy chimpanzee because if the latter were

used, we would be forced to use "common chimpanzee" for *P. troglodytes*, which is not appropriate because *P. troglodytes* cannot really be considered "common" now; moreover, "common chimpanzee" would represent only the western subspecies of *P. troglodytes* according to some authors (e.g., 11). Another disadvantage of the term pygmy chimpanzee is that the two words take more space than a single word bonobo. Kortlandt (12) supports White's (13) proposal to use "gracile chimpanzee" for bonobo and "robust chimpanzee" for *P. troglodytes*. It goes without saying that these alternatives are much better than the pygmy and common designations, but the two-word expressions are still awkward and waste space. Now that everyone recognizes the species-level difference between *P. paniscus* and *P. troglodytes*, each species should be represented by a single word.

It is true that "bonobo" has become a more popular term than any of the alternatives, and there might be criticism that our proposal would bring only confusion rather than simplicity. However, there are still some researchers who do not like to use bonobo (e.g., 13,14). Furthermore, the most serious problem is that the term bonobo is not understood at all in the only country where *P. paniscus* is living, the Democratic Republic of Congo (12; Kano, personal observation). Here, bilia is the common name for this ape (15,16,17). To conserve this rarest species of apes, we should employ all possible measures. To use bilia instead of bonobos will be an effective measure for their conservation because local residents will immediately understand what it means when used in conservation propaganda. We propose using the term bilia in describing *Pan paniscus* whenever possible.

It is currently impossible to force people to use bilia since bonobo has gradually become the accepted word. Even we proposers sometimes avoid it because the editors of journals may not allow it. Therefore, our proposal is to Use Bilia Whenever Possible. If people gradually understand the implications of using the term bilia rather than bonobo, and many people begin to use bilia, journal editors would change their attitude and allow us to use it in the long run.

As a matter of fact, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the single form is elia, and bilia is the

plural form. However, we would be able to use bilia as singular and "blias" as the plural form since the term would be incorporated into English. We hope that you support our strategy and help "bilia" to take the place of bonobo. The lingala word of *P. paniscus* is *mokonbusu* (*mikonbusu* in the plural form), which is another definite vernacular candidate for *P. paniscus*. However, bilia is much simpler.

Pan paniscus are found only in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Whether they survive the 21st century or not depends solely upon the willingness of the people of Congo to conserve them. Therefore, we should call these apes by the name that is easily understandable to the people who share and safeguard their environment. Moreover, the people of Congo would be pleased to know that their own language is used for the animal that they, more than any other people, have been in such close contact with. Consequently, they could proudly boast of blias being one of the most precious creatures in the world.

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