



## Nkungwe as Majestic as in the Pioneering Days

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Time flies like an arrow. Twenty years have passed since I first stepped on the soil at Mahale. It was Nishida-san that introduced me to the wonderful world of chimpanzees.

My life as a chimpanzee researcher started the first ten days during which I followed Nishida-san closely. After finishing this apprenticeship, I began to observe my focal animals by myself, although we often tracked the chimpanzees together because both he and I followed the adult males who tended to be in close vicinity to each other.



I was inhibited and always nervous in front of my great supervisor, who was much older than me. Moreover, he spoke so fast that I could hardly understand him during conversations. However, once I became absorbed in the intriguing social relationships between males, he began to behave like a bug-hunting companion, instead of my advisor. For example, one day, we observed three adult males walking in single file, emitting a pant-hoot in chorus. Just after they called, they froze in unison with their legs lifted as if this had all been prearranged. They seemed to be listening to distant replies to their call. Nishida-san looked back at me, pointing to the frozen chimpanzees as if to say, "Look! How funny!" I remember his smile to this day and occasionally laugh about this event even now.

At that time, Mahale M-group chimpanzees were in the midst of a historic change. Ntologi, the famous alpha male had been overthrown. Kalunde, who led the coup, successfully ostracized Ntologi and maintained his new alpha status by manipulating the triangular relationships with the other two high-ranking males, Shike, the beta male, and Nsaba, the gamma male. The three were allies and rivals with each other.

However, the situation changed soon after Nishida-san left for Japan. Shike got seriously ill and disappeared, which meant that the stable triangle collapsed. Kalunde came to face frequent harassment by Nsaba, who was 10 years younger than him. Kalunde became so overwhelmed that he began to travel alone. But three weeks later, Kalunde displayed an act of behavioral flexibility that characterizes chimpanzees. Kalunde came back to the group with Ntologi, who he himself had ostracized. Ntologi regained the alpha position, with support from Kalunde. Nsaba could not challenge them as Kalunde and Ntologi formed the strongest alliance ever at Mahale. In the end, Nsaba had to settle for life as the beta male.

This series of events coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. I described them in several letters that I sent to Nishida-san because I knew that he longed to hear about what was happening at Mahale. I also wanted to show him that I was carefully recording these historic events. Each time he received my letter, he responded very quickly to express his excitement. When I phoned him just after I returned to Japan, he said to me, "Thank you for your letters. I enjoyed them very much." Then, he paused for about three seconds and added, "*Yoku dekimashita!* (Very good!)" using a conventional praise for Japanese elementary school children. We met at Ochanomizu Station and he took me to a tempura restaurant. He treated me to *Ebitendon*, a bowl of rice topped with tempura prawns, his favorite dish.

In February 2007, two months after Nishida-san underwent an operation for rectal cancer, I met with him at the office of ANC Productions in Tokyo. I was asked to assist him and to help prepare his presentation. While we watched videos taken from 1989 to 1995, he reminisced about those times and said, "I enjoyed that time at Mahale the most." The chimpanzees of M-group were very well habituated, and there weren't many tourists. Under such good conditions, we could observe the political interactions between the adult males. I agreed with him and thought that I was very lucky to have accompanied him in those days.

In August 2009, Nishida-san visited Mahale after a two year absence. We departed from Japan together and stayed in Mahale for about two weeks. I had a feeling that this would be his last journey to Mahale. However, he was never sentimental but enjoyed his trip as usual.

For a couple of days after he reached Mahale, he tired easily. "I am tired," he said even after a 2 km trek from the Kansyana Research Station to the Ntale valley. But his strength improved each day. On the tenth day of his stay, he easily reached the Lubulungu, 4 km south of Kansyana, to observe chimpanzees cross the river to the south.

His main focus of study during this trip was play behavior of immature chimpanzees, but he enjoyed observing all aspects of chimpanzees and was curious as ever. In his last contribution to this newsletter, he reported "Puffy (nine year old female) showed 'nipple press' (one of the novel behaviors recorded in the 1990s) just as Alofu,

estimated to be her father, did.” This might be too small a finding to mark the finale of such a great chimpanzee researcher, but in a sense, it was indicative of the passion he always displayed when watching chimpanzees. He described this himself in a chapter of *The Great Ape Project* (1993), “Chimpanzees are always new to me!”

One day, we went on a safari to Katumbi and Buhingu in the northern area of the park. At that time, the Embassy of Japan in Tanzania was planning to build a dispensary in Katumbi. The main purpose of our safari was to hear the opinion of the Katumbi people, to inspect the building site, and to make a report to the Embassy. We visited Katumbi Primary School and met lively students there. This school was built by collaboration of the Mahale Wildlife Conservation Society and the Embassy under the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (2001). But Nishida-san seemed shocked to see the wretched condition of the school and took many photos. There were only four teachers for over 800 students. There were not enough desks. The floors of the classrooms were full of holes.

While Nishida-san was staying in Kansyana, he was always in a good mood. Every night, he enjoyed a little beer with fish from Lake Tanganyika, tough chicken and goat. After dinner, we went on to the next routine, gossiping about chimpanzees and humans. For example, we exchanged our observations about the idiosyncratic ways different alpha males shared meat and copulated. We had a good time, occasionally bursting into laughter. Twenty long years seem to have erased my inhibitions.

On the morning of August 27, 2009, when Nishida-san left Mahale last time, only I saw him off at Kasiha Beach. In the old days, many inhabitants of Kasiha gathered to say farewell to researchers going back to their countries. Now that the park administration controls the people who can stay in the park, we could not expect such a scene. The boat full of eco-tourists picked up Nishida-san and steered its course northward. It soon drifted out of sight. He gazed at Kasoje Forest in front and Mt. Nkungwe behind, the highest peak in the Mahale Mountains chain. I can no longer ask him if he reminisced about the pioneering days he spent there 44 years before or if he planned to come again next year.

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## The Last Day with Nishida-san

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On 27th May, 2011, about ten days before he passed away, I visited Nishida-san at his home. I visited him because I had received a message from him that he wanted to hand over several things about Mahale. Eventually, this visit became my last opportunity to see him alive.

I had not visited him for about a month then, as I had been busy in April and May occupied with teaching duties to new master course students. Nishida-san was much thinner than a month before and looked very small. When I arrived, he first apologized about staying in bed while talking to me. “I am deaf of one ear” told he. But he conversed logically and clearly.

He told me one by one, sometimes making a pause as if he was trying to remember everything that he needed to tell me, about long-term data of Mahale from the early

period, about his own data that had been input into computer but had not been published, and about his forthcoming English book “*Chimpanzees of the Lakeshore*” that became his final work. He was really a researcher until the very final stage of his life.

Finally, he expressed his concern about research assistants at Mahale. He asked me to think about supporting the post-retirement years of some assistants from the early days. I realized again how Nishida-san appreciated the contributions made by the Tongwe people for continuing the research at Mahale over 40 years.

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## Prof. Nishida and Ntologi

*Noriko Itoh*

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In 1995, I first visited Mahale. That was the year when Ntologi died. This happening left a vivid impression on me about Prof. Nishida: how deeply he was attached to chimpanzees and how deeply the local people understood it. When Ntologi was found dying in the forest, he did not hesitate to intervene between Ntologi and the other adult male who made several approaches. I was not aware how depressed he was when Ntologi died next morning and he collected necessary data from the body. But after finishing his tasks, he expressed his feelings and even said that he was discouraged from observing chimpanzees any more. I could not find any words for him. Ntologi died around 3AM and it was his wife that noticed the change in his condition, watching over him all night. Later, the wives of field assistants came to the camp together expressing their condolences to Prof. Nishida and his wife. Such an event happened only once in my memory. People understood Prof. Nishida’s attachment to individual chimpanzees, since he talked about chimpanzees to anyone pleasantly and passionately. I believe such local people’s understanding acted as the firm base for his accomplishments. I did not expect that we would lose our opportunity to hear his fascinating chimpanzee talks, often with a hearty laugh, so suddenly. There is another story about the death of Ntologi, but I keep it for later. May his soul rest in peace.

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## Dr. Toshisada Nishida and His Video Record of Chimpanzees

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I am presently in the forest of Mahale, where I am writing this essay. Dr. T. Nishida is not here, but his habituated chimpanzees and field station remain.

In August 1999, Dr. Nishida brought me to Mahale for my first study of wild chimpanzees. This was when he started to use a digital video camera for his fieldwork. Since then, video data have become one of the necessities of his research. I also used a video camera and focused on grooming behavior as my main subject, but Dr. Nishida seems to have recorded everything about chimpanzees in Mahale. When he followed chimpanzees, he always used his video camera and recorded feeding, displays, hunting,