

1 **Behavioral responses to injury and death in wild Barbary macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*)**

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25 **Abstract**

26 The wounding or death of a conspecific has been shown to elicit varied behavioral responses
27 throughout thanatology. Recently, a number of reports have presented contentious evidence
28 of epimeletic behavior towards the dying and dead among non-human animals, a behavioral
29 trait previously considered uniquely human. Here, we report on the behavioral responses of
30 Barbary macaques, a social, non-human primate, to the deaths of four group members (one
31 high-ranking adult female, one high-ranking adult male, one juvenile male and one female
32 infant), all caused by road traffic accidents. Responses appeared to vary based on the nature
33 of the death (protracted or instant) and the age class of the deceased. Responses included
34 several behaviors with potential adaptive explanations or consequences. These included
35 exploration, caretaking (guarding, carrying, and grooming) and proximity to wounded
36 individuals or corpses, and immediate as well as longer-lasting distress behaviors from other
37 group members following death, all of which have been reported in other non-human primate
38 species. These observations add to a growing body of comparative evolutionary analysis of
39 primate thanatology and help to highlight the multifaceted impacts of human-induced
40 fatalities on an endangered and socially complex primate.

41 **KEYWORDS:** Thanatology · Barbary macaque · Epimeletic behavior

42

43 **Introduction**

44 Responses to dying and dead conspecifics have been documented in several non-
45 human primates, ranging from cannibalism (orangutans [*Pongo abelii*], Dellatore et al, 2009),
46 to curiosity and exploration (snub-nosed monkey [*Rhinopithecus bieti*], Li et al, 2012;
47 chimpanzees [*Pan troglodytes*], Biro et al, 2010), to putative compassion and caretaking (e.g.
48 chimpanzees, Anderson et al, 2010; Biro et al, 2010, Cronin et al, 2011; common marmosets
49 [*Callithrix jacchus*], Bezerra et al, 2014), and group distress (chimpanzees, Boesch 1991;
50 Anderson et al, 2010). Epimeletic behavior, i.e., care or apparent altruism to the dying or

51 dead, is widely considered uniquely human (Counts and Counts, 1991), and certain reports
52 have contended that it is absent in non-human primate species such as geladas (*Theropithecus*
53 *gelada*; Fashing et al, 2011), and individual chimpanzee populations (Stewart et al, 2012).
54 However, reports of apparent epileptic behavior from other taxonomic groups (e.g African
55 elephants [*Loxodonta africana*], Douglas-Hamilton et al, 2006; river otters [*Pteronura*
56 *brasiliensis*], Davenport, 2010; long-beaked common dolphins, [*Delphinus capensis*], Park et
57 al, 2013), in addition to the aforementioned examples in non-human primates, have provoked
58 calls for developing a comparative evolutionary approach towards animal thanatology and
59 compassionate behavior in particular (Anderson, 2011; Fashing and Nyugen, 2011).

60 Variation in responses to the dying and dead may be related to inter-species
61 behavioral differences, inter-individual variation in the experience of observing death, or a
62 reflection of varying strengths of social ties with the deceased (Appleby et al, 2013;
63 Bercovitch, 2012; Stewart et al, 2012). Due to intensive infant-rearing in mammals,
64 especially by females (Hirshfield and Tinkle, 1977), the death of an infant is likely to have
65 notable physical and psychological impacts (Majolo and McFarland, 2009). Unsurprisingly
66 then, animal thanatology literature, particularly for non-human primates, is largely dominated
67 by analyses of conspecific responses to infant death (Sugiyama et al, 2009). The most
68 frequently reported response to infant death is the continued carrying of the infant corpse,
69 which has been documented in a range of primate species including Japanese macaques
70 (*Macaca fuscata*; Sugiyama et al, 2009), chimpanzees (Biro et al, 2010; Cronin et al, 2011),
71 gorillas (*Gorilla beringei*; Warren and Williamson, 2004) and Barbary macaques (*Macaca*
72 *sylvanus*). Barbary macaque mothers have been observed to carry their dead infants
73 (Campbell, pers. obs.), while males have been reported to continue using infant corpses in
74 “agonistic buffering” with other males (Merz, 1978). Females have also been observed to

75 increase self-suckling following the death of their infants, possibly as a means of stress relief
76 (Majolo and McFarland, 2009).

77 Less frequently observed and reported, particularly in the wild, are the reactions and
78 responses of non-human primates to dying or dead conspecifics of other age-classes. Such
79 information could be particularly informative with respect to how variation in social ties may
80 reflect variation in responses to death (Buhl et al, 2012). Here, we report on the deaths of four
81 Barbary macaques of differing sex- and age-classes resulting from impact with road vehicles.
82 In two cases, the monkeys were mortally wounded and the death protracted, while in the two
83 other cases, death was instant. Supported by photographic and video evidence, we describe
84 behavioral responses to these events and highlight differences in response according to the
85 nature of the death and the age-class of the deceased.

86

87 **Methods**

88 Observations were made at a study site located in the oak and cedar forest near the city of
89 Azrou, Morocco (33° 24'N to 05° 12'W; elevation 1,500-2,000 m above sea level). This area
90 is located within the Ifrane National Park, in the Middle Atlas Mountains. Barbary macaques
91 are an endangered species (IUCN, 2012) and this region contains the largest remaining
92 population of the species (van Lavieren and Wich, 2010). Barbary macaques live in multi-
93 male, multi-female, female-bonded groups and have been shown to form long-term intra- and
94 inter-sex relationships with conspecifics (Fooden, 2007; Young et al, 2014). The group of
95 macaques in this report (the Blue group) has been habituated and studied since January 2013.
96 All deaths occurred at a tourist picnicking site which the group frequently visits. Prior to the
97 deaths reported here, the group consisted of approximately 34 individuals: eight adult males,
98 seven adult females, one sub-adult male, one sub-adult female, approximately thirteen
99 juveniles (as juveniles have not been individually identified for study, this number is an

100 estimate based on an initial census) and four infants. The four reported deaths occurred
101 between September 2013 and October 2014. Data from focal samples and *ad libitum* scan
102 samples (Altmann, 1974) were used to calculate dominance hierarchies prior to the first
103 reported death (calculated from four months of behavioral data; May-September 2013).
104 David's score calculations (David, 1987) were used to determine the hierarchies, an approach
105 which has previously been applied in this species (e.g. Kaburu et al, 2012; see supplementary
106 materials for details). Observations of responses to deaths were recorded using focal and *ad*
107 *libitum* sampling of all individuals which approached within 15 m of the injured or dead
108 individual (Altmann, 1974). Behaviors recorded included all orientation toward, approaches
109 toward, and any social interactions with the injured or dead individual, as well as anxiety-
110 related behaviours (scratching, yawning). In addition to these field notes, for two of the
111 observations, responses to the deaths were video recorded using a Sony Handycam DCR-
112 SX33. For the other observations, only photographic evidence was collected.

113

114 **Results**

115 *Dominance hierarchy*

116 A significant linear hierarchy was found in both males ($r=0.90$; $p<0.00$; $n=9$) and females
117 ($r=0.97$; $p<0.00$; $n=7$).

118

119 *Observation 1: Protracted death of high-ranking female*

120 The highest-ranked cycling female of the group, MA, was hit by a bus when crossing a road
121 at approximately 15:00 on 27/09/2013. Visible injuries included partial detachment of one leg
122 and a large laceration of her anogenital swelling. MA was able to climb into a tree,
123 approximately 10 m above the ground. Two adult males (RG and IS) climbed the tree and
124 approached her, teeth-chattering and lip-smacking; behaviors associated with reassurance and

125 reconciliation. Both monkeys were observed delicately touching and inspecting the wounds.
126 As the other group members left the tourist site to go into the forest to sleep they made
127 several “long-calls”, presumably to MA, from approximately 100 m away; such calls are
128 usually used when an individual is separated from the group or the group is searching for a
129 separated individual. MA vocalised back but was unable to move to join them. Subsequently,
130 the group began to make fear screams and grimacing facial displays. The group, now
131 including IS and RG, then left to sleep approximately 500 m from MA. Approximately one
132 hour after the group left, RG returned to MA. They teeth-chattered at one another, he touched
133 her injured leg several times, including prolonged body contact between his hand and her
134 injured leg (figure 1a), and groomed her (figure 1b). Approximately 30 minutes after the
135 return of RG, several more males returned from the forest (IS, RO, GU) and sat below the
136 tree MA was in, with some climbing up sit beside her. As it became dark (c.19:00), all males
137 eventually left MA to join the rest of the group at their sleeping site. An hour after dark, IS
138 returned and sat in an adjacent tree to MA, where he remained until the observers left for the
139 night (c.22:00).

140

141 When observers returned at approximately 05:00, MA’s corpse was discovered unmoved
142 from the tree in which she was previously observed. IS was found in the same adjacent tree as
143 he had been seen in the night before. It is assumed IS remained with MA when she died
144 during the night. At c.06:30, IS crossed the canopy to approach MA’s corpse. He touched her
145 body twice, before moving back to the tree he had been in before, where he remained for the
146 following eight hours, until 15:41, when he left the tree to feed for the first time that day. The
147 rest of the group returned to the vicinity of MA’s corpse at c.09:35. Table 1 in the
148 supplementary material provides a detailed timeline of group members’ responses to MA’s
149 corpse. Males showed the strongest behavioral response. Three males (GU, TI and FE)

150 entered the tree she was in, spending an average of 18:09 (\pm 10:29) minutes in the tree with
151 her. One male (TI) approached within 1 m of the body, displaying 5 anxiety-related behaviors
152 (scratching and yawning) and six exploratory/vigilance behaviors (head-bobbing). Two (of
153 six) adult females (SA and WA) passed the tree without showing any reaction, while two
154 others (IZ and EL) were not seen near the body. The two remaining females (CO and PE)
155 spent a short amount of time within 10 m of the body (average 2:28 minutes) during which
156 they watched the body and exhibited one anxiety-related behavior (scratching) and three
157 exploratory/vigilance behaviors (glance and head-bobs). One sub-adult female (NI) spent
158 more than 20 minutes within 1 m of the body, head-bobbing at her four times, grooming
159 herself for 2:44 minutes, and grooming the body for 14:00 minutes (video 1 in supplementary
160 material). Three juveniles entered the tree MA's body was in and remained for approximately
161 one minute, spending the entire time watching her. At approximately 17:00 when the group
162 had begun to move away from the tourist site, and 19 hours since MA was last seen alive,
163 local merchants removed the corpse from the tree for burial as it posed a danger to visiting
164 tourists. When the corpse was removed from the tree, the high-ranking male RG sprinted
165 back to the corpse, screamed, threatened and charged at the merchants as they took the body
166 for burial.

167

168 *Observation 2: Immediate death of alpha male*

169 FE, the highest-ranking male in the group, was killed on 31/10/13 at 12:20 following a
170 collision with a vehicle on a road. He died instantly and there were few signs of external
171 damage or wounds. When local merchants removed the corpse to avoid conflict between the
172 monkeys and feral dogs, at least three adults within the group screamed at the merchants,
173 while at least three juveniles and a sub-adult female (UR) observed the body from trees
174 above. Due to crowding over the corpse by tourists and the initial vocal reaction of the

175 monkeys, FE was swiftly taken to be buried. UR and approximately three juveniles followed
176 the sellers to the burial site, an open area the monkeys had never before been observed to use,
177 and watched silently from a distance as the body was buried. They returned to the group
178 several minutes after the burial. No adult monkeys were observed near the site during this
179 burial.

180

181 *Observation 3: Immediate death of juvenile*

182 On 19/05/14 at 14:00, a male juvenile (between 2-3 years old) was struck by a vehicle and
183 instantly killed (struck in the head, one eye hanging out and jaw dislocated). The body was
184 moved off the road by local merchants immediately following the collision. The group
185 screamed and became extremely agitated, causing the merchants to abandon the corpse. One
186 adult male, CA, took the corpse up a tree (figure 2). CA remained with the juvenile's corpse
187 for over 30 minutes, before eventually dropping it to the ground. UR (sub-adult female) spent
188 several minutes with the body on the ground. The body was guarded by group members
189 (including CA and another adult male, GU) for approximately 80 minutes after the accident,
190 including threatening and charging a park official who attempted to get close to the body.
191 After the group moved away from the corpse and left the area, local merchants removed the
192 corpse for burial. CA and GU followed the merchants and corpse to the burial site (the area
193 used to bury FE described previously). During the burial, adult male monkeys threatened and
194 vocalised at the merchants. CA was at the forefront of the group, approaching as close as 5 m
195 to the merchants and threatening them. One unidentified male, the lowest-ranking female
196 (PE) and approximately three juveniles joined them at the burial site (figure 3). Many
197 performed aggressive calls and threats. Due to the clear agitation of the monkeys and the
198 potential risk of aggression from the group, particularly from CA, the burial was abandoned
199 and all human observers moved away from the corpse. CA moved immediately to sit near the

200 body and remained in this area with at least one other juvenile for two hours before they
201 eventually departed and the body could be buried.

202

203 *Observation 4: Protracted death of infant*

204 On 24/10/14 at 12:03, WE, the approximately 4-month-old infant of the female WA, was hit
205 by an automobile, partially severing one leg. WA immediately carried WE, still alive at this
206 point, into a tree and began grooming her. A sub-adult male (ME) approached the pair and
207 teeth-chattered at them. At 12:25, while adjusting position within the tree, WE fell around 3
208 m to the ground. WA climbed down from the tree and dragged WE approximately 5 m, but
209 she was displaced from WE by the presence of merchants, tourists and dogs. WE continued
210 to struggle on the ground, crawling on her arms, but succumbed to her injuries at 12:33.

211 Table 2 in the supplementary material provides a detailed timeline of group members'
212 responses to WE's corpse. After WE's death, WA climbed down from the tree and inspected
213 the body, but was disturbed by a local merchant who came close to determine if the infant
214 had died. WA threatened the merchant and retreated into a tree. When the merchant left, WA
215 descended, inspected and lifted the corpse before carrying it approximately 10 m to the other
216 side of the road (see video 2 in supplementary material). She then moved several metres away
217 to feed on bread distributed by tourists. At 12:47, feral dogs approached the corpse; WA
218 alarm barked and threatened the dogs, which left after several minutes. Over the next hour,
219 WA engaged in extensive bouts of self-grooming in a tree above WE's corpse, occasionally
220 making distress/fear screams (see video 3 in supplementary materials). At 14:30, WA left the
221 tree and the corpse. At 14:35, after the whole group had moved more than 100 m away from
222 the corpse and were leaving the tourist site, a local merchant took the corpse for burial. Many
223 members of the group rushed back to the merchant carrying the corpse and performed several
224 threatening behaviors (bared teeth, ground slaps, growling etc.). At the forefront of the group

225 were WA, two adult males (GU and IS) and another adult female (IZ). The monkeys reacted
226 thus for around 30 seconds, until the merchant was out of sight, after which they moved away
227 from the tourist site. No monkeys followed the merchant to the burial site. For the remainder
228 of the day, WA was observed intermittently (approximately every 30 minutes) making
229 distress/fear screams and displaying vigilance/searching behavior. At c.16:00, WA left the
230 group to return in the direction of the tourist site and stayed 75 m from the tourist site (100 m
231 from the rest of the group) for approximately 45 minutes, continuing to display
232 vigilance/searching behavior, before returning to the group. The next day, she sporadically
233 made distress vocalisations and was often seen away from the group.

234

235 **Discussion**

236 This report presents the behavioral responses of conspecific group members to the
237 mortal wounding and death of four wild Barbary macaques. In these accounts, several
238 behaviors directed to the dying and dead are reported which are similar to those seen in other
239 mammals, especially non-human primates; namely exploration (sniffing and touching of
240 wounds or corpses, Buhl et al, 2012) and caretaking behaviors, including guarding (Boesch
241 1991), carrying (Fashing et al, 2011), and grooming of corpses (Boesch 1991).

242 Affiliative behaviors resembling epimeletic behavior were shown in both cases where
243 death was protracted. Prior to death, MA was attended by males which examined her wounds,
244 displayed mollifying facial displays (lipsmacks and teeth-chattering), and groomed her. When
245 WE was wounded, her mother carried and groomed her, and both the mother and infant
246 received affiliative teeth-chattering from a sub-adult male of the group. These behaviors are
247 similar to those observed in chimpanzees (Anderson et al, 2010) and more recently in
248 common marmosets (Bezerra et al, 2014), where individuals were attentive and affiliative to
249 dying conspecifics. In the cases presented here, some affiliative behaviors continued post-

250 mortem. Grooming of corpses has been witnessed in a number of non-human primates,
251 typically with deceased infants (Boesch 1991; Anderson et al, 2010; Biro et al, 2010; Cronin
252 et al, 2011; Fashing et al, 2011; Li et al, 2012; Buhl et al, 2012). Explorative or curiosity
253 behaviors towards the body of the dead conspecifics have been recorded in other non-human
254 primate species (Biro et al, 2010; Fashing et al, 2011; Cronin et al, 2011) and appears to be a
255 common reaction in the majority of reported animal thanatology (Bercovitch, 2012). Such
256 responses have been suggested to reflect a cognitive inability of the animal to “understand”
257 death. Alternatively, they may reflect an adaptive “wait and see” strategy whereby
258 conspecifics are unsure of the state of the injured, diseased or deceased, requiring time to
259 make an accurate assessment of whether to abandon their stricken group member; this
260 strategy could have long-term advantages if individuals sometimes recover (Hrdy, 1999;
261 Sugiyama et al, 2009; Li et al, 2012; Appleby et al, 2013). Additionally, these behaviors may
262 present a learning opportunity, helping individuals to avoid a cause of death or injury if
263 similar conditions are encountered again (Cronin et al, 2011).

264 In all four cases reported here, other group-members screamed, threatened, and
265 charged when humans or feral dogs approached or moved the body. They also followed
266 merchants to the burial site. Guarding of corpses has been reported in, among others,
267 chimpanzees (Boesch 1991), rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*, Buhl et al, 2012) and
268 common marmosets (Bezerra et al, 2014). The male IS remained with MA overnight,
269 recalling the all-night attendance following a female chimpanzee’s death reported by
270 Anderson et al (2010). Unlike other non-human primate examples of motherly reactions to
271 infant death (Biro et al, 2010; Fashing et al, 2011; Li et al, 2012), WA carried her deceased
272 infant only for a short period of time, although this may be a consequence of the highly
273 disturbed environment at the tourist site (including feral dogs, local merchants, and tourists).
274 In line with the aforementioned “wait and see” strategy, guarding and/or carrying of corpses

275 could be advantageous if individuals sometimes recover or by preventing predation (Hrdy,
276 1999; Sugiyama et al, 2009). Violent deaths with graphic injuries may also cause heightened
277 behavioral and physiological stimulation, leading to increased guarding and aggression (Buhl
278 et al, 2012). These responses can be maladaptive; for example, when mothers carry dead
279 infants, the cost is predominantly energetic (Sugiyama et al, 2009). We also observed
280 instances of individuals separating themselves from the group or placing themselves at risk
281 by guarding corpses in close proximity to humans and feral dogs.

282 The injury and death of the high-ranking female, MA and the death of the juvenile,
283 invoked strong, nearly group-wide responses, with males showing particularly strong
284 reactions in both cases. In contrast, responses to the death of the alpha male FE and the infant
285 WE were limited to a few individuals. The strength of social ties between the surviving and
286 deceased has been proposed to explain the variation in the strength of responses to a death
287 (Appleby et al, 2013; Bercovitch, 2012; Stewart et al, 2012) and possibly to injury as well. In
288 female-bonded groups, dominance and kinship are expected to predict the strength of female
289 social bonds (Johnson et al, 2014), while Barbary macaque males are known to invest time
290 and effort in forming social bonds with infants and juveniles through playing and grooming
291 (Deag, 1980; Small, 1990) and have recently been shown to form stable social bonds with
292 other adult males (Young et al, 2014). The protracted nature of MA's injury and death may
293 have allowed more opportunity for reactions from other group members. Strong social bonds
294 and paternal care may explain the sustained defense of the juvenile corpse, particularly by
295 males. It is also possible that the very graphic nature of MA's and the juvenile's injuries
296 evoked a strong response among group members (Buhl et al, 2012). The comparatively
297 subdued behavioral response to the alpha male's (FE) death may be a consequence of weak
298 social ties, or may simply have been due to the relatively quick removal of the corpse and the
299 proximity of local merchants and tourists. The injury and death of the infant WE produced

300 notable responses only from the mother and a sub-adult male, though the moving of her
301 corpse elicited strong aggressive responses from several adults in the group, both males and
302 females. As a 4-month-old infant of a low-ranking female, it is possible that WE had not yet
303 formed any strong relationship in the group other than with her mother. Concurrently, the
304 mother's low rank may reduce the likelihood of other group members, particularly females,
305 investing in the protection of her infant.

306 In all cases, the injury and death of a group member caused observable distress to
307 other monkeys, including vocalisations, agitation, and anxiety-related behaviors. Similar
308 responses have been reported in chimpanzees following the death of a group member
309 (Boesch 1991; Anderson et al, 2010). Aside from these immediate reactions, there were also
310 obvious longer-lasting effects of these deaths on some individuals, including prolonged
311 distress behaviors, separation from the group, and behavioral inactivity. In the case of WA,
312 distress behaviors (vocalisations and searching behaviors) were displayed long after the
313 burial of her infant, and continued the following day. Our report outlines the complex
314 behavioral responses of Barbary macaques to dying and deceased conspecifics, adding to our
315 understanding of both Barbary macaque sociality and more broadly, animal thanatology.

316

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326

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408

409 **FIGURES**

410

411 **Figure 1:** RG inspecting the wound of (a) and grooming (b) the mortally wounded MA
412 (27/09/13).

413

414 **Figure 2:** CA (adult male) takes corpse of juvenile male into tree (centre of picture)
415 (19/05/14).

416

417 **Figure 3:** Photograph showing group members following the corpse of the dead juvenile
418 male to an exposed burial site. The monkeys of this group had previously never entered this
419 exposed area. The blue circle highlights the burial site, the red circles highlight group
420 members (19/05/14).

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