

Goblin's Biography

by Ian Gilby and Anne Pusey

Ian writes:

Born on September 16, 1964, Goblin is currently the oldest male in the Kasakela community. Goblin was the youngest male ever to reach alpha status, first doing so in 1979 at the age of 15. Many believe that he dominated the other males using sheer persistence. He was known for getting up early in the morning and knocking other chimps out of their nests! This persistence helped him to regain the top position after Figan, the previous alpha male, briefly battled his way back to the top.

Goblin finally lost his alpha status on October 25, 1989 when he was viciously attacked by the other males. He escaped, but it was only with the help of antibiotics administered by the field staff that he managed to survive. He spent weeks alone, resting, receiving medication, and running from other chimps when he heard them coming. He finally returned to the group when he was fully healed.

Since losing his top-ranking position, Goblin has always been able to maintain a relatively high spot in the hierarchy by establishing a relationship with the alpha male. Goblin spends a great deal of time with the alpha, grooming him, resting near him and displaying at the same time. Because of this relationship, the alpha male may support Goblin's squabbles with other males. Other chimps may be less likely to retaliate against Goblin if the alpha male is close by. A great example of this took place in October, 2001. I was following Goblin, and he became involved in a dispute between two other males. Sheldon and Wilkie displayed at Goblin, and sent him screaming to the top of a tree, where he sat for several minutes. Suddenly Goblin regained his confidence, and displayed out of the tree, scattering Sheldon and Wilkie. I was surprised at this turn of events, but soon realized why he was able to intimidate these higher ranking males. Frodo, the alpha male, had just arrived, and was sitting quietly nearby. If Sheldon and Wilkie had attacked Goblin in Frodo's presence, Frodo might have retaliated against them. For the rest of the morning, Goblin groomed Frodo, and always made sure that he was nearby.