

Research Protocol for working on Cayo Santiago, Puerto Rico

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Cayo Santiago is a small island located off the coast of Puerto Rico. In 1938, Ray Carpenter brought over some 400 rhesus monkeys from India to initiate a research colony for both breeding and biomedical work, as well as behavioral studies. Thanks to years and years of research, the Cayo population of rhesus monkeys represents one of the best studied populations of animals in the world.

Since 1987, I have been conducting research on Cayo Santiago. During this period, I have also taken students from Harvard down to work with me. Thanks to the excellent rapport we have had with the scientific staff on Cayo, and with the Caribbean Primate Research Center in general, we have managed to collect an extraordinary amount of data concerning rhesus social behavior, vocal communication, and cognition. In order for this rapport to continue, it is essential that those working on Cayo follow some very strict rules concerning the 3ethics2 of behavioral work on the island. The following represents a list of things that everyone must adhere to while on the island, and also, while living on the mainland in the town of Punta Santiago.

On the island:

1. Every morning, a boat departs from the mainland to Cayo. Sometimes, there are too many people for a single boat ride. When possible, if it is not essential for you to take the first boat out, be courteous to those who must and let them go first.
2. While working on the island, it is essential that you be considerate of others. The key is silence and sensitivity to where other researchers are working. To make the point as clear as possible, imagine that you are setting up for a looking time experiment or a playback, and someone else is yelling at the top of their lungs for Fred researcher to pick up their backpack. This would be a disaster. It is a disaster for all. It is therefore essential for you to constantly look out for other research teams. If you are about to run a playback experiment, but someone else is following a focal individual, wait, or ask them if it is ok. And ask in a quiet way.
3. Since it is sometimes the case that we test animals that are part of someone else focal group, it is essential for you to work with these other researchers. Talk to them before you set out for the day and check in frequently so that you may coordinate your activities.

4. If you are setting out to find a focal individual, look out for other research teams so that they you may avoid walking in a path that may alter their focal's behavior.
5. While watching animals, be sensitive to their personal space. All animals will differ in terms of when they get nervous with respect to your distance. Usually, a distance of 3-5 meters is good, though some animals will require more and some will allow less.
6. Some of you will want to eat on the island at lunch time and such, and you must do so in the enclosed eating area. Be careful not to eat in other areas and also make sure you throw away your trash in the appropriate place. Never eat food in front of the monkeys; some of you will be running experiments that involve presenting food, and that is a different situation.

Off the island:

1. Remember that we are visitors, not residents. Although I want everyone to have fun after a hard day of research, I also want you to be respectful of people who live nearby. The people in Punta like to have fun, and often have very loud parties. So having fun is not at issue. But do be respectful of your neighbors, and the property that you are renting.
2. The CPRC office is a privilege. We are given access to the phone, photocopy machine, and internet which makes life much easier. Take care of such equipment so that we can continue to make use of it.

Also, please keep in mind that when you first arrive in Punta Santiago, which is where you will stay, the first thing you need to do is to meet the Scientist-in-Charge, (Dr. Melissa Gerald) or the Secretary of Cayo Santiago. Make your flight plans to arrive in Punta Santiago before 4:30pm. If you arrive past 4:30pm, you will need to wait to meet them until the next day. Please have all paperwork completed. Melissa has been the director for several years, and you are required to give her or her Secretary Janet Rivera your paperwork.

If we all follow these simple rules, we will not only be able to do great work for dozens of years to come, but can also have fun doing it. Thanks for helping.

Marc