

hard labour. It seems likely that co-operation from other individuals was needed right back at the stages where the hunting ape was evolving from its forestdwelling ancestors. Luckily the co-operative nature of the species was growing alongside this hunting development, so that the cause of the trouble could also provide its cure. Normally, the chimpanzee mother not only bites through the cord, she also devours all or part of the placenta, licks up the fluids, washes and cleans her newly delivered infant, and holds it protectively to her body. In our own species the exhausted mother relies on companions to perform all these activities (or modern equivalents of them).

After the birth is over it may take a day or two for the mother's milk-flow to get started, but once this has happened she then feeds the baby regularly in this way for a period of up to two years. The average suckling period is shorter than this, however, and modern practice has tended to reduce it to six to nine months. During this time the menstrual cycle of the female is normally suppressed and the menstrual flow usually reappears only when she stops breast-feeding and starts to wean the baby. If infants are weaned unusually early, or if they are bottle-fed, this delay does not, of course, occur, and the female can start breeding again more quickly. If, on the other hand, she follows the more primitive system and feeds the infant for a full two-year period, she is liable to produce offspring only about once in three years. (Suckling is sometimes deliberately prolonged in this way as a contraceptive technique.) With a reproductive life-span of approximately thirty years, this puts her natural productivity capacity at about ten offspring. With bottle-feeding or rapidly curtailed breast-feeding, the figure could theoretically rise to thirty:

The act of suckling is more of a problem for females of our species than for other primates. The infant is so helpless that the mother has to take a much more active part in the process, holding the baby to the breast and guiding its actions. Some mothers have difficulty in persuading their offspring to suck efficiently. The usual cause of this trouble is that the nipple is not protruding far enough into the baby's mouth. It 92