

start to ask questions. How does the way we behave sexually help us to survive? Why do we behave in the way we do, rather than in some other way? We may be helped in these questions if we ask another one: How does our sexual behaviour compare with that of other living primates?

Straight away we can see that there is much more intense sexual activity in our own species than in any other primates, including our closest relations. For them, the lengthy courtship phase is missing. Hardly any of the monkeys and apes develop a prolonged pair-bond relationship. The pre-copulatory patterns are brief and usually consist of no more than a few facial expressions and simple vocalisations. Copulation itself is also very brief. (In baboons, for instance, the time taken from mounting to ejaculation is no more than seven to eight seconds, with a total of no more than fifteen pelvic thrusts, often fewer. The female does not appear to experience any kind of climax. If there is anything that could be called an orgasm it is a trivial response when compared with that of the female of our own species.

The period of sexual receptivity of the female monkey or ape is more restricted. It usually only lasts; for about a week, or a little more, of their monthly cycle. Even this is an advance on the lower mammals, where it is limited more severely to the actual time of ovulation, but in our own species the primate trend towards longer receptivity has been pushed to the very limit, so that the female is receptive at virtually all times. Once a female monkey or ape becomes pregnant, or is nursing a baby, she ceases to be sexually active. Again, our species has spread its sexual activities into these periods, so that there is only a brief time just before and just after parturition when mating is seriously limited.

Clearly, the naked ape is the sexiest primate alive. To find the reason for this we have to look back again at his origins. What happened? First, he had to hunt if he was to survive. Second, he had to have a better brain to make up for his poor hunting body. Third, he had to have a longer childhood to grow the bigger brain and to educate it. Fourth, the females had to