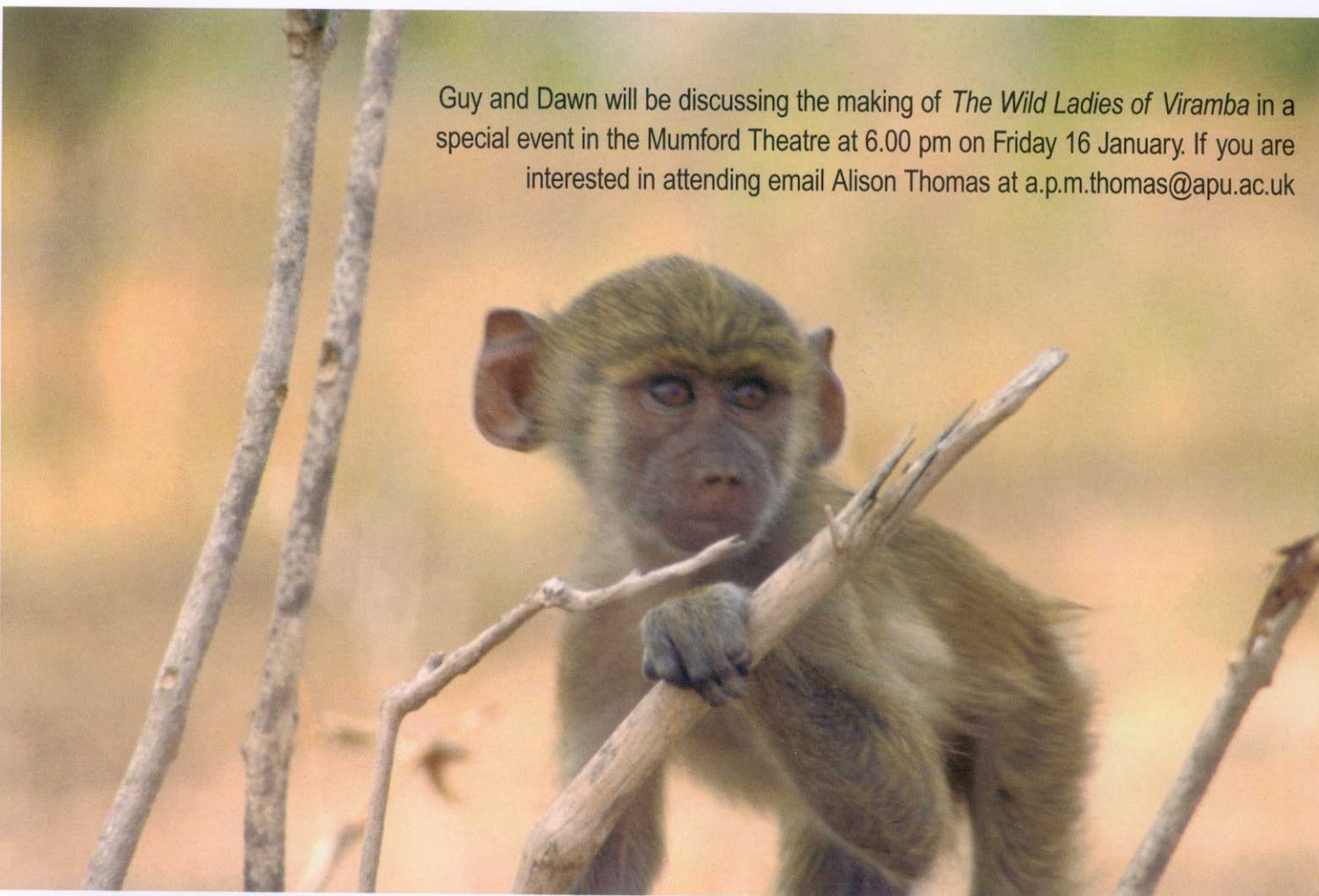


# The Wild Ladies of Viramba

If you'd like to find out more about Guy and Dawn's work in Mikumi visit [www.mikumi.org](http://www.mikumi.org) (thanks go to Toby Carter for designing the site)

Guy and Dawn will be discussing the making of *The Wild Ladies of Viramba* in a special event in the Mumford Theatre at 6.00 pm on Friday 16 January. If you are interested in attending email Alison Thomas at [a.p.m.thomas@apu.ac.uk](mailto:a.p.m.thomas@apu.ac.uk)



▲ One of the Viramba troop's young baboons

On the evening of Sunday 18 January, BBC2 will be paying tribute to Guy Norton's (Life Sciences and the Environmental Sciences Research Centre) work of the last quarter of a century. In 2001 the BBC commissioned Oxford Scientific Film Productions to make a film about Guy's unique long-term study of baboon behaviour in Mikumi National Park, Tanzania. *The Wild Ladies of Viramba* is the result. It interweaves the story of a year of the lives of the Viramba baboon troop with the experiences of Holly Carroll, a research assistant who started her volunteer year of observing the baboons as filming commenced.

The Animal Behaviour Research Unit (ABRU), Mikumi, of which Guy is now director, was set up in 1974, with the initial aim of maintaining continuous observation of selected baboon troops for ten years. Guy joined ABRU in 1978 and has ensured that ABRU has achieved thirty years of unbroken observations, making the Mikumi project

one of the world's longest continuous studies of a vertebrate species in the wild.

The film shows us a fascinating repertoire of baboon behaviour and is an important reminder that there are other types of African terrain to the short grassland we have grown accustomed to seeing in African wildlife films. The film's stars must be the three baby baboons – Heshima, Kitovu and Kibeti – who possess engagingly different personalities. These reflect the very different approaches to motherhood shown by their three mothers who occupy different ranks in the strict female hierarchy of the Viramba troop. It is easy to make human comparisons, to be reminded of the different approaches to child rearing shown by human mothers.

For Guy, too, studying the Mikumi baboons has prompted comparisons with modern man. Not for him, though, theories on child rearing but ideas about the problem solving and social living characteristics of modern man. Life is tough for

## FACTS

**ABRU – Mikumi's Animal Behaviour Research Unit – was set up in 1974**

**In 1994 Life Sciences set up the UK's first full-time undergraduate degree in Animal Behaviour**

**In 2002 the Darwin Initiative provided £108,000 to sponsor the work in Mikumi**

**The work in Mikumi is currently being sponsored by British Airways Assisting Conservation programme, New York Zoo's Wildlife Conservation Society and Oregon Wildlife Safari – as well as Toyota Tanzania**

the baboons in Mikumi's varied habitats. It is hard to obtain sufficient food and water and to be constantly vigilant against possible predators. For baboons, like early hominids, these problems are best solved in tight knit social groups. And so, argues Guy, in the baboons in Mikumi and elsewhere we are seeing a pattern of living not too dissimilar to that of our distant ancestors.

In the early 1980s Guy became affiliated to the Department of Applied Biology in Cambridge University and began spending time in the city. It was in Cambridge that Guy met his future wife, Dawn Hawkins. Dawn was competing her M.Phil within the Department of Applied Biology, and subsequently completed her PhD on an aspect of baboon behaviour at the University of Liverpool. But most importantly for APU, in 1994 Guy and Dawn joined Life Sciences and, together with a third new lecturer, Nancy Harrison, set up the country's first full time undergraduate degree in Animal Behaviour.

As *The Wild Ladies of Viramba* shows, while Guy and Dawn are teaching at APU the research at ABRU is continued by volunteer assistants like Holly. Over the past few years they have recruited three APU Life Sciences students – Alan Craig, David Hall and most recently Angela Higgison. Angela is shown at the start of the film handing over to Holly after two years as a research assistant. Former assistant Viki Gutterierrez-Diego – a visiting scholar from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid – completed her PhD (awarded June 2003) on aspects of the feeding behaviour of the Mikumi baboons while based at APU.

***In Mikumi, unlike her much filmed sister national park, the Serengeti, the grass is often of human height with patches of dense scrub, woodland and, at the highest elevations, even jungle-like forest.***

Guy and Dawn's interests have diversified in Mikumi over the years. In the spring of 2002 they were awarded one of the prestigious government Darwin Initiatives Awards to expand elephant monitoring in and around Mikumi National Park. The Mikumi elephants are part of the largest wild elephant population remaining in Africa. The Darwin Initiative aims to create a lasting capacity within the Tanzanian National Parks to be able to monitor, manage and protect this ecologically and

economically important species. To this end Dawn and Guy are developing a system for identifying and surveying elephants: here they are helped by Geography's Nick McWilliam and Oliver Cottray's extensive knowledge of GIS surveying. They will then train park ecologists, park wardens and rangers in the efficient use of these methods. This current project greatly extends preliminary work conducted by Life Sciences student April Ereckson, for her M Phil thesis, and is also enabling Fredrick Mofulu, Mikumi's senior ecologist, to study for a master's degree with APU.

Early on in his time in Mikumi Guy initiated, and has maintained, various long-term vegetation monitoring studies within the Park. In this context Guy possesses a particular interest in the fortunes of the African blackwood or mpingo. The blackwood is important commercially to Tanzania though sales of the wood to makers of woodwind instruments, particularly clarinets, and through the tourist trade in mpingo carvings. In Mikumi, Guy's vegetation monitoring recorded alarmingly large amounts of dead mpingo trees and few live specimens. The growth patterns of saplings have suggested to Guy that many might be clones instead of new sexually produced plants. This has implications for the maintenance of genetic diversity within mpingo populations and so the long-term survival prospects of the species. Within Life Sciences, Alison Thomas and Amanda Pugh have devised a DNA-based method to look at levels of genetic diversity within the species. They look encouragingly high for the blackwood but, surprisingly, not for the acacia in the park – another project here!

Their intimate knowledge of African wildlife is valued in a range of different contexts. For example Guy was a founder member of the Cambridge Conservation Forum and in 2002 he was invited to be Associate (European) Editor of the *African Journal for Ecology*. But the greatest tribute to Guy's work happened in early December 2003. Guy attended the Tanzanian Wildlife Research Institute's fourth annual conference in Arusha, Tanzania, where His Excellency Dr Ali Mohamed Shein, the Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania presented him with a special award in recognition of his 'dedication to Wildlife Conservation through research in Tanzania'. Many congratulations Guy, and thank you for all your fascinating insights into the lives of the Mikumi baboons.

## Staff Profile



▲ **Guy Norton (Senior Lecturer, Animal Behaviour)**

*Graduated from University of California, Riverside. Specialises in tropical wildlife conservation and biology.*

▼ **Dawn Hawkins (Senior Lecturer, Applied Science)**

*Graduated from Southampton University in 1987, gained an MPhil at Cambridge University in 1988 and a PhD at Liverpool University in 1999. Specialises in behavioural ecology and conservation biology.*

