



Show Me the Honey: The Evolution of Cooperation Between People and Wild Birds

April 20th (Thursday): 10-11am ET

Claire Spottiswoode



Cooperation between humans and wild animals is vanishingly rare. Yet for at least as long as we've been human, African birds called greater honeyguides have led people to honey, and so exchanged information for skills. Honeyguides know where bees' nests are located and eat beeswax, whereas human honey-hunters are able to subdue the bees and open the nest, exposing wax for the honeyguides and honey for the humans. In this talk, I'll share some of our work in collaboration with honey-hunting communities in Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa, asking how this remarkable partnership functions, and what it can teach us about communication and the coevolution of cultures across species boundaries.

Claire Spottiswoode is an evolutionary biologist and passionate naturalist with a particular interest in the ecology, evolution and conservation of species interactions. She runs two long-term field projects on African birds: one in southern Zambia focusing on coevolution between brood-parasitic birds (such as cuckoos, honeyguides and parasitic finches) and the hosts that they exploit to raise their young, and one in northern Mozambique (since 2013), on the mutually beneficial interactions between honeyguides and the human honey-hunters with whom they cooperate to gain access to bees' nests. She is a Principal Research Associate in the Department of Zoology at the University of Cambridge, and the Pola Pasvolsky Chair in Conservation Biology at the University of Cape Town's FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology.

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Contact: Lucy Liu

Email: lliu@g.harvard.edu



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