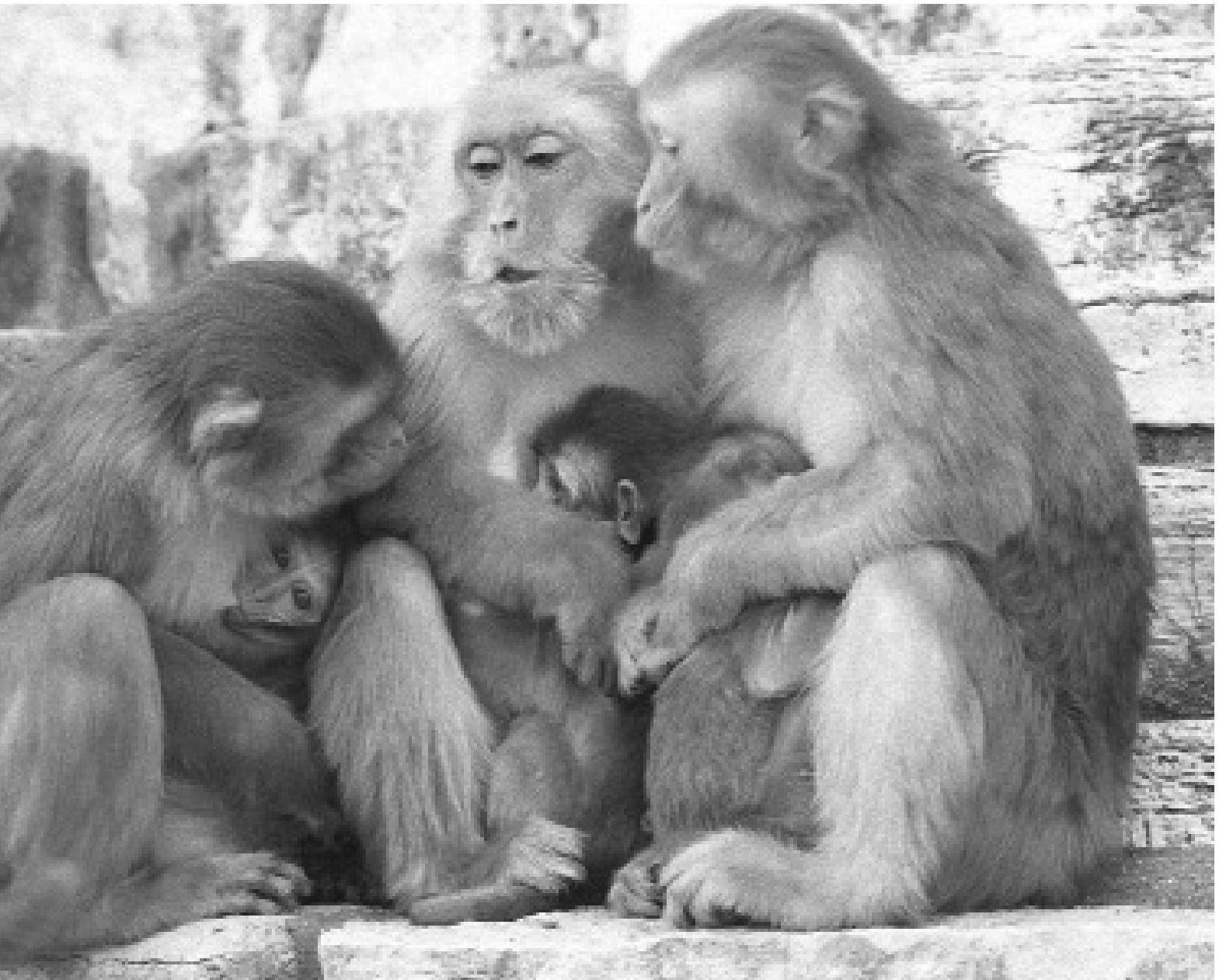


Family reunion

A nasty fight erupted within the “O-family” of our rhesus troop that involved two adult daughters of Orange, the alpha female. Sisterly feuds are the worst, especially high up in the hierarchy, where so much is at stake. Since one of Orange’s daughters is likely to take over when their mother becomes sick or dies, the most dominant one has an interest in asserting her position. In this fight, Orkid (adult on the left) bit the older Omega (adult on the right). The aftermath was tense, but I was waiting for a reconciliation. Even though rhesus monkeys are not nearly as good at making up as some other primates, within the family reconciliation is common. In the competitive environment of a macaque troop, families need to stick together, and how could they do so without repairing damaged relationships? Orkid and Omega soon joined their mom, Orange (center), and all three of them huddled closely together while “girning” loudly (a friendly vocalization), even lip-smacking at each other’s infants. As is typical of macaque reconciliations, eye contact was avoided. Soon the three were grooming, and peace was restored.



Symbolic punishment

A dominant female stump-tailed macaque has grabbed the arm of a juvenile, who, without fear, pushes his wrist straight into her mouth, letting her gnaw on it with a fierce expression on her face. To take punishment passively, reflecting agreement about who is boss, is not unusual among social animals. Stump-tails go through this kind of ritual all the time. Their “mock” bites never cause any injury; they probably do not even hurt. It looks as if the female is saying, “I could bite you. Perhaps I should bite you. But I won’t.” These status rituals signal mutual trust and agreement, underlining the social hierarchy without resorting to fighting. Stump-tail society is extremely close and tolerant, and the species can express status differences in ways that preserve rather than interrupt social cohesion.



Pickpocketing

Being dominant in rhesus society has lots of perks. For example, a monkey of high rank can without impunity remove food from a subordinate's mouth. Doing so is made easier by the cheek pouches typical of macaques, in which they store unchewed food. A dominant female holds the head of a subordinate still while she checks out the contents of his pouches: if she finds something good, she will eat it straight out of his mouth! Whereas in all animal species social dominance implies inequality, it rarely goes as far as seen here. Rhesus monkeys simply are not your average primate: they have been called the chickens of the primate world because of their obsession with the pecking order. If we consider a range of dominance "styles," from egalitarian to despotic, rhesus monkeys are clearly at the latter end of the spectrum. They don't hesitate to punish the transgressions of those lower on the totem pole, which explains the victim's lack of resistance in this picture. It is better to sit still and oblige than to get bitten.



Give me back my berries!

Jakie was eating berries when a big male snatched them out of his hands. Instead of taking this lying down, he pursued the offender using screams and his species' typical gesture of begging with palm up. Jakie's vociferous protest contrasts with the rhesus monkey on page 93, who passively lets a dominant individual remove food from his mouth. Such is the difference between a relatively egalitarian, tolerant primate, such as the chimpanzee, and one who obeys a strict hierarchy, such as the rhesus. For chimpanzees, stealing is against the rules, and Jakie knows it!

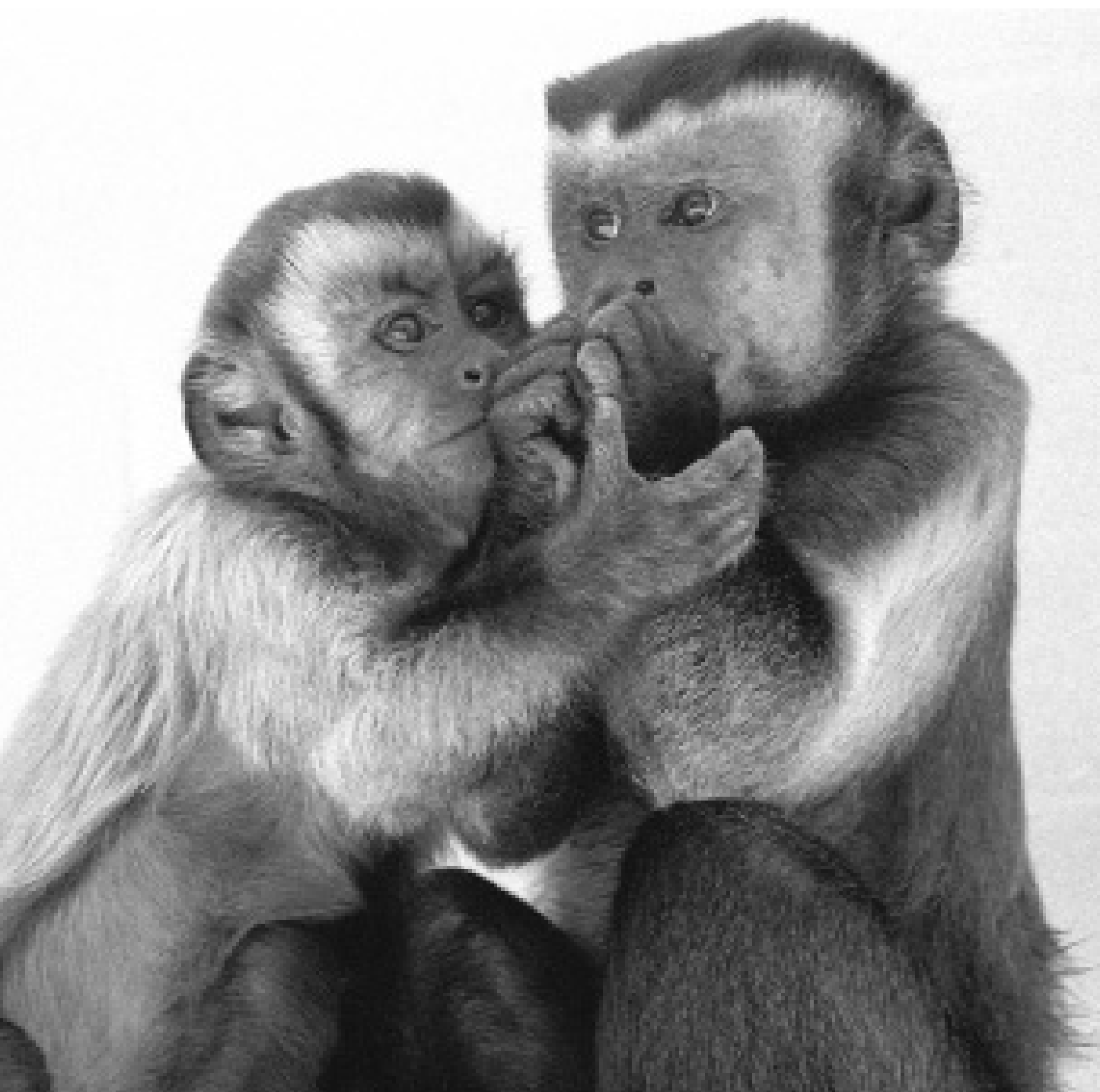
Manual gesturing is uncommon in the animal kingdom: it is seen only in apes and humans. We immediately understand the meaning of Jakie's open hand, as it is also used by humans in need.



Cheek to cheek

A juvenile capuchin cups his hand next to the food an adult male is eating. He is about to press his cheek against the adult's, a gesture called cheek-to-cheek begging. Few primates are tolerant enough to let another touch their food, let alone take from it. When I first noticed that capuchin monkeys share food, I was puzzled. Except for mother-offspring sharing, other primates eat by themselves. But capuchin monkeys share just like chimpanzees and that other tolerant primate, the human.

A common explanation for food sharing among chimpanzees and humans is that it evolved along with cooperative hunting. Fruit and leaves are dispersed throughout the forest, as are insects and other small prey; there is no need to share small bites. But when several individuals join together to capture large prey, there must be rewards. Chimpanzees share meat after killing a monkey, and human hunters bring back prey to their villages. Recently, field-workers solved the capuchin puzzle when they reported that these monkeys, too, hunt in groups: they capture and eat large squirrels. This is a difficult task, requiring coordination among the hunters, a perfect setting for the evolution of sharing.





United we stand

If looks could kill, these two staring rhesus females would do a good job defeating their opponent. Standing shoulder to shoulder, mother (left) and daughter advance on another female who had threatened the daughter. Kin-based alliances explain why in macaque society a female inherits her mother's rank. Females receive so much support from their mothers, as well as from other female relatives, that they can be said to belong to a clique. If her clique is low ranking, a female will be treated like dirt. If her clique is high ranking, she will be treated like royalty.

Among chimpanzees similar coalitions can be found, but these are far more flexible and opportunistic, at least among the males. The two males in the small photo ruled the colony at the Arnhem Zoo for several years. Nikkie (behind) was the alpha and Yeroen (front) his older partner. Here they stand united, fiercely screaming, against their common rival. This partnership lasted only as long as Yeroen received sexual privileges from Nikkie for supporting him. When Nikkie started to become jealous and intolerant of Yeroen's contacts with females, their coalition dissolved, and Nikkie lost his elevated status overnight.

