



cordially invites you to an

Interdisciplinary Seminar

with

Dr. Mark W. Moffett

on

“How a shift in social identity made enormous societies possible: An overlooked turning point in human evolution”

Tuesday, October 11, 2016

3:30-5 p.m.

Reception & refreshments at 3 p.m.

Hallam Auditorium, Room 206

1122 Volunteer Boulevard



Mark W. Moffett is an entomologist, nature photographer and explorer. He received his PhD at Harvard University, studying marauder ants with renowned insect scientist Edward O. Wilson and is currently a research associate in entomology at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. He has written more than 25 articles for National Geographic Magazine, which has featured nearly 500 of his images. He is also the author of several books, most recently *Adventures Among Ants: A Global Safari With a Cast of Trillions*. Moffett has appeared several times on *The Colbert Report* and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. He can be found at <http://www.doctorbugs.com>.

Abstract: Human societies are examined as distinct and coherent groups. In the societies of most other vertebrates, each member must recognize every other member as an individual. This typically limits societies to 100 members and never more than 200. Numerous and diverse identity labels substitute for such knowledge in humans and were necessary before our societies could grow more populous. How did a capacity for using societal labels arise? The rule of parsimony indicates that, at least as far back as their divergence from the chimpanzee line, our ancestors would have never lived in strict family groups or in any other compact societies offering regular face-to-face interaction. Nor did they form open networks. They were fission-fusion species that evolved, by simple steps, from having societies bounded by the recognition of individuals to societies differentiated by labels. I propose that this transition, ignored before now, occurred well before language by a simple shift in signals resembling those employed by chimpanzees. Free from usual size limits, societies at first reached into the multiple hundreds. Agriculture would permit societies to grow larger still, in part through the improved stabilization of labels within settled communities. This lecture expands upon the author's review in the September 2013 issue of *Human Nature*, *Human Identity and the Evolution of Societies*.