Primatologist Jill Pruetz, who earned her bachelor’s degree in anthropology at Texas State in 1989 and her PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has recorded the first evidence of chimpanzees’ using tools to hunt.

Pruetz, assistant professor of anthropology at Iowa State University, reported her breakthrough research last year in Current Biology. She reported the evidence she had found in the West African nation of Senegal that confirms tool use by female and juvenile chimpanzees when hunting vertebrates. In order to make their observations, Pruetz and her team spent four years getting the chimpanzees accustomed to a benign human presence throughout a 39-mile worksite.

Her study, funded by the National Geographic Society, is the first record of chimpanzees’ hunting with tools and the first account of habitual tool use by non-humans while hunting other vertebrates. It’s also the first report of hunting by female chimpanzees.

While female chimpanzees are known to make and use tools to extract insects from mounds of earth and crack open nuts for consumption, hunting was always considered a male activity. Pruetz documented 22 cases of female and juvenile chimpanzees fashioning tools such as spears to use in hunting smaller primates in hollow branches and tree trunks.

Pruetz is also involved in teaching and conservation in the tropics. She is co-director of the non-profit organization DANTA and affiliated with the El Zota Biological Field Station in Costa Rica. Pruetz offers field courses on primate behavior and ecology at El Zota and has taught similar courses in Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica.