Jane Goodall, the primatologist who revolutionized our understanding of chimpanzees and ourselves, dies at 91

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6 October 2025

Jane Goodall, the scientist who taught humanity about our closest evolutionary relatives, the chimpanzees, died last week at the age of 91. The Jane Goodall Institute, which she founded in 1977, released a statement that she had died on October 1 of natural causes, while in California on a speaking tour. Goodall was world-renowned for her ground-breaking research on chimpanzees in the wild. She was the first researcher to conduct systematic extended in-person observations of chimps in their natural habitat.

Her research revealed that chimpanzees, with whom we share the vast majority of our genetic makeup, also exhibit behaviors, such as the manufacture and use of simple tools, which provide insight into the origin of human technology. Tool use had previously been thought to be an exclusively human skill.

Furthermore, contrary to previous conceptions that chimps and other apes, as well as animals in general, are emotionless and unthinking, and driven entirely by instinct, she found that chimps have their own individual personalities and engage in complex social behaviors. The latter includes the use of vocalizations accompanied by hand and head gestures to communicate with other members of the group. Importantly, these behaviors are learned rather than genetically patterned, constituting incipient culture.

Her research has prompted investigations of other species, also found to have some of these same complex behaviors.

Born in 1934 in England and raised in London, Goodall did not initially train as a scientist, but was employed as a secretary. She recently revealed that as a child, she dreamed of growing up, going to Africa, living with wild animals and writing books. Opportunity arose during a trip to Kenya to visit family friends, leading to an encounter with the famous paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey, with whom she discussed her love of animals. Sensing her potential, he asked her whether she would be interested in studying wild chimpanzees in Tanzania. She agreed and was initially employed as Leakey's secretary.

Once in the field, on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika in 1960, while dealing with malaria and animal predators, Goodall found that getting close to the chimpanzees was not an easy feat. The chimps were wary and kept their distance. However, with persistence and a non-aggressive approach, she eventually won their confidence and was able to make direct, detailed observations, learning the individual characteristics of each member of the group, and giving them names rather than numbers, which was not standard practice at the time. In effect, she pioneered a fieldwork technique in primatology—participant observation, which had long been practiced in social/cultural anthropology—spending an extended period living and interacting with the subjects being studied.

Goodall discovered that not only did the chimps make simple tools (e.g., stripping leaves from twigs and using the bare sticks or long grass stems to extract termites from their colonies to eat them), but that chimps exhibited behaviors similar to human emotions, such as joy, sadness and fear. She also observed bonds between mothers and infants, sibling rivalry and the establishment of social hierarchies. They also ate meat and engaged in inter-group conflicts. Other researchers have subsequently found that chimps also make and use several different forms of tools, including stones used to crack open hard-shelled nuts, and spears used to stab

monkeys whom they hunt, and that these are cultural traditions which vary between groups. This evidence strongly suggests that the last common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees possessed at least the precursors of these behaviors, strengthening the understanding of a common evolutionary origin.

Goodall's discoveries gained world-wide attention in 1963 when *National Geographic* published her article, "My Life Among Wild Chimpanzees," which was featured on the front cover of the magazine. The prominent evolutionary biologist and science historian Stephen Jay Gould praised her work, which he said, "represents one of the Western world's great scientific achievements." She subsequently wrote 32 books, based on her research, including 15 for children, which further spread her findings among a wide audience. She was also featured in several television documentaries. In addition, her work earned her a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge in 1965, despite the fact that she had no undergraduate degree.

Her activities soon expanded from research to wildlife conservation and environmental preservation. In 1978, Tanzania honored her work by designating the Gombe Stream Chimpanzee Reserve, where she had done her original fieldwork, as a national park. In 1992 her institute founded the Tchimpounga Chimpanzee Rehabilitation Center, which has cared for hundreds of injured and orphaned chimpanzees, the casualties of chimps being hunted by humans for meat or kidnapped for the pet trade. She became world-renowned not only for her pioneering research but for her crusading efforts in wildlife and habitat conservation.

The Jane Goodall Institute funds scientific research and conservation projects around the world, including the Roots & Shoots program that works with young people. Goodall inspired a number of young women to become scientists, including Dian Fossey, who studied mountain gorillas for many years, a career featured in the film *Gorillas in the Mist.*

Goodall also became an advocate for human rights and concerns regarding climate change.

Jane Goodall was an extremely important scientific figure who changed the way people understand themselves, their relationship to the natural world, and the animal kingdom. Darwin's most controversial assertion was that human beings and the great apes had a common ancestor not that long ago. This truth is proven by the fossil record, but Goodall's work gave it a degree of staggering concreteness. She showed that chimpanzees make and use tools, hunt cooperatively, and display complex emotions and social structures once thought unique to humans.

The implications of her work, always understated, are in fact an assault on all forms of religious dogma, which hold that man was uniquely created in the image of a creator-deity. Actually, many of the unique traits of man are shared with the great apes because man is a member of the great apes family. The fact that Goodall held vaguely pantheist religious beliefs in no way undermines the profoundly materialist content of her work. However great a scientist she was, Goodall was known for her compassion and humanity both to people and to the animals she studied.

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