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Interviews

## JANE GOODALL

Scientist and conservationist

*London, 8th May 2003*

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Jane Goodall reflects on her years of work with chimpanzees in Africa, and discusses a number of her ongoing environmental and development projects. As a UN Messenger of Peace she discusses the importance of the United Nations, and highlights the emphasis that her "Roots and Shoots" programme for children is now giving to peace. She shares her thoughts on how her encounters with wild forests and animals have nurtured her own spiritual outlook.

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## **AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. JANE GOODALL, MAY 8 2003**

Jane Goodall is a scientist and conservationist who is famous for her ground-breaking work with chimpanzees. She travels the world extensively to raise awareness of the plight of chimpanzees and the environment. She's the author of many books including *In the Shadow of Man*, *Through a Window*, *My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe* and *Reason for Hope, A Spiritual Journey*. She is a UN Messenger of Peace, and a member of the advisory panel named by the Secretary-General to discuss new approaches to sustainable development. Her Institute runs a number of Programmes, both in Africa and worldwide.

We started by discussing her scientific work with the chimpanzees of Gombe. One notable feature of this is the patience with which she made her initial approach to them, sitting day after day watching them from a distance until they had gradually become accustomed to her presence. I asked her whether this patience could be taught. She responded: "To some extent. To be a good observer of animals, patience was necessary. Some of my students were impatient to start with, but the chimpanzees taught them that only by learning patience would they get good results. For those with time constraints it is difficult. And some people never seem able to acquire patience."

In the course of her work, she had observed in chimpanzee life that they share many of our behaviours and emotions, both good and bad. I wondered whether that meant that it was unhelpful to make a sharp distinction between the animal and the human kingdoms. Jane replied: "In fact biological and behavioural evidence suggests that it is no longer possible to draw a sharp line between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom. Once we are prepared to admit that we are not the only beings on this planet with personalities, minds and feelings, then we develop a new respect for the other animals. However, western religion and western science has traditionally maintained that human beings are separate from and superior to the other animal beings. Religions often insist that only humans have souls. Scientists have different reasons. It is not so easy to quantify personality and emotions. And it is harder to conduct invasive experiments on animals if you admit that they suffer pain similar to ours, have emotions similar to ours. Many people whose work involves treating animals in inhumane ways (intensive farming including fur farming, trapping, and so on, prefer to believe that animals are indeed different from us."

Another aspect of Jane's scientific approach is that it is one that fosters intimacy with the subject of study. This reminded me of the geneticist, Barbara McClintock's, comment about developing a 'feeling for the organism'. Jane's work initially met with disapproval precisely because it included an emotional component – giving the chimpanzees names instead of numbers, for example. I asked her whether she would go as far as saying that the sense of sympathetic identification she seeks to develop with the chimpanzees is an attempt to get in touch with their soul – whatever we might mean by that word? She replied: "Do chimpanzees have a soul? I suspect that if we do, so do they! But it was MY soul that I came more into contact with during all those months and years that I spent alone in the forest. It helped me to come into contact with my inner self."

A sense of awe is something that we generally connect with human experience in the context of religion. Yet some of the behaviour Jane has observed with chimpanzees suggests they too could experience wonder or awe. She described the incredible "waterfall dance" of a chimpanzee coming upon an 80 foot fall, how they gaze at the water, always coming, always going in the presence of what she calls the elemental great natural beauty; and she wonders whether, if they could speak, this might lead to the development of a kind of animistic religion. Awe and a sense of wonder are

desperately important to Jane; "I am horrified when I hear scientists maintain that soon science will have the answer to every last mystery of the universe." She has found that the large amount of time she has spent in the forests and jungles of Africa – places that are for her like cathedrals – have helped to develop a sense of inner peace in her, a sense she can take with her into her work in the world.

Asked about her belief in the importance of the United Nations, Jane responded, "It is even more important now, in the post Iraq era, than ever before. People are questioning the relevance of the UN, largely because of the high-handed way in which the Bush administration, backed by Blair's government, ignored the Security Council in their attack on Iraq. But for all its shortcomings, the UN is the only organization we have that offers hope of a peaceful future. Perhaps, under the leadership of Kofi Annan, the best Secretary General ever, the threat of global military domination by America can be avoided."

Jane has stated that, as well as the standard of living of the poorest 80% needing to rise, the standard of the richest 20% needs to fall. I asked her about the very difficult problem this poses – convincing the rich 20% that they don't need the luxuries they've become addicted to.

"The best way is to educate the children to be better stewards of the natural world than their parents. But we probably don't have the luxury of the time that takes. We must find ways to convince adults too. After all, most people genuinely care about their children and grandchildren. We must find ways to convince people to spend those extra few cents or pennies on products from companies with environmentally – and socially – sound ethics. And we need the wealthy. Rather than make them feel guilty because of an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, I hope they will be the ones to lead a new trend in buying the best new technology – solar units, hydrogen or fuel cell engines. Once they begin buying the price will come down and more and more people will be able to afford these things. Certainly we shall not get their support by trying to make them feel guilty."

As the conversation continued, it emerged that one of the signs of hope she sees is that the world of business is finally beginning to take environmental responsibilities seriously. Even if it is done mainly as a public relations exercise it is still a start and should be encouraged. Jane has, over time, worked with a number of groups whose products and practices she does not wholly agree with – for example, a logging company that is helping ensure that its roads are not used for the illegal trade in bushmeat<sup>(1)</sup>. A chimpanzee sanctuary run by the Jane Goodall Institute at Tchimpounga was built by the oil company, Concoco. As she said in an earlier interview, "Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don't believe is right... *You can't force change on people.* Lasting change is a series of compromises. And compromise is alright, as long as your values don't change." (emph. added).

I asked Jane to say something about two of the programmes of her Institute: Roots & Shoots; and TACARE. Roots & Shoots is aimed primarily at young people – although it has apparently "seeded itself" into senior citizens homes and prisons, and is just starting up in UNHCR refugee camps. Its name is symbolic – roots make a firm foundation, shoots seem tiny; together, to reach the sun, they can break through brick walls. If these walls are the problems that we humans have inflicted on the planet, then the program offers hope: hundreds and thousands of roots & shoots can break through and make the world a better place. There are at least 4500 groups around the world in over 70 countries. Each group is asked to implement three types of project: one for the environment; one for animals; and one for the community. Since

September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and the recent war in Iraq, Roots and Shoots have developed a strong Peace Initiative. A recent project by Rob Cornett and Matthew Hoffman of Puppet Farm Arts, in collaboration with Roots and Shoots, is the construction of giant peace doves. A web site, [www.giantpeacedoves.com](http://www.giantpeacedoves.com), contains information on how to make them, and Jane plans that on UN Peace Day, 21<sup>st</sup> September, Roots & Shoots groups – and many others, will “fly” these spectacular doves to promote a global commitment to peace. One young man in Israel, having heard about Roots and Shoots on the Internet, has set up quite on his own, a large number of groups, from elementary school to university level – which proves one of Jane’s deeply held beliefs that every individual can make a difference in building a better world.

TACARE began when Jane flew, in a small plane, over Gombe and the surrounding country. She was shocked to see that outside the national park virtually all the trees had gone. Clearly, the chimpanzees and other forest animals had gone also. She saw terrible soil erosion, making living conditions even harder for the local people. When people are too poor to buy food elsewhere, and cannot move on due to overpopulation, they must harm the natural world in order to survive. “Clearly, we could only hope to conserve the tiny 30sq mile park if we could improve the lives of the local people, get them on our side. TACARE is so successful that we now plan to replicate it in other parts of Africa, such as Nigeria, around the Cross River National Park, and Congo-Brazzaville, around our sanctuary for orphan chimpanzees. TACARE was developed by one European, George Strunden, who put together a great team of Tanzanians. This team went into the villages not with a solution to impose but to offer local leaders a “menu” of options. Initially many of the conservative village leaders were suspicious, but when they realized the benefits they gradually took advantage of all that was offered - tree nurseries, agro-forestry, the most suitable farming methods and soil erosion control. Roots & Shoots provides conservation education. Women can take out small loans from our microcredit banks, based on the Grameen system (2), for approved environmentally sustainable projects – and they are very reliable in repaying money. We offer scholarships to gifted girls to go on to secondary school (otherwise there is little opportunity). One reason for the success of TACARE is that the infrastructure is comparatively small and, unlike the situation in larger organization, one dollar does the work of five. Initially funded by an EU grant, TACARE now has funds also from a number of other donor agencies and some private monies.”

When I asked Jane to what she attributed her courage and dedication, that helped her to enter and persevere in a field that very few women were involved in, she referred to the many strong women in her family background, and particularly to the belief that her mother had in her and the support she gave. “When I dreamed of going to live with animals in Africa, as a child, everyone laughed at me except my mother. She always said ‘If you work hard, take advantage of opportunities and NEVER GIVE UP you will find a way’”

Jane’s passion for the preservation of the environment, and particularly of forests, is naturally one that is not confined to Africa, and she was recently (1<sup>st</sup> April 2003) involved in calling for the introduction of the **Act to Save America's Forests** in the US Senate. She spoke of her visit to a sustainably managed forest, Wildwood, in British Columbia. Its forester, Merve Wilkinson, is so attuned to his trees that he can judge when a tree will be past its prime and ready for felling. Large “grandfather” trees are left to seed new growth, horses are used to pull fallen trunks, and small saw mills are located close at hand. There are more animal species in the forest now than when Merve bought the area to save it from development 50 years ago.

Finally, as Jane has devoted a lifetime to pondering the mystery of non-human (and human!) life forms, I was curious to know if she had ever wondered about the possible

forms life may take elsewhere in the universe. "Of course!", she replied; though she confessed that she hadn't gone very far in her speculations. She has wondered what might happen after death – "Perhaps, for example, we shall exist in quite another form in a dimension where substance as we know it is meaningless. It may be possible for millions of people to stand on the head of a pin." She has also considered what the Earth might have been like if humans, with their extraordinary brains, had not evolved. "As a species we may be clever, but we seem to have lost wisdom. The wisdom that the indigenous people have." Their leaders, before making any major decision would always consider the possible implications of that decision on the lives of their people seven generations later. This contrasts strongly with the bottom line decisions of business and politics today. "Do these people, out for a quick buck, truly care about their children and grandchildren?" One hopeful sign is the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN, formed only last year. Jane recalled that at the *Millennium World Peace Summit* at the UN, which had brought together spiritual and religious leaders from 100 countries, it had been the indigenous leaders who had drawn attention to environmental degradation as a key issue.

(1) Wild animals, including chimpanzees and gorillas, slaughtered for food. Although indigenous inhabitants may have hunted these animals, they have done so sustainably, whereas the bushmeat trade is supplying its products to the cities as a luxury.

(2) Mohammed Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank, is a hero of Jane's. She regards him as having done more for the poorest of the poor than almost anyone else in the last century, and in a recent visit to Bangladesh she was able to go with him to one of his Grameen villages and meet some of the women whose lives he has so changed.

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On this web site there are contact details of other Jane Goodall Institute offices around the world, in Tanzania, Canada, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, South Africa, Taiwan, Uganda and the UK. There are also Roots and Shoots offices in many countries.