

Chimpanzee Champion



PHOTO: MICHAEL NEUGEBAUER

Jane in conversation with sanctuary chimp Uruhara

Jeremy Miles meets Dame Jane Goodall, Bournemouth's famous primatologist who knows how to speak fluent chimpanzee and is not afraid to use it

The exotic cries of an excited chimp ring through the trees in Bournemouth's usually sedate Central Gardens. The mayor, Councillor Barry Goldbart, looks slightly non-plussed as he regards his guest of honour, a 76-year-old woman, howling at the skies.

But Dame Jane Goodall, a trim figure in a red anorak and black jeans, is not your run-of-the-mill civic invitee. Not only does she speak fluent chimpanzee, she's not afraid to use it. The award-winning primatologist has just planted a tree in the town where she grew up to mark 50 years of campaigning to raise the profile of chimpanzees as an endangered species. Local schoolchildren, followers of her Roots & Shoots Conservation Programme, look on.

The mayor has clearly done his homework. He speaks in some depth

about how Jane's pioneering studies of chimpanzees and their social and family life led to a fundamental reassessment of these fascinating creatures. Jane Goodall listens intently. She is clutching 'Mr H', a stuffed toy monkey, her constant

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travelling companion and talisman. The H stands for 'hope'.

It was over half a century ago, back in 1960, at the Gombe National Park in Tanzania that Jane first broke with scientific protocol by giving the subjects of her studies names rather than numbers. This was

Jane Goodall's breakthrough, revealing that chimps possess unique and individual personalities and are capable of rational thoughts and emotions.

In Bournemouth she kisses the tree she has just planted "to give it strength and spirit" and throwing back her head gives her impassioned cry to the sky. "That's chimp for 'Hey, we've just planted a tree'."

Jane's research at Gombe is probably best known to the scientific community for challenging the longstanding belief that only humans can construct and use tools. Jane found evidence of tool making that led the scientist Louis Leaky to write: "We must now redefine man, redefine tools or accept chimpanzees as human." It was groundbreaking stuff. Leaky sponsored her to do a PhD at Cambridge, gave her a job and she was suddenly elevated to the

“Chimpanzees aren’t really animals, they’re more like people”



PHOTO: MICHAEL NEUGEBAUER

Jane with Fifi, one of the chimps she studied

frontline of zoological research. Jane would go on to prove that, just like humans, chimps are capable of reasoned thought and even the concept of self.

Her arrival in the world of primatology was perhaps a little unorthodox. It was in the late 1950s that she first visited Africa. She had

Jane famously personalised the chimps she studied by giving them names, including David Greybeard, Goliath, Humphrey, Gigi, Frodo and Flo

been invited to Kenya for a holiday with a school friend. Yet far from finding the contrast with her home in terribly English post-war Bournemouth a culture shock, she instantly fell in love with the great continent she had read so much about. “It was like going home,” she told me. “I’d read about it and dreamed about it. Getting out into the wild, first in the Nairobi National Park and then the Serengeti when I was working for Louis Leaky, was incredible.”

Jane’s love of wildlife goes way back to her childhood. She moved to Bournemouth with her mother, Vanne, at the age of five. It was the outbreak of the Second World War, and her grandmother’s rambling Edwardian house on the coast seemed like a relatively safe haven. A constant companion was a toy chimp called Jubilee. Her mother’s friends were appalled at the life-sized monkey, saying it would give little Jane nightmares.

Jane, however, loved her simian



PHOTO: JIGI/ROOTS AND SHOOTS

Jane with Peace Dove at a Roots & Shoots event in Bournemouth



Jane outside her Bournemouth home

PHOTO: MICHAEL NEUGEBAUER

academic world was not receptive to suggestions that monkeys might share human characteristics. Her first article for the publication *Nature* was returned with every reference to chimps as ‘him’ or ‘her’, ‘she’ or ‘he’, deleted and changed to ‘it’. Jane doggedly put the gender back in. “It was my first battle,” she recalls. Happily it was one she won. Later she would famously go on to personalise the chimps she studied by giving them names, including David Greybeard, Goliath, Humphrey, Gigi, Frodo and Flo.

It helped enormously in publicising the work of the Jane Goodall Institute. But even today she says she still finds pockets of resistance. “People who do nasty things to animals prefer to think of them as not having personalities, minds and emotions. It’s not nice to chop things up and stick electrodes in them if you think that they’re feeling beings like us.”

She tells me about Ham, the ‘astrochimp’ launched into space by the Americans in the early 1960s. “A rumour got out that he was scared, so they arranged a press call to prove otherwise. They got his capsule, but even two men couldn’t get Ham inside: he was completely terrified.” In the event the space flight misfired and though Ham survived Jane is still haunted by the pictures published at the time. “His face, when he came out, was a face of such fear as I’ve never seen on a chimp,” she says.

I ask how she detaches herself from her emotions while working. “I don’t, it’s a question of separating the two parts of your brain. You can feel with your right brain and think with your left brain. Just because you feel emotional about something doesn’t mean you have to stop being objective.” She agrees that a lot of problems arise from people who allow their rationality to be clouded

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friend. Intriguingly though, she makes light of subsequent press reports suggesting that this was the inspiration for her future career. “That’s just the media putting two and two together. I did love Jubilee because he was realistic and monkeys fascinate me, but I don’t think that’s

what led me to chimps! All my toys were animals and funnily enough the only doll I had was African, a black doll.”

Once she had achieved her doctorate and started working, she discovered quite what a Darwinian challenge she had taken on. The



Jane and Mayor Barry Goldbart with young supporters of her Root & Shoots conservation campaign

PHOTO: JEREMY MILES

by their emotional feelings, but adds, “I actually think it’s worse the other way round. That’s why some scientists can do such terrible, terrible things.”

A decade ago Jane Goodall was telling journalists that she would probably retire in six or seven years. And yet she still spends 300 days a year on the road and says that “every single second in between” is spent in Bournemouth writing books at her grandmother’s old house, which is still home to Jane’s sister Judy and her family.

“There’s the American tour, the Asian tour, two visits to Africa a year. I try to cluster them so that the days I have in Bournemouth give me time to write.” Even as we speak, Jane, who is also a UN Messenger of Peace, is en-route to a fundraiser in New York and has her laptop fired up and ready to go. Not a moment is wasted.

Despite her many exotic travels

Jane loves her Bournemouth roots and tells me that she cherishes memories of an idyllic childhood spent playing on the beach and cliffs and in the very gardens which now contain her sapling that one day will become a mighty oak.

The award-winning primatologist planted a tree in the town where she grew up to mark 50 years of campaigning to raise the profile of chimpanzees as an endangered species

Her time in Bournemouth finds her accompanied by a boxer-cross bitch called Charlie, the latest in a series of dogs that wait patiently at home in Bournemouth while she jets around the world. Dogs, she says, have always been her favourite

animals. “Not chimpanzees?” I question. “No, chimpanzees aren’t really animals, they’re more like people.” □

The tree planting was a prelude to Bournemouth Base Camp – Gombe 50, celebrating 50 years of Jane Goodall’s research. Hosted by the Jane Goodall Institute at Bournemouth University on 22 May, it includes a Roots & Shoots event, work by local artists and a screening of the award-winning film *Jane’s Journey*. Visit janegoodall.org.uk or rootsshoots.org.uk.

