

Remembering Dr. Jane Goodall: A Legacy for the Ages
A Deeper Look Into the Accomplishments and Impact of Jane Goodall
By: Taylor McDole

Before 1960, people knew very little about chimpanzees, despite the fact that humans share about 98% of their DNA with the fascinating creatures. One woman completely transformed everything people thought they knew about chimpanzees: Dr. Jane Goodall. Her groundbreaking research led to countless connections between chimpanzees and humans and helped pave the way for women in science. Dr. Goodall passed at 91 on October 1st, 2025. Her legacy is one that can never be forgotten and will continue to inspire generations to come.

Dr. Goodall was born in 1934. As a child, she showed a strong interest and love for animals. She had many pets, including a dog, pony, and tortoise, and had a dream of traveling to Africa to work with her favorite animals from books she read, such as Tarzan and Dr. Dolittle. When she became older, Goodall was unable to afford college and worked various jobs to save money. When she was 23, she left to visit a friend in Nairobi, Kenya. On the way, she met paleoanthropologist Dr. Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, who offered her a job at the natural history museum. She held her job at the natural history museum for some time, until Leakey decided to send her to what is known today as the Gombe Stream National Park to study wild chimpanzees. Goodall was chosen for this expedition due to her passion for knowledge and animals, and Leakey felt that her lack of formal education would provide unbiased results with her observations. The goal was to have Goodall study these chimpanzees with an open mind to understand more about what early humans were like using our closest living relatives. While Leakey raised funds for the expedition, Goodall studied what was already known about the behavior of primates. She left for the Gombe Stream in 1960 with her mother as her escort.

The beginning of Goodall's research was a challenge. She faced illness, and often hiked miles through thick forestry and rough terrain without seeing a single chimpanzee. Finally, one older chimpanzee allowed her to observe him, and although it was unfavored among ethologists, Goodall named this chimpanzee David Greybeard. Greybeard's acceptance of Goodall's observations led to the other chimps in the group to allow her to study them as well. Observing Greybeard led Goodall to one of her first major discoveries: that chimpanzees made and used tools, just like humans. She saw the chimps using blades of grass to take termites out of their holes. Goodall also made the discovery that chimpanzees were not herbivores, but rather omnivores; she also observed the hunting process of the chimps. Rather than observing the chimps as distant subjects, Goodall studied them as complex creatures with emotions, personalities and names. She had a heartfelt passion for studying and learning about the chimpanzees. Goodall continues her work in the field, and began earning her doctorate degree in 1962, without having an undergraduate degree. Senior scientists at Cambridge University challenged her methods of studying the chimps, objecting to her suggestion that the chimps had emotions and personalities. They also disagreed with Goodall's method of naming the chimps, rather than referring to them as numbers. This did absolutely nothing to hinder Goodall's work, as she infuriated them with the release of her first book, "My Friends, the Wild Chimpanzees," published by National Geographic. Dr. Goodall earned her P.h.D in 1966 and would continue her work in Gombe for the next two decades.

In 1977, Dr. Goodall founded the Jane Goodall Institute to continue her research and advocate for chimpanzee protection, conservation, and environmental protection. Her approach to all matters nature-related changed when she attended a conference in 1986 called "Understanding Chimpanzees", her focus shifted from research to conservation. The speakers at the conference all mentioned deforestation at their sites of research, leaving a deep impact on Dr. Goodall. In the early 1990s, she went back to Gombe and, much to her shock, saw mass deforestation. This was when Dr. Goodall knew she had to take action to protect chimpanzees and their homes. One of her first major steps was founding Roots & Shoots, a program that started with Tanzanian students focused on the steps young people can take towards conservation. The following year, Dr. Goodall established the Tchimpounga Sanctuary, a place of refuge for chimpanzees orphaned by the illegal commercial bushmeat and pet trades, as well as chimpanzees held at medical research facilities. She spoke with anyone who she felt could help make changes to protect places like Gombe Stream National Park and animals like chimpanzees, although she advocated for the conservation of far more species than just chimps. Her advocacy and determined spirit led to widespread awareness and changes being made to protect nature.

Dr. Jane Goodall left behind an irreplaceable legacy and was a quintessential leader in environmental advocacy. She authored over 20 books throughout her lifetime, was named a United Nations Messenger of Peace, and was awarded the Stephen Hawking Medal for Science Communication, as well as many other awards. She was also honored with her own Barbie Doll in the Inspiring Women series, the first doll in the series to be made with recycled materials. Dr. Goodall spent most of her life relentlessly fighting for animals and became a legend in the process. Her life was dedicated to planet Earth, and there are not enough words to thank Dr. Goodall for all the positive work she did for our environment. Anyone who reviews the influence her years of dedication had will find themselves deeply moved by her passion. I was aware of Dr. Goodall as a famous environmentalist, but upon taking a deeper look into her life's work, I learned even more about the action she took. I learned that she not only advocated for what she believed in, but also set up institutions and programs to carry on her legacy, even though she has sadly departed.

"The least I can do is speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves." - Jane Goodall