

Jane Goodall Institute

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE

Founder – the Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace

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SHORT VERSION

Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) and UN Messenger of Peace, was a world-renowned ethologist and conservationist who inspired greater understanding, and action on behalf of the natural world.

On 14th July 1960 Jane arrived on the shores of Gombe in Tanzania to begin what became groundbreaking studies into the lives of wild chimpanzee communities. Her discoveries that chimpanzees make and use tools forever changed our understanding of our relationship to the rest of the animal kingdom. This transformative research continues today through the Jane Goodall Institute as the longest running wild chimpanzee study in the world.

Jane’s work built on scientific innovations, growing a lifetime of advocacy including trailblazing efforts through her international organization of 30 Jane Goodall Institutes which advance community-led conservation, animal welfare, ongoing research and youth empowerment. In 1991 Jane founded Roots & Shoots, an environmental and humanitarian program with 12 high school students in Dar es Salaam. Now Jane Goodall’s Roots & Shoots empowers young people of all ages to become involved in hands-on projects of their choosing and is active in 75 countries and counting.

Up until her peaceful passing in October 2025 at the age of 91, Jane traveled approximately 300 days each year, inspiring audiences worldwide through speaking tours, media engagements, written publications, and a wide array of film, television and podcast projects. Author of many books for adults and children, her final publication “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times,” has been translated into more than 20 languages.

EXTENDED LENGTH VERSION

Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and UN Messenger of Peace, was a world-renowned ethologist and activist who inspired greater understanding and action on behalf of the natural world. Through her tireless advocacy to create a better future for people, other animals, and the planet we share, Dr. Goodall inspired millions around the world with her message of hope through action. She is best known for her groundbreaking studies into the lives of wild chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park, Tanzania begun in 1960. This transformative research is continued by the Jane Goodall Institute and is now the longest running wild chimpanzee study in the world over 65 years later.

Valerie Jane Morris-Goodall was born on April 3, 1934, in London, England, to Mortimer Herbert Morris Goodall and Margaret Myfanwe Joseph, affectionately known as Vanne. From earliest childhood, Jane's mother encouraged her fascination with animals. One of her most beloved companions was a stuffed toy chimpanzee, named Jubilee. In what her mother referred to as "Jane's first animal research program," she found Jane in bed with a handful of earthworms, trying to understand how they could possibly move without legs. By the age of four, having moved to a family farm, she gave her mother yet another scare by hiding in the henhouse for hours, waiting to watch a chicken lay an egg. Young Jane immersed herself in books about wild animals and dreamed of a life alongside African wildlife like Tarzan and Dr. Dolittle. At the young age of 23, after having spent the past few years as a waitress and secretary, she finally found a way to make her dream a reality.

EARLY RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

In 1957, Jane eagerly accepted a schoolmate's invitation to a family farm in Kenya. Within a few months of arriving, she met the famed paleoanthropologist, Dr. Louis Leakey. Dr. Leakey was searching for the right person to study fellow great apes, particularly chimpanzees. This was not only to better understand these little-known primates, but also to gain insight into the evolutionary past of humans, as chimpanzees and humans share a (*most recent*) common ancestor some 6 million years ago. He was drawn to Jane's persistent desire to understand animals and believed that a mind uncluttered by the reductionist thinking of ethologists of the time would yield a fresh perspective.

In July 1960, Jane arrived on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in what is now Gombe National Park, Tanzania, East Africa. Equipped with little more than binoculars, a notebook and her fascination with wildlife, Jane Goodall embarked on a journey that would redefine the relationship between humans and other animals and ultimately help shape the burgeoning strategies of world conservation into the 21st century.

She took an unorthodox approach, immersing herself in the chimpanzee's habitat. After months of trying to gain their trust, she was able to experience their complex society as a

neighbor, rather than a distant observer. She then further defied scientific convention by giving the chimpanzees names instead of numbers. She came to understand them not only as a species, but as individuals with personalities, complex minds, emotions, and long-term bonds.

In October 1960, she saw the chimpanzee she named David Greybeard use grass stems to fashion tools for fishing termites from their nest. Up until that revelatory moment, mainstream scientists thought humans were the only species to make and use tools. We were defined as “Man the Toolmaker.” Her insights rocked the scientific world, prompting Dr. Leakey to proclaim, "Now we must redefine man, redefine tool, or accept chimpanzees as humans!" Her published findings on the tool-making practices of chimpanzees remain one of the most highly regarded observations in the world of animal behavior research.

During her first years at Gombe, Jane also observed several other behaviors that *transformed* our understanding of chimpanzees. This included that they 1) Can be compassionate and altruistic, 2) Will hunt and eat meat (though it is less than 3% of their diet), 3) Can engage in “primitive warfare,” and 4) Have lasting bonds between family members (all species have strong mother-infant bonds). In 1961, Jane entered Cambridge University as a Ph.D. candidate, only the 8th person to be admitted without an undergraduate degree. She repeatedly returned to Gombe to continue her observations throughout her time at Cambridge, before earning her Ph.D. in ethology (the science of animal behavior) in 1966 and continued her research in Gombe.

REVOLUTIONIZING PRIMATOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

Dr. Goodall's field research in Gombe revolutionized the field of primatology. In one of the longest-running field studies of any species, she and her students further documented that chimpanzees have distinct personalities, minds and emotions, and form lasting and complex relationships. Over the years, her work continued to yield surprising insights. In 1965, she officially established the Gombe Stream Research Center, which became a training ground for students interested in studying primates, ecology, and more. Today, it hosts a skilled team of researchers from around the world and dedicated field assistants comprised entirely from local Tanzanians.

The research center at Gombe also attracted many women, who were nearly absent from the field when she began. "Jane Goodall's trailblazing path for other women primatologists is arguably her greatest legacy," said Gilbert Grosvenor, former chairman of The National Geographic Society. "During the last third of the twentieth century, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas, Cheryl Knott, Penny Patterson and many more women have followed her. Indeed, women now dominate long-term primate behavioral studies worldwide."

On her way to becoming the world's leading ethologist, Dr. Goodall had a son, Hugo, in 1967 with her first husband, Dutch (*nobleman*) wildlife photographer Baron Hugo van

Lawick. In 1975, she married Derek Bryceson, director of Tanzania's national parks, who died in 1980.

Perhaps most significantly, Dr. Goodall's work engaged a global audience, providing a window into the world of chimpanzees to a public with a deep curiosity about humankind's closest relatives. Through her books, particularly “In the Shadow of Man” and “Through a Window,” people around the world came to be on a first name basis with the chimpanzees of Gombe. The legendary Flo and her many offspring became so internationally revered that when Flo died, “The London Times” published an obituary. Dr. Goodall's eloquent ability to raise public awareness and understanding would become instrumental in her work to save chimpanzees and other species from extinction.

In 1977, Dr. Goodall established the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), which advances her vision and work around the world and for generations to come. JGI continues and expands upon essential science at Gombe Stream Research Center, now the home of the longest running wild chimpanzee study in the world. It has also become a global leader in the effort to protect wildlife and their habitats through community-led conservation. The institute advances innovative applications of science and technology, best practices in animal welfare, as well as youth empowerment through its Roots & Shoots program, created in 1991. Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots provides the resources to encourage and motivate young people to act on issues that matter to them. Today, the tools and support offered through the JGI program empower youth in all 50 United States and 75 countries to use their voices and ideas to address the issues that matter most to them in their communities.

In the late 1980s, upon organizing and attending the first ever “Understanding Chimpanzees” symposium, Dr. Goodall was witness to the accelerated pace of deforestation and declining chimpanzee populations beyond Gombe, and realized she had to leave her beloved Gombe to save chimpanzees from extinction. She realized this work through sanctuaries, research sites in Uganda and JGI Spain's site in Senegal and even fought to end the use of chimpanzees in medical research.

For decades, Dr. Goodall emphasized the interconnectedness of all living things and the collective power of individual action, urging her audiences to recognize their personal responsibility and ability to affect change. As Jane famously said, “Every individual has a role to play. Every individual makes a difference.”

JANE GOODALL THE AUTHOR

Dr. Goodall authored many books that have engaged an international readership for adults and children. Her titles include two overviews of her work at Gombe, “In the Shadow of Man,” and “Through a Window: My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe,” as well as two books of her collected letters, “Africa in my Blood,” and “Beyond Innocence,” her bestselling autobiography, “Reason for Hope,” and more recently “Harvest for Hope, Hope for Animals and their World”, and “Seeds of Hope: Wisdom and Wonder from the World of

Plants.” Published in 1986, “The Chimpanzees of Gombe: Patterns of Behavior,” is recognized as the definitive work on chimpanzees.

In 2009, she released “Hope for Animals and Their World: How Endangered Species Are Being Rescued from the Brink,” about the successful efforts of conservationists determined to save endangered species. Her many children's books include “My Life with the Chimpanzees and Chimpanzees I Love: Saving Their World and Ours,” and her final book, “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times,” was published in 2021 and has been translated into more than 20 languages.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Jane is recognized as a global icon and received numerous honors in her lifetime. In April 2002, Secretary General Kofi Annan named Dr. Goodall a United Nations Messenger of Peace. In a 2004 ceremony at Buckingham Palace, HRH Prince Charles invested Dr. Goodall as a Dame of the British Empire. In 2006, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin presented Dr. Goodall with France's highest recognition, the Legion d'Honneur. In 2025, Jane received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States.

Jane's awards and honors also include Tanzania's Medal of Mount Kilimanjaro, the National Geographic Society's Hubbard Medal, Japan's prestigious Kyoto Prize, the Prince of Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research, the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Life Science, the Mendel Medal, the UNESCO 60th Anniversary Medal, the Gandhi/King Award for Nonviolence, and the Manhae Grand Prize for Practice. She was awarded the esteemed Templeton Prize in 2021 and the Tang Prize in 2020.

Jane Goodall has received honorary doctorates from nearly 60 universities including University of St. Andrews, University of Stirling, Cambridge University, Goldsmiths University of London in the United Kingdom; Utrecht University in the Netherlands; Ludwig-Maximilians University in Germany; University of Guelph and Ryerson University in Canada; and Buffalo University, Tufts University in the USA.

Dr. Goodall's life and work are the subject of numerous television documentaries, as well as the 2002 film “Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees,” the 2010 documentary, “Jane's Journey,” the 2017 National Geographic documentary “JANE,” and most recently the 2021 documentary “Jane Goodall: The Hope.” Discovery Channel's Animal Planet has produced several features on Dr. Goodall, including “Jane Goodall's Return to Gombe,” “Jane Goodall's State of the Great Ape,” “When Animals Talk,” “Jane Goodall's Heroes,” and “Almost Human.”

In 2023, Cosmic Picture and Science North in association with JGI released “Jane Goodall's Reasons for Hope,” which is presently playing on IMAX ® and Giant Screens around the

world. The third and final season of Apple TV's award-winning children's series "Jane" debuted in 2025.

PASSING AND LEGACY

On October 1, 2025, Dr. Jane Goodall died peacefully in her sleep while in Los Angeles, CA for her speaking tour in the United States. She was 91 years old.

Dr. Goodall's life and work not only made an indelible mark on our understanding of chimpanzees and other species, but also of humankind and the environments we all share. She inspired curiosity, hope and compassion in countless people around the world, and paved the way for many others — particularly young people who gave her hope for the future.