

LA MONTAGNE

Jane Goodall, a powerful personality fighting for animal rights

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It would be almost impossible for me not to write about Jane Goodall, who has just died at the age of 91, as she was a hero to many including me. She was such a gentle but powerful personality fighting for animal rights and in particular her beloved chimpanzees.

She started as a young woman in the 60's saving her money to go to Africa near Lake Tanganyika where she found a job with the anthropologist Dr Louis Leakey and with his help she began studying the chimpanzees. Gradually the animals accepted and trusted her and she discovered some amazing facts about their lives. Chimpanzees use tools to find food, they have emotions and characters, they play, they laugh, they hug and also they can be angry and violent, so like humans. When her discoveries were filmed and photographed and published in the magazine the National Geographic she became famous. Previously scientists believed that only humans could use tools and have emotions, indeed it was difficult for Jane, as a woman, at this time to convince the scientists of her findings. She gave the chimpanzees names which the scientists decided was not professional, numbers would have been better!

After attending a conference and hearing of the massive destruction across Africa of the chimpanzees' habitat, threatening their survival she launched several projects to help the communities around Lake Tanganyika to create sustainable livelihoods and farming and education as a means of conserving local habitat and animal species. The Jane Goodall Institute and the Roots and Shoots association to help the youth around the world protect the planet and the animals.

She was a forceful speaker discussing climate change, animal rights and the environment and believed that each one of us, if we didn't live in poverty, could do our little bit to help the planet. She created a sanctuary in Africa for orphan chimpanzees, their mothers had been hunted, she came to their help with her usual determination. One can never quite forget the film of Jane with the chimpanzees, they would touch her, laugh and sing with her, hug her as if to say thank you. These films opened our eyes to the lives of animals in their natural habitat, she was inspirational and continued to speak about animals, the planet, the environment and what we could do to help, right up to the end of her life.

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