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# SIERRA

**Interview:**  
**"People Say That Violence and War Are Inevitable. I Say Rubbish."**  
***An icon of wildlife conservation tries to save the humans***

by Paul Rauber

Jane Goodall would clearly like nothing better than to study chimpanzee behavior in her beloved Gombe National Park in Tanzania (or Tanganyika, as it was known when she began her research there in 1960). Her early work demonstrated to a skeptical scientific community that chimps in the wild are unique individuals that show emotions, use reasoning, and exhibit strong personalities--all traits once thought to be exclusive to humans. Besides making her world-famous, Goodall's detailed, engaging descriptions of chimpanzee society transformed our notions of what it means to be a primate--and what it means to be human.

Goodall no longer does field research, however, because these days her work is among the humans. The need to shift her focus, she says, hit her 15 years ago when she flew over Gombe in a small plane and realized that "this little park, which is only 30 square miles, was absolutely surrounded by cultivated fields." Today the Jane Goodall Institute supports family planning and rural development in central Africa, recognizing that chimpanzees can survive into the future only next to stable, peaceful human populations.

**Sierra:** Recently you spoke at a Sierra Club conference about family planning. What's the connection between human population size and chimpanzees?

**Jane Goodall:** Worldwide there are more human children born every day than the total number of great apes left in the wild, which is about 300,000 at the most and decreasing all the time. As more and more people need more and more land, the chimpanzees are losing out.

**Sierra:** How are you trying to address population issues in central Africa?

**Goodall:** It's very hard. One way is to work with the women. Our program around Gombe includes a component on family planning, women's reproductive health, HIV/AIDS education, scholarships for gifted girls, and micro-credit programs for women to start their own environmentally sustainable projects. All over the world, as women's education goes up, family size has tended to drop. Already more and more women are having three children instead of five.

**Sierra:** How are chimps affected by growing population?

**Goodall:** The main factor is the bush-meat trade. The local people already depend on bush meat for their protein needs, but now the logging companies have built roads deep into the heart of the once inaccessible forests. This opens them up to people settling along the roadsides and to disease borne by humans, but the worst thing is commercial hunting. Now you have hunters from the cities with sophisticated weapons riding on the logging trucks, stopping where the road stops, and shooting everything--elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, antelopes, monkeys, anything that can be smoked or sun-dried, cut up, loaded on the trucks, and taken to the cities. This is going to crash very soon if we can't do something about it.

**Sierra:** What *are* you doing about it?

**Goodall:** Our involvement started with the sanctuaries we built for the orphan chimpanzees. No self-respecting hunter would shoot a mother with a baby, but this bush-meat trade is no longer made up of self-respecting people. And so mother chimps are shot, and as there's so little meat on a small chimpanzee, they usually try and sell the infant on the side of the road or in the market and get a few extra dollars. We were able to confiscate some of those baby chimps, and that was the start of the Jane Goodall Institute's Sanctuary Program.

I wish we were not involved in that; I really do. It's expensive, and you've got the orphans for life. We'd love to free some of them in the forest, but all wild chimps are territorially aggressive, and they kill strangers. So we use them as ambassadors.

Our biggest sanctuary is in Congo-Brazzaville, right in the middle of the bush-meat trade, and there we have the horrifying number of 129 orphan chimps. When local people come and see the chimpanzees, particularly the infants, they say, "I'll never eat chimpanzee again--they're too much like us."

In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development is helping us introduce alternatives to bush meat to the villages, like fish farms. It's also possible to breed large rodents like cane rats, and people like eating them.

**Sierra:** Do you find it odd that your wildlife-conservation efforts focus as much on people as on chimpanzees?

**Goodall:** There are many animal-welfare groups that sometimes seem to forget that human beings are animals too, that we need to include them in our sphere of compassion. Usually it's put the other way round, but there are people, particularly in the animal-welfare and conservation communities, who seem to have very little regard for the social injustices and miseries around the world. If you know enough about poverty and its hopelessness, you totally understand why people are cutting down trees and setting snares. If you know families ravaged by HIV/AIDS, or if you've been in the refugee camps and seen the children, you have a new perspective. And then it's irritating to find conservationists not wanting to bring people into the picture.

**Sierra:** Speaking of refugees, how are the chimpanzees affected by the wars in central Africa?

**Goodall:** The main effect is all the refugees moving around, desperate for food. They are hunting most anything, and that includes chimpanzees and gorillas.

**Sierra:** What has your many years' observation of chimpanzees taught you about human behavior?

**Goodall:** It's taught me that our aggressive tendencies have probably been inherited from an ancient primate some 6 million years ago. But also love, compassion, and altruism--we

find these qualities in chimpanzees as well. So if we believe in the common ancestor, both of these characteristics--the dark side of our nature as well as the more noble side--we've probably brought with us from the past. Some people say, therefore, that violence and war are inevitable. I say rubbish: Our brains are fully capable of controlling instinctive behavior. We're not very good at it, though, are we?

That's why I started Roots and Shoots. It began with a group of high school students in Tanzania and is now in more than 90 countries. Its main message is that every individual can make a difference, every one of us. Each group chooses three kinds of projects: one that is helping their own human community; one that is trying to improve things for animals, including domestic ones--a group in Florida, for example, runs a pet-adoption table at a local shopping center; and finally a project that helps the environment we all share.

Since 9/11, we've also had a very strong peace initiative, helping young people better understand those of different countries, cultures, and religions. My hope is that these young people can break through and make this a better world.