

Primates still her primary concern

Jane Goodall tireless in conservation efforts

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Calgary Herald

Saturday, April 12, 2008

Sixteen years ago, Jane Goodall took a flight over the Tanzanian national park where she had spent much of her career.

Gombe was the place where the world-renowned primatologist began her work in Africa almost 50 years ago.

"I was absolutely horrified to see the extent of deforestation," Goodall said of the change in landscape, comparing Gombe to a little island surrounded by a desert of cultivated fields.

It was a poignant reflection Friday for a pioneering woman who's spent her career studying chimpanzees and championing their conservation.

It was 1960 when Goodall travelled to Gombe: "I didn't have a degree; I wasn't supposed to be doing anything like that because I was a girl and girls didn't do that sort of thing." Today, at 74, Goodall still travels the world 300 days a year promoting her message of conservation.

Goodall was in Calgary on Friday to give an evening lecture on primates and conservation, presented in partnership with the Calgary Zoo.

In an afternoon press briefing, Goodall addressed the issue of zoos, a sticky question for many involved with animal rights.

"I would like to see all animals in the wild -- obviously I would," she said.

Goodall said she hates seeing animals locked in cages, something all too common in parts of the developing world.

That said, good zoos can play a role in educating the public, particularly children, Goodall noted.

Children, she said, will likely never have a chance to watch a chimpanzee in the wild.

"There's a place for zoos, but only for good zoos," she said.

Many zoos also raise and donate money for conservation projects, she said.

That includes the Calgary Zoo, whose conservation fund supports a hippopotamus sanctuary in Ghana.

The fund has also donated to projects in places like Rwanda, New Guinea and northern India.

"I come from the natural world, too," Brian Keating, head of conservation outreach for the Calgary Zoo said.

"I had no use for zoos until I realized there was an educational possibility." For her part, Goodall said she wasn't familiar enough with the Calgary Zoo to comment

specifically.

Earlier this year, a hippopotamus died en route from Denver to the Calgary Zoo.

In the last three years, a number of gorillas have died at the zoo.

Focusing her remarks on Gombe once more, Goodall said improving habitat for chimpanzees meant linking conservation with efforts to reduce local poverty.

Even in 1970, the area was still well-forested, she said. But then came wars, with refugees from neighbouring Burundi.

There was movement of people out of rural homes and into villages, she said.

One can't blame a starving local population for heading into national parks and poaching, Goodall said.

"I don't think that you can meaningfully do conservation unless you take people under consideration," she said.

Goodall said her organization began its program in a way unlike many other aid groups.

"We didn't have a bunch of white people go into the villages and say, 'We see that you're living in poverty and we feel very sorry for you, and so you have to do A, B, C, D.'" Instead, they sent in Tanzanians to listen to the people.

What they found was that making lives better had nothing to do with conservation. The concerns were health and education.

When the needs of locals are met, they then become partners in conservation.

Areas of the highlands once stripped for firewood by villagers are now being reclaimed, Goodall said.

She also spoke fondly of a chimp sanctuary in Brazzaville, Congo. It takes in orphaned chimps whose mothers have been killed by hunters.

Locals visit, she said, and many say they will never eat chimp meat again.

One of the foremost programs of the Jane Goodall Institute is Roots & Shoots. It is directed at young people and counts 10,500 members in Canada alone.

Youth come together in groups to act on conservation and community projects.

Children who came up through the program are entering the adult world, Goodall said -- not just as environmentalists, but also as doctors and lawyers and politicians -- with a different philosophy.

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