THE TORTOISE

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LEADING THE WAY
Conservation icon Jane Goodall talks tortoises and how to save the world

COVID-19 CONTRABAND
The unlikely ways in which the pandemic has reshaped Colombian turtle trafficking

PLUS: Philanthropist and supermodel Helena Christensen, artist Alexis Rockman, conservationist Tomas Diagne, turtle virtual reality, and Soviet tortoises circling the moon

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Jane Goodall

THE TURTLE CONSERVANCY INTERVIEW

By Zoë Lescaze and James Liu

When Jane Goodall arrived in Tanzania in 1960 to study wild Chimpanzees, human beings knew very little about their closest living relatives. The 26-year-old naturalist illuminated the world of Gombe National Park by embedding herself within it, documenting long-term relationships, rivalries, and behavior that revolutionized the science of primatology. Scientists had long assumed Chimps were vegetarian until Goodall observed them eating meat and hunting other primates. Toolmaking was thought to be a uniquely human trait until Goodall saw Chimps use grass and twigs to fish for termites. These and other pioneering discoveries demonstrated the close kinship between Chimpanzees and humans more than four decades before genetic analyses revealed that our species share 98.8 percent of our DNA.

Goodall is now a conservation icon and innovative leader in the field. She identified the importance of engaging local communities and young people in conservation early on and has devised a holistic environmental strategy carried out by the Jane Goodall Institute. Through her organization, international youth programs, books, and lectures around the world (she spends 300 days a year on the road), Goodall continues to inspire people to do their part to preserve wildlife and wild places.

Two weeks before her 87th birthday, Goodall spoke to the editors of *The Tortoise* from her family home in Bournemouth, England, about her latest projects, her reasons for hope in 2021, and the little-known turtles and tortoises in her life.

Zoë Lescaze: Thank you for taking the time to speak with us, Dr. Goodall. Of all the threats currently facing the environment, which do you see as the most severe?

Jane Goodall: Well, very clearly, I think the worst threat right now is the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity. Those two things are absolutely key, and everything else is affected by those two major problems, which, just like the pandemic, we've brought on ourselves by disrespecting nature and disrespecting animals. I think this pandemic, perhaps, has woken people up and is helping people to understand that we need a different relationship with animals and the environment, as well as a greener, more sustainable economy.

ZL: Do you see any initiatives that are helping to remedy these problems? Which endeavors give you hope for the future?

JG: The Trillion Tree Campaign that was announced at Davos last year is an amazing initiative. Salesforce was a leader in that, along with the World Economic Forum, and they've already planted more than 12 million trees in a year. And Roots & Shoots, the Jane Goodall Institute's program for young people, is now in 68 countries, and many of them are planting trees and restoring forests and other kinds of ecosystems that store carbon dioxide.

James Liu: Can you talk about this new generation? They actually think activism is cool, which is such a difference.

JG: The young people today have far more knowledge of what's going on than we had, partly because when I was growing up, there wasn't the same urgency. We didn't have quite the same crises that we have today. The world started heating up after the Industrial Revolution, when we began using machinery and spewing out emissions into the atmosphere, and then, of course, every time we cut down forest, we released the stored carbon dioxide into the air. The young people understand that. They're very eager to do their bit.

ZL: Can you say more about Roots & Shoots and how those projects work?

JG: Roots & Shoots is all about choosing projects to make the world a better place, and every group chooses three projects—one to help people, one to help animals, one to help the environment. And at the same time, they're beginning to understand as we bring them together, usually virtually, that far more important than the color of skin, or culture, or religion, is the fact we're all human beings. The program has got members from preschool through university and everything in between, and more and more adult groups taking part.

ZL: Are any chapters involved in turtle conservation?

JG: Many groups are working to preserve turtles. They're guarding the beaches where the turtles lay their eggs. Sometimes the program picks up the eggs and places them in hatcheries so that they can nurture the baby turtles and prevent them being eaten up by people or other animals. We've got programs looking after sea turtles in India, in Puerto Rico, in Greece, in Colombia, and in many other countries, but those are ones I've actually visited.

JL: Do you find it harder to convince adults—and maybe politicians specifically—to care about the environment, versus children?

JG: Well, it depends on the individual. You can't make sweeping statements. But unfortunately, politicians and major corporations are often trying to survive by raiding the natural world. They want to make food cheap, they want to grow bigger, they want to get richer. And if we carry on with business as usual, that's the end. So we have to make change, and we can do that through consumer pressure, which often starts with kids pushing their parents, as children learn about what's going on. If a company is not behaving responsibly, then don't buy the products, and they change. We know that. It's a bit more complicated with politicians, because I've actually known politicians who get elected on a green platform, but then when push comes to shove and they want to introduce legislation which will maybe make things cost a little bit more, then suddenly, all their supporters turn away, because when it comes to tightening your belt, people don't

PREVIOUS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: HUGO VAN LAWICK/COURTESY JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE

want to do it. So again, children are pushing their parents in the right direction—and their grandparents, which sometimes is even more important.

ZL: When you encounter someone who doesn't share your appreciation of wildlife and wilderness, how do you communicate that passion in a way that transforms their opinions? How do you try to reach people who have no interest?

JG: Well, I don't waste time trying to argue with them. I don't try and seek to change their brains, but I rather seek to change their hearts, and I find I can do that by telling stories. Telling stories about something that's beautiful. I mean, people are individuals. You can't make a sweeping statement; I can't change everybody this way. But when I'm meeting somebody like that, I always try to find one little thing that we can connect on. Maybe they have a dog or a cat, or maybe they have a grandchild that they adore. If you can work your stories around that to start with, and then form a relationship, then you can have a discussion.

ZL: You can't be confrontational.

JG: Having an argument doesn't work, because both sides get more heated. Neither side listens to the other and it's just a waste of time. And people may seem to capitulate, but they don't really. They're saying, "Well, she thinks I'm going to listen to her, but no way."

ZL: Speaking of stories, have you encountered any tortoises in the field, or witnessed any memorable primate-turtle interactions?

JG: Well, in Tanzania and Kenya and many other places, you get these giant land tortoises, and there was one occasion on the Serengeti when a pride of Lions found one of these giant tortoises and started batting it around. I think they were curious, and they did this for a long time. I don't know how long it was, but the tortoise remained perfectly safe. They couldn't harm it. And I'm just glad I haven't seen a Chimpanzee banging one on a rock. I would hate that, just so, ugh, cruel. You know, Chimpanzees are very like us—they can be cruel.

ZL: I understand that you kept tortoises as a child.

JG: We did have pets. Everybody had tortoises in those days. It was before imports had been

Previous spread: As a young researcher at Gombe Stream Research Center in Tanzania, Goodall interacts with the baby Chimpanzee named Flint (ca. 1965).

Top: Goodall identified the need to involve local communities in conservation early on. Her institute supports various sustainable development projects near the Chimpanzee preserve at Gombe, such as this woodlot, which help discourage deforestation.

Middle: Students share their sea turtle conservation projects with Goodall in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2016. Her global youth program, Roots & Shoots, has chapters in 68 countries.

Bottom: Goodall releases hatchling turtles with Roots & Shoots members in Santa Marta, Colombia, in 2013. Other sea turtle programs are underway in India, Abu Dhabi, Greece, Australia, and Puerto Rico.

Following spread: Jane Goodall and her mother, Vanne, sort specimens in her tent in Gombe Stream Chimpanzee Reserve (ca. 1965).

banned and we realized how bad it is. The male was named Percy Bysshe, because he was shell-y (ha, ha, ha) and he had a female companion. She sadly died, and so he was left on his own. And for a long time, he just stayed in his hutch. Then amazingly, the cat from next door came and lay down beside him, day after day, for quite a long time. And then Percy disappeared, and we looked and we went all round, asking people if they'd seen a tortoise. After I think it was two months, Percy came back and he'd found a female! Well now, this is completely amazing. There are hardly any tortoises around here in Bournemouth. How on Earth had he found a female in a situation where he could bring her back with him? We named her Harriet, because that was Shelley's wife. Anyway, they had a lot of exercise, a lot of good food. I discovered that they actually like eating meat, because I ate meat in those days, and they would eat it off the plate when we were eating out in the summer. In fact, Percy tried to nibble my nose once. Eventually, both of them went off to live in a tortoise sanctuary. So they got a nice life with lots of other tortoises.

JL: I love that story about the tortoise reappearing. It's happened to me before too, where I haven't seen it for a year, and it pops back up.

JG: With a wife or a husband?

JL: No, he didn't bring any others.

JG: Well, amazing that he turned up again.

JL: We've heard from our other friends in the UK that tortoises are often children's first pets and become these ambassadors for the natural world. Why do you think they make decent companions, and are they good ambassadors for wildlife?

JG: Well, I don't actually think that most people should be keeping them, because most people can't possibly provide the right conditions, you know. We built a large fenced-in place and there was a hutch, and they could go in and out. But most don't have a good time at all. I think they're ambassadors, because they're so fascinating, you know. This head

The main message of Roots & Shoots is that every single one of us makes a difference every single day.... If billions of people are making ethical choices, then it starts making a better world.

pokes out and they walk much faster than you think. Oh, the other funny thing, when we had Percy Bysshe and Harriet, you know how they mate—the male puts its head in and butts the female. They always did this when my grandmother, who was quite proper, had some old lady friends to tea out in the garden in the summer. And 10 to 1, Percy would start bumping Harriet and the ladies would say, "Oh, oh, why is the tortoise doing that?" and my grandmother didn't know what to say. Pretty funny. I forgot that story.

ZL: [*Laughs*] What a romantic soul.

JG: I have another kinship with turtles. I was born loving animals—no question about that—but the first books that hooked me on Africa were the Doctor Doolittle books. And, you know, I read the one where he takes animals from the circus back to Africa. So that started Africa for me. But one of the books is about the oldest living creature on the planet—a sea turtle—and he disappeared. And the story is about rescuing him, because a floating island had fallen on him and trapped him, and they manage to lift it off. But his name was Mudface.

ZL: Not quite as dignified a name as Percy, but perhaps he lacked the same poetic temperament. Thank you for those stories. You touched on this earlier but perhaps we can talk more about the effect of the pandemic on our relationship with wildlife. Are there particular lessons you feel we might absorb?

TOP: SHAWN SWEENEY | MIDDLE: ROOTS & SHOOTS MALAYSIA | BOTTOM: ROOTS & SHOOTS COLOMBIA | ALL COURTESY JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE

Some people interpret the state of the world as a wake-up call, and there are certainly all these encouraging photos of animals reclaiming places where they hadn't been sighted in ages, but at the same time, poaching and illegal deforestation have gone up with the lack of ecotourism and law enforcement and the collapse of many people's livelihoods. And so I'm curious how you see it in terms of conservation.

JG: Well, the way I see it is that 75 percent of all new human diseases to emerge in the last maybe 20 years are zoonotic. That's when a pathogen spills over from one animal to one person and then if it bonds with a cell in the body, it can create a new disease. So that's what happened with this current pandemic, and it's brought about by habitat destruction, first of all. Animals get pushed closer together. That can lead to a new disease in an animal. Animals, some of them, get pushed in closer contact with humans, through crop raiding or moving into cities to search for food as their own supply gets limited by destruction of the habitat. And this can cause an opportunity for a pathogen to jump over. But then the worst part is the trafficking. So animals from all over are sent off to wildlife markets in Asia, the bush meat markets in Africa, wildlife markets in Latin America, and all over the world. Many of these animals are sold for food, for meat, or they're sold for medicine, or they're sold for their skins, or they're sold for pets. The wildlife markets are typically very cruel. Animals stacked together in tiny cages, often killed on the spot for somebody who wants to buy the meat. There's blood, urine, feces all over the place and it's a perfect opportunity for a virus to bond with a person.

JL: So wildlife conservation is really in the best interest of our own species, to avoid more pandemics.

JG: If we continue destroying nature and treating animals the way we do, including in our intensive farms where animals are crowded together in terrible conditions, if we continue treating the natural world like this, there'll be more pandemics and, over and above that, climate change will get worse. The globe will heat up more. We lose more species of animal and plant. As species disappear, this tapestry of life that makes up a healthy ecosystem, on which we depend, gets more and more tattered, until in the end, the ecosystem collapses. And, you know, we cannot go on treating nature this way, but will all the businesses change? We have to push for change, and it's okay in our democracies. If you're growing up in one of the countries with an autocratic government, you can't have the liberties that we have. You can't march in the street. You can't protest. So it depends, you know. There are so many problems out there, really there are.

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JL: In wildlife markets, there are these forgotten species, ones that don't really have a champion like yourself—bats, pangolins, snakes, and things like that. How do you find a way to appreciate all those different species that aren't quite as charismatic?

JG: I talk about them in my lectures. I've just written a children's book about a pangolin, for quite young children, which was designed for the Chinese market, but apparently it's coming out in America and Europe first, which is kind of weird, but it's especially for China. The good news is that after this pandemic began, the government very quickly put a temporary ban on the selling of wild animals in the markets. And I think that the ban's been made permanent now, and the pangolin shot up to be the number-one level of Endangered species, with the worst kinds of fines or imprisonment

OPPOSITE: HUGO VAN LAWICK/COURTESY JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE

if you're caught illegally selling a pangolin or its scales. So these are the hopeful signs. I do hope that more people understand the problem and express what they want to happen, which again, in our democracies, we can do. We can do it through speaking, through writing.

ZL: Have you spent much time in China?

JG: We have about 2,000 groups in China, and within China, there's a lot of environmental protection. The problem is, outside China, they're raiding natural resources for their own development, which is exactly what British colonialism has done for years, and it's exactly what big corporations are doing now. So it's just that China is bigger and better at everything, you know. But anyway, we have about 2,000 groups of passionate young people in China. And the difference is huge to me. I've been going there since the mid-'90s; there's been a big change in attitude in China toward animals and conservation.

Goodall in Gombe National Park in 2015.

BILL WALLAUER/COURTESY JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE

ZL: I understand you're at work on another book now. Can you tell us about that project?

JG: It's called *The Book of Hope*. I think that's going to be its title. It's basically outlining my reasons for hope, which include the energy and passion of young people when they know the problems and are empowered to take action. The second reason is the brain. Scientists are beginning to come up with amazing technology to enable us to live in greater harmony with nature. And then in our own individual lives we are finding ways to leave lighter ecological footprints. And then the next reason for hope is how resilient nature is. I mean, give nature a chance and she can reclaim places we've destroyed. You see little tree roots bumping up through the paving stones and you see little flowers popping up through cracks in the pavement. And you know that if you left it alone for 20 years, it would all be green again. Nature's very good at destroying our infrastructure, if given time—and perhaps some help. And then finally, there's the indomitable human spirit, the people who tackle what seems impossible, and won't give up, and so often succeed. So, you know, the main message of Roots & Shoots is that every single one of us makes a difference every single day. And it may not seem like much, if you clean up litter or stop buying something, or whatever it is that you do, but if billions of people are making ethical choices, then it starts making a better world. Until we alleviate poverty, though, this can't happen, because if you're really poor, you cannot make those ethical choices.

ZL: Right, it's a luxury to be able to make those decisions.

JG: You know, you're inner city, very poor. You have to buy the cheapest food. You can't afford to ask if it harmed the environment, was it cruel to animals? Is it cheap because of child slave labor? You have to buy it to keep your family alive.

ZL: And this ties into engaging local communities in conversation.

JG: The only way that we can protect these important forests and other environments is

by working with the local people, and that's something that we at Jane Goodall Institute began back in 1994. It's a very holistic program, because if people are living in dire poverty, as so many in Africa are, you know, you're going to destroy the environment, because you need to have more land to grow food, because your population's growing, or you need to make charcoal to get some money.

ZL: What has surprised you most over the course of your career?

JG: I think what's surprised me most is the fact that I'm making a difference. And I only say that because I get told it every day. "I came to your lecture and I promise now to do my bit," from children. "You taught me that because you did it, I can do it too." And a lot of it goes back to my amazing mother, who supported my crazy dream of going to Africa when I was 10, when everybody else told me it was impossible, because I was just a girl, because I didn't have money. So the fact that I have become this kind of weird icon, which was nothing to do with me—it just happened—I think that's the biggest surprise that I've had. I see myself as just me.

JL: How does that make you feel? Is there a lot of pressure?

JG: Yes, it's a huge responsibility. It means I can't give up. And people say, "You're 87" (well, I will be in a few weeks). "You should be slowing down." But because I've got less time left—I don't know how much, none of us do—I have to speed up. That's the pressure, a lot of pressure.

JL: We appreciate you shouldering that burden. Are there still any wild places left on your bucket list that you want to go see?

JG: Oh, there were, but I know I won't be able to do what I once wanted to do. There are some things that get better with aging, but you know, I can no longer climb to the tops of mountains. I probably could if I had to, but it's not really sensible. I've got a funny knee which is normally okay, but sometimes it just gives. It doesn't hurt; it just stops working. I could fall and crash down a precipice, which would be pretty horrid for the people with me.

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ZL: Startling, to say the least.

JG: Places I would love to have gone to—Papua New Guinea, seeing some of those wild mountain places, and things like that. But right now, I have to content myself with going to the fringes of beautiful forests. But that's okay. I've got the forest within me, so it's all right. I've been very, very lucky.

JL: I think a lot of people have been connecting with nature more during the pandemic because outdoor spaces are one of the few places you can still go. How would you advise people to take in those places?

JG: Well, you can just be in it. It's fine to just be out in nature and let it sink in. But if you're a child, it's better to watch, to observe, to write down things, to really get the feeling of what it's like. And perhaps if you have a place where you can plant things, plant trees. We want everybody planting trees, please, to help with the Trillion Tree challenge. But nature, you know, you can't protect and love it unless you know it. So we need to get children into nature, whether it's rescuing turtles, guarding their nests, or just being in nature.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

TURTLE CONSERVANCY

"We can't save the world by playing by the rules, because the rules have to be changed. Everything needs to change—and it has to start today."
—GRETA THUNBERG

"I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want."
—ANDY WARHOL

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."
—RACHEL CARSON

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