



the Jane Goodall Institute

NEWS
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GOMBE RESEARCH CONTINUES TO BREAK GROUND NEARLY 50 YEARS LATER

Latest Findings Regarding AIDS-like Illness in Wild Chimpanzees Could Lead to Novel Treatments and Preventative Measures for Humans

Arlington, Virginia—The latest research findings from Gombe, Tanzania, demonstrate, yet again, the value of one of the longest uninterrupted field studies of a wild animal species. In a paper published July 23, 2009, in the journal *Nature*, a consortium of scientists led by Dr. Beatrice Hahn of the University of Alabama and including renowned primatologist and conservationist Dr. Jane Goodall, researchers from the Jane Goodall Institute's (JGI) Gombe Stream Research Centreⁱ, University of Minnesota, the Lincoln Park Zoo, Tanzania National Parks and six other institutions found that wild chimpanzees naturally infected with Simian Immunodeficiency Viruses (SIV) can suffer from an AIDS-like illness. According to a press release issued by *Nature*, "The finding challenges the view that SIV infections do not cause disease [in wild chimpanzees] and will allow researchers to study AIDS progression."ⁱⁱ

Dr. Hahn and her colleagues followed 94 chimpanzees in Gombe National Park for more than nine years monitoring their health through observational data collection, fecal samples and post-mortem analyses. Their finding that SIV causes disease in chimpanzees opens up a number of new avenues of research. According to Titus Mlengeya, the chief veterinary officer of the Tanzania National Parks, "This presents a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the disease-causing mechanisms of two closely related viruses in two closely related hosts."ⁱⁱⁱ

"We hope that a better understanding of these mechanisms will benefit both humans and chimpanzees," added Dr. Goodall who also emphasized that only non-invasive methods were used throughout the study.^{iv} For example, the researchers believe that the results could lead to new therapies and preventative measures while providing data that could inform AIDS vaccine development.

What this most recent study also demonstrates is the larger impact of the almost 50-year research effort at the Gombe Stream Research Centre. When Dr. Goodall landed in Gombe on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in 1960, her initial charge was to study the behavior of the resident chimpanzees in order to better understand humans. Today, Gombe represents much more than the site of Dr. Goodall's groundbreaking findings regarding chimpanzees making and using tools, eating meat and engaging in war-like activity. Over the years, observing and documenting the world of chimpanzees has provided

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profound insight into our closest relatives' emotions, behaviors and social structures, while shedding light on human behaviors and social patterns, their impact on the ecosystem and even the spread of disease.

In addition, the data amassed has informed JGI's species and habitat conservation programs. The Institute's community-centered conservation initiatives provide local communities the tools needed to manage their natural resources for long-term economic gain and environmental prosperity. Projects focus on everything from water/sanitation issues and health care to sustainable livelihoods and education.

More recently, Gombe has become an example of how cutting-edge technology can enhance conservation. As part of its conservation action planning process, JGI uses state-of-the-art high-resolution satellite imagery and Geographic Information Systems to map chimpanzee habitats and plan land use with local communities, including designating deforested areas for regeneration.

And finally, Gombe inspires the next generation of leaders to make positive change happen for people, animals and the environment we all share. Through Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots, JGI's global environmental and humanitarian youth program, Tanzanian members are working to better their community whether through reforestation initiatives or projects aimed at the refugee populations that call the area around Gombe home.

When speaking of Gombe and the latest research results, Lincoln Park Zoo veterinary epidemiologist Dr. Dominic Travis summed it up saying: "This field site is once again a model of how long-term scientific studies can inform us in many ways."^v

About the Jane Goodall Institute

Founded in 1977, the Jane Goodall Institute continues Dr. Goodall's pioneering research on chimpanzee behavior—research that transformed scientific perceptions of the relationship between humans and animals. Today, the Institute is a global leader in the effort to protect chimpanzees and their habitats. It also is widely recognized for establishing innovative community-centered conservation and development programs in Africa, and the Roots & Shoots global environmental and humanitarian youth program, which has groups in 110 countries. For more information, please visit www.janegoodall.org.

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ⁱ Drs. Anna Mosser, Shadrach Kamenya and Jane Raphael.

ⁱⁱ "AIDS: SIV Can Cause Disease in Wild Chimpanzees," *Nature* press release date July 22, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ "'AIDS' in Chimpanzees," University of Alabama press release dated July, 22, 2009.

^{iv} *ibid.*

^v "New Evidence: AIDS-like Disease in Wild Chimpanzees," University of Illinois and Lincoln Park Zoo press release dated July 22, 2009.