PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Gombe Stream Research Center

The World's Longest Running Wild Chimpanzee Study Advances Our Understanding of Chimpanzees, Conservation & Ourselves

Jane Goodall first arrived in Tanzania 65 years ago, on July 14, 1960, to study the wild chimpanzees of Gombe National Park. Jane's subsequent findings challenged scientific norms of the time, demonstrating that chimpanzees have personalities, complex minds, and emotions, and above all, that there is not a sharp line dividing us from them; we are a part of and not separated from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Dr. Goodall's observations have profoundly influenced the fields of primatology, animal behavior, human evolution, health, and psychology. Today, Gombe remains a living laboratory—home to the longest-running wild chimpanzee study in the world. This groundbreaking scientific research has many applications and lessons, including everything from health and zoonotic disease to intergenerational tool use. What will we discover next?

Dr. Goodall's observation in the Fall of 1960 that chimpanzees make and use tools and her overall research on wild chimpanzees in Gombe, Tanzania, shook the foundations of the scientific world and changed our understanding of non-human animals and ourselves forever. From the 1960s to today, research in Gombe has continued and evolved, producing invaluable scientific information, including some of the most important insights in modern history.

From the importance of social play in infants to social hierarchy and disease, we've established a wealth of knowledge with applications for ecology, conservation, evolution, human health, and behavior. With more than 165,000 hours of observations collected, over 300 peer-reviewed journal publications, and 500 broader articles on research in Gombe this place of wonder continues to spark curiosity and deliver world-shaping impacts daily.

One of Dr. Goodall's greatest contributions is her role as a mentor and creator of Gombe Stream Research Center. This hub and Gombe itself have contributed to generations of scientists, including many local Tanzanians as well as others from all around the globe.

Despite Gombe being the smallest national park in Tanzania, the wealth of biodiversity and scientific insights have made it a wellspring for hundreds of researchers. Their findings have gone on to influence thousands of subsequent publications and areas of inquiry.

These insights have not only shaped public understanding of our unique likeness to our closest living relatives, but also their innate value as sentient, complex beings and the need to protect them.

Photo Credits: JGI/Jane Goodall, Hugo Van Lawick, Hugo van Lawick

Jane Goodall Institute

Revised 1/2025

For more information, visit janegoodall.org or email info@janegoodall.org

THE "B" RECORD

Using Dr. Goodall's unique and innovative observational approach, researchers in Gombe follow selected chimpanzees daily, 365 days a year. These "focal follows," as they are known, have been in operation since Dr. Goodall was able to study chimpanzees in the 1960s. Researchers today record the group's composition, foods eaten, and interactions between the focal individual and others. This data fuels Gombe's research archives, which provide a longitudinal analysis of four generations of chimpanzee families. Scientists use this information to determine any lasting effects of childhood trauma, the emergence of new behavior patterns, the influence of changing forest ecology on the success of individuals, and more.

MOTHER-INFANT STUDY

In many ways, the social ranking of a chimpanzee is determined by their upbringing. Young chimpanzees who are raised by more supportive and attentive mothers tend to be more successful as adults: males attain a higher social rank, and females are better mothers themselves. Infant development and the relations between the growing child and their mother and siblings were of interest to Dr. Goodall from her early research, and it remains a thriving field of inquiry led by Gombe scientists. Most famously, Jane was able to study the parenting of Flo and infant Flint from birth to young adulthood in parallel with her own first child's development.

ONE HEALTH

Because chimpanzees are so genetically like humans, disease is a significant threat. Even small disease outbreaks or single deaths can disproportionately impact the viability of small or isolated populations, making it imperative to guard against disease. For decades, Gombe researchers and colleagues have worked to understand the relationship between the health of humans, wildlife, and ecosystems. Observing and recording symptoms shown by chimpanzees with regular health sheet surveys, along with non-invasive primate feces sampling and results of postmortem analysis, this team has created a robust system for detecting disease transmission and preventing outbreaks. The Gombe One Health Hub, launched in 2020, builds on and utilizes 65 years of continuous chimpanzee data; almost 30 years of conservation efforts; nearly 20 years of standardized health data; High-resolution satellite imagery from Planet and Maxar; Innovative non-invasive methods in Azure; Disease risk maps and dashboards all on a Powerful Esri ArcGIS Platform.

RESEARCH ON OTHER PRIMATES

Gombe's biosphere supports rich biodiversity, including baboons, five species of monkeys (including hybrids), and several galagoes. As Jane worked on her studies of chimpanzees, she also saw the importance of studying the behavior and ecology of these other primates. The impressive baboon study has been running for over 50 years. Newer research has focused on hybridization of blue and red monkeys, which is extremely rare and has applications for biological understanding of speciation in primates around the world.

CONSERVATION CONNECTION

In 1990, while flying over Gombe, Jane was shocked to see that the park, once part of the equatorial forest, had been reduced to a tiny island of trees surrounded by bare hills. Poverty has driven developing human populations to clear forests to provide for their families. Realizing that the future of the forest, chimpanzees, and people were interconnected, Jane and her team developed 'Tacare,' which develops solutions by empowering communities to own the conservation planning process, decision-making, and management of natural resources. As our cornerstone community-led approach, the work has increased the overall protection of the chimpanzee range in Tanzania from 9% to 40% and has grown in six countries.

Discoveries and observations have included chimpanzees making and using tools, being omnivores, having strong mother-offspring and sibling bonds, engaging in territorial "warfare," and showing qualities of compassion and altruism

165,000+
hours of chimpanzee observation

200+
researchers and field assistants have conducted research in Gombe

300+
peer reviewed journal publications, and over

500+
roader articles on research from Gombe

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