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Beacon of hope

The outlook for Planet Earth may be bleak, but primatologist Dr Jane Goodall is not giving up yet. >6

Planet Earth needs us

With the distinction of being the world's first 'honorary chimpanzee', the inspiring Jane Goodall now works as an emissary for Mother Earth – and she needs your help.

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MENTION the name Jane Goodall and the first thing that comes to mind is "chimpanzee". It seems natural to associate her with the African ape. After all, she almost single-handedly changed how science – and the rest of the world – viewed these intelligent apes, our closest genetic relatives.

It was Goodall's ground-breaking research on the Kasakela chimpanzee community at the Gombe National Park in Tanzania, from 1960 to 1986, that brought to light previously unknown chimp behaviour such as their ability to make tools, complex social hierarchy, and penchant for meat and warfare.

Goodall's work also revolutionised her field – ethology, the study of animal behaviour. By using unorthodox practices such as giving her chimp subjects human names instead of numbers and interacting with them instead of merely observing, she challenged stodgy methodology and made the data come alive.

Together with equally significant studies by two other renowned ape researchers – the late Dian Fossey who studied mountain gorillas in Rwanda and Birute Galdikas who studied orang utans in Indonesian Borneo – Goodall's landmark research helped us realise why the great apes are so important for humans.

And that is why, 65 years since she first wandered into the forests of Gombe looking for chimpanzees, "Jane Goodall" is – almost – a household name.

Emissary for Mother Earth

These days, however, Goodall no longer studies chimpanzees. After spending a good sum of her adult life watching what chimps do, she traded her binoculars and notebook for a life that has taken her around the world to raise awareness about animal welfare and ecological issues.

"Since October 1986, I haven't had more than three weeks off consecutively," she says matter-of-factly, in an exclusive interview with *The Star* during her brief whirlwind visit here last week. "That's 300 days a year on the road. It's an awful lot of travelling."

And yet, Goodall, who will turn 81 in April, seems unperturbed by the fuss made over her sake. Despite being away from her beloved chimps, the core of her mission remains clear.

"The reason I left that beautiful forest was because, at a big conference, we had a session on conservation and it was so shocking to see how across Africa forests were disappearing and chimpanzees were being hunted for food and to supply the live animal trade," she says.

In person, she is calm and composed. Though the blonde hair of her youth has long turned to silver and wrinkles now streak across her



Honorary chimp: Goodall spent so much time researching a group of chimpanzees in Tanzania that they accepted her as a member of the troupe – she remains the only human to be given that distinction. Here she's pictured in a file photo at Taronga Zoo in Sydney, Australia.

face, her eyes remain sharp and inquisitive, and her voice, though soft-spoken, tells it as it is.

"Learning more and more about the environmental problems that face us today ... deforestation, pollution, the shrinking of fresh water supply, soil erosion.

"There's also the dangers of intensive agro-farming, which means it's all mono-cultures destroying the environment with agricultural chemicals. And then there's climate change. Everywhere I go, people say 'It's very strange. The weather shouldn't be like this. It's too wet or it's too dry. It's too hot or too cold. Climate change is very real.'"

Apathy and hope

As Goodall spins a somewhat predictable tale of humanity's reckless abuse of natural resources, it's clear that she's unimpressed by human apathy. "I meet a lot of young people on my travels and they read all about the doom and gloom and seem to not have much hope for the future. When I talk to them, they were angry, violent and depressed ... just apathetic."

"They say, 'You've compromised our future. And there's nothing we can do about it.' And we have compromised the future for young people. When I see a child and think about it what it's like to be at that age, I feel angry, ashamed and sad. But I believe we have a window of time. It's not too late."

"We can still save the Earth. And that's why I started the Roots & Shoots programme. Which is why I'm here," says Goodall, her frown turning into a smile.

She's referring to the Malaysian chapter of Roots & Shoots, set up by a group of Malaysians who, according to Goodall, had "stalked" her when she visited Taiwan a couple of years ago and entreated



Goodall giving a talk at the British International School Kuala Lumpur last week. Photo: AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

her to come to our little corner of the Earth.

Founded in 1991 after a meeting with 12 teenagers on the back porch of her home in Tanzania who wanted her counsel on a range of issues, Roots & Shoots is the youth programme of the Jane Goodall Institute that has since become a global movement with networks in 139 countries involving more than 150,000 people working on various projects with the simple aim of "making the world a better place".

Set up in October 2014, the Roots & Shoots Malaysia already has projects lined up, including a collaboration with coffee franchise

Starbucks in Kota Kemuning, Shah Alam, where an edible garden is being planted with the help of youth volunteers.

For a veritable superstar adored by millions across the world, Goodall keeps it humble by not giving up. "My biggest hope lies with the young. My other hope lies with this brain that we have. If we link it to the heart, then we can achieve our full human potential. And our brain is capable of magic."

■ To watch a video of *The Star's* exclusive interview with Jane Goodall, visit <http://www.thestar.com.my>.