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WE MUST UNDERSTAND CHIMPANZEES TO SAVE THEM

March 12, 2014 · by Jonathan Silver · in Endangered Chimpanzees

I just watched an important film, *Chimpanzee*. It's important to me, because it bridges a gap that must be bridged if we want to protect the chimps. This gap is our lack of firsthand experience of chimps. Why is this kind of experience essential to our cause?

We hear about how chimps are wonderful, inspiring and intelligent—but until we see it with our own eyes, we won't fully understand. No description of chimps comes close to the rich understanding given in firsthand experience. What I'm talking about is the difference in understanding you have when, for example, a friend tells you about their parent versus meeting their parent for yourself; or in reading about a place versus visiting that place in person; or (wink, wink) in hearing about a movie versus seeing that movie for yourself.



Credit: Jane Lawton, JGI Canada

We would be more invested in saving the chimps, and we would be better able to convince others to join us, if we really understood how special they are. That's why saving the chimps requires us to experience for ourselves how intelligent they are, how complex their social behaviour is, and how they feel a variety of deep emotions.

But if I'm right, then it seems like we're in trouble since most of us will never see a chimp in person. Now you'll get why *Chimpanzee* is such an important film.

Chimpanzee affords us the closest thing to firsthand experience we're likely to ever get. We follow Oscar, a three-months-old chimp, as he learns smart tactics from his mother, Isha, for surviving in the wild. We see the loving and affectionate bond that develops between the two. When Isha is killed in an attack by a rival troupe of chimps, we watch Oscar struggle as an orphan and experience how sensitive and crucial the parent-child relationship is for a growing chimp. The most astonishing moment of the film is when Oscar is finally adopted by the most surprising candidate — a moment when we experience the admirable nature of our fellow creatures.

To save the chimps, experience the chimps. Watch *Chimpanzee*. Find out how you too can help orphaned chimps by checking out the Jane Goodall Institute's [Chimp Guardian Program](#).

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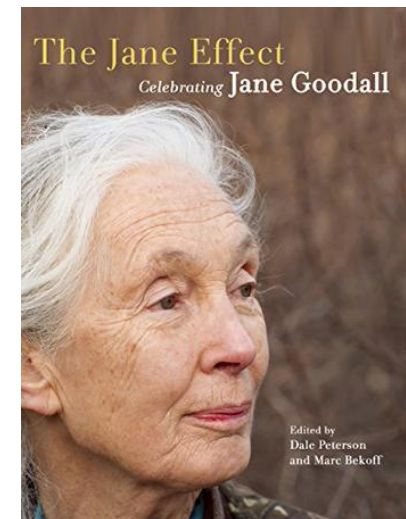
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