



What sustainable fashion can learn from Dr Jane Goodall

Dr Jane Goodall dedicated her life to studying chimpanzees in the wild. A week before she passed away, the zoologist and primatologist spoke to *Vogue Business* about legacy and the message she wants to be remembered for.

By Bella Webb



On Wednesday 1 October, Dr Jane Goodall died of natural causes at 91. A week before her death, the famed zoologist and primatologist spoke to *Vogue Business* about the importance of empathy, what humans can learn from the animals she dedicated her life to, and how she hoped to be remembered.

In July 1960, aged 26, Goodall travelled to what is now Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania to study chimpanzees in the wild. Her findings — that chimpanzees use tools, have personalities and experience emotions just like humans — changed the way we see the animal kingdom. In the latter half of her life, Goodall committed herself to near-constant travel, spreading a message of hope, fundraising to protect chimpanzees, and encouraging the next generation of scientists.

This mission took her into unfamiliar territory. Last year, she launched a jewellery collection with lab-grown diamond specialists Brilliant Earth, which was just renewed this month. In May, she appeared on an episode of Alex Cooper's *Call Her Daddy* podcast, better known for its discussions of sex and relationships, as opposed to science. And just last week, Goodall took part in a fireside chat with New York-based fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg during New York Climate Week.

Goodall's sights were firmly set on securing her legacy, using every tool in her arsenal to raise essential funds to carry on the Jane Goodall Institute's advocacy work, and protect chimpanzees far into the future.

Her second jewellery collaboration with Brilliant Earth was a prime example of this. The collection features recycled gold and lab-grown diamonds made of CO2 captured from the atmosphere. There's a medallion bearing a hand-engraved dove and an olive branch motif, designed to reflect Goodall's lifelong dedication to peace, as well as a bangle etched like a banana leaf, one of the primary "tools" Goodall discovered chimpanzees using.

"Every piece becomes a daily reminder that each of us has the ability to make a difference, no matter how small the act," says Brilliant Earth co-founder and CEO Beth Gerstein.





Ahead of the auction, I met Goodall in the animal print-adorned office above von Furstenberg's New York flagship. (Later, during the fireside chat, von Furstenberg admits that the first time the pair met, she had to quickly remove a zebra skin chair before Goodall — a committed vegan — entered the building.)

During our conversation, Goodall shared some of her most profound life lessons. There is a lot for sustainable fashion to learn, as the world remembers the late trailblazer.

***Vogue:* You have spent so much of your life living off-grid, far from consumer industries like jewellery. Why did you decide to collaborate with Brilliant Earth?**

I'm not into jewellery. A lot of jewellery is incredibly expensive, and that's not me. The team at Brilliant Earth knows that. But I heard about this company using recycled gold and turning carbon dioxide that would have gone into the atmosphere into laboratory-grown diamonds, and they gave me an opportunity to talk about some of the things I've seen.

I flew over an area of illegal gold mining in Brazil and I have never been more shocked. I've seen deforestation, I've seen erosion and forests turning into desert, but seeing what was happening in the Amazon, in these beautiful clear rivers that supported all sorts of animals, birds and Indigenous communities — I don't know how to describe the yellow of the mercury they use to sift the gold out from the sediment. They were destroying all biodiversity. I was shocked. That's why I decided to take on this collaboration.

***Vogue:* Jewellery is a very complex industry, and many of the sustainability claims around it are cloaked in scepticism. How did you navigate that when putting the collection together?**

One of the biggest problems on the planet is waste, so the more we can recycle the better. If there is gold being used and sold off, let's recycle it and give it a new life. Plus, most of the gold mining around the world is illegal, and the chaos it causes makes me sick to my stomach. It's the worst degradation of the environment I have seen. The lab-grown diamonds made from CO2 captured before it gets into the atmosphere is also very important.

***Vogue:* Often, sustainability requires a lot of nuance, which doesn't necessarily translate to consumers. What have you learnt from your advocacy career about sharing a complex message for maximum impact, without oversimplifying it?**

Well, I usually do it by telling stories and combining it with personal experiences I have had.

***Vogue:* So, making it human?**

Yes, exactly.

***Vogue:* You changed the way we see chimpanzees and the way we understand the natural world. What did you learn from that work, which could benefit the broader sustainability movement by knowing?**

We share 98.8 per cent of our DNA with chimpanzees, so their behaviour and gestural communication is very like ours. When I went to the University of Cambridge in 1962, I was told that I had done everything wrong in my two-year study; that I should have given the chimpanzees numbers instead of names; that I couldn't talk about their minds, personalities or emotions, because those were unique to humans. But my then husband was a filmmaker and his films started going around corroborating everything I had said about the chimpanzees. I didn't give in, because I had been taught by a wonderful teacher — my dog — that those professors were wrong.

The same professors told me that you couldn't be a proper scientist if you had empathy for your subjects, which has resulted in so much cruelty. Elon Musk recently said that empathy was one of the biggest





problems facing the Western world [during a podcast interview with Joe Rogan in March]. What a crazy statement.

Science gradually had to accept that humans were not separate from the rest of the animal kingdom, but part of it. Now, when we think about conservation, it's not the species I care about so much as the individuals. That little possum somewhere has a personality and feelings like happiness, sadness and anger.

***Vogue:* Your research and advocacy have appeared in the media countless times, and I'm sure some of that coverage is more accurate to what you believe than others. How do you see your legacy?**

I started a programme for young people called 'Roots and Shoots' through the Jane Goodall Institute, which is now in 76 countries. Each group chooses three projects: one helping people, one helping animals and one helping the environment. I hope that programme, as well as thinking of animals in a different way, is my legacy. But of course, to have a legacy you need an endowment, to make sure the work can continue. That's my job now.

***Vogue:* What have you learnt from this process? How do you make people care about the thing you care so much about?**

Stories, from the heart. Of course, recently, with everything going on in the world, it's not a very good time to be fundraising.

***Vogue:* During your recent appearance on the *Call Her Daddy* podcast, you said that one of the biggest problems we face right now is the loss of hope.**

If we lose hope, we become apathetic. If there is no hope, what's the point of anything? But hope leads to action, which inspires others to take action.

***Vogue:* What makes you feel hopeful?**

Nature is very resilient. There are places we have destroyed that have been able to come back, given a little help. The other thing is the indomitable human spirit. The people who tackle issues that seem impossible and will not give up. But mostly, what makes me hopeful is young people. Once children know what the problems are and they are empowered to take action, there's nothing stopping them. They are filled with energy and enthusiasm.

***Vogue:* I'm struck by the dissonance between the way you have lived your life — living in nature, among animals and largely offline — and the way so many children are brought up now. How can we help to bridge that gap, and give children the best potential for impact?**

It has been scientifically proven that time in nature is beneficial for mental and physical health. In Japan, a doctor can write a prescription for time in nature, which is particularly important for young children. Sometimes, it's just a park or a little patch of garden where they can grow something. There are programmes where children use citizen science to map the nature around their schools, so they know the first member of a migratory species to arrive, or they know when the monarch butterflies leave. Whatever it is, we need to get children into and learn about nature.

***Vogue:* You once said that when you live in a forest, it's easy to see that everything is connected. This week, thousands of people have descended on New York for Climate Week, but the city is so disconnected from nature and the problems we're all trying to solve.**

Nature is all around if you look for it, even in New York — you see clouds and trees. I've seen several birds fly past this window since I've been sitting here. Maybe we should convene in Central Park.





***Vogue:* Maybe, yes. What could we change about the ways we come together to discuss solutions, to keep nature at the forefront of our decision-making?**

When I came into this room, the lights were on. I asked the team to switch them off, because my lights are outside. It's little things like that. Do you have plastic water bottles at your event? Do you have recycling bins? When you have a big conference, what sort of food do you put out? Do you help people understand the value in moving towards a plant-based diet?

I was walking through Denver airport recently and there was a little drama next to my gate, so I stopped to watch. It was a male and female sparrow courting. The females like to be fed and there was a little crumb on the ground that the male was trying to get, to delight his lady love, but every time he flew down, someone would walk past on their cell phone. They never even noticed. So yes, slow down and notice what's happening around you.

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