



LINCOLN PARK ZOO MARCH 2007

Lincoln Park
Zoo

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Lincoln Park Zoo Plays Host to World's Leading Primatologists in First Scientific Meeting Dedicated to Study of Cognitive Abilities in Chimpanzees

Landmark Conference Focuses on How Chimpanzees Process Information

CHICAGO (March 16, 2007) – More than 300 primatologists from around the world will gather at Lincoln Park Zoo on March 22-25 for the first international scientific meeting dedicated to examining the complex cognitive abilities of chimpanzees. Researchers in the zoo's Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes are organizing the three-day conference, entitled "The Mind of the Chimpanzee."

Thirty speakers, including biologists, university professors and zoo professionals will present new research and collaborate on strategies to improve the understanding and care of chimpanzees. Some key presentations will focus on:

- The capability of chimps to cooperate in an experimental setting.
- How different types of tool-use represents culture among wild chimps.
- Chimpanzee communication and perception, including one study on new techniques to identify chimpanzee use of complex facial expressions for maintaining social relationships and another study on how vocalizations are used in mediating relationships.

2007 conference goes beyond studying behavior

More than 20 years ago in Chicago, Jane Goodall helped organize the first chimpanzee conference to focus solely on the study of chimpanzee behavior. The 2007 conference builds on growing research from the last two decades and concentrates on how a chimpanzee's mind processes information in order to perform both simple and complex tasks.

"The study of chimpanzees has progressed greatly since that first conference, both by increasing numbers of people working in the area and in the multitude of disciplines involved. Now we are talking about what is behind the behavior. We want to know what is going on inside the minds of chimpanzees which has until recently has been a mystery," said Elizabeth Lonsdorf, Ph.D., director of the Fisher Center and co-chair of the conference. "As humans, we are

fascinated with chimpanzees. They have similar behaviors to us – they form alliances, they cooperate, and they deceive. They are our closest living genetic relatives and their cognition mirrors our own.”

Conference provides once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share research findings

The Mind of the Chimpanzee conference will provide a rare opportunity for leading researchers to come together to share scientific knowledge, ideas and research underway in parts of the world ranging from the jungles in West Africa to the zoo in Lincoln Park.

“Conferences like this are where ideas are conceived, where science is vetted and where collaborations are born,” said conference co-chair Steve Ross, supervisor of cognitive and behavioral research at the Fisher Center.

Ross and Lonsdorf have collaborated for almost three years studying the zoo’s chimpanzees and their ability to use tools to fish for termites. “Ultimately, a better understanding of the chimpanzees’ cognition and problem-solving capabilities may lead us to a clearer understanding of them,” he said, adding that if the general public is more knowledgeable about chimpanzees, they are more likely to care about what happens to these animals in the wild.

In fact, the exchange of ideas at conferences like this one can have a profound impact on participants. The 1986 conference, for example, changed the course of internationally acclaimed chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall’s life work. “Until that time, Jane spent much of her time in the field studying chimpanzee behavior,” explained Lonsdorf. “After the conference, she changed course and has made it her crusade to raise public awareness about chimpanzee conservation.”

Jane Goodall will be attending the 2007 conference, along with Harvard University anthropologist Richard Wrangham. With a combined 82 years of experience and research in the field, they have changed the way we think about chimpanzees and humankind. At a sold-out public lecture on March 25, they will offer an in-depth look into the mind of chimpanzees, while sharing personal insights gained from a lifetime of work with these special apes.

The Mind of Chimpanzee Conference is generously supported by David Bohnett Foundation, The Wenner-Gren Foundation and United Airlines.

The oldest zoo in the country and one of the last remaining free zoos, Lincoln Park Zoo began in 1868 with the gift of a pair of swans. Today, 3 million visitors each year come to the Zoo to watch, listen to, delight in and learn from more than 1,000 mammals, reptiles and birds. Through conservation efforts both locally and around the globe, educational programs for students and teachers, and special events for the entire family, Lincoln Park Zoo continues its commitment to wildlife preservation, education and community service. For more information, call (312) 742-2000 or visit www.lpzoo.org.