



LINCOLN PARK ZOO MARCH 2007

Lincoln Park  
Zoo

**Media Contact:** Jack Wlezien  
312-558-1770  
JWlezien@pcipr.com

**Online Pressroom:** [www.chimpmindconference.org](http://www.chimpmindconference.org)  
Photos, B-Roll, Bios, Additional information

## **World's Leading Primatologists Gather at Lincoln Park Zoo in First Scientific Meeting Dedicated to Study of Cognitive Abilities in Chimpanzees**

### ***Conference Provides Rare Opportunity for Researchers to Share Scientific Knowledge of How Chimpanzees Process Information***

**CHICAGO (March 22, 2007)** – How chimpanzees think and what they think is the focus of an international scientific meeting that begins today in Lincoln Park. More than 300 primatologists from all corners of the globe will gather at Lincoln Park Zoo's Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes for the first international meeting dedicated to examining the complex cognitive abilities of chimpanzees. The conference, which ends Sunday and is entitled "The Mind of the Chimpanzee," provides a rare opportunity for leading researchers to come together to share their scientific knowledge about how chimpanzees process information.

"We want to know what is going on inside the minds of chimpanzees, which has – until recently – 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 behaviors similar to ours – they form alliances, they cooperate, and they deceive. They are our closest living genetic relatives and their cognition mirrors our own."

### **Thirty speakers to present groundbreaking findings**

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 presenters include:

- **Lisa Parr**, assistant research professor at Emory University's Yerkes National Primate Research Center, will discuss new techniques for identifying chimpanzee

facial expressions and will present data describing how chimpanzees categorize these expressions in computerized tasks. The purpose of her talk is to improve our understanding of the evolution of emotion.

- **Steve Ross**, conference co-chair and supervisor of cognitive and behavioral research at the Fisher Center, will discuss how cognitive studies help shape our obligation for the ethical care of chimpanzees. The purpose of his presentation is to advocate for a continuation of recent trends to provide better and more stimulating environments for chimpanzees in settings ranging from biomedical to sanctuaries and zoological parks.
- **Elizabeth Lonsdorf**, conference co-chair and Director of the Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes, will review current chimpanzee conservation issues and efforts to save our closest living relatives. This presentation will also examine how understanding the chimpanzee mind ultimately impacts species conservation.

### **Fisher Center is recognized leader in primate research**

Lincoln Park Zoo's role as conference host was boosted by the strength of the Fisher Center's chimpanzee cognitive research programs. "The Fisher Center is responsible for several significant achievements, so it's fitting the conference is held here," said Tetsuro Matsuzawa, director of Kyoto University's Primate Research Institute. "It's also one of the most important places to send the message to the public about how chimpanzees and the other great apes are endangered. We are the experts of chimpanzee research, but the outcomes of the research should be sent to the public. The Fisher Center at Lincoln Park Zoo serves as this important bridge."

The Fisher Center – one of four scientific centers at the zoo – has several studies underway designed to better decipher the thinking process of chimpanzees. One study focuses on the cognitive sequencing of objects: Both chimpanzees and gorillas are learning to use touch-screen computers in the hope that this interactive process will provide an eventual window into the ape mind. Currently, apes are learning to sequence randomly placed icons that appear on the screen. They begin with learning to select two items in a pre-determined order and move on to longer, more difficult lists of three, four and five items. Each time they correctly sequence the items, they receive a reward.

These types of tasks help scientists learn more about how apes perceive and categorize objects.

“By training the apes to interact with touch-screens, we hope to develop a better understanding of how these animals think and learn,” said the Fisher Center’s Steve Ross. “In addition, through the use of touch-screens, we can provide them with a platform to express their thoughts and preferences.”

The Fisher Center is also involved in a number of studies designed to measure tool-use aptitude among gorillas and chimpanzees. The goal of one such study – in which a single chimpanzee enters an area containing a nut-cracking apparatus – is to improve our understanding of the learning pathways and the social transmission of knowledge among species. Here, the animal watches a video of unfamiliar chimpanzees in Japan who are using a similar device to open nuts. After the video has finished, other chimpanzees are introduced to the area, and a scientist monitors the interaction to see first, whether the chimpanzee that watched the video learned the nut-cracking behavior, and second, whether the knowledge is transmitted to the other members of the group.

“Studying ape tool-use is vital to understanding how their mind really works,” said Ross. “We know that chimpanzees in the wild have myriad tool-use capabilities. They make use of branches, leaves and rocks for tasks as diverse as feeding, drinking, grooming and perhaps even hunting. By attempting to simulate these behaviors in a zoo setting, we can gain a better understating of how they originated in the wild.”

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

*The Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes was created in 2004 to mark a new commitment to ape research at Lincoln Park Zoo. Located in the zoo's Regenstein Center for African Apes, the Fisher Center brings together ape experts and organizations from around the world to collaborate on groundbreaking basic and applied research, special projects, conferences, fellowships, publications and informal education. It is one of four scientific research centers at the zoo. The others include: the Population Management Center, the Alexander Center for Applied Population Biology, and the Davee Center for Epidemiology and Endocrinology.*

*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](http://www.lpzoo.org).*