Pioneering research from the University of Cambridge



02 03

November 2019

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"Every single day that we live, we make some impact on the planet. We have a choice as to what kind of impact that is."

"In 1986, I helped organise a conference on how chimpanzee behaviour differed according to the environment. There was a session on conservation and one on conditions in captivity - in both cases, it was utterly shocking. I went to the conference as a scientist, and I left as an activist.

Since then, I've been travelling the world raising awareness not only of chimpanzee conservation and welfare, but also of wider environmental issues.

We have just one home, one planet, and we're destroying it very, very fast. The human population is growing, but on a planet with finite natural resources, and we're using up these resources faster than nature can replenish them. We're polluting the air, the water and



the land. We're recklessly pumping out CO₂ into the atmosphere and, at the same time, we're destroying our forests and oceans - the two great lungs of the world. If we carry on with business as usual, in 20 years' time, we may have a planet that's virtually unliveable.

We must not give up hope. Every single day that we live, we make some impact on the planet. We have a choice as to what kind of impact that is.

I see reasons to be optimistic. Nature is resilient. If we work to restore those places that we have destroyed, if we give them time, they will recover. A bleak, destroyed area can become beautiful again as the insects and birds and other animals come back. Animals on the very brink of extinction can be given another chance.

I truly believe we have a window of time during which we can begin to heal some of the damage we've inflicted and at least slow down the climate crisis. But we have to act now

My greatest hope is our young people. There's a saying, 'We haven't inherited this planet from our parents, we've borrowed it from our children'. But we haven't borrowed our children's future - we've stolen it. In my travels, I have met so many young people who seemed depressed, angry or just apathetic, feeling that their future has been compromised and that there's nothing they can do about it. That was why we started our Roots & Shoots education programme in 1991, to empower young people to make the world a better place.

Cambridge, like all universities and schools, can play a role in shaping the attitudes of young people. We need

to educate and inspire them, to teach them to respect each other and to respect other living organisms. We need environmental concerns to be taught not just in science, but in every discipline.

We are finally beginning to use our intellect to come up with technological solutions that will enable us to live in greater harmony with our planet electric cars and renewable energy, for instance - and to think about our own ecological footprints. We need the scientific endeavour for which institutions such as Cambridge are famous to be directed towards doing something about the mess that we've made of our planet.

The human spirit is indomitable. Throughout my life, I've met so many incredible people - men and women who tackle what seems impossible and won't give up until they succeed. With our intellect and our determined spirit, and with the tools that we have now, we can find a way to a better future."

At the age of 26, Dame Dr Jane Goodall travelled from England to what is now Tanzania, Africa, and ventured into the little-known world of wild chimpanzees. Among her many discoveries, perhaps the greatest was that chimpanzees make and use tools. She completed a PhD at Newnham College in Cambridge in 1966, and subsequently founded the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977 to continue her conservation work and the youth service programme Roots & Shoots in 1991. She now travels the world as a UN Messenger of Peace, speaking about the environmental crises we face, and her reasons for hope.

"The only way to operate is to believe we can do something about it, and I truly believe we can."

"It might seem like an obvious thing to say but we need to keep saying it: our planet is precious.

It provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink. You have only to take a walk through a forest and look up at its canopy to see the outstanding beauty and complexity of ecosystems. Pause in the stillness among the trees and contemplate what is surrounding you: it's mind-blowing.

But, rather than cherish this planet our home - we have too often treated it with contempt. Today, as a consequence, we face disaster on a global scale.

Everywhere we look, we see how ecosystems are threatened. The most striking illustration of climate change

Fortunately, we are now better informed about the state of the world that I have seen is seared on my memory: than ever before. We've seen a worldwide protest movement grow, led by young people afraid for their future and the future of their planet. We must listen to them. We must respond. We must act - and act now

We've seen before what can be done. When scientists identified the cause of a catastrophic hole in the ozone laver. the world acted. We saw global leaders listening to scientific evidence and taking action.

the first time I saw a dead coral reef.

It had actually bleached. Where once

now it was like a cemetery.

it had been full of hundreds of species.

A few decades ago, the idea that

humans could change the climate of

our planet was unthinkable. Now this

is incontrovertible and we are talking

about the risk of irreparable damage.

planet are becoming uninhabitable.

Species less able to adapt to rapid

lead to forced migrations. There will

leading to social unrest.

Rising temperatures mean parts of the

changes will be wiped out. Famine will

be major upsets in natural boundaries.

The climate crisis is a much larger problem, but if we can all pull together, I believe we can solve it. What each one of us does in the next few years will determine what happens in the next few thousand years. There is hope if we all every single one of us - take our share of responsibility for life on Earth.

Those in power can influence change. And those with knowledge and the ability to innovate can provide solutions to a great number of problems.

I have had the honour of being part of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative from its inception 12 years ago. I've seen what can be achieved when great talent is combined with great ambition: bringing together leaders in research, practice, policy and teaching gives us the greatest chance of developing the solutions required to save our planet.

In the same way, the new initiative Cambridge Zero will be vital. Combining expertise, from science and technology to law and policy to artificial intelligence and engineering, Cambridge Zero will help drive a vision for a carbon neutral future.

It's a source of comfort to me that people are recognising that their world is at stake, that the ocean is not infinitely full of food, that the ground is not infinitely full of minerals, that life on Earth is not impervious to the damage we cause.

Our planet hangs in the balance. The only way to operate is to believe we can do something about it, and I truly believe we can."

Broadcaster Sir David Attenborough's documentaries have brought the wonders of the natural world to our screens from the splendours of terrestrial life, to the otherworldly underwater kingdoms and the frozen ends of the Earth - but they also increasingly show our planet's fragility in the face of habitat destruction and climate change. He is an alumnus of Clare College and has given his name to the campus of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative - the largest cluster of biodiversity conservation organisations on the planet.

