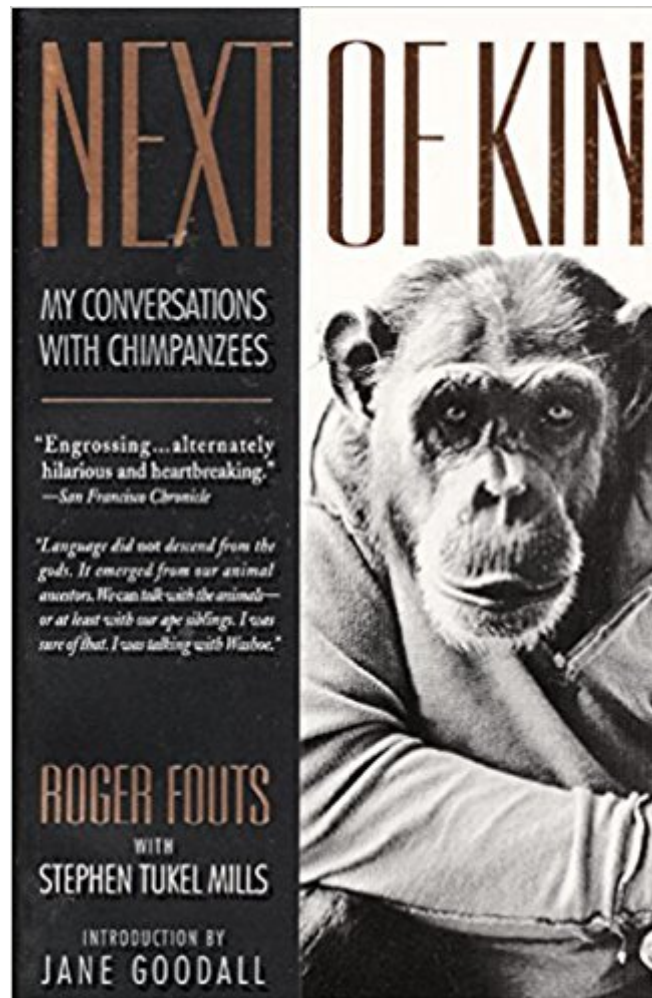




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Next Of Kin: My Conversations With Chimpanzees



Synopsis

For 30 years Roger Fouts has pioneered communication with chimpanzees through sign language--beginning with a mischievous baby chimp named Washoe. This remarkable book describes Fout's odyssey from novice researcher to celebrity scientist to impassioned crusader for the rights of animals. Living and conversing with these sensitive creatures has given him a profound appreciation of what they can teach us about ourselves. It has also made Fouts an outspoken opponent of biomedical experimentation on chimpanzees. A voyage of scientific discovery and interspecies communication, this is a stirring tale of friendship, courage, and compassion that will change forever the way we view our biological--and spritual--next of kin.

Book Information

Series: Living Planet Book

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks (September 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0380728222

ISBN-13: 978-0380728220

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 98 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #72,682 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 inÂ Books > Science & Math >

Biological Sciences > Zoology > Primatology #12 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Biological

Sciences > Animals > Apes & Monkeys #31 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences >

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Customer Reviews

For three decades, primatologist Roger Fouts has been involved in language studies of the chimpanzee, the animal most closely related to human beings. Among his subjects was the renowned Washoe, who was "endowed with a powerful need to learn and communicate," and who developed an extraordinary vocabulary in American sign language. Another chimpanzee, Fouts writes, "never made a grammatical error," which turned a whole school of linguistic theory upside down. While reporting these successes, Fouts also notes that chimpanzees are regularly abused in laboratory settings and that in the wild their number has fallen from 5,000,000 to fewer than 175,000 in the last century.

In the early 1970s, Allen and Beatrix Gardner performed groundbreaking research in language by teaching American sign language (ASL) to a young female chimpanzee named Washoe. Hired to work with Washoe on this project was a budding psychologist named Roger Fouts. In this work, Fouts (psychology, Central Washington Univ.), codirector of the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute, unfolds a fascinating account of how Washoe and four other chimps learned to communicate with humans and with one another via ASL, shattering the concept put forth by Herbert S. Terrace in *Nim* (1979) that language was a defining barrier between humans and other animals. Fouts also breaks another barrier?declaring love for his research subjects, considering the chimps as his extended family. His actions to improve life for his chimpanzees, he notes, and promote humane treatment of all apes in captivity have adversely affected his professional career. Recommended for academic and public libraries.?Raymond Hamel, Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Ctr. Lib., MadisonCopyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the best books I have ever read. I could hardly put it down. It is the autobiographical story of a graduate student who wanted to be a clinical psychologist working with children, but who didn't have either the grades or the money to get into a first-tier Ph.D. program. His advisor suggested that he apply to the University of Nevada, where he was admitted to the department of experimental psychology, a far cry from clinical. For money, they offered him a half-time assistantship, working for Allen and Beatrix Gardner, researchers who were trying to teach a chimpanzee to talk. His interview with Allen Gardner did not go well and he was sure he wasn't going to get the job, but after the interview ended he was asked if he would like to see the chimp."As we approached the fenced-in nursery school, I saw two adults playing with a child in the shade of a tree. At least I thought it was a child. When the child saw us coming she leapt up and began hooting. Then she began sprinting in our direction--on all fours. We were only a few yards from the four-foot-high fence now. Washoe continued to speed toward us and, without breaking stride, vaulted over the fence and sprang from the top rail. What happened next amazes me to this day. Washoe did not jump onto Allen Gardner as I had expected. She leapt into my arms."He got the job. He didn't know anything about chimpanzees, especially about changing diapers on an infant chimp, and he didn't know anything about American Sign Language, but he learned fast. For the next several years he was part of a project to teach ASL to Washoe and to demonstrate that a nonhuman animal could learn a natural, human language. They didn't treat Washoe the way

animals are usually treated by researchers. They raised her in a human family situation and treated her as a human child. They spoke no English in her presence--only ASL. They wanted to see if she would learn it the way a child learns language. She did, and in the process challenged the almost unanimous conceptions of scientists, linguists and philosophers about the uniqueness of language in humans. The Washoe project came to an end about the same time as Fouts was finishing his dissertation. The Gardners had arranged to send Washoe to the Institute for Primate Studies in Oklahoma. They asked Fouts to go along to take care of her. So for the second time he had Washoe to thank for getting him a job. But the situation in Oklahoma was not a happy one. For the first time in his life Fouts was introduced to the cruel conditions to which animals are routinely subjected in animal research and he found himself in the situation of protector of Washoe who he had always treated as a human child. Unfortunately, he was a young, inexperienced Ph.D. up against a powerful professor with a wide reputation. For the next 10 years or so he would have to use all his wits to survive and to protect the chimps under his care. He wasn't always able to succeed. While in Oklahoma, Fouts came in contact with an autistic child and his work with Washoe led him to a remarkable discovery. He realized that the child might not be able to coordinate his auditory experience with his visual experience and that might be why he couldn't communicate with others. So Fouts tried teaching sign language to the autistic child and in a couple of months the child was communicating with others for the first time in his life. His behavior also changed. He stopped screaming and rocking and started making eye contact with people. More remarkably, a few weeks after he started learning ASL, he started to speak in English. This led Fouts to begin theorizing about the origins of language, which is discussed at some length in this book. The situation in Oklahoma got worse and worse for the chimpanzees and Fouts began seeking an escape. Eventually he found a sanctuary in Central Washington University and built a home for Washoe and other chimps there--the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute, where the chimps live free from human domination. Graduate students who work with them can do so only if the chimps agree. (Remember, I am talking about talking chimpanzees here!) Fouts says that sometimes a graduate student will complain that he can't get the chimps to cooperate in a study and Fouts just says "Too bad. Think up a study that's more fun." As you might have guessed, Fouts became an animal rights activist. To him, his wife and his children, who grew up with Washoe, Washoe has always been considered a person. He says "Of all the people who visit Washoe's family, deaf children are the first to recognize the chimpanzee as our next of kin. To see a deaf child, who struggles daily to be understood by fellow humans, talking animatedly in sign with a chimpanzee is to recognize the absurdity of the age-old distinction between 'thinking human' and

'dumb animal'. When deaf children look at Washoe, they don't see an animal. They see a person. It is my fondest hope that, one day, every scientist will see as clearly." Teaching a chimp to use a natural language, bringing an autistic child out of his isolation, and fighting for animal rights are not Fouts' only remarkable achievements. He also demonstrated that an animal who used ASL would also teach it to her child. Washoe taught Loulis to speak. I remember first hearing about Washoe back in the early 70s, I think, but reading a popular science magazine article about her is nothing like reading this first hand account. As the introduction by Jane Goodall says, this book "has all the elements of a truly great novel--adventure, heartbreak, the struggle against evil, courage, and, of course, love."

I keep this book on my night table. ("Next Of Kin" and "Nim Chimpsky" are my very favorite books of all time). I have read this book more than once. I believe it should be required reading in schools across the country. The chimpanzee language studies of the '60-'70's proved how intelligent chimpanzees truly are. You will never forget the lives of Washoe and her family: Moja, Dar, Tatu and Loulis. These chimpanzee's, along with other chimps that my Dr. Roger Fouts taught, communicated with humans by speaking in American Sign Language (ASL). (Nim Chimpsky is another chimpanzee from this time.) Please, I urge everyone to read this book. It will change you forever, for the good. With Chimpanzees in the wild being endangered species and with our government promising to Retire their chimpanzees who have been suffering in their medical laboratories for decades "it is time for all us to better understand our Next Of Kin. Today, Tatu and Loulis are the last surviving chimpanzees from the language studies programs. They reside happily in Sanctuary at the Fauna Foundation (<http://www.faunafoundation.org>).

There's a good reason this book is rated so highly, and that's because it's a very well told story. The story follows Roger Fouts' career, from a young graduate student, to a world authority on chimpanzee communication and behavior. Where Jane Goodall got to observe wild chimps in Gombe, and study their natural lives, Fouts works with "domestic" chimps, with the goal of teaching them sign language, and studying how they learn and use it. The book is very entertaining and very engaging, and at times, heart breaking. It described the plight of chimps used in medical research, how these intelligent, sentient creatures spend their whole lives, which can be decades, in small cages with no contact with their own kind, and no mental stimulation. Through his career are trials and troubles, but Fouts always tries his best to overcome them, while keeping his chimpanzee charges interests in mind. Unfortunately, this leads him to be forced to choose between his chimp

friends, and his fellow scientific peers. The most touching part was his reunion after a 13 year separation with his friend Booe, who remembered him, and remembered his signs, though he presumably hadn't used them in so long. Booe was taken away from him, and used in a biomedical lab, where he was injected with Hepatitis. An interesting point is made in regards to humans using animals for tests, and that is that we seek to dehumanize that which we don't fully understand. Humans have used humans for slaves, Nazis used Jews for medical experiments, and up until the 1970s the US government was running a syphilis study on unknowing black men. All of this is condemned now, and is unthinkable in today's world, but as we move from one thing, we replace it with another, and it seems that we've moved to chimps now. I believe in the future we'll look back and not be able to imagine how we imprisoned and experimented on our evolutionary cousins. I just hope that day isn't too far off. The book ultimately ends on a fairly happy note, but the separations are agonizing to read about, and I found my eyes welling with tears on more than one occasion. Despite that (because of that?) this book is one of my favorites in my library, and I highly suggest it.

Roger Fouts writes about his lifelong journey of working with chimpanzees and working to bring about change for them and other animals who end up in medical laboratories. If you don't know anything about the secret life of chimpanzees, read this book. And even if you do know something, read it anyway. You'll see how much like us they are and how much they're not. No animal deserves to live in a laboratory. All vivisection does is isolate and torture non-human beings in the name of science and medical progress, which in the long run doesn't help us, is a waste of life and your tax dollars.

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