

Incident at Chimp Eden has sad outcome

Thursday, 8 May 2014 Margi Brocklehurst, managing executive of the Jane Goodall Institute South Africa (JGI SA), today confirmed that an employee of the Jane Goodall Chimp Eden sanctuary in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, was attacked by a chimpanzee at the sanctuary on Friday, 25 April 2014.

Commenting on the incident Brocklehurst said that while the employee had been badly injured he had been discharged from hospital and is recuperating at home. She commended the staff of Chimp Eden on their effective handling of the situation, which not only saved the life of the injured employee but also ensured that no further harm came to any humans, chimpanzees or other animals at the sanctuary. "I wish to thank our team for their swift and efficient action, which ensured that the victim received medical assistance in record time."

According to Brocklehurst, strict protocols are in place for the management of incidents at the sanctuary and staff are fully trained in the effective handling of situations such as these. She added that the attack was unprovoked and took place while a team of employees was checking the enclosure fences. Two male chimpanzees in their early twenties, charged the fences and despite being shocked by an electric current, one chimp managed to scale the fence to attack the employee. The other chimp was fortunately not able to escape from the enclosure.

She said the behaviour of the chimps is of tremendous concern to the staff and management of Chimp Eden and JGI SA as it was the second time the pair attacked an individual. A previous incident occurred in 2012 when an American anthropology student studying chimp behaviour at the sanctuary, was seriously injured after entering a secure area.

During the past fortnight the JGI SA team consulted experts worldwide to investigate alternatives to safeguard both staff and primates at the sanctuary.

"Every possible option has been investigated. However, keeping primates locked up in small cages is against everything that JGI SA and our founder, Dr Jane Goodall, stands for," explains Brocklehurst.

The chimpanzees were two of the first three chimpanzees to be given sanctuary at Chimp Eden when it opened in 2006. At the time the trio, who had behavioural problems caused by a traumatic past, had to be moved from the Johannesburg Zoo and were brought to Chimp Eden where the primary purpose is to aid and rehabilitate rescued chimps and teach them how to fall into natural social patterns with their fellow primates.

"The chimps that are brought to the sanctuary have been traumatised," observes Brocklehurst. "they were victims of the bush meat trade and were later humanised making their situation particularly difficult. In the interest of doing not only what is best for them but also for the other chimps at the sanctuary and those who care for them, a special meeting of the JGI SA ethics committee comprising the National Council of SPCAs Wildlife Protection Unit, Mpumalanga Tourism & Parks Agency, a veterinarian and executives and management of JGI SA was convened on 6 May to discuss the chimps' future. The committee unfortunately recommended euthanasia as the only possible solution."

World-famous primate expert, Dr Jane Goodall said: "If the sanctuary had the financial resources we would do this very differently, not only at Chimp Eden but all over the world. I am deeply saddened by this situation as the work being done by Chimp Eden is too important to jeopardise. There are 32 other chimps at the sanctuary to consider and many others that are out there in need of refuge. We need to

ensure the sustainability of Chimp Eden so that every rescued chimp will continue to be afforded a second chance at life.”

According to Isabel Wentzel, a member of the ethics committee and an inspector with the National Council of SPCAs, Wildlife Protection Unit, “This tragic case serves to cement the devastating long term effects on primates that are kept as pets. The chimps, despite being provided with natural conditions and the ability to live among their own kind, still bear the brunt of the deep-seated psychological trauma of being kept as pets. No primate no matter the size, should ever be kept as a pet. Chimpanzees are wild animals and like all wild animals, given their traumatic history, they will react. All we can do at sanctuaries such as Chimp Eden is to afford them the best chance at life possible. Unfortunately we cannot predict how their natural wild behaviour will manifest itself.”

Chimps occur naturally in 22 African countries, from the west coast of the continent to as far east as Tanzania. They are an endangered species and are now found in numbers in only five countries including Gabon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon.

To save the chimpanzees the JGISA would need to raise a substantial sum of money in a limited period of time.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- **The Jane Goodall Institute South Africa Chimpanzee Eden Sanctuary**

Situated within the 1,000 hectare Umhloti Nature Reserve, the sanctuary is a home to chimpanzees that have been misplaced from their natural habitats in Central Africa. The world-renowned Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) has made this tranquil venue its South African sanctuary and is committed to the rescue and care of chimpanzees in need of refuge. Being the first and only chimpanzee sanctuary in South Africa, this brings the world of chimpanzees closer to humanity through education and tourism.

The goal of the JGI SA Sanctuary is to rescue chimpanzees that have survived the bush meat trade; been orphaned and are traded in the illegal pet trade to zoos and circuses. These chimps are the lucky ones, living out their lives in a risk-free environment and provided with the necessary attention to recover from the trauma that they have experienced.

- **The Jane Goodall Institute**

Founded in 1977, the Jane Goodall Institute continues Dr Goodall’s pioneering research on chimpanzee behaviour research that transformed scientific perceptions of the relationship between humans and animals.

Today, the Institute is a global leader in the effort to protect chimpanzees and their habitats. It also is widely recognised for establishing innovative community-centred conservation and development programmes in Africa, and Jane Goodall’s Roots & Shoots, the Institute’s global environmental and humanitarian youth programme, which has groups in more than 120 countries.

You can friend the foundation on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/JGISA>

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