

China pillages Africa like old colonialists says Jane Goodall

February 18 2014, by Christophe Beaudufe



British anthropologist and primatologist Jane Goodall takes the hand of a Spider Monkey during her visit to the Rehabilitation Center and Primate Rescue, in Peñaflo, southwest of Santiago, Chile, on November 23, 2013

China is exploiting Africa's resources just like European colonisers did, with disastrous effects for the environment, acclaimed primatologist Jane Goodall has told AFP.

On the eve of her 80th birthday, the fiery British wildlife crusader is

whizzing across the world giving a series of lectures on the threats to our planet.

And the rising world power's involvement on the continent especially raises alarms when it comes to her beloved chimpanzees and wildlife habitats.

During the last decade China has been investing heavily in African natural resources, developing mines, oil wells and running related construction companies.

Activists accuse Chinese firms of paying little attention to the environmental impact of their race for resources.

"In Africa, China is merely doing what the colonialist did. They want raw materials for their economic growth, just as the colonialists were going into Africa and taking the natural resources, leaving people poorer," she told AFP in an interview in Johannesburg.

The stakes for the environment may even be larger this time round, she warns.

"China is bigger, and the technology has improved... It is a disaster."

Other than massive investment in Africa's mines, China is also a big market for elephant tusks and rhino horn, which has driven poaching of these animals to alarming heights.

But Goodall, who rose to fame through her ground-breaking research on chimpanzees in Tanzania, is optimistic.



British primatologist Jane Goodall delivers a speech during a presentation at the National Museum on January 26, 2013 in Nairobi

"I do believe China is changing," she said, citing as one example Beijing's recent destruction of illegal ivory stockpiles.

"I think 10 years ago, even with international pressure, we would never have had an ivory crush. But they have," she added.

"I think 10 years ago the government would never have banned [shark fin soup](#) on official occasions. But they have."

'Small window of time'

Her organisation Roots and Shoots, founded over two decades ago to

instill conservation values in children, has also become involved in China.

"We work with hundreds of Chinese children, and they are not different from children we work with here. They all love nature, they love animals, they want to help, there's no difference because they're Chinese," she said.

Young people's enthusiasm to change the world is a major reason to hope, for this lady with seemingly inexhaustible energy who can still keep an auditorium hanging on her words for more than an hour.

"These young people will become the next parents, the next teachers, the next lawyers, the next business people and the next politicians, some of them."

"The biggest problem is that people understand but don't know what to do," she said.

"If you have one thousand, one million or eventually several million people all making the right choice, all thinking about the consequence of their behaviour, then we're going to see big change."

Another glimmer of hope is "this amazing resilience of nature," she continued, citing as an example the China's Loess Plateau on the Yellow River bouncing back after massive [soil erosion](#).

"It was set to be the biggest totally destroyed ecosystem in the world," she said.

A \$400-million project funded by the Chinese government and international donors introduced better farming methods in the area, which greatly reduced erosion and lifted 2.5 million people out of poverty, according to the World Bank.

"That took a lot of money, but if you look at it now, it's all green, lush and farmland, and children have come back from the cities. It's even got a whole area for wildlife," said Goodall.

"We still have a small window of time to change things."

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