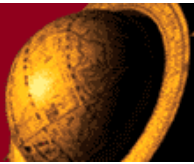


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## Human rights for apes? Growing movement wants to grant 'personhood'

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1:00 a.m. Eastern

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An international movement is growing to grant human rights and "personhood" to [apes](#).

In Austria, judges must decide whether a British woman should become legal guardian of a [chimpanzee](#), and in Spain, members of parliament are being urged to grant apes the right to life, freedom and protection from torture, reports BBC News magazine.

Ian Redmond of the U.N.'s [Great Apes Survival Project](#) contends apes are special because they are so closely related to humans – chimpanzees and bonobos, for example, differ by only 1 percent of [DNA](#).

*(Story continues below)*



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Redmond argues the great apes have the human quality of self-awareness and the ability to reason.

"Show a gibbon a mirror and the reaction suggests he or she thinks the reflection is another gibbon," he said. "But all the great apes have passed the 'mirror self-recognition' test and soon begin checking their teeth or examining parts of their body they couldn't see without the mirror. This self-awareness surely suggests that they know they exist."

Zoologist Charlotte Uhlenbroek argues apes have a similar lifespan to humans and form lifelong family bonds in which they display emotions that could be described as love, anxiety, fear, jealousy and trauma.

"If I was an alien from [Mars](#) and looked at human society and a society of apes then in terms of the emotional life I would see no distinct difference, although we live very different lives because of language and technology," Uhlenbroek said.

Redmond asserts apes need protection, noting, for example, an international trade ban is flouted in Africa and South-East Asia, where mothers are shot and their infants shipped off as pets, circus performers or lab animals.

The British woman who wants to adopt a chimpanzee, Paula Stibbe, says the animal was abducted from its family tribe in West Africa 25 years ago. It now lives in an animal sanctuary that is about to close, and she wants to prevent it from being sold to a zoo by persuading a court to grant the same protection as a child.

Members of Parliament in Spain are being asked to support legislation endorsed by the international organization [Great Ape Project](#), which advocates a United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Great Apes that would confer basic legal rights on great apes. The law would be based on the assertion apes deserve a right to life, freedom and protection from torture.



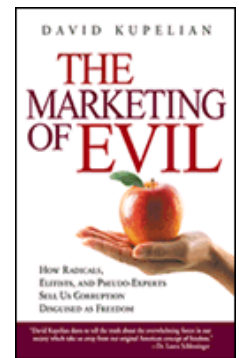
Bonobo participates in musical performances with musicians  
(Photo: [Great Ape Trust of Iowa](#))

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But Steve Jones, professor of genetics at University of London, maintains human rights cannot be imposed on animals.

"Where do you stop? It seems to be that being human is unique and nothing to do with biology," he said. "Say that apes share 98 percent of human DNA and therefore should have 98 percent of human rights. Well [mice](#) share 90 percent of human DNA. Should they get 90 percent of human rights? And plants have more DNA than humans."

Jones argues that bestowing rights based on criteria invented by one group is itself a breach of human rights, similar to what the Nazis did in the Holocaust.

"Rights and responsibilities go together and I've yet to see a chimp imprisoned for stealing a banana because they don't have a moral sense of what's right and wrong," he said. "To give them rights is to give them something without asking for anything in return."

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