



Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees

By Roger Fouts, Stephen Tukul Mills

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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.

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Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees By Roger Fouts, Stephen Tukul Mills Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #99426 in Books
- Published on: 1998-09-01
- Released on: 1998-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x 1.04" w x 5.25" l, .79 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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.

From Library Journal

Having spent most of his career teaching sign language to chimps, Fouts divulges our hairy cousins' opinions on humans.

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From [Booklist](#)

Can chimpanzees talk? As Fouts explains in this fascinating account, the answer to this question is no. But if the question is rephrased as, Can chimpanzees communicate using nonverbal language? the answer is a resounding yes. In the late 1960s, Washoe, a female chimpanzee, was taught American Sign Language in a groundbreaking study. Fouts was involved with Project Washoe from the beginning, and this account of the experiment and its aftermath reads like a novel. The ups (such as Washoe's inventions of novel signs or names for things) and downs (working with an unpredictable and arrogant senior scientist) of the unfolding story are intertwined with the scientific theories and concepts that underlie all the research being described. The similarities between humans and chimpanzees, particularly in their behavior (and language acquisition is the main behavior being studied), are emphasized and explained in the clear, easy-to-understand narrative. The evolutionary and genetic bases for these similarities are explored early in the text and are woven through the descriptions of Washoe's continuing acquisition of language. By comparing Washoe's behavior in captivity with both the behavior of wild chimpanzees and with autistic children, Fouts leads readers through complex scientific concepts while entertaining them with Washoe's (and his own) stories. What makes this book an exceptional popularization of scientific research is the authors' ability to charm with a fascinating story while also teaching *why* the story is so fascinating. Extensive notes round out a terrific book that is recommended for all libraries. Movie and foreign rights sold; special promotions to animal-rights groups planned. *Nancy Bent*

Users Review

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Ramon Jeter:

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Rosa Milliken:

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