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## *Ape House* author visits apes' home *Sara Gruen meets Great Ape Trust bonobos to ensure upcoming novel portrays the species with integrity, respect*

Des Moines, Iowa – June 26, 2007 – Best-selling author [Sara Gruen](#) visited Great Ape Trust of Iowa in early June to gather background information for her upcoming novel *Ape House*, a story about a family of bonobos that will be released by Spiegel & Grau, a division of Random House Inc., next year.

Gruen, whose most recent novel, *Water for Elephants*, occupied the No. 1 spot on the *New York Times*' best-seller list for paperback fiction in early June, earned a behind-the-scenes tour of the Trust, and a special introduction to resident bonobos [Kanzi](#) and [Panbanisha](#), after making a \$2,500 donation to world-class scientific research center in southeast Des Moines. Gruen previously had adopted 10 infant bonobos from the [Lola Ya Bonobo Sanctuary](#), whose ape rescue and conservation efforts in Democratic Republic of Congo are supported by Great Ape Trust. The adopted apes remain with their foster mothers until it is safe for them to be released in the wild.

As with *Water for Elephants*, which recounts the efforts of a young man and an elephant to save a Depression-era circus, *Ape House* will explore humans' relationships with animals and show how animals can teach people what it means to be human. *Ape*

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*House* is the story of a family of bonobos torn from their laboratory home by animal liberation activists and placed on a television reality show.

Gruen, who promises to keep her fully developed animal characters “true to their nature,” said the experience won’t significantly change the storyline for her book, but it gave her additional insight into the collaborations between scientists and great apes and deepened her understanding of the workings of a respected scientific research center like The Trust. The only significant departure from the way bonobos live at The Trust will be the use by the fictional apes of American Sign Language, a universally known and accepted form of non-verbal communication. The bonobos at Great Ape Trust have acquired language and communicate through the use of symbol-based lexigrams, a concept that Gruen thinks would be difficult for her readers to grasp.

During her visit the afternoon of June 8, Gruen met all seven of The Trust’s resident bonobos, but spent most of her time with Kanzi and Panbanisha, two of the most language-competent apes in the world. She said her visit was “wonderful, educational, utterly transporting and truly magical.”

“I feel like I have a relationship with them,” Gruen said moments after leaving the bonobo home on The Trust’s 230-acre campus, “and I am beyond charmed.”

The author presented backpacks filled with gifts, including a pair of Mr. Potato Head dolls for Kanzi and Panbanisha, to the bonobos. Gruen said she was particularly enchanted by Panbanisha’s reaction to pictures of her three children. Panbanisha has two sons, [Nyota](#) and [Nathan](#), and Gruen thought it might be of interest to the bonobo to know that she had children, too. “Panbanisha got right up against the glass and looked at the babies,” Gruen said.

As recently as two years ago, Gruen had never heard of bonobos. After *Elephants* was released, she was searching for a topic for her next book when her mother sent her the link to Great Ape Trust’s Web site, [www.greatapetrust.org](http://www.greatapetrust.org), and the idea for *Ape House* began to gel.

Gruen, who is originally from Canada, moved to the United States in 1999 for a job as a technical writer. She was laid off in 2001 and decided to pursue a lifelong dream of writing fiction. She has written four novels, three of which have been published, and each has involved animals as full-fledged characters. Her debut novel,

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*Riding Lessons*, and second effort, *Flying Changes*, both had horses as central characters and both had moderate success.

*Water for Elephants*, though, was a surprise success and Gruen is now regarded as one of the hottest new sensations in the literary world. *Publisher's Weekly* reported late last year that after her success with *Water for Elephants*, Gruen left her former publishing house, Algonquin, and inked a lucrative deal with Spiegel & Grau to write two books, including *Ape House*, for a reported \$5 million.

Gruen, 38, lives in northern Illinois with her husband, three sons and a menagerie of rescued animals – two dogs, three cats, three goats and a horse – in an environmentalist community where residents live in energy-efficient houses and share an organic farm and charter school. Gruen donates a portion of her earnings from all of her books to various animal charities.

## **GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND**

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

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**Insights through collaborations with apes**