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## Great Ape Trust of Iowa swans named in collaboration between researchers, bonobos

*Trumpeter swans named Morgan and Olivia by the bonobo Panbanisha*

Des Moines, Iowa – August 29, 2007 – After a months-long collaboration with scientific researchers, the bonobos of Great Ape Trust of Iowa have named a pair of trumpeter swans nesting on their 230-acre campus in southeast Des Moines. The bonobo [Panbanisha](#) made the final selection, choosing the names Morgan and Olivia from an array of possibilities displayed as abstract symbols known as lexigrams.

Great Ape Trust is internationally known for its leading-edge cognitive work with apes on language acquisition, but the naming exercise better illustrates the organization's philosophy of "insights through collaborations with apes," said [Dr. Karyl Swartz](#), who along with bonobo researcher [Liz Rubert-Pugh](#) worked closely with Panbanisha on the swan-naming exercise.

"As we bring something into the bonobos' environment that's very different, we need to collaborate with them rather than impose changes on them," said Swartz, a cognitive scientist involved in the comparative study of memory, problem solving, social perception and self-recognition in apes. "It has to do with our philosophy that we collaborate in every way possible – from research to everyday activities."

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The swans were released on The Trust's 30-acre lake last April as part of a conservation project with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. However, the bonobos were unable to see them until high water levels from spring rains and flooding began to recede.

Swartz said the collaboration between Panbanisha and Rubert-Pugh, who helped raise many of the bonobos at Great Ape Trust, was one of the most revealing aspects of the naming process.

"The steps Liz took to explain the process were important," Swartz said. "The bonobos needed to know the swans, they needed to talk about the swans and they needed to have lexigrams for each of the possible names so it was not something we were just imposing on them. Panbanisha was attentive throughout the process, and Liz helped make that happen."

The process was complex, Rubert-Pugh said, because Panbanisha needed to be motivated to give the swans names. The bonobo enjoys watching other waterfowl on campus, including Canada geese, a variety of ducks, and great blue herons and egrets, Rubert-Pugh said, but distinguishes them by the species name rather than individual appellations.

"Why would she want to name the swans as opposed to the many different types of birds she sees and enjoys on campus?" Rubert-Pugh asked herself at the onset of the process. "What would be her motivation?"

Over the course of several months, Rubert-Pugh and other staff members made references to the swans in conversation with the bonobos to show them they were interested in giving them names, displayed pictures and played videos of the swans, took Panbanisha on a walk to find them, and asked other staff members to videotape their outdoor searches for the swans.

"A lot of attention was paid to the swans, and there became more of a reason to name them," Rubert-Pugh said. "Panbanisha could see how other people were interested in naming them."

Lexigram symbols were developed to help the bonobos distinguish between the three male and female names under final consideration. The symbols, each subtly different, were a mix of abstract, as is the case with most of the symbols on the

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bonobos' lexigram board, and iconic. Symbols for the male names featured various positionings of a swan's head and neck with the DNR identification collar placed on the male swan when he was released. For the female names, "swan" was written in Elian Script, a non-linear writing system initially developed as a code.

Swartz said she's been asked whether the bonobos understand what a name is. "Yes," she said, "they know their own names, each others' names and the names of the all the people in their lives, and they report on the things specific individuals have done. They use the lexigram to refer to people and other bonobos."

## ***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). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to [www.GreatApeTrust.org](http://www.GreatApeTrust.org).

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**Insights Through Collaborations with Apes**