

# AMANKA STORIES

SAVING THE LAST APES

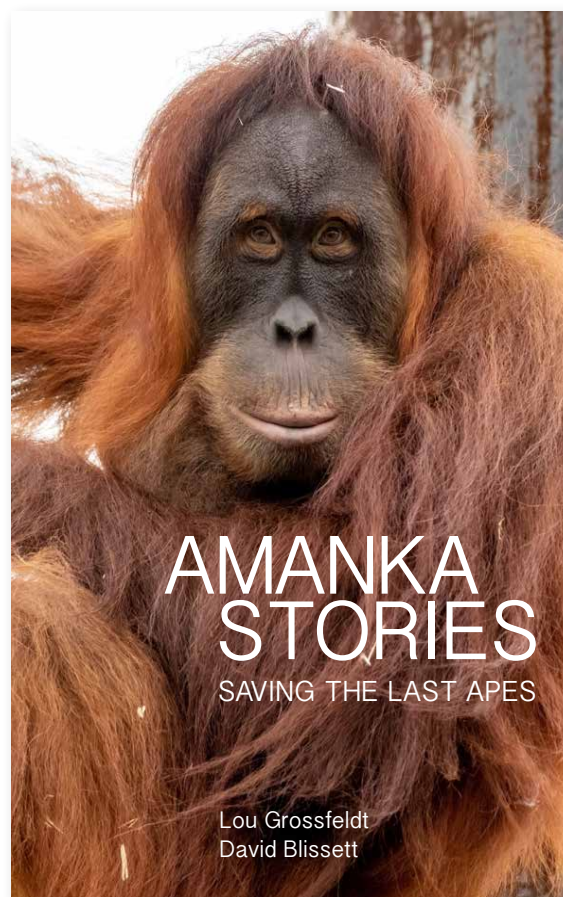
Amanka is a word from one of the languages used by people living in the rural north west of Uganda. It's a beautiful, rich word that means 'family'. Yet, in the forests and villages of this part of Uganda – and across much of tropical Africa and Asia – families are at war. In the narrowing margins between forest and farm, human and non-human, there is a growing conflict. A deadly conflict.

The Amanka Book Project has been coordinated by writer, David Blissett and primate curator, Lou Grossfeldt. They celebrate our closest living relatives, by sharing the stories and experiences of the people who are working, fighting, and sometimes risking their lives to save them. The focus is on all ape species (gorilla, orangutan, chimpanzee, bonobo and the gibbon family). These are stories of sacrifice and courage and hope; tears and happiness; love and loss. In each chapter, Lou and David speak with people who devote their lives to the conservation and wellbeing of the apes. This includes scientists, researchers, caregivers, vets, filmmakers and conservation advocates. Many of the stories in this book have never been told before and will give readers a direct insight into the day-to-day heartaches, challenges and joys of working with these intelligent, sentient beings.

*'We wrote this book to raise awareness of the plight of our ape family and to share the stories of the unsung heroes who are trying to help them. All contributors have donated to this project and profits from book sales will be donated to various ape conservation and enrichment programs or projects'*

— Lou Grossfeldt and David Blissett

Lou Grossfeldt  
David Blissett



## The Author

**Lou Grossfeldt** is a conservationist and ape husbandry specialist. She is the Primate Manager at Sydney Zoo in the Bungarribee Parklands of Western Sydney, teaches animal management courses for TAFE NSW, and works with ape conservation organisations around the world, including Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation and The Jane Goodall Institute. She is currently completing a Master's in Animal Welfare, Ethics and Law.

**David Blissett** is a writer of both fiction and narrative non-fiction. He has won multiple national awards for short fiction and has featured in numerous anthologies including the Award Winning Australian Writing series. His non-fiction work focuses on wildlife conservation and the interaction between humans and the natural world.

*Amanka Stories* is Lou and David's second book project together, following on from *Our Primate Family*, Melbourne Books in 2015.

## The Contributors

**Amy Atherton** has an indelible passion for animals, particularly great apes. Based in South Australia, Amy is an administrator and creator of numerous social media groups dedicated to the conservation and wellbeing of great apes, including *Cousins in Our Care* and *For Great Apes* on Facebook. She has a Bachelor Degree in Biodiversity and Conservation and a Certificate III in Captive Animals. She has worked as an Intern at Chimps Inc in the USA and Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Sierra Leone, and as a Volunteer Primate Keeper at AAP Primadomus in Spain.

**Tammie Bettinger** is an American researcher and conservationist currently serving as the Operations Advisor for the Gorilla Rehabilitation and Conservation Education (GRACE) Centre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2017, Tammie retired from her role as the Animal Operations Director of Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando Florida, following over 30 years' work in the field of zoo research and management. She has conducted in-situ conservation in equatorial Africa since the Year 2000, including helping to establish the GRACE Centre, the world's first sanctuary for rescued and orphaned Grauer's gorillas. Tammie has a Ph.D. in Zoology from Oklahoma State University.

**Jake Burgess** brings together a unique combination of commerce and conservation. Jake is the co-founder and Managing Director of Sydney Zoo, near Blacktown, which delivers unforgettable animal experiences, interactive learning and conservation engagement to the people of western Sydney. Jake has previously worked in financial services and has sat on several advisory boards of leading private equity firms. Passionate about conservation, Jake also supports advancement of First Australians through development of cultural programs at Sydney Zoo, and his pro-bono work on the advisory Board of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. Jake has a Bachelor of Science (Hons) from the University of Sydney, where he specialised in groundwater studies, hydrology and marine sciences. He holds an MBA from the Australian Graduate School of Management.

**Fleur Butcher** is an Australian zookeeper and primate enrichment expert. She began her animal enrichment career at Perth Zoo, working with all species before specialising with primates. In 1996, she travelled to Borneo as a volunteer assisting at Wanariset Orangutan

Reintroduction Centre in East Kalimantan. She was a founding member of Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia and was previously nominated as Young Australian of the Year for her work with orangutans. Today, Fleur works as a primate keeper at Melbourne Zoo and is one of Australia's most experienced orangutan caregivers. She is also an enrichment/welfare advisor for the BOS Foundation in Indonesia.

**Debby Cox AM** is an Australian conservationist, animal behaviour expert, zookeeper and qualified vet nurse. Formerly a senior primate keeper at Taronga Zoo, Debby has worked around the world, especially in Africa, to save wildlife and wild places from the impact of human beings. She was instrumental in the creation of world-renowned ape sanctuaries including Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary, near Entebbe in Uganda, and the Tchimpounga Chimpanzee Rehabilitation Centre in the Republic of Congo. She has a Masters of Environmental Science from the Australian National University. In 2009, Debby received the Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of her conservation efforts, especially her chimpanzee conservation work with the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI).

**Bruno Djakou** was born in the Cameroon capital, Yaounde. Growing up with a passion for animals, when he was only 17, Bruno secured a job as a gorilla caregiver in the primate sanctuary of the Mefou National Park, run by the Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund (later renamed Ape Action Africa). Bruno cared for orphaned western lowland gorillas at the sanctuary for the next 12 years, before moving to Australia. He now lives in Sydney with his family.

**Ruben Gralki** is Deputy Head Keeper Primates at Zoo Berlin in Germany. A great ape specialist, Ruben began his caregiving career at Zoo Berlin in 1994 and has been working with primates since 1997. In 2010, he completed a Masters in Zookeeping at Leipzig and is considered to be one of Europe's most experienced keepers in bonobo care and husbandry.

**Steven Johnston** has a Bachelor of Science from the University of Canterbury and a Certificate in Animal Management (Captive Wild Animals) from Unitec in Auckland, New Zealand. A primate keeper at Sydney Zoo, Steven was previously a part-time keeper at the Willowbank Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch, and has been a volunteer at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Queensland.

**Christopher Kerr** studied Structural Engineering at Sydney Technical College and he began his working career as a cadet with the NSW Electricity Commission. He went on to become the construction manager at Taronga Zoo. He has been the construction manager and project consultant on tourism and conservation projects across Africa, including major ape sanctuaries like Ngamba Island chimp sanctuary in Uganda, the GRACE gorilla sanctuary in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Tchimpounga chimp sanctuary in the Republic of Congo. Today Chris lives in Uganda, working as a self-employed building and construction manager.

**Khalfan Kikwarley** is a local guide working for the Tanzanian Parks Authority. He is based at Gombe National Park on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. Khalfan has lived in Gombe most of his life and has known Dr. Jane Goodall since he was only seven years old. He has worked with the chimpanzees of Gombe for more than twenty years.

**Yvonne Levenston** is a contemporary artist, based in Sydney. Her work promotes an appreciation of biodiversity and nature through the power of wildlife imagery, in particular threatened species and especially the great apes. Yvonne draws, paints, prints and sculpts her subjects, exploring new artistic outcomes by combining traditional and experimental methods of art form.

**Tilo Nadler** was born in Germany and has a Master's Degree in Airconditioning Engineering. In the early nineties, Tilo travelled to Vietnam to make a TV report about the rediscovery of the Delacour's langur in Cuc Phuong National Park, where he learnt about the critical situation facing Vietnam's primates. With the support of Frankfurt Zoological Society, Tilo started the "Vietnam Primate Conservation Program" working with rangers to combat illegal logging and illegal wildlife trade and gather biological information about rare primates. With confiscations of primates increasing, he established the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC), the first ever wildlife rehabilitation facility in Indochina. After almost 25 years in the role, Tilo now focuses on forest protection and animal release projects across Vietnam.

**Dr. Fred Nizeyimana** is a Ugandan veterinarian specialising in great apes. He has a Master's Degree in Wildlife Health and Management from Makerere University Makerere University, Uganda and participated in mountain gorilla research projects funded by Gorilla Doctors. After graduating in 2005, Dr. Fred worked as

acting project manager for the Kibale Eco-health Project in Uganda's Kibale National Park. In 2007, he volunteered at the Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary and was later promoted to the role of sanctuary manager and veterinarian. Dr. Fred joined Gorilla Doctors in 2010 and currently serves as a field veterinarian in Uganda, performing routine health checks and interventions on mountain gorillas in the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable National Parks.

**Dr. Anton Nurcahyo** is the Deputy CEO of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. He holds a PhD in Biological Anthropology and a Bachelor's Degree in Forestry. He has worked in several conservation roles, including biologist at the Wildlife Conservation Society – Indonesia Program, Coordinator Orangutan Conservation for the Nature Conservancy, and Orangutan Reintroduction Program Manager for Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation in Central Kalimantan. In his research work Anton has studied primate distribution and density, as well as siamang ecology and orangutan morphology. In 2017, he was an integral part of the scientific team that identified and classified a new orangutan species – the Tapanuli orangutan.

**Stany Nyandwi** was born in the small African country, Burundi. Today, he is a chimp carer, educator and conservation worker and he has served with the Jane Goodall Institute for more than three decades. Stany's outstanding knowledge, empathy and kinship with chimps enable him to bond with these complex apes in ways few can hope to replicate. Such is his reputation and ability, fellow chimp experts (including Dr. Jane Goodall) refer to him as the "Chimpanzee Whisperer." Stany has worked with chimps in sanctuaries and zoos across Africa and in Europe, Australia and the USA. In 2020, Stany and Dr. Jane Goodall were featured in a multi award-winning short documentary film called *Pant Hoot*.

**Jo O'Boyle** is originally from Wellington, New Zealand. She has a Bachelor of Zoology from Massey University in Palmerston North, a Certificate in Vet Nursing from NMIT, and a Certificate of Captive Wild Animals from Unitec in NZ. The Senior Primate Keeper at Sydney Zoo, Jo has previously worked in zookeeping roles at Edinburgh Zoo, Wellington Zoo and Mogo Zoo. She has worked for the NZ Department of Conservation as a field assistant, volunteered as a primate carer/vet nurse with International Primate Rescue, and an enrichment program supervisor for Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia.



**Richard Reens** has been shooting and developing his own pictures since the age of 10. American born, Richard was discovered by Neiman Marcus and Estée Lauder, launching his commercial career when he was only 18 years old. His photographs have been featured in international publications including Allure, Amica, Glamour and Marie Claire. In 2001, he was named one of the top 15 photographers in the world by Archive Magazine. His commercial directing experience includes award-winning advertising campaigns for Mercedes Benz, Hummer, Sony, and 7UP. In 2019, Richard filmed his debut documentary, *Pant Hoot*, featuring Stany Nyandwi and Dr. Jane Goodall. *Pant Hoot* went on to win multiple film awards including best short documentary at the San Diego International Film Festival.

**Elke Schwierz** is a German primate keeper and husbandry specialist. She began working at the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC) in Cuc Phuong, Vietnam in 2002. In 2007, she began working for Zoo Leipzig in Germany and continued to work at EPRC as a part of Zoo Leipzig's keeper training program. Fluent in Vietnamese, Elke shares her outstanding expertise with local centre staff, as well as keepers and volunteers from around the globe. She has rescued and overseen the rehabilitation of some of the rarest primates on earth, including Vietnam's endangered gibbon species.

**Jacqui Sunderland-Groves** is a UK-born researcher and great ape ecologist, currently working for the University of British Columbia in Canada. Holding a Master of Philosophy in Conservation Biology, Jacqui has worked in west-central Africa and Asia since 1995, specialising in great ape ecology, conservation-related research, wild reintroductions and management of complex conservation programs. Jacqui's earlier research focused on the distribution, ecology and conservation of Cross River gorillas in Cameroon, where she established a long-term research and conservation project. More recently, her work extended to the BOS Foundation in Indonesia, where she assisted with the reintroduction of Bornean orangutans in Kalimantan.

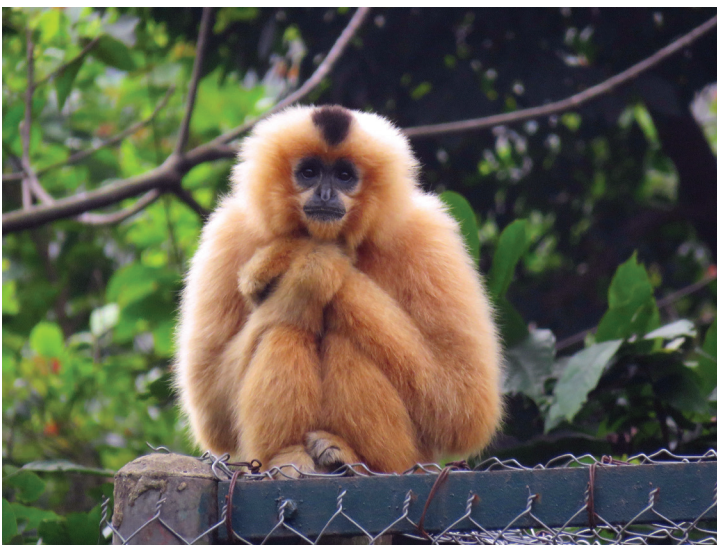
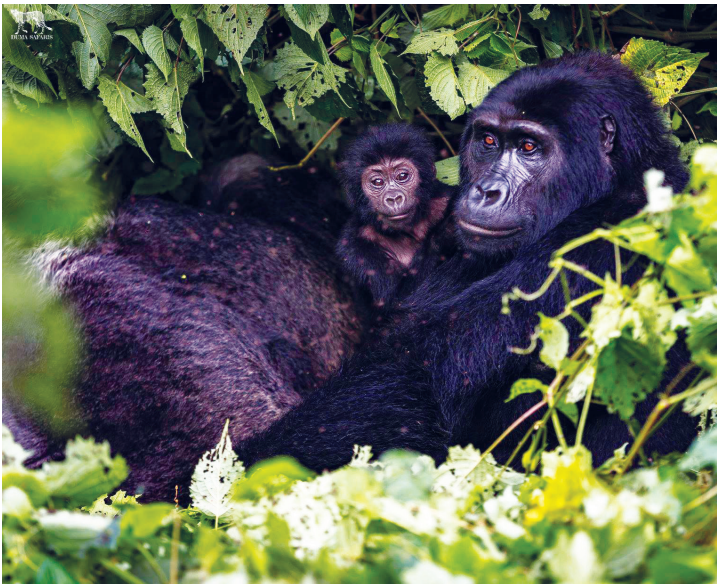
**Dr. Maryos Tandang** has worked as a vet for Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation since 2009. He studied at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia and while he primarily works with orangutans and other wildlife at the BOS Foundation Nyaru Menteng sanctuary, he also treats domestic pets and livestock belonging to local people. Maryos is an active member

of the IUCN Red List of plants, specialising in the orchid species of Kalimantan. He and his family are recognised cultural artists in Central Kalimantan and have performed in international choir competitions in Indonesia, Belgium, The Netherlands, France, Spain, South Korea and Thailand.

**Holly Thompson** is the primate section supervisor at Perth Zoo in Western Australia, where she has worked since 2002. While she has worked with a wide range of species in her career, Holly has a particular passion for primates, especially the apes. Her work has included hand-rearing critically endangered gibbons, facilitating the species management programs for two gibbon species and coordinating the release of zoo-born Sumatran orangutans into the wild. She has worked for the Silvery Gibbon Project (SGP) since 2003 and serves on the project committee. SGP is a project of Wildlife Asia, working to rescue, rehabilitate, reintroduce and protect these critically endangered Javan apes. As well as qualifications in animal husbandry, Holly holds a Bachelor of Science in Conservation and Wildlife Biology.

**Vanessa Woods** is an Australian-born research scientist, writer and journalist. She has written for Discovery Channel, BBC Wildlife, New Scientist and Travel Africa. Vanessa's work has been translated into 12 languages. She received the 2004 Australasian Science Award for Journalism. In 2010, her book *Bonobo Handshake: A Memoir of Love and Adventure in Congo* won the Thomas Lowell Award for non-fiction. With husband Brian Hare, Vanessa has authored several other book titles, including *The Genius of Dogs*. She has a Master's in Science Communication from Australian National University, a Bachelor of Marine Sciences and a Bachelor of English Literature from University of NSW. Vanessa and Brian live in North Carolina in the US.





*top left:* Protector and friend Bruno Djakou with his gorilla family at the primate sanctuary, Mefou National Park Cameroon. © Leah Djakou

*top right:* Jacqui Sunderland Groves measuring gorilla nests with local assistant, Albert. © Jacqui Sunderland Groves

*middle:* A female of the Nshongi group, one of Dr. Fred's favourites . Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. © Bobby Jo Vial

*bottom:* Victoria the Southern yellow cheeked gibbon, in her semi wild enclosure at the EPRC. © Elke Schwierz