

The Top 10 Celebrity Scientists

The Science Channel



They brought us black holes and great whites, gorillas and chimps, footprints and evolution ... and weren't shy about it. Say hello to the Top 10 Celebrity Scientists.



Jacques Cousteau

Along with engineer Émile Gagnan, Cousteau perfected the aqualung, which for the first time allowed divers to stay underwater for hours. With his French accent, and from his boat the Calypso, he hosted the popular TV series "The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau," which was renowned not only for its amazing deep-sea creatures, but also for the awe-inspiring underwater filmmaking.

It also showed us the dire implications of pollution in our seas.

"From birth, man carries the weight of gravity on his shoulders. He is bolted to earth. But man has only to sink beneath the surface and he is free."



Richard Feynman

Richard Feynman was never one to follow along with the pack, a trait that helped him solve the mystery of the Challenger explosion. While the research commission dismissed the idea that a cold launch morning caused the explosion, all Feynman had to do was drop a rubber O-ring -- the crucial piece that sealed the rocket boosters -- into an ice-cold glass of water, and let Congress watch as it flattened out.

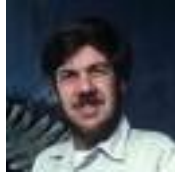
"I'm smart enough to know that I'm dumb."



Dian Fossey

She overcame an unhappy childhood in San Francisco to champion the cause of gorillas in Africa. Thanks to her they were no longer Kong but rather mammals, very much like us. But as much as Fossey publicized the gorillas' plight, she also launched a campaign against the dual enemies of poaching and zoos -- both of which brought gorillas to the brink of extinction. Her beliefs, according to some theories, may have brought about her tragic ending: Dian Fossey was murdered on December 26, 1985, and the guilty parties have never been found.

"The man who kills the animals today is the man who kills the people who get in his way tomorrow."



Stephen Jay Gould

An ardent Darwinist, Stephen Jay Gould wasn't shy about sharing his beliefs. And the public ate them up, as his many books -- and their highly readable style -- became runaway best-sellers. Gould also tackled the IQ testing industry in his book "The Mismeasure of Man," shared his dismay over the fact that baseball hasn't had a .400 hitter in more than 60 years in Ken Burns's "Baseball," and even guest-starred on "The Simpsons." But it is evolution that he is most known for -- and the fact that he would never back down from a creationist fight.

"The most erroneous stories are those we think we know best -- and therefore never scrutinize or question."



Jane Goodall

Jane Goodall changed the way we look at chimpanzees -- and ourselves. Only a few decades ago, the consensus was that humans were the only animals that could use tools. That changed when Jane Goodall saw chimps poke twigs into a termite nest and eat the termites they collected. After she reported her findings to famed anthropologist Louis Leakey, he said, "Now we must redefine 'tool,' redefine 'man,' or accept chimpanzees as humans."

"The greatest danger to our future is apathy."



Stephen Hawking

Largely due to "A Brief History of Time," the book that allowed ordinary people to talk about black holes and quantum gravity, Stephen Hawking is the best-known physicist alive today. His appearance -- in a wheelchair due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, and with a mechanical voice generator due to a tracheotomy -- only adds to the incredible nature of his achievements, which include a model depicting why the universe knows no bounds.

"God not only plays dice, He also sometimes throws the dice where they cannot be seen."



Mary Leakey

Though she participated in countless digs, and was the matriarch of a renowned family of archaeologists, Mary Leakey is probably best known for a set of footprints she discovered in 1976, in Tanzania, Africa. More than 3 million years old, these footprints -- two sets side by side, about 80 feet long -- are among the earliest evidence of upright, bipedal walking. One set was made by a larger Australopithecine, the other by a smaller. Were they male and female? Mother and child? Only time will tell.

"She stops, pauses, turns to the left to glance at some possible threat or irregularity, and then continues to the north. This motion, so intensely human, transcends time."



Carl Sagan

Born in Brooklyn with an eye toward the stars, Carl Sagan brought the universe to our living rooms with "Cosmos," a 13-part television series that influenced a new generation of astronomers with its down-to-earth approach to science. Sagan was also the author of over 20 books, including "Pale Blue Dot" and the novel "Contact," which became a film in 1997. What might not be as widely known, however, are his discoveries about Venus (it was a scorched world, rather than a tropical paradise as popularly believed), which tied into his predictions for dangerous global warming here on Earth.

"In order to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe."



Watson and Crick

On February 28, 1953, the team of James Watson and Francis Crick did the unthinkable -- they were able to determine the structure of DNA. Only through its double-helix structure could DNA "unzip" itself, making copies that become the building blocks of all living things. The base pairs -- adenine, thymine, guanine and cytosine -- became the key in decoding the rungs to this curved ladder. It's a find that's almost taken for granted today, but shook up the genetic world over 50 years ago. It also brought fame to its finders -- American Watson and British Crick -- and the Nobel Prize.

"Francis Crick and I were both in trouble at various times in our careers, but that never really stopped us, because we always found someone to save us." - James Watson

"We've discovered the secret of life." - Francis Crick