

# Dorothy Cheney, Biology

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*Dorothy Cheney*

Dorothy Cheney, emeritus professor of biology in the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania and renowned primate researcher, died November 9 at her home in Devon, Pennsylvania, from breast cancer. She was 68.

Dr. Cheney was born in Boston and attended Abbott Academy in Andover and then went to Wellesley College, where she earned a BA in political science. She had planned to become a lawyer until her husband, Robert Seyfarth, teamed up with noted zoologist Robert Hinde at Cambridge University to study baboons in South Africa. She joined her husband on the trip, and it changed her career path entirely. Inspired, she went on to receive her PhD in zoology in 1977 from Cambridge University.

They joined the faculty at Rockefeller University in New York and then UCLA before coming to Penn in 1985. She began as an assistant professor in biology; he joined the psychology department. The popular animal behavior class they taught influenced generations of Penn students. Dr. Cheney received the Biology Department Teaching Award in 2009. She became a full professor before her retirement in 2016, at which time she earned emeritus status. A kind, thoughtful professor willing to share her time and intellect with students, she was known to be unflinchingly self-critical and rigorous in her work and writing and taught students the value of exhibiting that same level of critical thinking in their own lives, recalled Dr. Marc Schmidt, co-director of the Biological Basis of Behavior Program.

Dr. Seyfarth and Dr. Cheney produced groundbreaking research on the communication and social structures of baboons and other monkeys living in the wild. As a team, they were known for their careful, patient field experiments in Africa and elsewhere. One of their most well-known experiments involved playback of vervet monkey calls and the study of how the monkeys interpreted those calls. Notably, they learned that the monkeys were able to warn each other not only when a predator was present, but specifically what type. Drs. Cheney and Seyfarth published their findings in the 1990 book, *How Monkeys See the World: Inside the Mind of Another Species*. In 1992, they began a 16-year research project with their graduate students using audio recordings to explore social bonding among baboons in Botswana. In 2007, they wrote *Baboon Metaphysics*.

Dr. Cheney received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1995. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Almanac* May 18/25, 1999 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v45/n33/honors.html#6AA>)), the National Academy of Sciences (*Almanac* July 14, 2015 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-62-number-1#national-academy-of-sciences-members-62-01>)), and she and her husband shared the Distinguished Primatologist Award from the American Society of Primatologists. Dr. Cheney also received the Distinguished Animal Behaviorist Award from the Animal Behavior Society.

Dr. Cheney is survived by her husband; daughters, Caroline Cheney Roberts and Lucia Hall Seyfarth; sister, Margaret; brothers, Drew and Thomas; stepsisters, Robin Bell and Roseanne Currier; stepbrother, David Bell; and a granddaughter.