





# THE chimpanzee challenge

by NANCY LAWSON

**June 16:** A study coordinator kicks Sifafu's arm twice as he exits the chimpanzee's cage.

**June 17:** A study coordinator places an irretrievable orange on a bar outside Sky's isolation cage and says that Sky will "start crying." Sky clings to the back of her cage and rocks.

**August 9:** Babs' isolation cage is filthy, with feces smeared and caked onto her perch, the gridwork, and the metal panels.

**August 25:** Despite Jolene's recent wounds, she is allowed to fall to the floor of her cage yet again.

**September 23:** Sterling suddenly hits his own face, curls inward and screams.

— Scenes from a nine-month investigation of the New Iberia Research Center, cited in an HSUS complaint to the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Last summer, while an HSUS undercover investigator documented the wretched lives of animals at one of the world's largest primate research labs, workers caring for chimpanzees at another facility in the same state were keeping detailed notes of their own.

The nature of their observations was decidedly different, tracking the progress of residents who'd only recently seen the light of day. Juan, who'd declined to venture beyond the enclosures during his first three years of freedom, was heading into the forest for the first time. The "fabulously full-figured" Gwennie, once obese and arthritic, was 35 pounds lighter after some fun in the sun. Sara, ever protective of her group, had been seen making alarm barks while attempting to spear a snake with a sharpened stick.

Chimp Haven, the official home for government-owned chimpanzees retired from research facilities, is just 220 miles from the University of Louisiana's New Iberia Research Center. But with its forested habitats, full calendar of entertainment activities, and adoring employees, the Keithville, La., sanctuary might as well be

worlds away.

As the HSUS investigator filmed chimpanzees at NIRC cowering in barren cages, their counterparts at Chimp Haven lollygagged on wooden platforms in play yards, made nests of yaupon holly and pine needles, and fashioned their own ant-fishing tools. And as the animals in the laboratory screamed in terror at employees sedating them with dart guns, those in the sanctuary cried out in delight at staff delivering their daily treats.

Known as "food barks," these vocalizations broke the silence of the sanctuary one morning last August in response to the whooping calls of behaviorist Amy Fultz and enrichment technician Erin Loeser. "In the wild, if they find a fruit tree," explained Fultz, "they make that sound to tell others."

Rising noisily from their sunbathing perches, the chimps stretched their arms high to catch the goodies being proffered: soda bottles filled with baked banana-nut muffin mix. They've come to expect such novelties from their caretakers, who concoct "ape-sicles" from sunflower seeds and juice and keep storage rooms full of boomer balls, puppets, and plastic paintbrushes. Giant ice treats, cattail browsing, the chance to admire themselves in full-length mirrors—even a visit from a local drumming group—are among the many activities designed to keep these former research subjects happy and healthy.

The muffin creations would prove to be a highlight of that late summer day. Some chimps wasted no time in cracking open the plastic to get at the goods, while others spent the better part of the next hour extracting every last crumb with fingers and sticks. Even the bottles would not go to waste; recycling-minded residents reuse the empties to gather water.

These behaviors are new for many of the animals, with captive-born chimps mimicking their wild-caught brethren. Just like people, they learn throughout their lives, said the sanctuary's director and president, Linda Brent. She's just surprised by how



Though the Animal Welfare Act requires environmental enhancement for chimpanzees in research, this chimp and many others at NIRC live without even the smallest creature comforts, such as straw.

quickly they take to their new digs.

“They actually figure out they’ve got the good life really fast, and then shortly after that, they become very demanding,” she said, admiring a chimp named Midget who was running along a wall and banging it. “They realize that we’re here for them, and they kind of get this attitude: ‘OK, well, this is my time, this is my place; I’ll cooperate if I want, and if I don’t, I’m not going to.’”

“And you know what? That’s perfectly fine with us.”

### PAIN AND SUFFERING

Two days before that idyllic August morning at the sanctuary, the HSUS investigator at NIRC discovered that a chimpanzee named Jolene had lost her thumb; workers said she’d chewed it off while coming out of sedation.

The 18-year-old chimp had also repeatedly crashed to the hard floor from the perch in her cage—a common occurrence following sedation of animals at the facility, which houses about 325 chimpanzees and 6,000 monkeys for pharmaceutical testing, infectious disease experiments, and breeding. Although chimps can be trained using positive reinforcement to volunteer a limb for an injection of anesthesia, NIRC chose fear-inducing methods. Employees used dart guns or “squeeze cages” with walls that closed in to immobilize the animals, a loud and frightening procedure that set off torrents of screaming, crying, shaking, rocking, and defecating.

Rather than alleviating the suffering of their charges, NIRC staff threatened them with dart guns and brooms, taunted them

with food they could not reach, and, perhaps worst of all, ignored them. A 21-year-old chimp named Sterling, who screamed for long periods before curling up into a ball and biting his arms and feet, was dismissed by a supervisor as having “mental problems.”

Though the Animal Welfare Act requires environmental enhancement for primates in research, the NIRC chimps lacked even the smallest sources of comfort, such as straw. Confined to stainless steel and concrete spaces, they had little to amuse them; those in isolation cages the size of a small closet were given only metal perches, a Kong-like toy, and pictures of chimps, islands, and

cartoon characters taped to the walls.

Despite a 2007 National Institutes of Health announcement that the agency was permanently ending chimpanzee breeding, NIRC is still doing so, to the tune of millions of taxpayer dollars and the detriment of the animals’ psychological well-being. Observed by the investigator in a barren “nursery,” baby chimps who’d been yanked from their mothers clung to each other and interrupted their play to begin rocking back and forth.

After viewing the undercover footage, renowned primatologist Jane Goodall wrote, “In no lab I have visited have I seen so many chimpanzees exhibit such intense fear.”

The environment at NIRC isn’t unique in the research world, say former employees of other facilities. And many of the 1,000 chimpanzees in laboratories around the nation aren’t even used, due to the meager value of chimpanzee studies compared with the high financial and ethical cost of such research. Instead, the animals are warehoused, languishing in environments that deprive them of all dignity and any semblance of a natural life.

Yet despite the prison-like accommodations, laboratory settings ring up a large tab, often at taxpayer expense. It costs about \$55 a day to keep one chimp in a U.S. research facility. For considerably less—\$20 to

## BILL BOX

Federal legislation to protect chimpanzees gained momentum following a February attack by a chimp being kept as a pet and the March release of the HSUS investigation into a Louisiana research facility.



About a week after Charla Nash was mauled by her friend’s chimp in Connecticut and the chimp was shot and killed by police, the U.S. House of Representatives passed **The Captive Primate Safety Act**, H.R. 80/S. 462, to prohibit interstate and foreign commerce in primates for the pet trade. Sponsors include Reps. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., and Mark Kirk, R-Ill., and Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and David Vitter, R-La.

**The Great Ape Protection Act**, H.R. 1326, was introduced in Congress the day after The HSUS revealed its findings of hundreds of Animal Welfare Act violations at the New Iberia Research Center. The bill phases out the use of chimpanzees in invasive research and retires the estimated 500 federally owned chimps to permanent sanctuary. It also codifies a recent decision by the National Institutes of Health to end breeding of federally owned chimpanzees. By mid-April, the bill had 45 cosponsors, led by Reps. Edolphus Towns, D-N.Y.; David Reichert, R-Wash.; Jim Langevin, D-R.I.; and Roscoe Bartlett, R-Md.

**TO CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS** and urge support for the bills, call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 or visit [humanesociety.org/leglookup](http://humanesociety.org/leglookup).



As Teresa watches, Derma grooms her friend Debbie—an important bonding behavior seen often at Chimp Haven but denied to research chimps living in isolation cages. Our closest relatives, chimpanzees share more than 98 percent of our DNA and live in complex social groups of 20 to 100 animals.

\$35 per day—chimpanzees could be spending their last days in a sanctuary that provides them with the next best thing to a life in the wild.

Instrumental in the passage of legislation that paved the way for a national sanctuary system, The HSUS is now gaining new ground in its efforts to give all chimps used in research the gift of retirement. More than 130 animals already live at Chimp Haven, which opened in 2005, five years after President Clinton signed the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance, and Protection (CHIMP) Act into law. Federal dollars fund 75 percent of the care of government-owned chimps at the sanctuary; private donations pay for the other 25 percent, as well as for education programs, additional facilities and staff, and the care of 10 chimps not owned by the government.

Taking the next step, the Great Ape Protection Act—introduced in the wake of the HSUS investigation—would end invasive research on the species and require the transfer of an estimated 500 government-owned chimps to sanctuaries. If the legisla-

tion passes, the U.S. will finally join the league of other developed nations, none of which conducts invasive research on our closest relatives.

“This is equivalent to putting an innocent person in jail for life,” says Rep. Roscoe Bartlett, R-Md., a former research scientist and medical professor who is a lead sponsor of the legislation. “These are animals that can communicate with you through sign language. ... If they could vocalize, they’d

talk to you. And if they could talk to you, it would be even more obvious that we ought not to be doing this.”

Perhaps no one knows that better than Siafu, an NIRC chimpanzee infected with Hepatitis C. As the HSUS investigator saw him bang his isolation cage, sway, stomp his feet, and scream, employees threatened to get a dart gun and a study coordinator scolded him, saying, “Quit it, dipshit.”

“He was trying so hard to tell me something,” said the investigator, who watched Siafu repeatedly tap his fist to his chest. Upon reviewing the footage, chimpanzee expert Roger Fouts came to a heartbreaking conclusion: The movements looked like crude begging gestures.

A complaint filed five years ago by a former NIRC employee indicates that the chimp’s attempts to communicate have long gone unheeded by the humans

PREVIOUS SPREAD: DAVID THROOD/GETTY; OPPOSITE PAGE: THE HSUS; THIS PAGE: TOP: RICCI DELAHAY/CHIMP HAVEN; BOTTOM: AMY FULTZ/CHIMP HAVEN



While animals at NIRC were taunted with fruit they could not reach, Keith and his fellow Chimp Haven residents dined on a prolific supply of fresh produce.



Recent studies have shown that chimpanzees used in invasive research suffer symptoms similar to those afflicting people with post-traumatic stress disorder.

around him: “Siafu would sign to us, but because we had no idea of what he was saying, he would get very agitated, repeatedly signing,” wrote whistle-blower Nariman Fakier. “Nothing was ever done for him.”

### SECOND NATURE, SECOND CHANCE

Chimp Haven employees are always eager to find out what’s on the mind of Sheba, who likes to stand on wooden platforms and gesture in sign language at people walking by. After the sanctuary hired a caretaker who

knows how to sign, Sheba finally had someone smart enough to understand her communiqués: “I’m hungry,” “I’m beautiful,” “I’m smart,” and “Listen to me.”

If Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal heeds The HSUS’s request to release to Chimp Haven NIRC’s 26 oldest chimps—one of whom has been in research facilities since the Eisenhower administration—they will get similar personal attention and lead a life like that of 56-year-old Grandma, who rules the roost in an enclosure not far from Linda Brent’s office.

## A Life of Misery HSUS investigation reveals horrifying conditions for monkeys in research

**The monkeys** at the New Iberia Research Center have no names, appearing only as numbers in a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

But their stories live on in excruciating detail, through the efforts of an HSUS investigator who documented hundreds of abuses while also trying in vain to ease their pain.

There was Macaque 02D183, who alternated for months between spinning in circles and picking at the gaping self-inflicted wounds on his legs. There was Macaque 99C234, a constant pacer who chewed his own shoulder to a pulp. And there was Macaque 02D163, who appeared congested and unable to move his jaw but was kept in a study until he became emaciated and his knee joint was “moth-eaten,” in the words of one NIRC veterinarian.

Most disturbing of all was the seeming indifference of workers who ignored signs of physical and psychological deterioration. Naturally social creatures who travel in large groups, many of the monkeys received no socialization or enrichment. Infants were torn from screaming mothers so tubes could be forced down their throats.

The investigator, whose job involved observing the monkeys, was told not to report behaviors such as circling, back flipping, spinning, and hair plucking—known signs of psychological distress—because they were so common. Hair loss was also to go unreported unless it affected more than 20 percent of a monkey’s body; veterinary staff were “tired” of seeing such observations. Broken perches often went unrepaired, even though perches are important to primates and help keep them dry during cage cleaning.

The video depicts staff treating monkeys like objects, lining up sedated animals on carts and countertops, where some fell to the floor below. Appalling handling techniques included yanking monkeys out of cages using a neck pole; they screamed and clung to the cages in resistance.

“There’s no reason to be wrestling them out of a cage like that,” says Kathleen Conlee, who directs The HSUS’s Chimps Deserve Better campaign. “If you’re going to use monkeys, you can train them to cooperate using positive reinforcement.”

When she provided social enrichment to monkeys at a facility in the 1990s, Conlee created a setup that allowed them to voluntarily enter an area of their housing for anesthesia. From a scientific perspective, stress isn’t just a moral problem, she says; it can taint results. When Conlee redesigned the monkeys’ housing to better accommodate their complex social structures, those singly housed for long periods fared much worse, suffering compromised immune systems and reproductive problems.

Of the estimated 112,000 nonhuman primates in U.S. research facilities, most are monkeys used in invasive experiments that can cause pain and distress. Animal Welfare Act amendments passed in 1985 emphasized attention to the psychological well-being of primates in laboratories, but the standards are vague and lack accountability. The HSUS is calling for better enforcement as well as stronger and clearer regulations—and has gained the support of many experts shocked by the treatment of primates at NIRC.

“There is torture, distress, and neglect occurring regularly, and the people are behaving as if this is a typical everyday affair and show not one bit of sympathy or empathy with this suffering,” says Mary Lee Jensvold, Ph.D., assistant professor of anthropology and associate director of the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute at Central Washington University. “Instead, they add to it.”

Following the release of the HSUS exposé, Agriculture secretary Tom Vilsack immediately issued a statement promising a federal investigation. “We’re hopeful that the new administration will not only hold NIRC accountable,” says Conlee, “but will make changes to the regulations that are so desperately needed—and were intended by Congress 24 years ago.”



“She’s our Wal-Mart greeter,” Brent said as Grandma climbed onto a perch for a better view and clapped her hands. Fond of people and stuffed animals, Grandma tossed her chimp doll over her shoulders as if she were carrying a baby and joined her friends in accepting diner-style ketchup bottles filled with glucosamine and fruit juice—“just like old ladies on a joint supplement,” said a caretaker.

The daughter of two of the first 100 chimpanzees ever used in research, Grandma spent more than five decades in laboratories before arriving at the sanctuary in 2005. She and her friend Les are happiest in enclosures where they can chat up the passersby. A “mesh walker,” Les prefers to stay close to the perimeters of structures—a remnant of his past life, when walls may have provided some sense of security.

“There are certain ones who arrive here and won’t put their feet down on the ground,” says Fultz. “They touch the grass, and they lift their hands up, and they’re like, ‘What’s that?’”

With time and encouragement, most

eventually take to it with a vengeance. A typical morning found a chimp named Jerry at the edge of a grassy enclosure littered with orange peels and lettuce, propping his foot on one wall and stretching back into the soft pine straw. In the midst of some red plastic crates sat Midget, arranging his treasure in a precise semi-circle. Running along the perimeter of another yard, Keeli showed off, punching the side of the open-air enclosure. Harper gathered blankets into a circular nest, assessed his creation, and added a tire to complete the look.

When she conceived of Chimp Haven 14 years ago while working at a research facility in Texas, Brent envisioned a place that would allow chimpanzees to control their environments and choose their routines. Little did she know how quickly it would become second nature to chimps who had been robbed of any nature at all so many years before.

Some couldn’t wait to get back to their wild roots when the first of two forested habitats was completed in July 2005 and



Known affectionately as Chimp Haven’s “Wal-Mart greeter,” gregarious Grandma arrived in 2005 after spending five decades in research facilities.

staff threw open the gateways to the great outdoors. Fultz was so nervous that she slept outside that night, keeping watch from the other side of a moat that surrounds the habitat. Since then, she has counted 153 nests in the woods, where many chimps forage and rest during the day before hungrily downing with their groups for the night in their decked-out enclosures.

Recalling a 2006 trip when she saw chimps in Africa hanging out in trees, eating vegetation, traveling in groups, and making nests right in front of her, Fultz got goose bumps as she watched a chimp named Debbie vanish down a forested path and a baby named Tracy peer over her father’s shoulder to beg for more muffin mix. “We’re giving these chimpanzees here the opportunity to do some of those things that they haven’t done before,” she said.

And in some cases, the chimpanzees are getting to do things they did long ago, in another country and another lifetime, before their freedom was taken away. The first time two wild-caught chimps named Rita and Teresa entered the forest at Chimp Haven, they sat down and stared in wonderment; it had been decades since they’d been among trees.

When the sanctuary reunited Lolita and Sheila, a mother and daughter once placed in different research facilities, the meeting lacked a dramatic run through the fields and long-lost hug of recognition. Instead, after years of separation, the two chimpanzees did one of the many things their kind does best: They greeted each other, sat down quietly, and shared a watermelon snack. ■



Once back in more natural environs, chimps who were caught in the wild decades ago return to their old ways. Karin was the first one observed at the sanctuary to strip sticks of their leaves for use as ant-fishers.