Chimp Haven’s Population Swells to 211!

All 110 New Iberia Research Center chimpanzees are now in sanctuary

Thanks to you, our donors, June 12 was an exciting day at Chimp Haven. Joy and anticipation filled the sanctuary as we awaited the arrival of the last group of chimpanzees from the New Iberia Research Center (NIRC).

This journey began just 18 months earlier as staff set out to bring the first of 110 chimpanzees on a four-hour trek from New Iberia, La. to their forever home at Chimp Haven. The journey wasn’t easy, but with your help we were triumphant!

“Our work is not done.”

At first unsure of their new surroundings, they cautiously stepped out onto grass, some for the first time in their lives. Can you imagine feeling grass on your feet, smelling fresh air or seeing the sky overhead for the very first time? You made this possible.

Over the next several months, 42 more of these beautiful animals crossed the Chimp Haven threshold for their own new beginning. By the summer of 2013, all efforts were placed on making room for the 60 who remained at NIRC. The sounds of heavy equipment and construction were music to our ears, as we were realizing our dreams.

Now, they’re all home; 110 chimpanzees are enjoying the retirement they deserve. But our work is not done. It’s far from over, as we’re tasked with providing lifetime care for not only these chimpanzees, but the other 101 who also reside here. They still need you.
Four Generations Enjoy Retirement at Chimp Haven

Chimp Haven is home to many chimpanzees who are related to one another, but with the migration of the NIRC 110 completed, we now have a four-generation family residing here!

We were amazed, and grateful, to learn that Phyllis, Abby, Passion and Arden would all be retired to the sanctuary. Not unlike our own families, each has her own unique personality.

Phyllis, 48, is the matriarch. She arrived at the sanctuary with the first group in January 2013. She’s a silver-coated, energetic chimpanzee who can be a fierce protector. She also has a soft heart and cares for group mates with special needs.

Abby, daughter of Phyllis and mother of Passion, is 32. She’s shy and quiet, but manages to get plenty of attention. Care staff say she has two boyfriends, Backus and Andy. She has a sweet temperament and enjoys swinging from the brachiation bars in her play area.

Passion, 21, arrived at Chimp Haven last year exhibiting abnormal behavior. She would often poke her eye with her finger when she was feeling stressed. Animal care staff noticed Passion’s condition and worked to comfort her. Now, Passion has adjusted to her new surroundings. Her anxiety has decreased and she is learning to enjoy her days of relaxation at the sanctuary.

Along with Passion came her 5-year-old daughter, Arden. A lover of the trees, she can often be seen swinging high from branch to branch in the forested habitat. After learning how to use tools from group mate Tracy, she easily climbs to the top of a simulated termite mound in search of goodies with a stick that is twice her size.

While each of these lovely chimpanzees has her own special story, they all share the same happy ending. Though rather than an ending, we like to think of it as a new beginning.

Thank you for giving this family their freedom. Their life in a research lab may be over, but they’re still depending on you for a lifetime of care.
Lending a Helping Hand
Human ear specialist offers expertise to Chimp Haven

Sheena has been a resident of Chimp Haven since 2005. Although she is able to vocalize, she is deaf and has suffered from chronic ear infections intermittently for 10 years. She has undergone surgery to help correct the problem, but has not been able to find relief.

Searching for a solution, Chimp Haven’s veterinary staff reached out to local ear specialist, Dr. Maura Cosetti from Louisiana State University Health Science Center-Shreveport (LSUHSC-S). She and her team of physicians visited Sheena to assess the problem and begin offering treatment.

According to Dr. Cosetti, the chimpanzee ear and human ear are very similar and the condition which Sheena suffers from is also common in humans. Sheena is experiencing an itching sensation and will stick straw inside her ear as an attempt to scratch it. Because of the inner ear’s tiny structure, pieces of straw often get stuck. When Dr. Cosetti performed the first, of what will likely be several treatments, many pieces of straw were removed.

Dr. Cosetti feels that with a little time Sheena’s problem can be cured. In the meantime, we are happy to have friends in human medicine who willingly offer their time and talent to improve the lives of our residents.

LSUHSC-S and Chimp Haven staff members prepare for surgery.
Sounds of the Sanctuary

Volunteers provide musical enrichment for chimpanzees

Sweet sounds fill the sanctuary daily...though usually it’s pant hoots and food grunts. However, lately volunteers have been offering their musical talents to serenade the chimpanzees.

“Enrichment for the chimpanzees come in various forms,” Chimp Haven Enrichment Specialist Erin Loeser said. “Categories of enrichment include social, physical, food, occupational and sensory. Music falls into the sensory category and many of the chimpanzees, along with the staff, appear to enjoy it.”

For a few hours, a variety of local musicians equip themselves with their instrument of choice and perform live tunes from an array of genres.

Perched on the rooftop, a local drum circle offers rhythmic beats for the chimpanzees.

Local musicians Winston Hall and Jerry Lee serenade the chimpanzees.

“The reaction of the chimpanzees is always interesting to see,” Loeser said. “They vary from instrument to instrument and chimpanzee to chimpanzee. What we see with the guitar may not be seen with the drum. It’s truly fascinating.”

If you are interested in playing for our colony, send us an email to volunteers@chimpahven.org.

But do the chimpanzees like it?

Some of them really seem to. Some chimpanzees will sway and rock while others become extremely calm.

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