



Humane Society (HSUS) Issues Public Statement on Project Chimps; Advocates Respond

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The News

On July 2nd, Kitty Block, the CEO of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), sent the following statement to people who participated in a letter writing campaign calling on the organization to improve animal welfare at Project Chimps, HSUS's sanctuary in Georgia that is home to 77 chimpanzees.

HSUS STATEMENT

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Kitty Block <kblock@hsi.org>

To: anna.bradley@projectchimps.org, steven.white@projectchimps.org

Sent: Friday, July 2, 2021, 06:54:58 PM PDT

Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Help The Chimps, Steven White

The HSUS has [clearly communicated](#) that we agree with Project Chimps' longstanding plan to build out its facilities and staff to support more time in outdoor habitat space for all the chimps at the sanctuary, and that we'll be directing our future financial support of the sanctuary toward those priority needs. We hope that as the previous challenges of weather and COVID wane, better circumstances will allow Project Chimps to begin build-out efforts in the near future. In the meantime, we've confirmed repeatedly—with both independent and internal sources who are most familiar with the sanctuary's work—that the chimpanzees are receiving good medical care and ample enrichment.

The HSUS continues to provide Project Chimps with significant financial backing, as we've done since the sanctuary's inception. The sanctuary also needs to develop more independent support, in order to maintain and improve its facilities and program of care. We're disappointed to see these continuing attacks on the sanctuary caring for these animals, which without Project Chimps, would still be in a lab. At this point, such mischaracterizations of the situation at Project Chimps are actively undermining the support the sanctuary needs to achieve the best outcomes for these animals.

Letter sent by HSUS CEO Kitty Block to advocates who contacted her regarding inhumane treatment at its chimpanzee sanctuary in Georgia, Project Chimps

OUR RESPONSE

The organizations and activists advocating on behalf of these chimps are pleased that HSUS is finally acknowledging the need to create new yards so that the chimps have access to the outdoors every day. However, we are disappointed that HSUS is denying other serious deficiencies and using [PR spin and misinformation](#) to give the impression that conditions at the sanctuary are humane.

We realize that powerful organizations can be intransigent, but, given HSUS’s mission to help animals, we are baffled by the poor welfare conditions; by HSUS’s refusal to acknowledge and fix them; and by its unwillingness to apologize to the whistleblowers who they sued after they exposed these conditions.

PROJECT CHIMPS, INC.)		 
)		
Plaintiff,)		
)	CIVIL ACTION NO.	
v.)	2:20-cv-00162-RWS	
)		
CRYSTAL ALBA and)		
LINDSAY VANDERHOOGT)		
)		
Defendants.)		

VERIFIED COMPLAINT

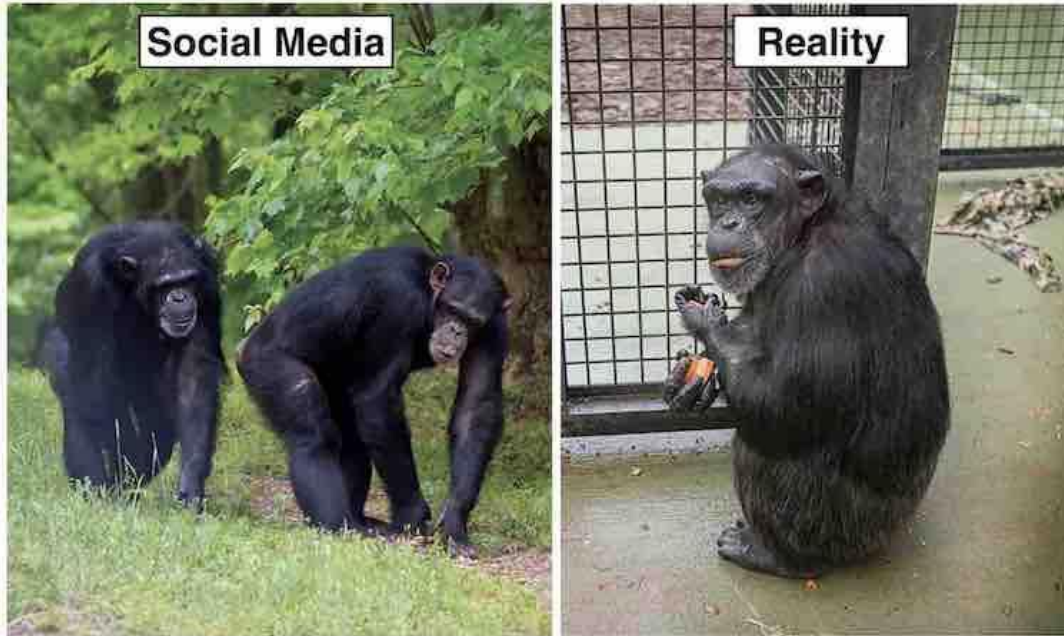
Plaintiff Project Chimps, Inc. (“Plaintiff” or “Project Chimps”) brings this Complaint for Injunctive Relief and Damages against Crystal Alba (“Alba”) and Lindsay Vanderhooght (“Vanderhooght”) (collectively “Defendants”) to prevent further irreparable harm to its organization and its mission by two disgruntled former employees who have embarked on a campaign to smear Project Chimps.

HSUS sanctuary Project Chimps filed – and ultimately dropped – a lawsuit against former employees Crystal Alba and Lindsay Vanderhooght after they came forward publicly with evidence of animal cruelty

HSUS can continue to use its PR machine to discredit the advocates and portray us as uniformed. The truth, however, is on our side. We will be continue to be a voice for the 77 chimps until HSUS transforms Project Chimps into a true sanctuary that meets the standards set by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS).

Outdoor Access

HSUS states that the chimps should have “more time in outdoor habitat space.” Until now, HSUS has dismissed our concerns about the long stretches of confinement by falsely claiming that the chimps have access to the outdoors every day on porches. The porches, however, are concrete rooms with metal bars through which chimps can merely *see* the outdoors. HSUS further deceives the public and its donors by posting photos that give the impression that the chimpanzees spend their days in a lush outdoor habitat.



In its statement, HSUS attributes the delays in creating new outdoor habitats to COVID and bad weather, but the chimpanzees have been living without sufficient outdoor space for six years. Furthermore, if Project Chimps was able to build hiking trails for tourists during the pandemic, then why couldn't it create yards for the chimps? Sanctuaries are not zoos; they are supposed to prioritize the needs of the animals, not amenities for tourists.



HSUS claims that COVID and poor weather prevented Project Chimps from creating yards for the chimps, yet these conditions didn't stop the sanctuary from creating hiking trails for tourists.

If advocates hadn't exposed the fact that Project Chimps was warehousing these chimps instead of providing them with a true sanctuary, then HSUS would not be acknowledging the need to "begin build out efforts in the near future." It would still be suing the whistleblowers who publicly exposed this gross deficiency in the first place.

Veterinary Care

HSUS states that the chimpanzees are "receiving good medical care" according to "independent sources." That is not true. In a highly anticipated assessment of Project Chimps conducted in late 2020, Dr. Steve Ross gave Project Chimps a D grade on its welfare management programs, which assesses veterinary services, enrichment, training, safety, staffing and diet. In his report, Dr. Ross emphasized, "There is relatively little veterinary experience." Dr. Ross published his critical assessment eight months ago (11/2020), and, still, HSUS has not hired a veterinarian with chimpanzee experience.

3. Programs

The overall **programs score was 67**, suggesting that there are a number of areas deserving attention and possible refinement.

(a) Diet

- Diets were of high-quality.
- Feeding regimens were atypical for the community. Extensive time to hand-feed may result in anticipatory and anxious behaviors as chimpanzees await their meals. May consider greater reliance on scatter-feeding, further investigation of cooperative feeding methods, and variable feeding times, all of which have empirical research demonstrating their benefit.

(b) Veterinary staff

- During the assessment, the organization successfully filled the position for a full-time veterinarian, which is a critical need for the colony.
- There is relatively **little veterinary experience** in that department, and as such continued collaboration with colleagues in zoos and sanctuaries will be beneficial.
- There is a need for growth of the veterinary department as the chimpanzee population continues to grow. The inclusion of a certified veterinary technician is suggested.

(c) Veterinary resources

- **Veterinary resources are moderate.** At this time, some spaces are used for multiple purposes such as meetings, but growth of facilities will become increasingly necessary. **We recommend the development of dedicated, sterile examination rooms that are not multi-purpose in nature.** Future construction may consider build-in medical wings.
- Continued efforts to **acquire veterinary equipment** (such as a new ultrasound machine) will be beneficial especially as preventative physical exams begin.

In a 2020 assessment of HSUS sanctuary Project Chimps, primatologist Dr. Steve Ross gave Project Chimps a D on its welfare management programs, which include veterinary care.

At Project Chimps, medical care is administered by a retired small animal veterinarian who has no prior chimpanzee experience and who spends just a few hours, one day a week at the sanctuary. Since May 2020, two chimpanzees needlessly died after he ignored the pleas of chimp caregivers to address their serious and recurring symptoms.

“Chimps would still be in a lab”

HSUS states that the chimps “would still be in a lab without Project Chimps.” That is misleading. More than a hundred chimps are STILL in a lab because of HSUS’s failure to create a true sanctuary environment.



A contract between New Iberia Research Center (NIRC) and HSUS stipulates that all of the chimps will be sent to Project Chimps, but NIRC has stopped sending chimps due to welfare concerns at the sanctuary.

The contract between HSUS and the lab (New Iberia Research Center – NIRC) stipulates that NIRC will send all of its chimpanzees to Project Chimps, but NIRC has stopped sending chimps because HSUS is not fulfilling its obligation to provide them with a true sanctuary. If HSUS hired a veterinarian and care staff with chimpanzee experience and modified the yards to increase time outdoors (while creating new yards), then NIRC would be able to send the remaining chimpanzees to Project Chimps.

“Attacks on the Sanctuary”

HSUS states that “attacks on the sanctuary” are “actively undermining the support the sanctuary needs to achieve the best outcomes for these animals.” That is false. It is only because of these “attacks” (aka advocacy) that HSUS is finally acknowledging at least one of the sanctuary’s serious deficiencies – a shortage of outdoor space for the chimps.

The whistleblowers, activists and national advocacy groups (Nonhuman Rights Project and PETA) that are advocating for these chimpanzees never intended to speak out publicly, but HSUS’s arrogant dismissal of the concerns that we raised in private left us – and continues to leave us – with no choice. Normally, the Global Federation of Animals Sanctuaries (GFAS), not activists, would ensure that accredited sanctuaries are treating their animals humanely. However, because GFAS was created by and is, in part, funded, by HSUS, it is not enforcing its own standards at Project Chimps. The chimpanzees are victims of this conflict of interest.



The image shows the logo for the Global Federation of Animals Sanctuaries (GFAS) Accredited. The logo is a shield-shaped emblem with a green background. At the top, it says "GLOBAL FEDERATION" in white capital letters, flanked by two yellow stars. In the center is a white globe with a black silhouette of a lion standing on it. To the left of the globe is a white dove in flight, and to the right is a white cow. Below the globe, a yellow banner curves around it with the words "OF ANIMAL SANCTUARIES" in black capital letters. At the bottom of the shield, the word "ACCREDITED" is written in large, bold, green capital letters.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2019
FOUNDATION AND
ORGANIZATIONAL
SUPPORTERS !

- Acton Family Giving
- Albert Schweitzer Animal Welfare Fund
- American Anti-Vivisection Society
- Anonymous Giving
- Arcus Foundation
- Arnall Family Foundation
- ASPCA
- Humane Society of the United States**
- Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust
- Maria Norbury Foundation
- Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation
- Tigers in America

How can GFAS independently assess a sanctuary operated by an organization funds it?