

THE CHIMPANZEE CHALLENGE



The ethical debate over using chimpanzees in research rages on. Here's how you can help champion the cause to protect them.



For years, scientists viewed chimpanzees as ideal research subjects because they are so similar to humans, sharing more than 98 percent of our genetic code. They've been used to test everything, from the safety of space travel to vaccines. Today, they are predominantly used in infectious-disease experiments, most commonly for hepatitis C.

Ironically, in many areas chimpanzees have proven to be poor study subjects. In the 1980s, hundreds of them were bred specifically for AIDS studies, which largely failed because it turns out that the virus

progresses differently in them than it does in humans. And, because these animals are sensitive and highly intelligent, they're often affected both psychologically and physically by laboratory life. "If an animal is distressed or anxious, that has an effect on his or her immune system and other biological systems, which can skew study results," says Kathleen Conlee, director of Program Management for Animal Research Issues at The HSUS.

Things started to look up for the chimpanzee in 1999, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposed a policy geared

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toward improving the psychological well-being of captive primates. But the research community challenged the policy, and the USDA dropped the proposal in response to this pressure. Consequently, bleak scenarios continue to exist. More than 1,300 chimpanzees—the majority of them captive-bred—currently live in biomedical research labs in the United States, which uses more apes and monkeys in research than does any other country in the world. These chimpanzees, naturally roaming, sociable creatures, are often housed in lab cages as small as 5 x 5 x 7 feet (the minimal legal requirement), many times without windows or natural light.

THE EFFORT TO PROTECT

Due to these and other reasons, The HSUS is working to end the use of chimpanzees in biomedical research.

Conlee points out that on a practical level, keeping chimpanzees housed in labs is extremely costly. Caging, food, and staff are often paid for with federal grants, i.e., taxpayer money. The National Research Council (NRC), which examined ways to address the surplus of chimpanzees in laboratories in the United States in the late 1990s, indicated that euthanasia is an unacceptable solution to this housing problem. Given that the average life span for a captive chimpanzee is 50 years, the NRC also stressed that sanctuaries should be established to care for the chimpanzees instead of holding them in laboratory settings. The HSUS's efforts on this issue stipulate that retired chimpanzees should be permanently relocated to appropriate sanctuaries.

One sanctuary, known as Chimp Haven, opened this past spring in Shreveport, Louisiana. Chimp Haven has been the first sanctuary built so far as a result of the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance, and Protection Act, passed in 2000 and backed by The HSUS. The goal of the CHIMP Act, as it's called, is to establish a

national sanctuary system for chimpanzees used in research. Not only do the animals benefit from the naturalistic setting and group living at the sanctuary, but public costs are also reduced because housing in a sanctuary setting is less expensive than in a laboratory. In addition, Chimp Haven must raise 25 percent of its own funding for the daily care of the chimpanzees and 10 percent of construction costs. The Chimp Haven facility in Louisiana currently houses 30 chimpanzees but will ultimately be able to care for up to 300 of them. The entire sanctuary system will ultimately provide care for an estimated maximum of 900 chimpanzees.

This landmark legislation sends the message that simply disposing of chimpanzees once they are no longer useful in scientific research is unacceptable.

In fact, in the past four years, the number of federally funded research projects involving chimpanzees has dropped by half. And alternatives are already in the works. Scientists have discovered ways to use human cell and tissue cultures for some kinds of studies, which doesn't just spare chimpanzees, but is "better science," according to Dr. Theodora Capaldo, president of the New England Anti-Vivisection Society.

"Throughout the world, breakthroughs in hepatitis C research are occurring without the use of chimpanzees. There's no reason why the U.S. can't go in that direction as well," says Capaldo. "Even though the chimpanzee model has failed time and time again, scientists are having a hard time admitting it," she adds.

Conlee agrees that there's still too much reliance on chimpanzees by the scientific community and that there needs to be more funding for alternatives. "Maybe," she says, "it will take a ban on all chimpanzee research to really make it happen." †

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For more information on animals used in research, visit www.hsus.org/research or write to *Animal Research Issues*, The HSUS, 2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

by going to www.hsus.org/leglookup and letting them know that you would like to see an end to invasive chimpanzee research.

CONTACT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH RESOURCES

and thank it for extending the moratorium on chimpanzee breeding until 2007, and ask that it be adopted permanently.

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SAFE HAVEN
In 2000 the United States implemented a national sanctuary system to retire chimpanzees used in research.

