



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

The HSUS Undercover Investigation of the New Iberia Research Center

Executive Summary

The New Iberia Research Center, in southern Louisiana, cages more than 300 chimpanzees and nearly 6,000 monkeys – one of the world’s largest populations of captive nonhuman primates. NIRC breeds chimpanzees and monkeys for use in pharmaceutical testing and infectious disease experiments and is funded largely with federal grants and drug-industry money. NIRC operates in near-total secrecy, with few details about its activities made public and images of the goings-on behind the facility’s barb-wired security fences nearly impossible to come by.

In 2008, however, The Humane Society of the United States completed an unprecedented operation that placed an undercover investigator inside this 100-acre compound for more than nine months. Working as a laboratory animal caretaking assistant, the HSUS investigator secretly recorded hours upon hours of footage—a disturbing, never-seen-before look at the lives of chimpanzees and monkeys used in experimentation at NIRC and those who are simply being warehoused at NIRC at a cost of millions of taxpayer dollars every year.

Over those nine months, the investigator documented acts of cruelty and neglect, prompting The HSUS to file a 108-page complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) citing approximately 338 possible violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act, including monkeys being struck by staff, monkeys sprayed with water during cage cleaning, filthy and broken cages, and routine protocols certain to outrage the public and raise questions among lawmakers about the adequacy and enforcement of this nation’s policies regarding primate research. The investigation is a troubling look at how even the minimal standards set by the federal government are routinely skirted, even ignored. Perhaps more importantly, HSUS’ findings graphically demonstrate how routine practices cause primates untold physical and psychological distress. The undercover video shows:

- Chimpanzees in isolation cages measuring 5’x6’ for months at a time
- Chimpanzees screaming in terror as technicians threaten them with powerful and painful dart guns or “squeeze” them between the ends of their cages for sedation
- Monkeys and chimpanzees engaging in neurotic and psychotic behaviors, including violent self-mutilation – ripping bloody wounds open on their arms, legs, and faces – possibly due to inadequate environmental enrichment and high stress
- Chimpanzees and monkeys crashing to cement and steel floors after sedation
- Monkeys - sick or wounded, denied adequate veterinary care, but used in the drug studies nevertheless, in some instances for months

- Infant monkeys torn from their mothers and isolated from them for weeks, terrified by technicians forcing tubes down their throats
- Monkeys forcefully yanked from their cages and then violently restrained in chairs so tubes can be forced down their throats for test drug delivery
- Elderly chimpanzees captured from the wild languishing at NIRC; one, Karen, has been in labs like NIRC since the Eisenhower Administration and another, Linda, has had at least 11 babies taken from her since her capture in the wild in 1968

Despite years of being frightened, manhandled, and infected, many of these primates nevertheless show affection toward their human handlers. During her employment at NIRC, HSUS's investigator got to know many of these research primates as individuals, and came to understand their likes and dislikes, their quirks and unique behaviors. For example, 22-year-old Petra would press against the cage hoping for a scratch on her back; others, like Siafu (who was once taught a form of sign language), delighted in having his fingers stroked through the wire mesh, and would make sounds and focus his gaze on the investigator's hands.

Conversely, some chimps remained aloof or suspicious, their fears of yet another needle making it difficult to interact with the center's staff. Jolene, who bit off her thumb following a liver biopsy, would either sit with her knees drawn up to her chest, arms folded, or she would endlessly pace in her cage. Sterling, a chimpanzee permanently removed from study because of "self-injurious behavior," engaged in spasmodic outbursts accompanied by self-biting and violent screaming fits. According to recent scientific studies, such behaviors are indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which indicates long-term psychological damage.

Although NIH instituted a moratorium on the captive breeding of government-owned chimps in 1995, the agency still gives NIRC millions of dollars in grants to continue breeding chimps for research. Since 1995, some 200 chimpanzees have been born at NIRC, some of whom were deliberately bred to meet NIH contract demands and many of whom were taken from their mothers within days, weeks, or months, resulting in stereotypic rocking and other behavior abnormalities.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) owns some of the 320 chimpanzees at New Iberia, but claims that it does not have a list of those animals, making it difficult to impossible for the government to know if the chimpanzees it owns are being used for breeding in violation of the moratorium.

The HSUS' investigation of NIRC, one of the nation's largest repositories of primates bred for and used in experiments, provides a rare and intimate examination of a world previously hidden from public view. The footage, documentation, and first-person insight not only penetrate NIRC's 10-foot security fences, but the investigation also adds new fuel to the ethical debate over the need to reduce and replace monkeys and chimpanzees (humans' closest genetic cousins) in experiments.