

Animal Rights Groups Call for New Leadership at HSUS's Project Chimps

From [Donny Moss, TheirTurn.net](#)

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Multiple animal advocacy groups are calling on the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to replace the current leader of its chimpanzee sanctuary with an Executive Director who has chimpanzee experience. The sanctuary, Project Chimps, was thrust into the national spotlight in May, 2020, when 22 employees and volunteers sent a letter to the Board of Directors to sound the alarm about poor veterinary care, overcrowding, a lack of sufficient enrichment and infrequent access to the outdoors.

The death of Alex, a chimpanzee whose [symptoms were ignored](#) by Project Chimps leadership, has created an added sense of urgency around this demand.

“While Project Chimps has made some cosmetic changes as a result of increased public scrutiny and primatologist Steve Ross’s blistering critique of its welfare management programs, the organization’s leadership continues needlessly compromise the health and wellbeing of the chimpanzees,” said Crystal Alba, a whistleblower who the organization sued in 2020.

“Until it is managed by someone who has chimpanzee experience and who prioritizes animal welfare, Project Chimps will continue to fail the chimpanzees in its care.”

Advocacy Groups Call for New Executive Director at Project Chimps

Throughout 2020, third party experts documented the failure of Project Chimps to maintain adequate animal welfare standards for the 78 chimpanzees in their care. Most recently, as part of an assessment to provide sanctuaries with feedback on their care and management practice, primatologist Steve Ross gave Project Chimps a 67% on its welfare management programs. This D grade corroborates the animal welfare allegations made by two dozen employees and volunteers. In order for Project Chimps to uphold its mission to provide lifelong exemplary care to chimpanzees, it must hire an Executive Director who has chimpanzee behavior and ecology experience; who has the respect of his or her staff and peers in the primate sanctuary community; and who instinctively prioritizes the welfare of the animals. Project Chimps must also appoint two people to its Board of Directors who have captive chimpanzee experience. Animal rights activists will continue to protest The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which oversees Project Chimps, until HSUS and Project Chimps meet these demands.

Donny Moss, Matthew Schwartz - TheirTurn
Karen & Michael Budkie - Stop Animal Exploitation Now
Annoula Wylderich, Former HSUS Senior District Leader of Nevada
Cory Mac a'Ghobhainn - Progress for Science
Jeff Engelking - Do The Right Thing
Bob Ingersoll - Project Nim
Edita Birnkrant - NYCLASS
Crystal Alba & Lindsay Vanderhoogt - The Whistleblowers
Bonnie Klapper - Animal Rights Attorney

In January, 2020, HSUS conducted an internal investigation of its sanctuary after receiving complaints about animal mistreatment by employees. In her report, Katie Conlee, HSUS's Vice President of Animal Research Issues, wrote, "the root causes of various problems appear to be inadequate management."



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PC Report from K. Conlee re allegations of Jan 2020 FINAL new edits.docx

Project Chimps investigations findings: summary and recommendations

Written by Katie Conlee

The investigation has revealed that the **root causes of various problems appear to be inadequate management,** communications and transparency regarding concerns raised by staff and subsequent decision making. Many of the staff interviewed commented that they feel that management _____ isn't listening to their concerns and recommendations. Communication and attention to employee feedback and concerns were also identified as areas of need for focus on the survey carried out at the end of 2019. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the staff are happy with the way things are going, and the majority of the staff are functioning in an appropriate and positive way. Additionally, certain staff members are creating a divisive culture, so that the identified lack of adequate management is only making this worse. It is critical that these issues be addressed as soon as possible because continued escalation could be very damaging to the organization.

The Humane Society's internal investigation of Project Chimps revealed that "the root causes of various problems appear to be inadequate management."

An inspection conducted by an external expert in October and November also exposed deficiencies in the organization's leadership. Dr. Steve Ross, a renowned primatologist, gave Project Chimps a D grade (67%) on its welfare management programs as part of his highly anticipated [assessment](#) of the sanctuary. Welfare management programs are the responsibility of the organization's leadership.

Welfare Management Practices

Assessment

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.

(d) Safety program

- Good safety protocols are in place and innovative training and drill methods are implemented.
- Staff seem well-trained but several instances of casual practices (e.g. forgetting to double check locks or not waiting for confirmation from fellow staff before shifting) were observed so continued training and monitoring will be beneficial.
- Consistent use of radios for communication should be encouraged.

(e) Enrichment program

- The enrichment program is high-functioning and ambitious in that time and resources are provided to innovate new forms of enrichment.
- Greater variety of enrichment items and more intensive evaluation processes are encouraged.

Dr. Steve Ross, a renowned primatologist, gave Project Chimps a D grade on its welfare management programs, which are the responsibility of the organization's Executive Director. In 2020, the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) took the unusual step of issuing public statements calling for reform at Project Chimps, though neither made specific recommendations regarding the organization's leadership.



In recent months, whistleblowers have brought to light well-documented information that shows Project Chimps and the Humane Society of the United States (Project Chimps' primary funder) are not fulfilling their commitment to provide true sanctuary to Project Chimps' chimpanzee residents, including the NhRP's clients Hercules and Leo. The NhRP is calling on Project Chimps and HSUS to take whatever steps and devote whatever resources are necessary to immediately provide Hercules and Leo with daily access to an outdoor habitat. Please find the NhRP's statement below.



In early 2020, PETA was contacted by individuals connected with Project Chimps, who alleged multiple, serious animal care issues at the sanctuary. Because the allegations, accompanied by photos, appeared credible, PETA immediately contacted the sanctuary's board of directors, which responded that the allegations were without merit. Over the next few weeks, numerous sanctuary employees, former employees, and volunteers came forward with similar concerns. PETA then contacted the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS), which had accredited the sanctuary. GFAS conducted its own investigation. While GFAS did not release its findings to PETA, Project Chimps has publicly acknowledged that GFAS made several recommendations for improving conditions and care, which Project Chimps claims to be implementing. Whistleblowers are essential to the work of all organizations and government agencies dedicated to ending abuse, and their rights must be protected.

Animal rights groups, including The Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), have called on HSUS to improve animal welfare at Project Chimps. At Project Chimps, the 78 chimpanzees have access to an outdoor habitat for approximately 10 hours per week. For the remainder of the time, they are held in concrete enclosures. Local and national animal advocacy groups are calling on Project Chimps to create additional habitats so that the chimps have daily access to the outdoors.



Roxy and Lindsey, two of the 78 chimpanzees at HSUS's Project Chimps facility in Georgia