

Prime Apes

Founder's Message

November 2001

As 2001 draws to an end, we are reflecting on many things. All of us in America (really, in the world) were affected by the events of September 11. Our thoughts of concern and condolences go to our volunteers, members, and friends who lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks. Our great nation is at war and our economy is in crisis, but Americans are bravely dealing with the threats facing them. Our prayers are encompassing much of the world right now.

As I write this, it is one week before Thanksgiving, and there is much to be thankful for. Besides being grateful to be part of a national community that has pulled together to stand strong in the face of terrorism, I am grateful for a government that is leading the way. I'm grateful for our dedicated military service personnel and for the many people such as policemen, firemen, airline personnel, health care personnel and teachers who work so hard to help us.

And, I am *very* grateful for our members and supporters who have helped us to accomplish more each day in establishing this sanctuary and providing life-long care for captive great apes who need a refuge.



Mari

This past year has been full of progress. Just last month, we welcomed a new resident to the sanctuary. Mari is a beautiful 20-year-old female orangutan who came to us from a language research lab at a university in Georgia. She has spent most of her life living in the company of bonobos and chimpanzees, and we are eager for her to meet her first male orangutans...Pongo and Christopher.

A new project at the Center was started this summer, which will greatly enrich the lives of the apes here now (as well as those who come in the future). The new Boswell Walk-About is an elevated chute system going through the woods and across the creek, connecting all the enclosures. Thanks to our Trustee, John Boswell, the orangutans and chimpanzees at the sanctuary will be able to leave their dome enclosures, follow the chute paths through the woods, "hang out" at the creek to watch an otter, and have a greater sense of freedom and choice.

Just this week, we received a matching grant from the Arcus Foundation specifically to help us (as we grow to accommodate more apes in need of care) build a health care center and larger food prep area. The Arcus Foundation promotes tolerance, compassion, diversity, and dignity for all individuals. They also "support the rights of animals to live free of human cruelty and abuse with a special fund dedicated to sanctuaries and conservation of Great Apes". We are very grateful for the Arcus Foundation's generous gift, and we're working now to raise the funds to match their pledge for this necessary project at the Center.

Finally, we welcomed a new staff member (but old friend) to the sanctuary this year. Ray Rooney, who worked with the Center for three years while we were in Miami, moved to Wauchula this summer, buying a house right across the street from the Center. She has over 10 years experience caring for chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas, and bonobos. Along with our staff member Tina Gilbert, Ray provides excellent care for our sanctuary residents.

Thank you for your continued help which allows us to feed and care for the great apes at the sanctuary -- Butch (29), Chipper (27), Toddy (27), Mari (20), Pongo (11), Grub (10), Christopher (9), Kenya (8) and Noelle (7).

We wish you a peaceful New Year. God bless all humankind. ...and *all* our beloved animal friends!

Patti Ragan

MARI Ray Rooney

Our newest resident is Mari, a Sumatran orangutan. Mari came to us from a facility in Georgia where she was part of a language and cognition study. She was born at the Yerkes primate center and was sent to a language research project when she was very young. For several years, she was housed with another young female orangutan in the study, but her companion was relocated to Zoo Atlanta. Most recently, Mari had bonobos for playmates.

Mari is a very unusual orangutan in that she has no arms. She lost both arms while still an infant when her mother, in a very agitated state, damaged her limbs beyond repair. In spite of the accident, Mari is a very *able* orangutan. In fact, we don't consider her handicapped, but rather "handi-cabable". She uses her chin to hoist herself up, uses her feet as we would our hands, and she walks upright (or rolls when she wants to get somewhere quickly). Initially, we were concerned that she might have difficulty maneuvering in a new environment, but she quickly proved us wrong. She moves with such ease and grace that sometimes we have to remind ourselves that she is missing her arms.



We are now in the "getting to know each other" stage with Mari, and it's going very well. Pongo and Christopher, our male orangutans, were absolutely fascinated when Mari arrived. Mari has been in quarantine for about a month (standard procedure for new arrivals), but the boys can see her from their enclosure and night house. Chris and Pongo have spent many hours watching Mari and occasionally trying to get a reaction from her. This week, Chris "dressed himself up" with celery stalks around his neck and on his head, and then paraded around in Mari's view. He kept checking to see if she was looking at him. We're not sure whether Mari was impressed, but he had her attention!



Mari playing in an old T-shirt

Great apes in general are extremely intelligent animals and need a very stimulated environment when housed in captivity. In Georgia, Mari worked with lexigrams, mazes, puzzles, and memory tasks. She could even solve computer mazes by manipulating a joystick with her feet. We are always brainstorming to create different activities for the apes to keep them challenged and active. Based on Mari's extensive exposure to cognitive projects, we're hoping to locate a touch screen computer to stimulate and engage her, and to further enhance these abilities.

Mari has never seen a male orangutan before, but we're hopeful that we'll be able to introduce her to Pongo and Christopher very soon.



Pongo & Chris are fascinated watching Mari from their nighthouse across the way.

TREE PLANTING PROJECT



Vicky Smith, Laura Martuscelli, Tom Misotti, Alan Li, Debbie Misotti, Laura Shroyer, Andy Swope, Scott Swope, Eric Shroyer, Marilyn Magill ready for digging !

In September, on a very rainy and blustery day, 14 of our volunteers gathered at another chimpanzee sanctuary in Florida to help plant banana trees. This effort started by our Advisory Board member, Eric Shroyer, was a gift from our sanctuary to the retired Air Force chimpanzees at their new sanctuary-home in Ft. Pierce, Florida. The trees will not only provide bananas in the future for the chimpanzees, but also fresh browse for their diet and nesting materials. Great apes love banana leaves!! We're happy to support the efforts of other sanctuaries in whatever ways we can. After all, we're all working towards the same goals!



Vicky Smith, Alan Li, Laura Martuscelli, Eddie Lorenzo, Lisa Leitten, Tom Misotti, and Kim Licari



Butch today at the sanctuary, 29 years old

Circus Chimps

Recently, I was saddened to see a chimpanzee act in a traveling circus in Florida. Three young male chimpanzees dressed in sequined costumes and feathered hats went through a series of “tricks” including a Mexican hat dance and a nauseating performance of having all three chimpanzees spin like windmills on a large contraption.

These chimpanzees, with chains around their neck, had very little hair (either due to the rubbing of the costumes or stress-plucking) and displayed “stress-faces” throughout the performance.

Circus chimps like these travel in small cages or crates (usually in a truck) from town to town. Unbelievably, these chimpanzees (brought into the United States by a trainer from South Africa) were performing at the Florida State Fair in Tampa, the Dade County Youth Fair in Miami, and the Fort Lauderdale Swap Shop. Now, they’ve gone on to other states.

While I felt sickened to see these chimps suffer such indignities, I was encouraged with the fact that the audience gave only half-hearted laughs... hopefully signaling the fact that the public now knows more about the intelligence of great apes and is much less receptive to this kind of “entertainment”.

Our two oldest chimpanzees at the sanctuary, Butch and Chipper, spent the first 12 years of their lives traveling in the Ringling Brothers Circus with two other chimpanzees (Louis and Tony) who died years ago.

In Jane Goodall’s & Dale Peterson’s book Visions of Caliban, there is a passage written about them. Their trainer “*who for years thrilled circus audiences with his four performing chimpanzees at Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey, was said to club his apes: they were*

also castrated. According to (another) trainer at Ringling: ‘I first witnessed the training of four chimps in winter quarters in Venice, Florida. They were on a long, multi-seated bicycle on which three of the large chimps rode as passengers while the largest chimp, Louis, steered and pedaled. The vehicle was difficult for even a human to ride under those conditions, and Louis had a hard time of it, spilling the ensemble repeatedly. And repeatedly, he was struck with a sturdy club. The thumps could be heard outside the arena building, and the screams went farther than that. My blood boiled. I’m ashamed to say I did nothing!’ “.

And from another book The Rose-Tinted Menagerie by William Johnson, another passage about Butch and Chipper’s former life. “*According to the testimony of one vet, the chimps were ‘in very bad shape’ ...and ‘had many scars and some burns, possibly from motor-bike training.’ ”*

Please take a stand against the use of apes in such ways. (1) Don’t go to circuses that use chimpanzees, (2) Contact local sponsoring organizations of such circus acts to express your opposition, and (3) Patronize non-animal circuses such as Cirque du Soleil



Butch and Chipper are lifelong companions since their first days in the circus.