



Meet the Chimpanzees

at Project Chimps (middle)

Meet Latricia, Greg, Kivuli, Buttercup, Charisse, and Lucky! Who are they? They are a few of the inhabitants of Project Chimps, a special wildlife sanctuary for chimpanzees, which is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of north Georgia.

What is a wildlife sanctuary?

A sanctuary is very different than a zoo. A zoo is open to the public and breeds wild animals while a sanctuary is a facility that provides a home for animals in need of refuge after being rescued from neglectful or abusive situations.

Project Chimps is a sanctuary; sanctuaries provide a forever home for chimpanzees previously used in medical research, in the entertainment industry, and as pets. Of the 2,000 chimpanzees currently in captivity in the United States, about 700 live in sanctuaries.

Why are chimp sanctuaries needed?

Project Chimps was established in 2015 after the United States government changed its policies to end invasive medical research on chimpanzees. The United States was the last country in the world to stop testing on chimpanzees, who are our closest biological relatives. That's right. We share approximately 95% of our DNA with chimps!

Before 2015, the United States government considered wild chimpanzees as endangered species. At the same time, the government also said that "captive" chimpanzees were not endangered. It was an obvious and unfair contradiction.

People fought to save the chimps

Animal protection organizations like the Humane Society of the United States fought for many years to end that contradiction and make chimpanzees a protected, endangered species in the eyes of the law.

In 2015, they won! On September 14, 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service modified the federal Endangered Species Act to protect captive chimpanzees in addition to wild chimpanzees. This date also marked the end of chimpanzees being used in invasive medical research.

In 2015, more than 700 chimpanzees lived in laboratories and research facilities across the United States. Now, they all needed a forever home.

Project Chimps was created

A group of animal advocates raised the money and with the support of the Humane Society of the United States, celebrities and other private donors, they bought a former gorilla sanctuary in north Georgia.

They realized that the largest group of research chimpanzees – more than 220 - lived at the University of Louisiana's New Iberia Research Center, in Louisiana. They made an agreement to take ALL of New Iberia's chimpanzees, as soon as they could.

The day the first chimps came

The first chimps to make their home at Project Chimps arrived in September 2016. It was a very special day. Nine female chimps, led by alpha female **Latricia**, arrived on the Project Chimps special transport trailer after a 14-hour journey. They settled into their new home - a large group enclosure or "villa" with views of the mountains, as the Project Chimps team worked to clean up the 6-acre forest where they would soon be able to play outdoors with no cage overhead.

Eventually, more than 200 chimpanzees will reside at Project Chimps to live out their lives in safety, having nothing to do every day but socialize, forage, eat, play, explore the outdoors, and sleep.

Project Chimps is home to chimps young and old (add picture of Kivuli)

The youngest chimpanzee here is **Kivuli**, who was born on January 19, 2011, and the oldest is **Greg**, who was born on September 21, 1980. Kivuli is young enough that he probably wasn't used in medical experiments, but Greg certainly was. Now Greg, a high-ranking male, seems happy and content to shuffle about his villa and doesn't even seem to mind sharing his food with some of the other chimps in his villa.

Kivuli was 7 years old when he came to sanctuary and Greg was 39. Both could live to be as old as 60, they will need our care for many years to come.

Project Chimps is home to twins!

Buttercup and **Charisse** are identical twins who were born on February 24, 2005. They are very much alike, both in the way they look and the way they act.

Chimpanzees and humans are also alike. Did you know that humans and chimpanzees share approximately 95% of their DNA? Chimps are more closely related to you than they are to gorillas! Put another way, humans are 95% chimpanzee and chimpanzees are 95% human.

We are all primates

Chimps are part of the “great apes” family (Hominidae) along with bonobos, gorillas, orangutans, and humans. We are all part of the Order Primates. Within the Primates Order there are two groups: Prosimians and Simians; chimpanzees belong to the Simian suborder. A chimpanzee’s scientific name is ***Pan troglodyte***.

Wild chimpanzees are endemic to equatorial Africa where they used to number in the millions. They could be found in tropical rain forests, lowland forests, swamp forests, and savannah woodlands in 21 different countries. Now, their population is estimated to number only between 170,000 and 300,000 in the wild.

Why can’t captive chimpanzees go to Africa?

Chimps that have lived in cages for most of their lives would not be able to survive in their native habitat. In addition, extensive deforestation and hunting by humans have reduced the inhabitable areas in which wild chimps live to the point where there is no more land available for additional chimpanzees.

What do chimpanzees eat?

In the wild, chimpanzees’ choice of foods makes them an omnivorous frugivores. Their main food is fruit but they also eat leaves, nuts, seeds, bird’s eggs and insects. They also will occasionally eat colobus monkeys and other small mammals.

The chimp’s diet at Project Chimps mimics the natural diet and includes fruits, vegetables and legumes – an overall vegetarian diet. Caregivers will also hide foods in the outdoor habitat so that the chimps can forage for them. Chimpanzees find nuts and vegetables such as kale, celery, cabbage, and eggplant.

Sometimes local farmers donate food for the chimps. That helps, as it costs Project Chimps about \$22,000 per year to take care of just one chimp!

Chimpanzee behavior can be similar to ours

Many chimpanzee behaviors appear to be similar to human behavior. Chimpanzees communicate using gestures, facial expressions, and vocalizations. They show affection by embracing, touching hands, and kissing. They even laugh when they play!

Chimps comfort each other by hugging and touching. And, as Jane Goodall discovered, chimps make their own tools. Chimps have also been known to treat themselves from diseases in the wild.

Project Chimps strives to mimic chimpanzee social societies in the wild. In the wild, chimpanzees live in large communities, up to a few hundred individuals of both sexes and all ages, just like us! Sometimes members will break into smaller subgroups temporarily to sleep or forage. This is called a fission-fusion society.

Chimpanzee hierarchies and chimpanzees' status within a fission-fusion society can change and will fluctuate depending on the make up within the subgroups. A female with a baby may find herself treated with greater deference and respect. They show their dominance over each other using display behaviors such as swaying back and forth; shoving; pushing; throwing objects; using exaggerated movements; running/moving wildly about and screaming/vocalizing. Chimps will also walk bipedally to appear larger, drum and pound on trees and other things that will make lots of noise, wave their arms and make their hair stand on end (piloerection).

Chimpanzees are good communicators

Chimpanzees can hear and communicate with each other over a distance of two miles! They have a variety of ways to “talk” to each other and communicate their feelings.

If chimps are relaxed and calm, they may sit quietly with their lower lip hanging loosely. They will open their mouths wide and only show their bottom teeth when they are happy and playing.

In contrast, a big open mouth showing upper teeth, especially when paired with waving arms, manic movements, throwing things, and screaming means the chimp is angry. A facial expression where they appear to be smiling while showing all of our teeth is actually a fear grimace.

Besides using facial expressions, chimps communicate using vocalizations. Chimpanzee laughs are a wheezy, chuckling, high-pitched sound. They greet each other and their Project Chimps caregivers with a purse of the lips and a Hooo, Hoo-oooh-oooh noise.

Pant hoots are used to communicate excitement, demonstrate social structure, assist in communication while traveling and to determine where other chimps in their group are.

Chimps like to climb!

One of a chimp's favorite ways to get around is to brachiate or swing from branch to branch using their long arms. Chimps arms are 1.5 times the length of their bodies. **Latricia** was one of the first chimpanzees at Project Chimps to climb a tree. From there, she could see what the rest of her group was doing!

Chimpanzees also have heightened development in the left hemisphere of their brains and motor cortex, so they have great aim! Caregivers at Project Chimps have reported that the chimps will sometimes throw things at them to get their attention.

Now they have a forever home

Project Chimps provides former research chimpanzees a forever home and an environment that allows chimps to be chimps. Here, chimps can spend time with each other, or enjoy time alone. They explore the 6-acre outdoor habitat. They play and learn with items donated to them for enrichment purposes. Most important, they can just be chimps.