

Hollywood stories

Tarzan and Jane Goodall

Fans of *Extras* can laugh at the way Ricky Gervais and his sorry cast of characters are treated compared to the A-list stars. But at least they aren't kept in cages and retired to vivisection laboratories. They have it a lot better than their nonhuman costars—particularly the chimps. In Hollywood the ABCDs of the entertainment business are perhaps seen most vividly with chimpanzees.

On the Chimpanzee Collaboratory Web site you can view a ten-minute film called *Serving a Life Sentence*, about the use of chimps in entertainment.²⁵ It features the leading primatologist Jane Goodall, the primate behavioral researcher Dr. Roger Fouts, and the prominent film scriptwriter and director Callie Khori (*Thelma and Louise* and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*), who refuses to use chimp actors in her movies.

Jane Goodall talks about the training of chimps for the movie business. She fears that when people see that there has been a humane officer on the set they will assume that the animals were well treated. She explains, however, that most of the abuse happens before the chimps get to the set. She says, "Before that, most of the trainers want to establish a relationship based on fear so that they get instant obedience." She says that one method of behind-the-scenes training involves an iron bar surrounded by newspaper, then, "on the set you just need a rolled up newspaper."

The short film includes coverage of the famous animal trainer "Jungle Josh"



"O.K., so no animals were harmed, but were they adequately compensated?"

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Karen Dawn

Weinstein, taken by KARE 11 Television in Minnesota. Even knowing the cameras were rolling, Weinstein threatens his chimp, Tarzan, with fury in his voice. You will find it particularly sad to watch the film knowing that Tarzan died under suspicious circumstances weeks after the story was shot.

It's Hard Out Here for a Chimp

When not on the set, animals used in the film business live in cages.

Mature chimpanzees, no longer cute, have the strength of many men and cannot be safely used by the industry. Though other Hollywood animals may end up on hunting ranches, it is illegal to hunt primates in the United States, so chimps are discarded elsewhere. They are often sold to roadside zoos as described above. Jane Goodall explains that respectable zoos don't want them because performers cannot fit into chimp troops. But bad roadside zoos don't have troops; they often house chimps in isolation. In the Chimpanzee Collaboratory film we learn about Chubbs, who now spends his days in a cage at a roadside zoo. He starred in Tim Burton's 2001 production of *Planet of the Apes*.

A few chimps may end up in some of the new sanctuaries being founded (described later in chapter 6), which, like the elephant sanctuaries, offer them some sort of decent life. Too often they end up in cages, like at Animal Haven Ranch, a sanctuary where a tragic event brought media attention to the plight of Hollywood chimps:

In February 2005, St. James Davis was at the Animal Haven Ranch visiting Moe, a chimp he had raised from a baby but had been forced to give up after the chimp bit off a neighbor's finger. During Davis's visit, two other chimps, discarded Hollywood movie stars, escaped from their enclosure and attacked the man, biting off most of his face, his testicles, and one of his feet. Nobody knows what brought on the attack. Perhaps the sad, bored, discarded animals were jealous of the attention given to Moe. Perhaps the rage that built up over years of brutal training for the entertainment industry was taken out on the first person the chimps, now big enough to defend themselves, had a chance to punish. Moe watched helplessly as the one man who had cared for him was continuously attacked, until the other chimps were shot dead—ending their pathetic caged existences as discards of the Hollywood entertainment industry.

All the World's a Cage: Animal Entertainment

The media explained that Moe had been an orphan brought back by the Davis family from a vacation in Africa. The story didn't share that almost all baby chimps acquired from Africa are orphans. As with elephants and orcas, a living mother will never part willingly with her baby chimp; hunters shoot the mothers out of trees and pull the babies off their backs. For decades the babies supplied the U.S. demand arising from TV shows, circuses, and people wanting exotic pets.



"It says, no animals were actually killed in the production of this cave painting!"

Oliver's Travels

Oliver's tale teaches us about Hollywood animal lives. Oliver was captured as a baby in the jungles of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo and sold to Janet and Frank Burger, whose animal acts were regularly featured on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. He achieved stardom in the 1970s, billed as "the Missing Link," or as a "humanzee," the billing due mostly to his humanlike two-legged walk. He also had less facial hair and what is considered to be a more human-shaped head than most chimps. He was sold by the Burgers to another trainer and toured Japan, smoking cigars, drinking whisky, and sleeping between satin sheets in fine hotels. But when interest waned, according to London's *Daily Mail*, "Oliver spent the next decade passing from trainer to trainer, appearing in jungle parks, circuses and, eventually, in roadside freak shows." Then he was sold to a vivisection laboratory, where he spent seven years living alone in a cage between painful tests.²⁶

An article about Oliver in the *Atlantic Monthly* told us it was surprising that Oliver

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was “tractable enough” to be used in the entertainment industry into his twenties. It explained:

A performing chimp’s career is usually over by around the age of eight, though a trainer may be able to safely squeeze out a couple more years by pulling the animal’s front teeth or, in the case of a male, by castration. Since chimps in captivity can live forty or even fifty years, the question arises of what to do with all those movie and circus veterans for the remaining 80 percent of their lives. Some are used to breed the next crop of performers; others end up in private homes or roadside zoos; and many, like Oliver, are sent to bio-medical research labs.²⁷

That kind of makes you want to tell all those child stars who voluntarily turned to drugs that it’s time to quit feeling sorry for themselves—particularly if they ever acted with chimps.

Oliver now lives at the Primarily Primates Sanctuary in Texas. Sadly, sanctuary retirement doesn’t guarantee a good life. He lived entirely alone there for many years in a small cage. Now he is in poor health and almost blind. Oliver had a brief respite from solitude when seven chimps were retired to the sanctuary from an Ohio State University research program, and one of the chimps, Sarah, was housed with Oliver. People volunteering at the sanctuary, while worried about Sarah having been separated from her group, said that she had been looking out for Oliver. The two chimps had bonded and were grooming each other. Unfortunately, however, according to the *Houston Chronicle* (and reported similarly elsewhere), “Overcrowded and filthy, the facility was a squalid hoarder’s camp.”²⁸ In late 2006, after more than a decade of allegations of horrendous conditions at the sanctuary, a Travis County probate judge ordered Primarily Primates placed under court supervision.²⁹

During the six-month period of court supervision, seven OSU chimps, including Sarah, were moved to Chimp Haven. Oliver was left behind. Much ado was made about

All the World's a Cage: Animal Entertainment

his move into a much larger cage, but through most of 2007, this ex-television star, trained to sleep on satin sheets, lived in that cage alone.

The control of Primarily Primates has been returned to a restructured board of directors. Some of the sanctuary's troubles continue, but Oliver is finally doing well. An elderly female chimp, Raison, ostracized by her troop, has moved in with Oliver. Video shows them lying side by side grooming each other. With care and companionship Oliver's last few years may be as good as possible for anybody in ill health and captivity. But I hope his sad tale will help people understand why animal advocates protest the use of chimps in the entertainment industry. We are familiar with their fates.

My Dead Flicka

Not all Hollywood animals are killed behind the scenes or rot away in cages until their deaths—some die on the set. As audiences who love horses flocked to see *Flicka*, they might have wondered which of the animals they were watching were now dead. Two horses were killed during the making of that movie. Nevertheless, the film got a nod from the American Humane Association, which monitors movie sets. A *Los Angeles Daily News* article noted that the Screen Actors Guild of Hollywood funds the American Humane Association, and quoted animal advocate Kathy Riordan: "I personally think there is a major conflict of interest when the entity responsible for monitoring an industry is supported by it."³⁰

When one remembers that two hundred horses were killed in the filming of the original *Ben-Hur*, *Flicka*'s awful record almost looks good. Some people have suggested that *Flicka*'s pro-mustang message makes the film worthwhile, and that the horse deaths were just unfortunate accidents. The beautiful animated film *Spirit*, however, shows us that a strong pro-mustang message can be delivered in a compelling film without the use of animal actors. It is a great rental.