

# a place of their own

On a sprawling ranch in East Texas, hundreds of animals find quiet refuge

by ANGELA MOXLEY



A veritable animal kingdom finds peace and freedom at Black Beauty Ranch, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. The ranch's founder, the late Cleveland Amory, had dreamed of starting a sanctuary ever since reading Anna Sewell's novel *Black Beauty* as a child. His vision is encapsulated in the inscription on the ranch gate, taken from the last lines of the book: "I have nothing to fear, and here my story ends. My troubles are all over, and I am at home."

**A**s day breaks at the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch one morning just before the arrival of spring, the rustlings of breakfast time permeate the crisp silence—horses and burros, bison and cattle by the hundreds serenely munching hay and grass in the misty fields.

On the bank of a tree-shaded half-moon pond, deer stand at attention or bound through the grass while llamas and emus wander across the hill and ostriches streak by on tiptoe, feathers fanned to the side. In this haven operated by The HSUS in partnership with The Fund for Animals, the rest of the world fades beyond the fog, leaving no trace of the abuse and exploitation that landed many of these animals on the ranch's 1,250 pristine acres. Here, there's nothing but unbridled freedom and the wide Texas sky.



Babe was born in South Africa's Kruger National Park in 1984; adults in her family were shot for population control and she was captured for shipment to a U.S. circus. Now safe at Black Beauty, she has friends of many species; ranch workers believe an antelope and burros have enjoyed sleepovers in her barn.



Far away across the open fields, the ranch's earliest riser has been awake in her barn for hours. Babe, an African elephant discarded by a circus when she could no longer perform due to foot and leg injuries, reaches up to a hay-filled net attached to a pulley lovingly constructed by doting keeper Arturo Padron; the contraption enables her to stretch her neck and trunk in ways that she would in the wild. Babe pulls down a bundle and arranges it in the crook of her trunk, twirling the hose-like appendix with the grace of a ballerina. Soon Padron will give her the first of three daily washes to cleanse and soothe her long-suffering feet.

Babe's chimpanzee neighbors bear scars from their time in research facilities that no solution can ever wash away. But at Black

Beauty, healing is on their own terms, and they have only hours in which to wile away the day. Midge, the perpetual teenager, plops on the grass of their outdoor habitat, arms and legs splayed, reading the activity around him like the morning paper. Lulu lolls on the sky-walk leading from the chimps' indoor "bedroom," sprawled on a bedsheet and sucking on an orange. Kitty, the protector, sits on the grass below, arms wrapped around her and head down but eyes looking out, assuming what workers refer to as "compacted Kitty" mode. Later, she'll climb up to Lulu, leaning into her as they share a snack.

**“The concept of sanctuary is that it is the animals' place first, rather than a place for people.”**

The sounds and sights of this ranch, the daily lives of its nearly 1,300 residents, and the breathtaking beauty of the broad, lush landscape—all are enough to mesmerize any animal lover. But except for invitation-only open houses held twice a year,

Black Beauty Ranch is closed to the public. The only humans the animals usually see are the 13 ranch workers and administrative staff.

The seclusion is intentional, an homage to the animals' sacred privacy. The chimpanzees aren't prompted to make faces to amuse visitors; if they're given toys, it's simply so they can amuse themselves. The horses aren't

ridden, and the burros carry no burdens on their backs. If Babe doesn't want to saunter outdoors until high noon, no one is standing by to goad her into the light of day. At commercial facilities, animals are bred to produce the adorable babies who attract paying customers. But at Black Beauty, the animals are sterilized and no offspring are born unless the mother arrived pregnant or in the inevitable case of the occasional accident. And once the animals arrive, they're here to stay; they won't ever be returned to a world where humans can harm them.

This ethic of protection has imbued the ranch since its founding three decades ago, when The Fund for Animals needed a place to house 577 burros airlifted from the Grand Canyon, where they were slated to be shot by the National Park Service. Since then, thousands of creatures have passed through its gates, seeking permanent haven from the agriculture industry, research facilities, zoos and other entertainment enterprises, captive shooting operations, government culling programs, and individual acts of abuse. Though their species and backgrounds vary, they bask in the common security of a place where, as envi-

sioned by the late Fund president and founder Cleveland Amory—author, journalist, and animal protection crusader—the animals are not to be looked at, but looked after.

Black Beauty is their home, and they own this place in all but the legal sense.

“The concept of sanctuary is that it is the animals' place first, rather than a place for people,” says Richard Farinato, senior director of animal care centers for The HSUS, which joined forces with The Fund in 2005. “So, you try to do as much as you can to make it comfortable and appropriate for the animals. And in many cases, people visiting on a regular basis, like in a zoo situation—even though the animals get used to it, it is still stressful for them. Everything that is done here, from cage design to diet to cleaning routines to interaction with animals, is based on what the animal needs, not what the people need.

“The staff is there to essentially wait on the animals hand and foot.”

#### CUSTOM CARE

Of all the staff who tend to the denizens of Black Beauty, Sheila Ivey may be the most



**CLEVELAND AMORY AT BLACK BEAUTY:**  
 “He always wanted to be for ... the ordinary democratic animal,” says Marian Probst, his longtime assistant and now an HSUS board member.

popular waitress. Every morning just after 7, she fills buckets with pellets and tosses them in the back of a pickup truck outfitted with a humming feed hopper and dispenser.

At the ranch kitchen, where Ivey picks up a bucket of syringes, a three-page printout details the food and medicine to be given at each stop, but she leaves it behind. Practice has burned the routine into her mind: Friendly—a ranch icon and possibly the only remaining burro from the original Grand Canyon airlift—and her constant companion Scar get arthritis medicine mixed into their senior equine food. Omar,



As breakfast arrives in the feed truck, a menagerie of animals lines up outside the fence around their feeding area. Ranch hand Sheila Ivey opens the gate, and they're off to the races, dashing to be the first to dig in.



Among the living links to Cleveland Amory are 80-year-old office manager Loree Roberts and burro Friendly, who has greeted visitors and attended parties at Black Beauty since the ranch's beginning.

a camel who was cast off as a sick baby from the Christmas pageant circuit and was then bottle-raised at the ranch, sometimes eats dirt, so he gets medicine to prevent colic—and companionship from Ivey. “He’ll come up and eat out of my bucket,” she says. “He’ll even stick his head in the truck. He wants you to pet on him.” At almost every one of the 18 stops on her route, she delivers a little extra care for animals with special needs.

Most of the residents aren’t picky about their dinner partners; horses and burros alike form rings around feeding stations kept stocked with hay during the winter. Abigail, an elderly pig, mooches off her horse roommate Deb; standing just out of hoof range, she scarfs up pellets that fall

to the ground as Deb crunches away. In one feeding area mingle animals of all shapes and sizes—ostriches, emus, deer, goats—who wander from trough to trough sampling the goods like guests at an interspecies cocktail party.

Caring for this many creatures comes with a hefty price tag. Every two weeks, the ranch receives 14,000 pounds of grain and more than 4,000 pounds of feed. The primates, elephant, and reptiles consume 650 pounds of produce a week; the hoof stock, 587 tons of hay per year. Last year, Black Beauty spent \$295,000 on animal care, including twice-yearly hoof checks, tooth care, vaccinations, and dewormings for the horses.

Another \$50,000 or so goes to

## Trunk-to-Toe TLC Keeping up with Black Beauty’s African elephant is a full-time job

Caring for a 6,800-pound pachyderm with feet as big as dinner plates and toenails the size of a child’s hands may be a tall order, but Arturo Padron is up to the task. He oversees Babe’s foot washes, chops her meals (25 pounds of produce a day), and gives her showers, moving the hose in circles to massage her skin. He stuffs hay and fruit into her “piñata,” a plastic barrel with cutouts that hangs from the ceiling of her barn. And for her morning juice, he squeezes an orange into a 3-gallon bucket of water that she downs in three slurps, with a gurgle that sounds like a garbage disposal.

Because Babe is affected by the all-too-common leg and foot ailments associated with elephants in captivity, for the last few years she has been on a weight-loss and foot-care regimen with the goal of improving her overall health. It’s a necessary preparation for her future, whether she moves to another sanctuary to live with others of her kind or is joined at the ranch by other elephants.

Until that day, Padron does his best to provide the stimulus Babe needs for her well-being. When he’s not there working with her, he often turns on the radio to mask the sounds of people entering the feed room next door, so Babe doesn’t mistake the noise for a visitor and anticipate a treat. And each day he trucks a wheelbarrow with Babe’s droppings to the compost pile in the woods, then brings back sticks and branches that he strews along both sides of the fence she shares with rescued exotics such as addaxes and elands. The mutual snack attracts visitors, allowing Babe to catch up with her camel buddy, Omar, nosing her trunk along his curves.

Under an elephant management model known as “protected contact,” barriers separate Padron from Babe at all times. She can squash a monster pumpkin with one foot, bite a whole watermelon in half, and toss a steel gate like it’s a piece of foam, and the suction of her trunk rivals that of an industrial-strength vacuum cleaner. Working with Babe through the barriers reduces the risk to humans and eliminates the need to maintain control through dominance. Her friendship with Padron centers on this security, as well as on the trust built during months of positive reinforcement training. Babe understands his requests to present an ear so blood can be drawn; offer a foot so an X-ray can be taken; walk onto truck scales where

she can be weighed; and swish a saline solution in her trunk, then blow it into a bag to be tested for tuberculosis, a common elephant ailment.

Circuses and other abusive industries often depend on physical dominance to intimidate elephants into following orders. Using protected contact instead, Padron offers food rewards for every step toward mastery of a behavior. “You cannot beat an elephant one day and the next day expect her to do things for you,” he says. “It just will not work.” When he’s been away for any amount of time, she greets his return with a low rumble—an elephant’s affectionate hello. “It’s a way to build a relationship of trust and respect,” he says. “She works because she wants to, not because we tell her to.”

Nearly five years ago, Padron gave up a job supervising a hospital cleaning crew to join his dad, Julian, at the ranch; his brother Julio followed soon after. His work with the animals has awakened feelings of compassion for their suffering and outrage at their abuse. “With Babe, it would take a lot for someone to come in here and do something to her,” he says. “They would have to come through me first.”



Instant choreography is a useful skill for ranch hand Sheila Ivey as she tries to ensure each animal eats only what he is supposed to. The burros persist, trailing Ivey wherever she goes and poking their noses into buckets in search of leftovers.



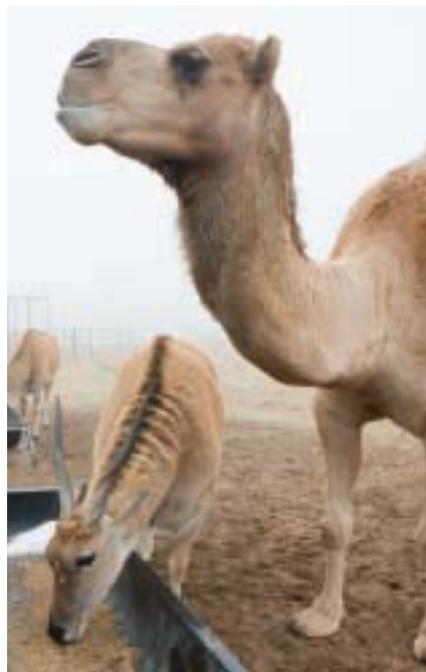
groundskeeping, including regular fertilization and upkeep of the more than 600 acres of pastures; 150 acres of annual ryes are planted as a cover crop to give animals a winter graze when the perennial grasses fade away. “Maintenance of the pasture is a huge part of the operation,” says Farinato. “If you don’t do that, you’ll get invasions of weeds, shrubs, and trees that reduce the nutritional value of the pastures for the horses and other grazing animals. And that means our carrying capacity on the range would go down and our feed bill goes up.”

The goal is for each horse to have 2 acres of good pasture, the ideal calculation to keep animals well-fed, parasite loads low, and hooves healthy—and give everyone a little breathing room if they can’t get along. “We pretty much have enough space that, in general ... eventually they’ll just give each other a wide berth and work it out,” says director of operations Diane Miller. “It’s not like they’ll fight to the death out there when they’ve got 1,300 acres to traverse.”

#### FREE-RANGE THERAPY

More than any other species, Black Beauty belongs to the burros; 329 of them plod the

well-worn trails, forming an almost unnoticeable backdrop. They may lack the exotic looks of the horned Barbary sheep and the charisma of the primates, but they still have much to teach their two-legged admirers: Stand in any one spot for five minutes, and you’re likely to attract an audience of burros



who seem to bask in the simple joy of being.

From 1979 to 1984, The Fund rescued more than 2,000 of these gentle donkeys from inhumane deaths at the hands of airborne shooters in the Grand Canyon and in Death Valley National Park in Nevada. Cleveland Amory poured his heart and soul into the effort despite the ridicule of many, says his longtime assistant Marian Probst, who recalls him looking out with pride over the ever-expanding sanctuary. “They could roam wherever they wanted to, and that’s what he wanted to happen—just for them to eat and be free, and roll over, and go drink in the lake,” says Probst, now chair of The Fund for Animals and an HSUS board member.

Of the 1,270 animals on the roster, more than 600 rove the open range at Black Beauty, and Edward Palmer knows a little something about almost all of them. In his nine years here, the ranch foreman has personally picked up many of the animals and driven them to the safety of the sanctuary.

One recent morning as he sets out to make his daily rounds, he recalls their stories: Two horses came from a now-closed slaughter plant in nearby Kaufman, he says;

an activist had seen the pair at an auction and sent money for their rescue. One herd of 65 horses came off the Nevada range. “You look at the pictures then, it’d be hard for you to imagine it was the same horses,” he says. “It was pretty desolate and they didn’t have much to eat.” A group of mares was rescued from a facility where they were kept pregnant and tied in stalls so their urine could be harvested for hormones used in estrogen replacement therapy. A steer with a lame shoulder was abandoned as a crippled orphan, and a Scottish highland cow from a nearby farmer came with an udder infection so bad the staff had to bottle-raise her calf. “She’s getting old, and sometimes in the winter, we have to bring her up to the stable for extra care and feed,” Palmer says.

Once at the ranch, the animals stick together in their original bands, form new groups, break off into pairs, or keep to themselves. Often the companionship of others, coupled with a free-roaming lifestyle, is all the medicine needed to heal these broken souls. Alfred was a bellowing mess when he arrived at Black Beauty Ranch in December 2006 as an 18-month-old steer. His human family had hand-raised him since he was 3 days old, indulging him often in his favorite snack of Twinkies. But when he kept getting out after Hurricane Rita destroyed the fence in his



Roo soaks up a scratch from his gal Ivey. He was abandoned by a traveling boxing kangaroo exhibit after he injured his arm, which was later amputated.

yard, the family decided they could no longer keep him.

When he arrived at the ranch, it was a chore to get him off the trailer, and he followed his human parents like a dog, seemingly unwilling to say goodbye. After a week of weaning from people, Alfred was turned

out on the pasture to learn how to be with his own species. Now, he barely glances at the staff as they call his name and cajole him to come over for a visit; he’s just one in a long line of cows and steers walking the land. Alfred has found his place among the herd. ■

▶ FOR MORE ABOUT THE RANCH, including histories of the animals, visit [blackbeautyrancho.org](http://blackbeautyrancho.org).

## How to Help

Operating costs at Black Beauty Ranch—one of four animal care centers run by The HSUS—totaled about \$1.12 million last year, funded mostly by donations. Charitable organization GreaterGood.org donated \$325,000 generated through visits to its [animalrescuesite.com](http://animalrescuesite.com) website; each time someone clicks on the site (for no cost), the foundation donates ad revenue to the care and feeding of animals at Black Beauty and other sanctuaries.

The ranch also offers an “adoption” program where donors can sponsor any of six animals with a monthly donation. To sign up, visit [blackbeautyrancho.org](http://blackbeautyrancho.org) and click on “Ways to Give.”



# The **SPICE** of **LIFE**

## Black Beauty keeps primates busy with food and companionship

When it comes to mealtimes at Black Beauty Ranch, sometimes four limbs just aren't enough to gather up all the bounty.

On the last primate feeding round of the day one March afternoon, Julio Padron stuffs tomatoes and whole heads of cabbage into a chute that leads into the indoor enclosure of chimpanzees Kitty, Lulu, and Midge. Somehow Kitty, the leader of the bunch, ends up with more food than she has hands and feet to hold it all, so she stuffs a tomato in her mouth and carries her windfall up to a perch.

Next stop: the brown lemurs, who clamor at the side of their cage and make popping noises in anticipation. At every stop along the route, Padron is trailed by the sound of lips smacking with satisfaction.

Prepared and predictable meals can be a source of boredom for captive primates, who in the wild would spend the majority of their time in search of food, says Richard Farinato, senior director of animal care centers for The HSUS. Take that challenge away, and the animals are left with little to do. So the staff tries to mix it up, providing treats smeared with peanut butter and seeds, ice blocks containing fruit, or cardboard tubes with raisins. Blueberry smoothies, frozen peaches, and heated apples are among the fruity snacks whipped up by Dawna Epperson, the primates' main caretaker. She also brings branches into the enclosures—"macaques love a gnawing stick," she says—and scatters seeds, popcorn, cereal, dried fruit, and nuts to encourage the animals to forage.

The chimps get the star treatment from Epperson: manicures for Kitty and Lulu, magazines, and even a mirror to gaze into. "Lulu's really clever about it. ... The first time I gave her the full-length mirror—this was so funny—she walked straight up to it and turned around, and then



looked in the mirror. It looked just like, 'Does my butt look big?'"

Staff make an extra effort to interact with pig-tailed macaque Willy, a human-oriented ex-pet who shares his cage with a baboon named Robert. An odd but workable pairing, the two were introduced as youngsters long ago. Epperson engages Willy by playing keep-away with a piece of rope and has taught him the patience to eat from a spoon and drink from a bottle without grabbing the objects away. Willy intently grooms a caretaker's arm or head safely through the wire or presents his arm or back to be groomed in return. "Mutual grooming is an enormous part of normal primate social behavior and is important for his psychological health," Farinato says.



**White-handed gibbons (top) and brown lemurs (bottom) are among the 23 primates at Black Beauty Ranch, rescued from research facilities, zoos, or households where they were kept as pets.**