

After being injected with diseases in the name of research, nearly 70 chimpanzees were left isolated, hungry and thirsty on Liberian islands, despite the lab's pledge to provide for them.



## LEFT TO DIE IN LIBERIA

NEW YORK BLOOD CENTER UNDER FIRE FOR ABANDONING ITS RETIRED RESEARCH CHIMPS

// BY KAREN E. LANGE

**FOR 35 YEARS**, he survived in captivity, ripped from his family, his right limb amputated after an injury suffered when his mother was shot in a Liberian forest. For most of those years, Bullet lived in a small cage at a research lab operated by the New York Blood Center in the West African country. He was darted and sedated hundreds of times and infected with hepatitis B. After Liberia's civil war began in late 1989, food for Bullet and the other research chimps became scarce. When the conflict reached the lab, some were killed by fighters.

Finally, in 2008, no longer needed for research, dozens of chimps were retired to six mangrove islands off Liberia's coast. But the islands lacked food and water, leaving the



chimpanzees dependent on man-made water systems that often broke and caregivers who visited once every other day. Thirsty chimps gulped water from plastic cups when caregivers arrived. Then this March, the lab, which had previously promised to support the animals, abruptly cut off funding, abandoning the apes. They went four days without food before individuals on the ground donated money.

So it was with surprise that Agnes Souchal, an HSUS consultant, met with old Bullet near one island in May. She had heard about him from colleagues and hadn't expected him to survive this latest ordeal, but he did. His ribs showed through his skin. The hair on his chin was gray. But he was still the dominant

chimp in his group, leading others into the water to greet a delivery of fruit, paid for with HSUS emergency funds.

"He coped with his very hard life," Souchal says. "He is still the boss. ... He's an amazing survivor."

During her visit, the water systems were fixed with HSUS money and she began planning the future of the 66 chimps now on the islands. The HSUS and other groups had already asked the lab to restore funding. The coalition appealed to the public to put pressure on the blood center and raise money for the apes' interim care. More than 2,000 outraged people responded.

"I've never seen such a reaction on an issue," says Kathleen Conlee, HSUS vice president for animal research issues. "People are like, 'You used them. ... You better step up.' This is an example of what [happens] if you fail to do right by animals. You can't walk

away without accountability.”

In July, after the blood center refused to renew funding, The HSUS delivered a petition with more than 185,000 signatures. People had given approximately \$155,000, and the Arcus Foundation added \$30,000. That allowed the coalition to offer the caregivers, who had worked without pay since March, gifts of appreciation and to formally hire staff.

The blood center had been spending \$350,000 a year on the chimps. Souchal estimates they can get better care, with daily feedings, for \$153,000 a year. But more money will be needed for medical care and a project manager.

It's not much when you consider all these animals have endured, she says. More than 400 have died since the lab opened in 1975. Fear has warped the behavior of those left: Souchal watched one chimp bargain for food by offering his leg to the caregivers, as he would have done in the lab when being darted.

Bullet and most of the other chimps can't return to the wild. They lack the skills to survive there, and those experimented on carry diseases that can be fatal for humans. The blood center owes the chimps a retirement, Souchal says.

“They served,” she says. “They deserve respect. It's a moral duty.”

**+ TELL** the New York Blood Center to restore funding at [humanesociety.org/abandoned-chimps](http://humanesociety.org/abandoned-chimps).

## U.S. CHANGES CHIMP STATUS

Captive chimps in the U.S. have been granted endangered status by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Sparked by an HSUS petition, the new rule means those who would use chimps in harmful ways will have to show how their work benefits the conservation of the species—detering exploitation by researchers and the entertainment and pet industries.



A Wisconsin church blesses animals in honor of St. Francis Day.

## PET PRAYERS ANSWERED

ST. FRANCIS' EXAMPLE INSPIRES A WISCONSIN CHURCH

// BY KAREN E. LANGE

**THE WOMAN WITH THE TWO BIG DOGS** came to the Oshkosh Area Humane Society because she didn't have enough money to feed them. Several years ago, the Wisconsin shelter would have had to turn her away, having no means to supply food for pets in the community. But thanks to a local church's new program, it could give her a 50-pound bag of food. The shelter can regularly provide assistance like this because of a Fill the Bowl program at First Congregational Church in Oshkosh, says Joni Geiger, the humane society's executive director.

“I'm just amazed at what they've been able to do,” Geiger says. “This has opened everyone's eyes: We don't want to see anyone separated from their pets.”

Fill the Bowl, created and promoted nationwide by The HSUS, was launched at First Congregational in October 2014 during its first-ever celebration of St. Francis Day, which honors the saint known for his compassion toward animals. A Saturday pet blessing drew people carrying dogs, cats, gerbils, guinea pigs, rats, a rabbit and a gecko; an accompanying vegan potluck displayed recipes for all of the dishes. On Sunday, the pastor delivered a sermon on St. Francis and children brought stuffed animals to the front of the sanctuary to be blessed.

The spirit of compassion continued after the weekend was over. A dog crate in the church's entrance allows members to leave pet food and supplies for Fill the Bowl.

“It's hard to ignore a container that you pass every week,” says Cheryl Hentz, an HSUS faith outreach volunteer and leader of the church's animal ministry, which started last year.

Church members have donated hundreds of pounds of dog and cat food, and the church benevolence committee gave \$500. The contributions allowed the shelter to donate more than 1,300 pounds of food to pet owners during the program's first seven months.

Hentz says her faith and caring for animals go hand in hand, since the Bible says God gave man dominion over the animals.

“You don't dominate the animals; you don't mistreat them,” she says. “You are supposed to be taking care of them.”

**+ REQUEST** a free St. Francis Day in a Box kit at [humanesociety.org/st-francis](http://humanesociety.org/st-francis).