

Groups Vie for Space Chimp Colony

A colony of chimpanzees that dates from the dawn of the U.S. space program is the object of a tug-of-war between a biomedical research foundation and animal rights activists. The U.S. Air Force, which owns the colony, no longer has any need for the chimps and is looking for a private outfit to take them over. Three groups are expected to submit proposals by the 3 June deadline, and the outcome of the contest will determine whether the animals will be used for research or be left to live out their lives in a sanctuary.

The colony was established about 40 years ago to help blaze a trail into space for NASA astronauts. In 1961, its most famous member, Ham, was the first of the group to ride a rocket into space. But the Air Force hasn't needed the chimps for research since the early 1970s. Now, the government wants to transfer ownership of the 144 animals to a group with sufficient financial backing and expertise to provide lifelong, quality care.

The current front-runner, say most observers, is the Coulston Foundation, which now cares for the colony at no cost to the government in exchange for the right to use them for research. Most of the animals are housed at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. The chimpanzees have been valuable subjects in research on aging and AIDS, says the foundation's Don McKinney, and were crucial in the development of a vaccine for hepatitis that has "saved millions of lives." If the foundation has to give up the Air Force chimps, says McKinney, it will likely breed replacements as needed from among the other 450 chimps it maintains.

But animal rights groups are opposed to further biomedical research on the animals, and they have attacked the Coulston Foundation's record in animal care. Eric Kleiman, a spokesperson for In Defense of Animals, points out that in March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture charged the foundation with violating the Animal Welfare Act for actions that resulted in the 1997 deaths of two chimpanzees. McKinney says the foundation has filed a response contesting the charges. "The chimps [here] are extremely well cared for," he says.

Coulston's chief opponents are two groups that want to free the animals from further research. The Center for Captive Chimpanzee Care, based in Boynton Beach, Florida, has raised \$1.2 million toward the \$13 million it says is needed to build and operate a sanctuary where the chimps could live in half-hectare-sized enclosures. "Even in a good lab, life is hard for a chimp," says primatologist Jane Goodall, who serves on the center's board of directors. "These chimps

have been through enough." Earlier this month Goodall made a pitch for the center's proposal before an audience of senior government officials when she accepted the first-ever Public Service Award from the National Science Foundation.

However, the center's overall philosophy has led some researchers to seek a third option for the space chimps. "I respect all of [Goodall's] work," says Michale Keeling, who oversees the chimpanzee facility at the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Bastrop, Texas, "but her emphasis has been on chimps in the wild." He says that the animal rights groups that fund the center have shunned people with experience tending a facility for captive animals.

Keeling and others have formed a group called Chimp Haven Inc., in San Antonio, that, he says, has the engineering know-how that Goodall's group lacks. But "it's

been much harder to raise money than we thought" from pharmaceutical companies and a variety of corporate-based foundations, he says. Its attempts to raise money

from sources tied to animal research have also contributed to a split between the two sanctuary groups. "We invited Goodall's group to join, and basically there was a lot of going back and forth and things didn't go anywhere," says Chimp Haven President Linda Brent. Instead, the two groups hope to bid on separate blocs of chimps. The Air Force, however, has said it would prefer to keep the colony intact.

Whichever group takes the chimps will need more than just money and a good heart to deal with the trials

of daily care, warns Sarah Boysen, a primatologist at Ohio State University, Columbus. "Some of these chimps have been in labs for 30 years," she says. "You can give them all the Popsicles and Gummy Bears you like, [but] they're not going to be too thrilled with humans."

—David Kestenbaum



Patriotic primate. Air Force seeks new home for Ham's relatives.

PHILANTHROPY

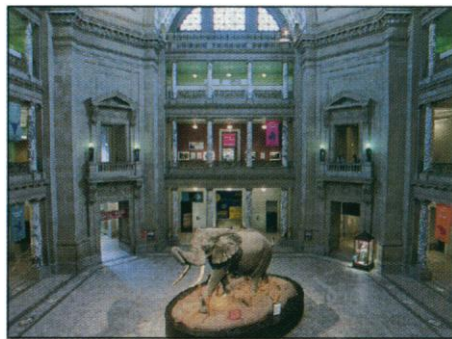
Elephantine Gift Stirs Museum Debate

The National Museum of Natural History, the anchor of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., will soon begin spending the largest private donation it has ever received, but some staffers are uneasy about how the gift will be used. The top brass say they want to spend the money—\$20 million, from Kenneth Behring, a real estate developer and former owner of the Seattle Seahawks football team—to clean up the dusty central rotunda, create traveling educational programs, and improve some 40-year-old mammal exhibits. But members of the museum's scientific staff worry that the renovation may result

in the trashing of some cherished old exhibits and the relocation of the huge elephant in the museum's entrance rotunda that serves as the museum's icon.

Museum director Robert Fri, who has been struggling with rising costs and flat revenues, welcomes Behring's generous donation, which he sees as a nice kick-off to an upcoming capital campaign. But he acknowledges that "the donation has set off an intensive discussion" within the staff. Behring has not stipulated precisely how his \$20 million is to be used, nor has the museum released any plans. "We are now transitioning from brainstorming to bringing in a design team," says Fri. Design contracts are to be let soon, he says, and construction is to begin later this year.

But Fri says that "functionally, we know what we want to happen." He hopes to create traveling educational exhibits called "mammals on the move" and "mammals in the schools," in effect, taking the museum to the people. He also says he aims to scrub decades of grime off the "dingy" rotunda—"one of the great public museum spaces in the world"—and replace some exhibits and faded specimens, some dating to the 1930s or earlier. All this is part of an effort to "turn the museum from a simple destination for tourists into a learning hub." His



Vulnerable icon? Renovation may displace museum's famous elephant.

plan is to create a deeper contextual setting for animal specimens, displaying "natural history as history," illustrating that "nothing exists for long, even an elephant."

Staffers who have attended internal meetings on the plans expressed concern that some diorama displays—such as one depicting pronghorn sheep on the Burgess Shale in Canada, where former Smithsonian head Charles Walcott uncovered a trove of fossils in 1909—may be gutted to make room for renovations. (Walcott's widow paid for the original artwork.) Two curators of the North American mammals—Richard Thorington and Alfred Gardner—said that, as part of the renovation, the museum plans to close these exhibits at the end of May, after which the public may not have another chance to view them. "There is a real concern that there's no clear plan" to get public advice or transfer the exhibits to other institutions before doing away with them, says Thorington. Gardner adds that they are unique examples of naturalist art and that they contain authentic materials from the places they represent.

Meanwhile, an intramural committee last week expressed its opposition to suggestions that the big elephant in the rotunda be moved aside, possibly to make room for a new information center. Plans for refurbishing the rotunda have been the subject of intense speculation, including a rumor that Behring, who became a passionate big-game hunter 5 years ago, has donated an elephant of his own that may be mounted in the rotunda opposite the longtime resident. Fri says only that Behring has given "several hundred" animal specimens to the museum, and "we are still working on" where they will go. Behring himself says it's entirely up to Smithsonian officials how the specimens will be used. "They're really in charge on what animals to put in," he says.

In spite of that reassurance, several senior researchers at the museum grouse that the Smithsonian may be making too many concessions to woo donors. They are especially upset that the rotunda itself may be named after the Behring family. Recently, the museum opened two donor-named exhibits—the Janet Annenberg Hooker Hall of Geology, Gems, and Minerals and the O. Orkin Insect Zoo, honoring the successful pest exterminator and his business—but the critics believe that this case is different. "I don't object to naming the halls after people who make donations," says one researcher, "because I know that in 20 or 30 years those exhibits will change and the names will go." But he doesn't like the idea of enshrining a benefactor's name in a federal building, forever.

Fri, who notes that the Smithsonian's board of regents has approved the renaming, says it is fitting that the donor of the museum's largest gift should be honored in this way. It's no precedent: The museum itself is named for its original benefactor, John Smithson.

—Eliot Marshall

PUBLIC HEALTH

WHO's Slow Road to Funding Reform

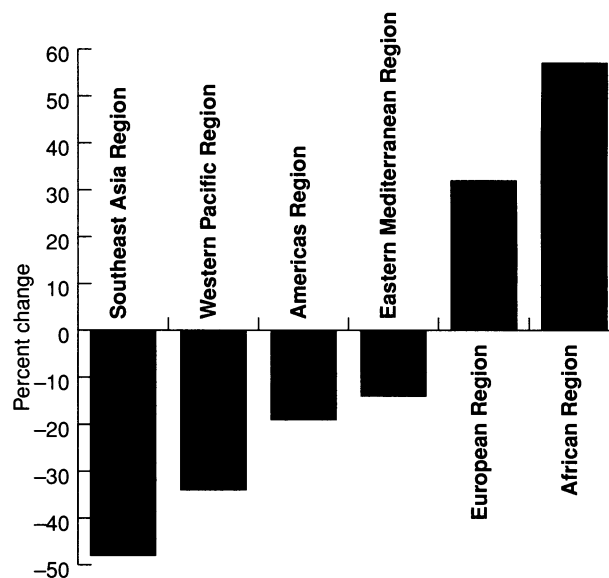
GENEVA—As the member countries of the World Health Organization (WHO) gathered here last week to celebrate the body's 50th birthday and ratify the appointment of its new director-general, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (*Science*, 9 January, p. 166), the festive mood masked some frantic maneuvering. Behind the scenes, delegates were scrambling to avert a damaging split in the organization over funding reform. A proposal to redistribute the organization's budget for field operations—\$560 million every 2 years—had threatened huge budget cuts for some of WHO's regional operations, such as 50% from its Southeast Asian office. But after a week of tough negotiating, delegates reached a compromise in which the poorest countries would be protected and cuts elsewhere would be phased in more slowly. "I feel very good," says Khalkur Rahman, counselor in the Bangladesh Mission in Geneva, whose country escaped a 66% cut in its funding from WHO.

Few people question the need to reform how money is allocated among WHO's six regional offices, which has more to do with a region's historical need and its clout in WHO committees than with its situation today. But many delegates attending the World Health Assembly were shocked at the size of the cuts that the new funding model prescribed for so-called Least Developed Countries (LDCs), such as Bangladesh, Nepal (a 62% cut), and the Maldives (77%). The cuts would have affected the whole range of WHO programs in these countries—everything from health and nutrition programs to efforts to control diseases such as malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis, and AIDS. The compromise, say WHO officials, should ease the pain of trimming programs while recognizing the new realities of world health, such as the collapse of health and social conditions in the former Soviet Union.

When the regional budget was formulated 50 years ago, the Southeast Asian region, which includes the Indian subcontinent, was the neediest region in the world, with the largest population and the largest disease burden. But times have changed, and countries in other areas, principally Africa and Eastern and central Europe, have emerged as contenders for the "neediest" title. "There has been no health- or needs-

based analysis of how much money we give to the regions," says Dennis Aitken, a WHO assistant director-general.

About 6 years ago, WHO began looking for a fairer system. It hired three experts from Ghana, Singapore, and the United States to assess a new model for calculating the allocations. The model, known as the Human Development Index (HDI), uses a combination of life expectancy, educational attainment, and gross domestic product per capita as the criteria for development. WHO also added



Money movements. The WHO's new funding formula will dramatically shift the focus of the agency's funding.

safeguards to ensure that larger countries do not benefit unduly at the expense of mini-states and a weighting for countries with poor immunization coverage.

"The beauty of it is that it will continuously adjust what individual countries get depending on how those countries do," says Jo Asvall, regional director for Europe. "If they do better, they get less. If they do worse, they get more." Says Aitken: "The flexibility is critical because people won't believe in the system if it doesn't always reflect change."

But when the size of the cutbacks for some obviously poor countries became apparent, many delegates criticized the new model for relying on life expectancy and education. "We don't like HDI because it is not sensitive. It's not health related," says Suwit Wibulpolprasert, chief medical officer in Thailand's Ministry of Health. He believes a country's disease burden and maternal and infant mortality rates should play a more important role in the calculations. "I personally initiated a move to exempt LDCs from these cuts," says Rahman.