



Chimps' Best Friend

Hailey Adams, Jax, and a barrel of chimpanzees

Canine visitors help keep sanctuary chimps from going ape.

Over 330 chimpanzees are living the good life—aka “the chimp life”—at the nonprofit Chimp Haven, and dogs are a special part of that.

The sanctuary near Shreveport, Louisiana, offers chimpanzees 200 forested acres to explore, indoor bedrooms, and enrichment activities to keep them mentally and physically stimulated, from puzzle games to classical music concerts and dance performances. Most of the chimps are retired from biomedical research.

But Dog Day might be the most popular form of enrichment, says Hailey Adams, behavior technician at Chimp Haven. That’s when Adams

brings dogs, including her current pet, Jax, to make guest appearances just outside the habitats—to the delight of the chimps.

“Sometimes they’re very, very excited to see the dogs,” she says. “We have a chimp named Emma who tried to trade us a shovel for one of our dogs.”

Reactions vary—some chimps run alongside the fence with a dog or try to get them to play, while others “display,” a common behavior to assert their toughness.

Even the “Golden Oldies,” a group of females who are over 60 years old (plus one male named Julius) enjoy Dog Day.

“This is a group that has seen it all.

They’ve been around for a long time,” Adams says. “A lot of times when we do enrichment they don’t care, but they always all come out and line up to see the dogs.”

The experience provides enrichment for the dogs as well. Recently Jax grew excited watching an active group led by a chimp named Keeli because they were running around and throwing things.

“He’s a young dog, so I think it was really fun for him, too,” she says, adding, “Most dogs are never, ever going to see a chimp.” —Jen Reeder

For more information, visit chimphaven.org.

KARALEE SCOUTEN, COURTESY CHIMP HAVEN