

Cheri Stevens Statement: California National Primate Research Center (CNPRC)

Summary

My name is Cheri and I was an employee at the California National Primate Research Center (CNPRC). My term of employment began in March 2002, and ended in March 2005, when I voluntarily resigned to seek employment in an environment that was non experimental. Many things I witnessed or was directly involved in led me to believe that the business of animal research was not for me.

The CNPRC would like to paint the public a picture of their establishment as a place of business that maintains a constant state of order, a place that makes decisions that are nothing but humane to the animals housed on site. I witnessed a much different place. The CNPRC is in the business of making a profit at the expense and well-being of the primates housed there. I witnessed several animals suffer from behavioral and health issues there were a direct result of the care they were not receiving from staff at the CNPRC. I witnessed many decisions being made based on what would benefit the employees rather than the primates housed at CNPRC. I witnessed many unfair and unjust practices being used on a daily basis. I witnessed staff mishandling and abusing animals as if it was a necessary part of the employee's day. The CNPRC is understaffed and the primates are not receiving adequate care. Many primates die every year due to malnourishment. They are literally starving to death. It is common practice for the CNPRC to sweep the dirt under the rug.

Most of the concerns that I developed over the years were never addressed. On more than one occasion problems were reported that were not addressed and this led to more severe issues. This is the case with the seven primates who lost their lives in the ARS building during the ventilation malfunction, as well as with a particular primate affectionately known as "Buzz" (MMU 25616.) who died due to negligence. I am here today to bring my concerns to the public's attention. Much of the funding the CNPRC receives is through federal tax dollars and I think it is necessary for the public to know what their money is being spent on. I am hoping that by bringing this to the attention of the public changes will begin to take place that will only benefit the primates housed there. For the lives that they live and the sacrifice they voluntarily make they deserve nothing less than humane living conditions.

CNPRC / ARS Heater Malfunction – August 2004

In August 2004, a malfunction in the ventilation system at the UC Davis ARS building kicked heat back into a primate housing room which resulted in ending the lives of several primates. Approximately two weeks before the incident, the building was tested by UC Davis' maintenance department. Another Animal Technician who was responsible for that area and I were sent there that day by my supervisor to meet the inspectors. The inspectors determined that the systems in each room were functioning improperly. Immediately upon our return to the CNPRC the ventilation system's failures were reported to our supervisor who said she would report the situation to her boss. The day before the incident, I went to ARS to feed the primate's their P.M. meal and was the last CNPRC employee in the room to see all of the animals alive.

The following morning around 6:00 am some UC Davis maintenance workers had been there to take care of an unrelated issue related and said later they saw no sign of any malfunctions while they were there.

Around 7:30 am. the same Animal Tech that was with me during the ventilation inspection went to ARS to perform the morning health check, feed animals and complete daily husbandry tasks. The room that malfunctioned was the last room she entered around 8:00. When she went through the first door into the "anti-room" she could feel the heat coming out from the animal room and knew immediately without even entering the room that something was wrong. She panicked, and without entering the room returned to CNPRC. I ran into her when she returned and she seemed to be frantic so I asked her what was wrong. She explained the situation to the animal health tech and to me. We then came up with a plan for both of us to return to ARS where the on-call vet would meet us. When we got to the gate we realized someone would need to wait for the veterinarian because she did not have the security code to the gate that accesses the property.

I left the Animal Tech with the van at the gate to meet the veterinarian and proceeded to the building on foot. When I got to the room, the smells, sights, and heat were almost too much to bear. I tried opening the back door to allow for some ventilation. The door was either stuck or locked so I was unable to open it. I began trying to unlock and open cages to examine the animals more closely and at this point I thought there were not any survivors. At that time I left the room to regain my composure.

I went outside just as the Veterinarian and Animal Tech pulled up to the building. The Veterinarian and I went back into the room and it was discovered that there were two survivors who we transported to the CNPRC. Only one animal survived the incident. The other primate was euthanized due to what I was told was severe brain damage caused by the extreme heat he/she had experienced in the room that morning.

Any animals remaining in ARS building were relocated to CNPRC that day. Despite what we had been told for years, there actually was room for them at the CNPRC. I was aware of this because I found cages for many of them myself. I reported this to the enrichment group but it was disregarded. I was approached by the safety coordinator and was told that if I

wanted to discuss what I had seen she would arrange for someone to come and talk to me, but I was not ready to revisit the experience.

It had also been brought to my attention that USDA was onsite to investigate the incident and was requesting to speak with those involved. For some reason I was never questioned on the matter. Having been directly involved in the situation I believe my testimony would have been effective in an accurate assessment of the incident.

Buzz MMU 25616, BAR01

Buzz was to have a head post implanted by investigator Carol Barnes and Carrie, a local veterinarian. According to protocol, both were to remain in the room during the procedure. The Veterinarian left the room while Barnes proceeded and inserted the restraints used to position the head for surgery into the ears. Barnes wounded the animal's eardrum, possibly unbeknownst to her, for nothing was done to care for the injuries received. Buzz was reported several times by Animal Techs during morning health rounds for having oozing ears. This was also reported by Animal Techs during Buzz's transport to his testing site on grounds. Later he was reported as being lethargic. When he finally was taken in by therapeutics it was found that what had started out as an outer ear infection created by the wound inflicted by Barnes had at that point escalated into a brain abscess.

Buzz was in much pain during his last days. I expressed concern and asked why he was being kept alive even though he was clearly in pain; I was told that they were waiting to be able to collect data. If they euthanized him to end his suffering, all research data would be lost. It was intended from the beginning for Buzz to be euthanized at the end of the project but it needed to be done in a way that data could be collected from him. By prolonging his death for research the investigator clearly stated that this animal's welfare was secondary to her research.

Inhumane Treatments of Primates

Some days, when my daily tasks were complete I would find myself wandering into therapeutics to see if I could be of assistance. On one particular day there was an infant monkey with some serious health problems in a cage without his mother, looking quite terrified. He was malnourished, with severe liquid stool and was not eating. I decided to show this animal some affection to see how he would respond. I had been warned that he was aggressive, but knew that I sometimes had a way with these animals that no one else did and so I decided to give it a try before giving up. It appeared that everyone else had given up on him.

I reached into the cage and “introduced myself.” It took little convincing and in no time the animal warmed up to me. I was able to get him to drink the liquid therapeutics provided and got him to eat a little of the rice cereal and grapes in his cage. He grew more and more comfortable with me and eventually even let me hold him. I stayed through lunch to care for him and he seemed to be coming around. I left the animal for some time to feed the other animals I was responsible for that day, and quickly returned to his cage when I was finished. I carefully bundled the animal in a towel and removed him from his cage. I took a seat on a stool and just held him close. The animal became so comfortable that he fell asleep on my chest for what I was told was the first time since he had been in therapeutics.

The time for me to go home was quickly approaching and I was having trouble with the idea of leaving him. I thought about staying, but for how long? I could not move in. I had to go home some time. Finally around 4:15 I decided I had done all that I could and certainly more than anyone else. He already was showing signs of improvement so I placed him back in his cage, still sleeping and went home for my two days off.

The following day I made a few calls to therapeutics to check on the infant primate but was not able to reach anyone and no one returned my phone calls. When I returned to work I found out that the very next day, my first day off, they decided to euthanize him. I was told that there was nothing that they could do for him so they euthanized him. I could not believe it. I had done so much for him that resulted in so little. I have felt guilty for so long because when I left I knew that no one would take the time to help him eat, drink, or even make him feel secure. But I know now that it was not my fault that the primate did not make it. It is the fault of the CNPRC for the ideas that they silently instill. To them the infant primate was just an animal beneath them, just a number that could be replaced this year or the next. To me he is one of many reasons to stand up against the evils of animal exploitation.

It is of my opinion that the diet offered to the primates at the CNPRC is inhumane. Animals are offered four to eight monkey chow biscuits, depending on their species and sex, and whether or not a female is pregnant or nursing. Twice a week the animals are offered fresh produce which could be something like a half an apple or a carrot. Once a week the animals were offered vitamins, I believed that policy may have been changed to twice a week since I left. The point that I would like to make on this subject is that in one fiscal year the primates can earn around 80 million dollars through research grants for the University of California at Davis. Are the primates receiving the best diet possible that could be offered

to them? Eight million dollars can buy a lot of fresh produce that simply is not being bought because it is not a priority for the University's researchers.

Due to repeated disagreements between co-workers on the Technical Crew, a managerial decision was made to discontinue performing the dental scaling procedure during preventative health round-ups. I expressed concern to those on the technical crew that I believed animals in my care were in dire need of dental care. The plaque build-up on the primates' teeth would undoubtedly lead to more severe issues. And it was visible from the outside of the cages just by looking in.

The official reason I was given for the discontinuance of treatment was that the crew was awaiting a training document to be provided by Training Coordinator to offer a consistent procedure to avoid further conflict. It is my experience from having worked on this crew that there was always something to argue about. However it is inhumane to deny the animals this treatment because they need it to avoid abscesses, and it is wrong to deny this treatment simply over a disagreement between co-workers.

Under CNPRC's SOP animals are not to be anesthetized until they are a specified minimum weight in order to perform preventative health measures such as TB testing in primates' eyelids, initial tattooing and touch-ups as well as shaving around tattooed area to allow expedient identification of animals, dental scaling, and trimming of fingernails and toenails. Primates were being tattooed and TB tested regardless of the fact that they were too young or too small (under age and weight requirements) to be anesthetized, thus doing so inhumanely and against the University's own protocols.

On one occasion I witnessed an infant primate being restrained past the point of consciousness which he regained in therapeutics with a little physical stimulation to the body. After this incident I reported my concerns to a resident veterinarian who had the authority to change the policy or at least get employees to adhere to those policies already set in place.

Unfortunately I did not witness any changes before I left the CNPRC.

Corners are repeatedly cut during the cage sanitizing and changing processes. A step most commonly cut during the in-place sanitization process was to leave animals in cages during the acid wash step, rather than removing them by transfer box as stated policy in CNPRC's SOP. Every employee is trained on the dangers of these chemicals and staff must wear protective clothing to avoid serious injury to ourselves, so I am not sure why anyone would decide that this was a humane corner to cut.

One particular incident resulted in the severe chemical burning of several male Rhesus Macaques housed in an all-male room located in the "Speed Space" area of the CNPRC. Animals were placed in in-patient care with therapeutics to allow constant access in treating these flesh-bearing chemical burns. Animals received burns to their fingers, hands, arms, legs and faces.

There are specific guidelines to be followed when addressing whether or not a primate is living in a cage that provides adequate living space. This is determined by the weight and

not the sex of the animal. On several occasions it was determined by weighting out rooms that many females were too large for the cages they were living in. On more than one occasion I compiled a list of such animals and reported it to "enrichment," who is responsible for all animal moves that are made for reasons other than experimental.

I was told, more often than not, that there were not cages available for them, and at most maybe they could have two smaller cages. I won't say that it never happened, but I cannot recall a single incident where an animal was moved due to living in a cage that was insufficient to its body weight. I would also like to add that there were several instances when juveniles were being housed with their mothers in a single cage even after they were big enough to need their own cages. This is more common with the larger of the Macaque species housed at CNPRC, the Rhesus Macaque, due to the restrictions being based on body weight.

Animals often went without enrichment things that were due to them simply because there just was not enough necessary things to go around all of the time. I was always scrounging for mirrors and toys for the animals and their cages. There was never enough produce for all of the animals to have a little extra, but there was sometimes a little extra for infants, nursing and expecting females, or the larger males that required a larger diet due to body size. The primates' natural need for activity was subdued by showing videos brought to their rooms on transportable televisions, however not on a daily basis. There were only enough televisions to be rotated throughout the entire center, which was done on a daily basis. I could not say whether or not the animals even enjoyed watching nature on the television.

If an animal had not been eating a sufficient amount of chow to maintain its body weight, this was reported to therapeutics. Once an animal lost a sufficient amount of weight, therapeutics would then place the animal on a special diet of soaked chow, rice cereal, and fresh produce on a daily basis. It came to my attention, in the wing that I worked in at least, that there were around ten animals or so that just were not eating a sufficient amount of chow every day. At the end of the day more chow was being pulled from their cages than was being eaten. I compiled a list of these animals and reported it to my supervisor to get permission to put these animals on the special poor appetite diet because I was concerned for their health.

I was denied the right to offer these diets and told that it was therapeutics' job to do the evaluations and set up the diets. I was told that they were working on it. None of the animals on the list ever received a special diet from therapeutics before I resigned. I offered them what I could undercover but it was not as sufficient as it could have been if I had been granted the permission to care for the primates I was assigned to care for.

Inhumane Experimental Procedures

There is nothing humane about placing a post on an animal's head that is held in place with dental acrylic. First there is little room for error in the surgical procedure necessary to provide such an inhumane way to ensure an animal will remain still, whether they voluntarily wish to do so or not. More often than not infections will develop at the site of the head post unless cleaned more often than just daily.

I have witnessed a handful of animals being admitted to therapeutics in-patient care due to complications directly associated with head post implants. Animals not only physiologically reject these implantations, but also have difficulty adjusting to them mentally. I have witnessed animals pick at them until they bleed, grab at them to remove them, and even bang them on cages or rub against cage bars to try to knock them off. The bruising behind animals eyes tells me that this is not a pleasant recovery for the primates and some never recover from them at all.

It is my direct knowledge that animals involuntarily went without nourishment for up to twenty-four hours and sometimes longer due to "fasting policies." Fasting tags for the next mornings AM feedings were hung the night before by the Technical crew. If a primate's cage received a tag marked "Fast," the chow was to be pulled within minutes of the animal receiving it. Whether it had all been eaten or not, whatever was left had to be pulled out by an Assistant Animal Technician before the end of the day. So unless the animal hoarded chow in its cheek pouches or frantically devoured it, the primate's last full meal was eaten that day in the AM. On the following day the animal would not be fed again until after the animal had awakened from the anesthesia it had been put under to perform the procedure that had required the fasting of the primate.

Sometimes this would be mid day and other times primates would not be offered chow until the end of the day during PM feeding. If the day of fasting fell on a Tuesday or Thursday (fresh produce days) the primates would simply not get any. If the animal was not able to sit coherently by this time, then they were not offered food again until the following AM feeding, possibly leaving the animal without a chow offering for as long as 48 hours.

It has come to my attention that now fastings are handled solely by the animal caretaker assigned to the animal in need of fasting which may clear up some of the confusion of what animal was fed or not fed when, but it does not change the fact that animals were going without nourishment for extended periods of time.

After breeding, females are swabbed with cotton tip applicators to check for the presence of semen. This is not a procedure that the females enjoy. As a matter of fact, many of them must be squeezed into submission and forced into the correct position needed to obtain the sample from the primate's vagina. Often times a metal stick (I have witnessed these sticks being used as tools of abuse as well) is used to work the animal into position which causes distress from the animal being worked with directly, which then causes aggressive reactions such as biting down on the stick and fighting with it.

This procedure also causes distress in the animals who are watching what is taking place, causing them to call out in distress as well as rattle their cages.

Not all reactions to this procedure were aggressive. Some females would simply pull the cotton tip applicator from the technician's hand as they proceed to obtain the sample.

And, this step in the breeding program is inhumane and unnecessary seeing as the CNPRC has an extensive ultrasound program in place.

The UCD employment policy at the CNPRC has potential to be considered inhumane to the primates housed there and the employees responsible for the animals' care. A typical work load usually consists of responsibility to feed and sterile clean four to five animal rooms, each room containing an average of close to 40 primates. That provides a ratio of about one animal care taker for every 180 primates, give or take twenty. It is almost impossible to do what is asked of you and provide everything humanly possible to these animals when you are trying to think of them individually, which is what is humane. They are all different and need special attention to their individual needs. It becomes all too easy to miss health, behavioral, and enrichment problems when you are caring for such a large number of animals.

Typically what ends up happening is that favorite animals are picked so about five to ten animals from each room will receive the extra amount of care that is needed in such a confined and unnatural setting. This leaves out those primates who might be less attractive, more aggressive, or repeatedly unsocial.

The ratio of staff to animals is inhumane in that it does not allow for the best possible life and care for these animals that are in a delicate situation to begin with, and one in which they themselves have no rights.

One experiment working with infants housed with their mothers included a procedure that required infants to be removed from their mothers and transported to a different location within the CNPRC for testing. Due to scheduling errors made by research staff, infants were often left alone awaiting the return of researchers from lunch or other duties.

Recalling one specific incident, animals were left in their transfer boxes in a dark room hearing nothing but the cries for their mothers, a cry that could be heard throughout the building, a cry that no one seemed to care to address.

I took it upon myself to investigate the situation and upon my findings I took measures to minimize as much stress in these infants as possible. With permission from the Enrichment Supervisor I placed stuffed animal "buddies" and fresh towels in the transfer boxes with the infants and kept them company for as much time as I could. When I left the room I left the light on and covered the front of the boxes with towels. What I had done was not time consuming and it would have taken less time if it had been addressed by those who were

responsible for the infants' wellbeing during testing.

It is not uncommon for researchers to conduct business without compassion. I continued doing so for these infants until researchers caught on or until the testing expired. I only know that one day the fearful cries from those particular infants ceased to come from that room.

Witnessed Animal Abuse

On several occasions I witnessed a lack of concern for an animal's wellbeing by co-workers, and at times it was blatant abuse. Two specific employees come to mind whose stories I will tell but their names will remain anonymous for the purpose of this paper.

Co-worker A was known for making trouble and harassing animals and co-workers. Everything was a joke to this person and I remember being frustrated working with him because of his lack of concern during preventative health round-ups. I witnessed him skin an animal's inner thigh with an electric razor and show no concern for the matter. This person brushed it off as if the blood and the pain the animal would feel when they woke up was not a matter for concern. I had to tell them to take the animal to therapeutics to receive the antibiotic ointment to lessen the chance of infection because animal cages are only clean for about 10 minutes after they've been hosed out creating the possibility for infection. This led to a verbal confrontation in which I held my ground to ensure that the animal was treated with the respect it deserved.

This person is also responsible for the animal that went missing and supposedly went into the drain in the floor. I cannot speak specifically to what went on for sure in that room. All I can say is that a thorough search for the remains of the animal was done in the entire pipeline of the CNPRC. They found syringes, needles, some trash, and various metal objects, but not a single animal bone. I can also say that it is unnatural for a primate to use burrowing as a form of escape, primates are climbers. I don't know what happened in the room that day, but I do not believe the story I have been told. I have a difficult time believing the juvenile primate was out of its cage by accident, knowing that the crew this person worked on would purposely let animals loose in the room so that they could catch them, for fun.

The same person managed to train an animal to masturbate against its own leg and arm on command with repeating "show me what you got." This employee did this on a regular basis and would show the new people because he thought it was hilarious.

Co-worker B was more of a physical abuser of the animals. On several occasions I witnessed unnecessary roughness and extreme force being used to manipulate an animal into the positions that were necessary for him to complete intended procedures. A particular incident I can specifically recall led me to report this abuse, and not for the first time, to my supervisor. I was performing my daily husbandry tasks when Co-worker B entered the room to move animals around for the purposes of breeding. He went to a male's cage to remove the female who was hiding behind the male. Co-worker B reached around the door and slapped the primate right on his head, right in front of me. The animal was not aggressive before or after the attack but for some reason this co-worker felt it necessary to repeat the abusive action. Again the animal did not react aggressively, rather stunned. This left me with a sinking feeling in my chest and I reported it to my supervisor because this was not the first time I had seen this employee behave this way.

More than one time I witnessed him use extreme force and the squeeze cage to put a primate into the position needed to perform an experimental task. He would literally slam the back of the cage into the front of the cage with the animal trapped in the middle. Many times he was very aggressive in his verbal approach to animals causing them to also behave aggressively and at the very least grimace in his presence.

Both of these employees were employed still at CNPRC at the time of my resignation and I believe they are currently employed there. One of them has their employment backed by the fact that he works directly for his uncle. I witnessed this create a conflict of interest when dealing with disciplinary actions needed to ensure that all employees are behaving within the realm of respect for other employees and the animals housed at the CNPRC.

I have been asked if I witnessed animals being abused by researchers and investigators. What I can say to that is, for the most part the animals were tested behind doors. I had the opportunity to observe a few tests being conducted and the researchers that I observed were very caring towards the animals. It is my experience that animals will only work when they want to and for who they want to. You have to cooperate with an animal if you want it to cooperate with you.

There was just one incident where I recall actually witnessing an investigator harassing an animal. He was in an animal room that I was responsible for and was shaking the cage of a male primate until he became aggressive. They went back and forth like this for a minute until I entered the room which startled the investigator. I reported the incident to my supervisor. I can recall a physical description but not a name of the investigator.

Primate Behavior at CNPRC

No two primates are alike. Each handles the stress of their unnatural living conditions in their own way. My experience with CNPRC deals directly and primarily with animals housed in the indoor colony and that is specifically what my examples refer to.

Animals are housed in single animal cages and for approximately thirty-five hours a week total. Many primates are paired on a daily basis (with the exception of weekends and holidays) with a neighboring primate. Reasons for not pairing neighbors are usually due to aggressively territorial reactions to being housed in such close quarters. Many primates just cannot handle sharing the space provided to them with another animal. Those who were unable to be paired would often socialize with other primates in the room that they were able to make eye contact with. Some animals would even go to the lengths of using the mirrors provided to them that were attached to cages to socialize with other primates. Those that were fortunate enough to be a part of a pair craved this daily opportunity to bond and socialize with another.

It was easier to pair the primates in the morning than it was to separate them in the afternoon for the remainder of the day until the next morning. I cannot say whether or not the enrichment program set by CNPRC works to relieve stress on the animals or not because what was provided to them never seemed to be enough. Some of the more common responses to the stress and need for activity include, but are not limited to things such as spinning, rocking, pacing, bouncing, and self mutilation. Reactions to living in a stressful environment would also manifest in gastrointestinal complications such as development of a poor appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or bloating.

Mutilations that were self-inflicted were usually from obsessively grooming, to the extent of creating bald spots. A more bizarre reaction to stress that I witnessed would be vicious self attacks, where for example an animal would grab its own body parts, (usually arm or leg) and manage to make it appear that they were vicious, even to themselves by biting themselves. This reaction seemed to come out of defense and its purpose seemed to be a warning to those with a threatening presence. This defense mechanism was also demonstrated with the Kong chew toys offered to the animals for enrichment.

Another behavior that was brought on by the indoor living conditions was what I call cage-to-cage finger wars. It was not uncommon for animals in neighboring cages to fight amongst each other between cages. This often resulted in one of

the primates chewing off the other primate's fingers. I reported this behavior a number of times and very rarely, maybe once these animals were rearranged to eliminate the stress and aggressive activity in the animal rooms.

Another unnatural condition created by research policies is the "harvest" of infants from their mothers before they would naturally leave their troupe in the wild. This would cause some mothers to develop poor appetites and even vomit for a day or two after the infants were removed and placed in juvenile corrals or in cages more convenient to the projects

they may have been assigned to.