

June 19, 2006

Timothy Van Norman, Chief
International Permits
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Arlington Square Building
4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Rm. 700
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Yerkes National Primate Research Center's Application PRT 837068 (71
Fed. Reg. 28,881; May 18, 2006)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

As nineteen professional scientists, we are writing to express our concern about a recent proposal by Yerkes National Primate Research Center (Yerkes) to receive permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to "lethally take" endangered white-collared mangabeys under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA).¹ For the reasons explained below, we respectfully urge the USFWS to deny this permit application. Approving Yerkes' application could open the floodgates to future permit applications premised on allowing entities to kill or otherwise harm endangered species in exchange for making financial contributions to conservation programs.

The ESA prohibits lethal take (*i.e.*, the killing of species listed as endangered) except under very narrow circumstances in which the take will enhance the survival of the species. 16 U.S.C. §1539(a)(1)(A). Yerkes has applied for a permit to immediately euthanize 30 mangabeys in order to make room in the center's colony for future breeding efforts and to kill an additional 20 mangabeys per year for five years in the name of disease research for the possible benefit of humans and mangabeys.

In support of its proposal to immediately euthanize a number of mangabeys, Yerkes' application describes financial and space constraints on breeding—concerns that could have been avoided with adequate planning and could have been remedied by additional financial investment. In any case, the ESA prohibits lethal take for convenience or cost savings. Yerkes' additional rationale for this take (*i.e.*, that the mangabeys at Yerkes may be reintroduced into the wild) is completely specious, since such taking is not needed to maintain existing genotypes, assuming that the mangabeys are even suitable for reintroduction, which they are not.

Yerkes further contends that it qualifies for a permit because it plans to donate funds to a conservation project for mangabeys in Cote d'Ivoire. Although we certainly encourage any and all financial contributions to *in situ* conservation for endangered species, Yerkes does not need a lethal-take permit in order to make such contributions. Furthermore, the activities that

¹Both white-collared and sooty mangabeys are listed as endangered under the ESA, 50 C.F.R. §17.11(h), with the sooty (*Cercocebus torquatus atys*) considered to be a subspecies of the white-collared mangabey. *See* 41 Fed. Reg. at 45,990 (listing the white-collared mangabey and two subspecies, "*C. atys* and *C. lunulatus*").

necessitate a permit under the ESA—lethal biomedical experiments and colony thinning—are so removed from the purported conservation benefit (*i.e.*, financial contributions) that granting such a permit would be tantamount to establishing a “pay-to-take” program by the USFWS. The potential consequences of such a policy cannot be overstated. Such a policy would significantly undermine conservation efforts for imperiled species in the U.S. and abroad by sending a message to the world that the commercialization of imperiled species is an acceptable conservation tool.

Although the present proposal focuses on captive monkeys, we are also concerned that a similar rationale could be generalized to endangered species in the wild. Indeed, we note that when this very policy (*i.e.*, to “pay to take” imperiled species) was proposed by the USFWS two years ago, it was roundly opposed by scientists and conservationists throughout the world and was never finalized by the agency. *See* 68 Fed. Reg. 53,327 (Sep. 10, 2003); 68 Fed. Reg. 49,512 (Aug. 18, 2003). *See also* Vedantam, *U.S. May Expand Access to Endangered Species* (Oct. 11, 2003). Based on this potential precedent alone, we strongly urge that Yerkes’ permit be denied.

For all these reasons, we respectfully urge the USFWS to deny this permit application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Goodall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Jane Goodall Ph.D.

On behalf of the undersigned:

Michele L. Goldsmith, MA, MS, Ph.D.
Great Ape World Heritage Species Project

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Specialization: Animal Behavior

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Specialization: Primate Behavior

John Mulcahy, MS

Specialization: Primate behaviorist.