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## Great Ape Trust of Iowa to provide home for orangutans from entertainment industry

*Relocation of entertainment orangutans from Los Angeles area to  
Des Moines great ape facility draws praise from ape experts*

Des Moines, Iowa – July 16, 2008 – A group of orangutans who appeared in Hollywood films, television commercials and magazine advertisements is being relocated to Great Ape Trust of Iowa – a significant move that begins to close the curtain in the United States on the decades-long use of orangutans in the entertainment industry. Great Ape Trust, a scientific research facility in Des Moines, Iowa dedicated to the study of primate intelligence and behavior, will triple its orangutan population from three to nine.

The first of the new residents, 3-year-old Rocky and his 19-year-old mother Katy arrived safely at Great Ape Trust on Saturday, July 12, from the Los Angeles area, where they had been privately owned by Steve Martin's Working Wildlife, co-owned by Steve and Donna Martin. Their company specializes in providing trained animals for entertainment and advertising.

In discussions with Dr. Robert Shumaker, director of the orangutan research program at Great Ape Trust, the Martins decided to donate these orangutans to The Trust and discontinue their use of orangutans in entertainment.

"The owners are the sole supplier of entertainment orangutans on the West Coast and they are ending this practice," said Dr. Shumaker. "I'm extremely gratified the Martins and Great Ape Trust are in such strong agreement about the future of these orangutans, and we look forward to working with them throughout this transition period."

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Steve Martin said he believes the orangutans will have a good quality of life at Great Ape Trust. “You can tell they are going to have a wonderful home here,” he said. “We are extremely happy to see the facility and the upgrade in their socialization opportunities.”

Lori Perkins, chair of the Orangutan Species Survival Plan and director of animal programs at Zoo Atlanta, calls the agreement a significant event with wide-ranging implications.

“I’m thrilled for orangutans and by what Dr. Shumaker and Great Ape Trust have been able to accomplish. This can only happen when you forge relationships,” said Perkins. “One of Rob’s real strengths is being able to build bridges with different animal communities, where everyone has a different perspective, by looking at issues passionately and finding common bonds. The species wins and these orangutans win. You can’t beat that – it’s a home run.”

Rocky comes to Great Ape Trust as the most visible orangutan in the entertainment industry in the United States today, having appeared in numerous television commercials and magazine layouts. The agreement to transfer Rocky and the other entertainment orangutans to Great Ape Trust has drawn praise from ape experts and animal welfare groups across the country that have been battling the issue for decades.

“This industry is a relic from a bygone era of entertainment, and it sends a signal to filmmakers loud and clear: Our world is intelligent enough and compassionate enough to know that you don’t have to use these animals,” said Doug Cress, vice president of development for the Orangutan Conservancy in Portland, Ore.

In addition to scientific research, Great Ape Trust’s mission focuses on the well-being of captive apes, the conservation of wild apes and to providing unique educational experiences about apes. A survey conducted of visitors to Great Ape Trust and cited in *Science* magazine (March 14, 2008) showed that the appearance of apes in advertising and entertainment negatively influenced the general public’s perception of the conservation status of apes in the wild.

“Using nonhuman primates in entertainment venues like films, television and advertisements certainly doesn’t enhance public attitudes toward their conservation, and doesn’t get across the message about their precarious situation in the wild,” Perkins said. “This is a very serious situation involving a species on the brink of extinction. Weigh that against the idea of having these magnificent creatures performing for our amusement, and it’s a pretty sharp contrast between entertainment and what’s happening to their counterparts in the wild.”

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Rocky and Katy will join Azy, a 30-year-old male, Knobi, a 28-year-old female and Allie, a 13-year-old female – the current participants in the orangutan research program at Great Ape Trust. The two new residents will undergo a 30-day acclimation period that will be followed by introduction to the other orangutans.

“One of the most challenging aspects of behavioral and cognitive research with captive apes is small sample size – larger numbers of apes is always beneficial,” Shumaker said. “This diverse group of orangutans will dramatically increase the potential of our scientific research, specifically helping us to better understand individual variation and styles of learning. Given that all of our research is voluntary on the part of the apes, my colleagues and I look forward to designing studies that are interesting and intriguing for these important individuals. We expect significant new insights by collaborating with these orangutans.”

Four of the remaining orangutans will be transferred from California in the coming months and subsequent moves will be timed carefully. “We think doing this gradually is in the best interest of all the orangutans, including our current residents Azy, Knobi and Allie,” Shumaker added.

Great Ape Trust facilities include the three-story orangutan home and a spacious outdoor enclosure where the orangutans have 24-hour access throughout spring, summer and fall. In addition, a 3-acre wooded yard – the largest in North America – will be available to them.

“While we have the space to comfortably accommodate the orangutans for the next year, we are moving forward with a fundraising campaign to construct additional orangutan facilities on our 230-acre campus,” Shumaker said.

## ***GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND***

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to [www.GreatApeTrust.org](http://www.GreatApeTrust.org).

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## Insights Through Collaborations with Apes