

Chimp Charlie dies at 52 despite smoking habit

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Photograph by: Screen shot, YouTube

JOHANNESBURG - A chimpanzee famous for smoking cigarettes died at a South African zoo, after puffing until age 52, despite zookeepers' efforts to help him kick the habit, an official said Wednesday.

Charlie the chimp started smoking after visitors to the zoo in central Bloemfontein tossed him a lit cigarette, which he picked up and stuck in his mouth, aping the human onlookers.

The trick earned laughs, encouraging more people to feed his habit. For years zookeepers tried in vain to convince people to stop abetting him.

In the end, Charlie lived 10 years longer than the average chimp, so his addiction did not end his life prematurely, zoo spokesman Qondile Khedama told AFP.

An autopsy would determine whether smoking had caused his death, said Khedama.

"He was on serious medications and in and out of the vet," Khedama told AFP.

"Charlie was very old for a chimp, and even though he has been receiving special care, and a special diet including protein shakes, vitamin and mineral supplements, he succumbed to old age."

The zoo is looking for a new companion for his widow Judy, "although we realize it will be almost impossible to replace a character like Charlie," he added.

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