

March 16, 2022

Robert M. Gibbens, D.V.M.  
Director, Animal Welfare Operations  
USDA-APHIS-Animal Care

*Via e-mail*

**Re: Request to Terminate The Monkey Whisperer, LLC's Animal Welfare Act License**

Dear Dr. Gibbens:

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) terminate The Monkey Whisperer, LLC's—owned and operated by Jimmy Hammonds—Animal Welfare Act (AWA) license (number 58-B-0614) because Hammonds pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to wildlife trafficking.

The USDA may terminate a license for any reason that would require it to deny an initial license. 9 C.F.R. § 2.12. Those reasons include, if the licensee made any false statements or provided any false or fraudulent records to government agencies or “has been found to have violated any Federal, State, or local laws or regulations pertaining to the transportation, ownership, neglect, or welfare of animals.” *Id.* § 2.11(a)(7).

On March 2, 2022, Hammonds pleaded guilty to four federal charges related to the illegal sale and transport of primates. Ex. 1 (Plea Agreement); Ex. 2 (Court Acceptance of Plea); Ex. 3 (Indictment). Hammonds pleaded guilty to:

- Conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act by conspiring with others to knowingly sell and transport a capuchin monkey from his facility in Florida to rap artist Chris Brown in California, where it is illegal to possess this species as a pet;
- Violating the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by selling an endangered cotton-top tamarin to an individual in Wisconsin in March 2016;
- Violating the ESA by selling an endangered cotton-top tamarin to an individual in Alabama in April 2017; and
- Violating the ESA by selling two endangered cotton-top tamarins to an individual in South Carolina in October 2017.

The conspiracy to commit wildlife trafficking conviction is a felony, for which Hammonds faces up to five years in jail, three years of supervised released, and a \$250,000 fine. Ex. 1. The three convictions for ESA violations are misdemeanors, for which Hammonds faces up to three additional years in jail, three additional years of supervised release, and \$150,000 in additional fines. *Id.* Hammonds is scheduled to be sentenced on May 27, 2022. Ex. 2.

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS  
FOUNDATION

Washington  
1536 16th St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles  
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90026  
323-644-PETA

Norfolk  
501 Front St.  
Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-PETA

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- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

As part of the plea agreement, Hammonds admitted that he “attempted to conceal aspects of the unlawful scheme” to illegally sell and transport a capuchin monkey to Chris Brown. Ex. 1. He admits to submitting “false records to a law enforcement officer investigating the unlawful transaction” to make it appear that the capuchin was “sold to a different individual in Nevada, where it was legal to possess a capuchin monkey.” *Id.* Hammonds also admits that he attempted to “conceal his unlawful trade in endangered species by telling his purchasers to falsely claim that they had received the cotton-top tamarins at a flea market.” *Id.* Thus, not only did Hammonds illegally sell and transport primates, he tried to cover it up by falsifying records, lying to law enforcement officials, and coercing others to do the same.

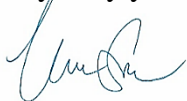
Hammonds’ guilty pleas for federal criminal charges relating to wildlife trafficking constitute grounds to immediately terminate his AWA license. The fact that Hammonds admitted to providing fraudulent documents to government officials in an effort to conceal his illegal conduct, is yet another basis to terminate his AWA license.

It is imperative for the USDA to have a zero tolerance for wildlife trafficking, which is what the AWA implementing regulations contemplate. *See* 9 C.F.R. §§ 2.1(a)(1)(vii), 2.11, and 2.12. Hammonds’ business is the breeding and selling of exotic animals, primarily for the pet trade. He is now a convicted felon after pleading guilty to charges related to wildlife trafficking. The law enforcement officials who investigated Hammonds detailed his calculated and intentional behavior, all designed to further his wildlife trafficking activities. Ex. 4 (Search Warrant Affidavit). While Hammonds was only convicted for four instances of illegal sales of wildlife, his conduct suggests that he was a proficient criminal who has likely engaged in this illegal activity long before he was caught. In fact, law enforcement officials investigating his wildlife trafficking believe that Hammonds was also involved in the sale and transport of spider monkeys to another rapper in California: Swae Lee. *Id.* Anyone engaging in black market sales of exotic animals should immediately and permanently lose their AWA license.

Please exercise your discretion to terminate The Monkey Whisperer’s license.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Very truly yours,



Michelle Sinnott, Esq.  
Associate Director, Captive Animal Law Enforcement