

Written Evidence on the UK Primate Pet Trade

Submitted January 2014
by

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Part 1 – Extent of the UK trade in primates as pets.

1. Monkey World – Ape Rescue Centre has been rescuing, rehabilitating, and re-homing monkeys and apes from the UK pet trade since 1989. No other organization in UK has as much knowledge or experience of the trade and its effects upon the animals, those tasked with administering the trade, or the hundreds/thousands of well-meaning but ignorant owners of these animals.
2. Since 1989 Monkey World has rescued 78 monkeys and apes, of 16 different species, from the British pet trade. Over the past 10 years the trade has increased exponentially, in our experience, with 26 of the 78 monkeys brought in from the pet trade in just the last two years (2012 – 2013).
3. In Britain there are currently three different ways a person can purchase a pet primate; from a pet shop, from a private breeder at home, or from a social networking site. Pet shops require an amendment to their licence to be able to sell primates but private owners do not. Most private owners advertise in local papers, free ad magazines, or on the Internet. Over the past 5+ years or more there has been an increase in sales of pet monkeys from Internet sites such as Facebook.
4. It is Monkey World's understanding from information given by previous owners, and through our own investigations, that there is one main commercial breeder of marmosets and tamarins (small south American primates) that supplies many pet shops to order and one main breeder of lemurs (various species from Madagascar) for the pet trade. It is our understanding that both organizations are/have been investigated by National Wildlife Crime Unit for illegal practices with endangered species.
5. Monkey World has built several new facilities to house more “refugees” from the UK pet trade but we are unable to keep up with the current increase in the trade in primates as pets and we now have a long waiting list of upset and concerned owners who are desperate to find specialist homes for animals that they now realise they are unable to care for adequately.

6. When Monkey World first started rescuing monkeys from the pet trade in 1989 there were far more “specialist” keepers or enthusiasts who had a greater understanding of the needs of the primates in their care. Over the past 10 years the demographic of monkey owners has changed to be any member of the public, including young families, bachelors, and grandmothers, who’s reason for getting a pet monkey was to show off and have a very different exotic pet or well meaning individuals who feel sorry for a monkey they see for sale in a pet shop or on-line. Most of the pet owners Monkey World gets primates from present day are ignorant as to the specialist care these animals require in terms of environment, diet, social companionship, or veterinary care.
7. Over the past 10 years it is our experience that the cost of primates sold as pets has increased dramatically. 10 years ago a male or female common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*) would have cost £350 and £500 respectively on average. Advertisements for the same animals now are asking £1,100 – £1,300 regardless of the sex of the individual. Uneducated people are buying them with a significant increase in the numbers of advertisements for these animals on social networking sites, Internet sale sites, and free ads magazines.
8. Along with an increase in social networking advertisements and an increase in the number of unknowing people purchasing pet primates, has also come an increase in the number of fraudulent advertisements. It is now easy to find numerous adverts (that often use similar or the same information and photographs) that solicit well-meaning individuals to get in touch, as there is a monkey that “desperately” needs a new home. Posing as potential buyers we find that these scam advertisers tell people “the monkeys are house trained, like wearing nappies, are child friendly, and make great family pets”. None of these details are true and then the scammers ask for a deposit of £500+ for veterinary checks and transport of the monkey – which of course does not exist.
9. With the increased trade a new business in exotic pet insurance has developed targeting people who purchase these specialist animals at vast expense.
10. The British public are being misled, lied to, and ripped off by fraudulent advertisers and unscrupulous breeders and dealers. Under existing standards animals are being abused and neglected and often well-meaning members of the public are having their money taken under false pretences.

Part 2 – Does the Code of Practice offer adequate protection to primates kept as pets?

11. The Primate Code of practice has no “teeth”, as it is merely a suggestion of good practice, and therefore offers no protection to primates kept as pets.
12. I have been an expert witness in the prosecution of 21 cases of cruelty or neglect of primates kept as pets in Britain. Several cases have been prosecutions taken by the police for smuggling and/or cruelty and the rest are cases brought by the RSPCA. In all instances Monkey World assisted with the seizure of the animals, assessed the monkeys’ physical and mental health, took guardianship of the monkeys for the rest of their lives, and provided expert witness statements for the prosecution. All cases have been successful bar one when a judge ruled that although an act of cruelty occurred when a tiny infant capuchin monkey was removed from its mother at only

a few weeks old to sell into the pet trade, he decided that as it was not illegal in this country that the baby could/would be removed at some point so therefore it was not unavoidable. An incorrect assessment in our opinion that neglects to acknowledge that monkeys have a long maternal dependency (1 year+) and that it is cruel to sell a solitary infant on to an unknown individual at a motorway petrol stop. Unfortunately RSPCA prosecutors did not adequately argue this point at the time.

13. The primate Code of Practice does suggest that primate keepers should be registered with a veterinarian that has specialist knowledge of the species, however there are very few veterinarians who have this specialist training. In UK today the veterinary medicine courses at universities only cover 1 week of “wildlife” medicine. In this one week there is an overview of parrots, reptiles, fish, and in some instances primates and other small mammals. It is our experience that most primate pet owners do not have their monkey registered with a veterinary practice and those that do are with un-qualified vets that do not have knowledge or experience in handling, assessing, or treating primates kept as pets. Indeed Monkey World gets several calls a year from veterinary practices asking us “How do you anaesthetise a marmoset?”, “What are the nutritional needs of a marmoset?”, or even “How should a marmoset move if it is healthy?”. Advice needs to be given to veterinary practices (through the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons or from Local Authorities) that if they do not have specific experience of treating primates, these individuals should be referred to others who do. This sounds obvious, but inexperienced/unqualified vets are also part of the problem in protecting primates kept as pets.
14. Local Authority persons in charge of assessing DWA licences are not qualified in the care of exotic animals and in particular primates, nor are most RSPCA inspectors. This makes applying the Code of Practice a non-sense as there is no understanding of basic animal husbandry or animal behaviour. We have found similar frustration working with many different police constabularies who do not understand what their rights to seizure are under what circumstances. In terms of local authorities, RSPCA inspectors, and police the primate Code of Practice does not offer adequate protection of primates kept as pets.
15. There are currently 5 laws governing the care of any one captive monkey kept in Britain today – the Zoo Licencing Act, the Dangerous Wild Animals Licence (DWA), the Pet Shop Licence, the Performing Animals Licence, and the Scientific Procedures Act. This categorically does not make sense. If one considers what “Terri” the capuchin monkey needs to be kept in a good and healthy way, this standard of care should be the same for “Terri” regardless of if she is living in a house, a zoo, a pet shop, or a circus. She is still the same monkey with the same needs. The Animal Welfare Act covers the care of all animals kept in any of the above circumstances but as such is very open in its interpretation as it covers so many taxon of animal in so many circumstances. In recent years the DWA legislation was reviewed and then relaxed leading to more species of primate being de-listed. Previously only marmosets (currently 23 different species recognised) were allowed to be kept as pets without any specific licencing required. Following the DWA review in 2001 all species of tamarin (currently 38 species recognised) and all species of squirrel monkey (currently 5 species recognised) were de-listed now allowing 66 different species of primate to be bought and sold “over the counter”, with no regulation or

licencing, like goldfish or budgies. This has made it very easy for unscrupulous breeders and dealers to take advantage of unknowing members of the British public. The Zoo Licence is the best and strongest legislation existing in Britain today that protects the health and welfare of primates in captivity.

16. Most of the primates from the British pet trade arrive at Monkey World with physical and mental problems. These conditions are often life threatening and include: severe malnutrition, bone disease, organ failure, broken and rotten teeth, hair loss, amputations, poor physical fitness and lack of muscle tone, self mutilation, hyper aggression (to others of their own kind and/or people), and agoraphobia.
17. Most owners of pet primates are not specialist keepers and have little if any understanding of the animal's specialist care requirements such as dietary needs, environmental requirements, and social/life style needs. In our experience private breeders, pet shops, and dealers do not give adequate information, let alone training, to prospective owners and often the information given is inaccurate or wrong. In order to secure a sale of a pet primate prospective owners are told that the monkeys don't live long, that they can live in a bird cage indoors, that it is fine to keep them on their own, and that they can eat pretty much anything including processed sugary foods such as marshmallows, all of which is inaccurate/untrue.
18. There is no legislation that overseas private breeders or even what defines a "private breeder" How many primates does a person have to sell from their home before they are subject to the same licencing standards as a pet shop? And if a pet shop does not keep a monkey in the shop but offers to sell one to a customer to order from the main breeders in another location then who is responsible for the animal's welfare throughout and following the sale? There are many loopholes in the current laws and regulations that make it impossible for local authorities, including Trading Standards, to keep up and provide adequate protection for the animals or the people being sold these animals.
19. The Code of Practice and existing animal welfare legislation does not offer adequate protection of primates kept as pets nor do the current laws protect the well meaning British public who are being misled and defrauded, in our opinion.

Part 3 – Should people be allowed to keep primates as pets/privately?

20. One could ask for a ban of this trade but it is possible for a private person to keep a monkey in good conditions given the appropriate knowledge, dedication, and finance. The current legislation is not protecting the monkeys in the pet trade or the well meaning British public who are falling victim to unscrupulous breeders and dealers. Our aim with this evidence is to improve and ensure the appropriate standard of care of primates kept privately. We are not seeking a ban on the trade outright.
21. Primates should not be able to be advertised for sale on the Internet or social media sites or purchased "over the counter" from a pet shop in our opinion.
22. Over the past 18 months Monkey World has collected 108,669 signatures on our petition calling for pet primates to have the same standard and duty of care as those that are kept in zoos or wildlife parks open to the public. We have also had the

- support of many MPs and members of the House of Lords as we have a realistic practical approach to a developing and growing problem.
23. We would suggest that primates should not be kept as “pets” but for individuals that are specialist keepers there are existing laws governing the care of these species that could be used as a bench mark for their care – namely the Zoo Licencing Act. A register of “Specialist Keepers” could be developed.
 24. Monkey World is suggesting a *Welfare 4 Wildlife* campaign that employs the highest standard and duty of care under existing legislation. For captive primates in Britain today this would be the Zoo Licencing Act. Government could advise local authorities, which already have a team of experienced inspectors that licence zoos and wildlife parks, to use the same standards for private owners. A monkey deserves the same standard of care in a private dwelling as they do in a zoo.
 25. We look forward to an opportunity to make a presentation to the EFRA Committee about our evidence in person.



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