

Captive Primate Welfare Issues



The Scioto County sheriff in Ohio removed a badly neglected pet spider monkey from an elderly woman's home. The monkey, who was near death, was rushed to Primate Rescue Center in Kentucky for treatment and permanent housing.



A solitary gibbon sits in a filthy cage.



Wear patterns are evident in the concrete from this baboon's frantic pacing—a step to the left and then to the right.



The white barrel in this corn crib cage serves as the only "indoor" space for a macaque monkey at an Indiana roadside zoo.

Primates are extremely intelligent and have complex social, physical, and psychological needs. All primate species lead busy, active, stimulating lives. Most are highly social and naturally live in pairs or family groups with whom they travel, groom, play, build nests, sleep, and raise their offspring. Many primates spend up to 70 percent of their waking hours in foraging-related activities. Primates have excellent climbing abilities and many are arboreal. All too often, captive primates are denied mental stimulation, sufficient exercise, proper diets, and interaction with others of their kind.

Minimum Requirements for Captive Primates

- All infant primates require maternal care that can last months or years
- Companionship adequate to satisfy their social needs
- An outdoor and indoor enclosure that provides enough vertical and horizontal space to allow climbing and brachiating
- Visual barriers and separate compartments that allow low-ranking individuals to avoid conflict
- Perches, swings, hammocks, and climbing structures
- Nesting material
- Environmental enrichment that routinely presents these clever animals with new challenges, such as puzzle feeders, objects to manipulate and destroy, and sturdy toys

Typical Sub-Standard Living Conditions for Captive Primates

- Maternal deprivation that begins within days of birth, causing the newborns to develop into mentally disturbed individuals with self-destructive and neurotic behaviors
- Small, barren cages
- No access to the outdoors for primates kept as pets or insufficient indoor space for primates in roadside zoos
- Social isolation that causes depression, loneliness, boredom, and neurosis
- Insufficient stimulation, such as a token toy that the primate quickly loses interest in

Problems Caused by Unhealthy Living Conditions

People sometimes obtain primates as surrogate children, but quickly discover that they are extremely active, messy, destructive, and have a tendency to bite. In a futile attempt to make the animals less dangerous, they are often mutilated by having their teeth removed—a painful procedure that may result in chronic health problems. Ultimately, they are relegated to a caged life of solitary confinement. Abnormal behaviors include repetitive movements, such as pacing, circling, rocking, spinning, clapping themselves, biting themselves, over-grooming, and plucking their hair resulting in bald patches.



Weak Animal Protection Laws Cause Immense Suffering for Captive Primates

Crosby, Texas	The Houston SPCA seized a sick and emaciated 23-year-old male pet chimpanzee named Henry who was living in a garage in a 15-square-foot cage littered with cigarette butts, soda cans, and other trash. He had been living in those conditions for 15 years and was suffering from malnutrition and ailments related to a lack of exposure to sunlight.
Seattle, Washington	A Seattle dentist kept a solitary capuchin monkey in his downtown office for more than 20 years. PJ lived in a barren Plexiglas box mounted on the wall of one of the exam rooms, and at night and on weekends she was put into a cage inside a storage closet.
Madison, Wisconsin	The Dane County Humane Society seized a 3-year-old baboon who was being kept in a basement laundry room. The baboon's canine teeth had been extracted.
New Orleans, Louisiana	A couple was convicted of cruelty to a patas monkey and three marmosets who were confiscated and found in poor overall health with a diaper rash, dehydration and piercings. The monkeys were dressed as pirates and brought to Bourbon Street just before Mardi Gras where the public was allowed to handle them and pay to have a photo taken with the monkeys.
Independence, Kentucky	Acting on a tip, Kenton County authorities found a 24-year-old baboon—kept in a cage located in a dark corner of the family's garage—suffering with serious health issues including diabetes, sores, and bad teeth. The owners said they bought the animal from an Ohio dealer when she was 5½ months old. The baboon became aggressive and spent most of her life in a cage located either in the basement or the garage. The baboon was placed in a sanctuary.
Lansing, Illinois	A 46-year-old woman was charged with keeping two capuchin monkeys and five dogs in filthy, unsanitary, and neglectful conditions. One malnourished monkey was living in a small wire dog cage and the other was in a large metal bird cage. The cages were covered in excrement and cigarette butts and none of the animals had food or water.
Shelbyville, Tennessee	Animal control officials took custody of four macaque monkeys who were being kept at a private home in dog crates and bird cages that were too small for the animals. The monkeys also did not have access to food or water and were discovered after a fifth macaque escaped from the home and was shot and killed when he attacked a neighbor woman and a sheriff's deputy.

