



Non-human primates should never be kept as pets. They are difficult to keep, potentially dangerous and have no legitimate conservation value.



Thousands of lemurs, monkeys and apes are kept as pets in North America. While many people find it amusing to watch these bright, often human-like creatures perform tricks or wear clothes, they are nearly always very disappointing, destructive pets.

Non-human primates are difficult to keep in home situations and can carry diseases fatal to humans. As well, many primates are physically dangerous because they are very aggressive, quick moving and strong. In many jurisdictions, their possession is illegal. They should never be kept as pets.

Pet primates can be dangerous

The majority of primates are purchased as infants. While cute as babies, after the age of two they tend to exhibit unpredictable behaviour. Many male monkeys become aggressive and both sexes, many of them possessing strong jaws and large teeth with well-developed incisors, bite to defend themselves and establish dominance. Bites can be very painful and result in severe puncture wounds and lacerations.

Scratching is also a concern as many primates have strong fingers and hard fingernails making scratches quite painful. Medium-sized primates like macaques may also severely pinch and contuse any tissue they can reach. There have been numerous reports of monkey bites and scratches to their keepers and bystanders, many of them quite serious.

Rather than risk injury, some keepers try to render their pets harmless by removing their incisors, fingernails, castrating males or by confining them for longer and longer periods in their cages.

Transmission of Disease

Non-human primates also carry a number of diseases transmissible to humans, including hepatitis, monkey pox, yellow fever, tuberculosis and rabies. Almost 90% of all macaque monkeys are infected with Herpes virus B, a virus that is harmless to monkeys but often fatal to humans. A person who is bitten, scratched, sneezed on or spit at while shedding occurs is at risk of contracting the disease, which can cause a potentially fatal brain infection. This virus has proved fatal in about 70% of known cases and most survivors have suffered permanent neurological damage.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns that non-human primates are unsuitable as pets due to the extremely high prevalence of Herpes Virus-B, as well as aggressive behavioural characteristics.



Primate Pets are Difficult to Keep

Primates are highly, active, very social animals that live in relatively stable, highly structured groups. Macaques, for example, live in groups of between 20 and 50 animals in the wild, while capuchin monkeys live in troops of 6 to 20. Other primates, such as gibbons, live in smaller, stable family units. A proper social environment is extremely important.

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Primates Do Not Make Good Pets

Primate Pets are Difficult to Keep

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Space and physical stimulation is very important to primates. Being active animals that move through their habitat both horizontally and vertically, they require expansive, well equipped enclosures, far beyond what can be provided in private residences.

Most primates are fruit eaters or insectivores. They can be very messy and must often be given more than they will actually eat. This can become quite frustrating and expensive. Also, primates cannot be housebroken the way that dogs can. They let their droppings fall where they may, just as they do in the wild.

Pet primates usually end up being far more trouble than expected, so many owners try to dispose of them elsewhere. Because good facilities that take in unwanted primates are few and far between, most end up in other pet situations, substandard roadside zoos or pseudo-sanctuaries.

The survival rate for pet monkeys is low. Many with potential natural life spans of twenty or more years survive for only one or two. The reasons for such high mortality include inappropriate housing, poor diets, loneliness (lack of contact with their own kind), disease and nasty temperaments that cause their owners to dispose of them.

Greater than one third of the world's more than 235 primate species are threatened with extinction. There is no conservation value in keeping lemurs, monkeys or apes as pets or in breeding them for sale. In fact, exploitation by the pet trade and other industries still threatens the continued existence of some wild primate populations.



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