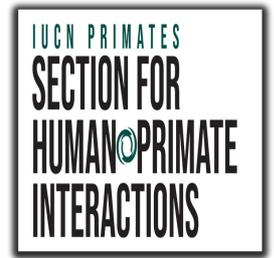




Why Primates Make Bad Pets

A Contribution from the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group
Section for Human-Primate Interactions



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Primates include apes, monkeys (such as capuchins, marmosets and macaques), lemurs, lorises, and bushbabies. Primates are wild animals and do not make good pets. Primate pets often behave in ways we interpret as cute or endearing, but these displays often signal they are in extreme distress. If they live to adulthood, they will increasingly assert their independence and normal wild nature, become difficult to manage, and behave in ways we perceive as anti-social. Other reasons why primates make bad pets:

Primates bite. Their ability to seriously harm you or your children (or someone else's children), friends and family, increases as they get older, bigger and stronger. Even small monkeys can cause serious injuries. Primate bites can be severe (see photo), get infected easily, and often require medical attention. You may need preventative treatment for severe diseases such as rabies, Herpes or Hepatitis B.



Primates are expensive. In addition to a high purchase price, many require special diets that can be costly and hard to find. Without these specialised diets they can become sick, and develop deformities due to dietary deficiencies that can require extensive medical care. Veterinary care for your pet primate may be difficult to acquire and expensive. Providing a secure area for them will require increased financial outlay as they mature. Many species are native to the tropics so you cannot keep them in unheated areas in colder climates - adding to your costs.

Remember that primates can live for a very long time. Monkeys such as macaques, capuchins and squirrel monkeys can live for over 20 years, and other primates such as lorises and lemurs for nearly as long. Gibbons can live into their fifties, and chimpanzees and orangutans can live for as long as 40-60 years. You might, therefore, be looking after that primate long after you stop looking after your children and certainly long after they have lost interest in their pet.

Primates have their own characteristic odours that many people find overpowering. They will often remove diapers because they can. That means they are likely to soil wherever they are. Also, some species will mark their surroundings with their faeces and urine, leaving a greasy and smelly stain. Capuchins and squirrel monkeys regularly rub their own urine all over their hands and bodies and, inevitably, your soft furnishings.



Primates are susceptible to many of the same infectious diseases as humans such as the flu and more serious diseases such as tuberculosis. Likewise, you, your family and friends can be exposed to monkey diseases that may be difficult to diagnose and treat.

Primates are wild animals. Being raised in captivity does not change this. As they mature, they naturally become increasingly independent and assertive, unlike domesticated pets which remain deferential to people, even as adults. Primate pets can be intolerant of other people or pets in the same household, potentially putting all parties in danger.

Primates are very curious. They can injure themselves and people, damage property by turning on the gas, destroy items or furniture with their teeth or hands, spill household chemicals, and/or eat things they shouldn't.



Primates are highly intelligent and require ongoing mental and social stimulation much like human children. The level of constant attention a primate pet requires is often exhausting to caretakers.

Primates are psychologically damaged when removed from their mothers as infants. Without adequate mental and social stimulation provided by others of their kind, primates often engage in abnormal behaviours such as self-harm, which is distressing for the animal and you.

Good intentions are not enough. You may intend to give your pet primate everything that they need, to shower them with love, and to treat them as “part of the family”. But what they really need is to live with their own families, on their own terms.

By taking on a primate you are making a lifelong commitment to an animal that will be entirely dependent on you. Usually, people do not intend to be cruel when they acquire a primate pet but the reality is that most become overwhelmed by the level of care required for a highly intelligent animal that requires constant attention. Primate pet owners often become trapped in this situation, being inadvertently cruel to their beloved pet and heartbroken as a pet owner.

Primates in captivity require intensive professional care in specialised facilities. Accredited zoos and professional rescue centres are fully staffed with trained experts to manage the needs of the primates in their care. Most rescue centres and sanctuaries are, however, overwhelmed with ex-pet primates, so if you decide to surrender your pet you will have few options to provide them with appropriate lifetime care elsewhere, and they may have to be euthanised humanely.

You are not supporting conservation or welfare by acquiring a primate as a pet. Depending on where you live, your pet primate is highly likely taken from the wild. This means that their mother was probably killed, and her baby stolen. Alternatively, your pet primate may have been bred in a captive facility, and taken from their mother just after birth, thereby inhumanely depriving both for commercial gain. All primates have a fundamental need to remain with their mothers for an extended period and with their social group for the rest of their life.

**Whether primates are born in captivity or the wild,
they belong with their own families,
NOT WITH US.**

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