



# Watching Captive Primates in Zoos and Sanctuaries

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Zoos and wildlife parks offer visitors the chance to see animals that they might not otherwise be able to see in their natural environment. More than 700 million people visit one of the world's 1300 zoos and aquariums each year. For many urban residents, a visit to a zoo or aquarium provides a rare opportunity to connect with nature. Zoological collections and aquariums are therefore in a unique position to educate people about the world's biodiversity and its conservation. The European Association of Zoos & Aquaria (EAZA) alone contributed an enormous €22.6 million to the conservation of over 600 species globally in 2019, and the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums spends an average of US \$160 million on field conservation projects per annum, covering more than 900 species ([AZA, 2022](#)).

In addition to accredited zoos, institutions such as wildlife sanctuaries or rescue centres may provide an opportunity for visitors to view exotic animals face-to-face. Sanctuaries differ from zoos in their goals; while reputable zoos focus on species conservation, reserve breeding, research, and education, sanctuaries focus on providing a safe home for rescued wildlife. The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) provides guidelines for sanctuaries, and visitors can use GFAS accreditation as assurance that the sanctuary maintains high welfare standards. Regardless of the type of institution or their industry regulation standards, all are responsible for maintaining good welfare of the animals they keep, and this should involve a level of visitor education about appropriate behaviour during their visit.

The visitor can play an active role in *respecting the primates' personal space and protecting the primates' physical and mental wellbeing* by following the guidelines below when visiting a zoo or sanctuary. Animals need to feel secure in their homes, to have freedom of movement, and to have choices in how they use their space. With this in mind, we have developed the following guidelines to ensure the welfare of captive primates and enhance the visitor experience.

## Recommendations

Primates require specialist diets and are vulnerable to many of the same illnesses that humans are. They also deserve to live free of harassment, loud noises, or other unnecessary stress. Visitors can help in these ways:

- Observe primates at a safe distance; do not climb or lean over the barrier to touch the primates or place hands/ feet or any other part of the body through the mesh.
- Allow the primates to rest/sleep.
- Avoid interacting with, feeding, or having your photo taken with captive primates.
- Be mindful of primates' sensory sensitivity by switching your flash off, not using a torch, and never bang on glass, play music, shout or scream, run, or stamp feet.
- Avoid mimicking the primate's facial expression and behaviours and do not pull faces, torment, or tease.
- Refrain from smoking or vaping near primates, to avoid exposing them to secondary inhalation.
- Do not visit captive primates when drunk or under the influence of legal or illegal substances.
- Avoid giving foreign objects (e.g., cigarettes, toys, phone, pencils, hair bands, paper) to the primate. These may be eaten and may spread germs between people and animals.
- Hold onto hats, sunglasses, and other easily removable items when near barriers, particularly water moats.

**In “walk-through” exhibits,** visitors should follow all guidelines listed above, plus the following points:

- Avoid eye contact, and move away from any primate moving towards you on the ground or overhead.
- Keep your personal belongings secured close to your body.
- Move buggies, wheelchairs, or mobility aids away from approaching primates.
- Ensure all food is stored securely.
- Do not touch or stroke the primates.
- Observe primates from a safe distance – ideally 7m (23 feet) from the animal.
- Give the primates priority on the path. Stop and allow them to pass you.

- Do not chase primates.
- Observe pathway barriers.
- Rest at designated seating only.
- Do not allow them to sit or climb on you for a photo.

## Further Reading

Doyle, C. 2017. Captive wildlife sanctuaries: definition, ethical considerations and public perception. *Anim. Studies J.* 6: 55–85.

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