



# Primate Society of Great Britain

President: Prof Simon K. Bearder

## POSITION STATEMENT ON THE KEEPING OF NON-HUMAN PRIMATES AS PETS

Effective: 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014

### Summary

- This Position Statement is prepared by the President and Captive Care Working Party of the Primate Society of Great Britain (PSGB). It has been endorsed by the Council of the Society.
- PSGB is a learned society affiliated to the European Federation for Primatology (EFP) and the International Primatological Society (IPS).
- PSGB shares a common policy (detailed herein) with IPS opposing the keeping of non-human primates as pets.
- Conservation, ecological and animal welfare objectives are significantly compromised by perpetuating wild capture of primates for the pet trade.
- Primates are cognitively and emotionally complex with specific social and environmental needs which are almost impossible for pet owners to meet to adequately secure the animal's welfare.
- Primate pets, their owners and other members of the public present significant risk to each other in terms of disease transmission and physical injury unless the primates are adequately housed and professionally managed.
- Given the expertise needed to thoroughly assess the adequate provision of housing, enrichment and husbandry for primates it is unlikely that the existing regulatory system is sufficiently robust to secure the welfare of primates kept as pets.
- Considering the weight of existing evidence PSGB "opposes the holding of nonhuman primates in captivity by individuals for any non-scientific, non-certified educational or non-registered/accredited sanctuary purposes, including the possession of nonhuman primates as pets or companion animals as well as engaging in breeding and trading for these purposes."

## 1. The Primate Society of Great Britain and its Captive Care Working Party

1.1. The Primate Society of Great Britain (PSGB) is a UK learned society (Registered Charity No. 290185, <http://www.psgb.org/>) affiliated to the International Primatological Society and the European Federation for Primatology. PSGB was founded in 1967 to promote research into all aspects of primate biology, conservation and management with the publication of the useful results of such research. The Society is very strong scientifically and holds regular scientific meetings. *Primate Eye* is the PSGB journal, and the Society has also recently adopted *Folia Primatologica* as another official PSGB publication. It also awards several medals to mark individual contributions to primatology. PSGB has three permanent working parties: the Captive Care Working Party, the Conservation Working Party, and the Research Working Party.

1.2. The Captive Care Working Party (CCWP) considers all issues that relate to the use, maintenance and breeding of primates in captivity. It provides expert advice to interested parties within and outside the Society and co-ordinates action on matters relating to the welfare of primates in all captive settings. CCWP also awards grants to support research that benefits primate welfare in captivity, and to assist education projects about captive primate welfare. Membership of the CCWP includes those with specialist knowledge of, or a professional interest in, the care of primates in captivity. Currently, membership comprises both researchers and animal welfare representatives who have experience with a range of primate species (Strepsirhines, New World monkeys, Old World monkeys, and apes) in a variety of captive settings. One of the challenges facing the CCWP is to form stronger links between all institutions housing primates, particularly research facilities, zoos and rescue centres.

## 2. PSGB's Position on the Keeping of Primates as Pets

2.1. As affiliates of the International Primatological Society ([www.internationalprimatologicalsociety.org](http://www.internationalprimatologicalsociety.org)) PSGB endorses and supports a common policy on the Private Ownership of Nonhuman Primates which opposes the keeping of nonhuman primates in captivity by individuals for any non-scientific, non-certified educational or non-registered/accredited sanctuary purposes, including the possession of nonhuman primates as pets or companion animals as well as engaging in importation, breeding and trading for these purposes.

2.2. IPS Policy on Private Ownership of Nonhuman Primates (<http://www.internationalprimatologicalsociety.org/PrivateOwnershipOfNonHumanPrimates.cfm>):

2.2.1. "WHEREAS 50% of primates are now classified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered in the wild; and"

2.2.2. "WHEREAS primates are recognized as being highly intelligent animals with complex emotional, social and physical needs and capabilities; and"

2.2.3. "WHEREAS young primates in private ownership are commonly removed from their mothers at an early age, preventing the opportunity for appropriate social and physical development, and may then become extremely powerful, unpredictable and unmanageable in private settings, often resulting in removal to substandard facilities;"

2.2.4. "WHEREAS nonhuman primates can pose a hazard to human health and safety in the form of physical attacks on owners or innocent bystanders that can result in serious injury or even death when not adequately maintained and securely contained; and"

- 2.2.5. “WHEREAS evidence suggests that many nonhuman primate species are susceptible to many of the pathogenic infections that afflict humans and the transmission of infection can occur in both directions, especially in privately owned primates which are often in direct proximity with the owners - including children and the elderly; and”
- 2.2.6. “WHEREAS, individuals who privately acquire primates for non-certified educational, non-scientific or non-registered/accredited sanctuary purposes are often unable to provide or sustain adequate care and facilities for these long-lived mammals; and”
- 2.2.7. “WHEREAS, the holding of nonhuman primates by individuals and organizations in non-scientific, non-educational or non-registered/accredited sanctuary settings is common in some countries but is not sufficiently regulated to assure adequate care and well-being of nonhuman primates or to assure adequate protection of humans from health and physical risks;”
- 2.2.8. “The International Primatological Society therefore opposes the holding of nonhuman primates in captivity by individuals for any non-scientific, non-certified educational or non-registered/accredited sanctuary purposes, including the possession of nonhuman primates as pets or companion animals as well as engaging in breeding and trading for these purposes.”

### **3. Evidence against the Keeping of Primates as Pets**

This section is structured on the above paragraphs (2.2.1 to 2.2.8)

#### *3.1 Conservation status of primates in the wild*

The survival of a great many primate species is threatened. Indeed the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species identifies that 54% of around 400 primate species and subspecies for which information on conservation status is available are threatened with extinction. While many primates currently held as pets will have been bred in captivity, continuing demand is likely to fuel the often illegal capture and trade of individuals from the wild. Only a fraction of live primates extracted from the wild survive for long enough to become pets. The absence of definitive and rigorously applied tests to demonstrate the origin of individual animals creates loopholes for the continued extraction of animals from increasingly threatened wild populations resulting in further threats to the survival of their species in the wild. In the wild primates play an important role in maintaining the health and viability of forest and woodland ecosystems, including pollination and seed dispersal, thereby ensuring forest sustainability and diversity. Therefore, all trade in wild primates has consequences for both ecological and social group stability and is regulated by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

#### *3.2 Primates are highly intelligent animals*

The very features that make primates attractive to some people as pets result in them not always coping well with captive conditions. Compared to most other animals primates have very large brains relative to their body size, and they are also cognitively advanced “with complex emotional, social and physical needs and capabilities”. Typically, unless these needs and capabilities are met in a species-appropriate way significant stress and even

distress may result and consequently the animal(s) may manifest a range of serious symptoms including aggressive behaviour (directed to themselves or their keepers), stereotypic behaviour, immune suppression, and social withdrawal (Novak et al, 1994; Mallapur & Choudhury, 2003; Hosey & Skyner, 2007). Even with the application of significant resources and expertise it is difficult to provide adequately for captive primates in this regard. A pet keeper is unlikely to be able to approach acceptable standards let alone achieve Best Practice standards in this area. A key aspect for provision for primates is their social environment: humans are not appropriate social partners for nonhuman primates. Primates should be kept in species-typical social groupings in structurally complex environments wherever possible to help provide all opportunities to display a natural range and frequency of desirable species-typical behaviour (Wolfensohn & Honess, 2005; Jennings et al., 2009). In most cases these conditions will be too challenging for a pet keeper to meet (and perhaps for regulating bodies to assess) and generally require specific primatological expertise to implement and evaluate.

### *3.3 Developmental challenges*

Captive breeding and wild capture practices often involve the forced removal of an infant from its maternal setting at an earlier age than would occur during natural weaning. It is infants or young juveniles that are typically supplied as pets as they exhibit desirable characteristics of dependency and baby-features. Primates are characterised by having long periods of development during which the norms of behaviour, appropriate social interaction, food safety and safe environmental exploration are moderated by adult group-mates, particularly their mother (Prescott et al, 2012). Removing an infant from its mother early prevents its appropriate behavioural development and may result in imprinting on human keepers and subsequent development of sexual and aggressive behaviour towards their keeper or other humans. It may be equally damaging for an infant to be parented by a conspecific which has experienced an abnormal development (Suomi, 2006).

### *3.4 Primates as physical threats*

Nonhuman primates can pose a hazard to human health and safety in the form of physical attacks that can result in serious injury or even death when the primate is not adequately maintained and securely contained. Many primate species may grow to be quite large and powerful and without appropriate containment may pose a significant threat to owners or innocent bystanders. Even many of the smaller species often favoured as pets are capable of inflicting serious bite wounds. Poor husbandry, inadequate social and environmental provision, and inappropriate development (see paragraph 3.3) may increase the likelihood of the display of dangerously aggressive behaviour (Honess & Marin, 2006).

### *3.5 Primates and disease*

Due to their genetic proximity to humans, primates are highly susceptible to a number of human diseases and in some cases (e.g. tuberculosis, herpes simplex virus) are more susceptible than humans. In addition there are diseases which have a lesser impact on primates that are extremely serious, even fatal (e.g. simian herpes B virus) when contracted by humans (Wolfensohn & Honess, 2005). In many cases disease may pass in

both directions. Exposure to disease among children or older is likely to have greater consequences.

### *3.6 Provision of adequate care*

As noted earlier (paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3) primates have very specific care requirements. Responsible, accredited and well-resourced institutions that maintain captive primates for educational, research or sanctuary purposes may be able to provide adequate care, where they meet appropriate sources of guidance on best practice in primate care (e.g. large peer reviewed scientific literature, IPS International Guidelines for the Acquisition, Care and Breeding of Nonhuman Primates [IPS, 2007], AZA/EAZA husbandry manuals, and <http://marmosetcare.com/>). Proper care of primates is expensive and requires careful monitoring, particularly given that they are long-lived (up to 40 years in some species) and require correspondingly enduring commitment. Without sufficient financial resources or expertise (as established objectively) a pet owner will be unable to meet the most basic environmental, social or cognitive needs of the animal. Indeed it is also unlikely that appropriate specialist veterinary expertise will be available for the pet keeper to provide for the security of the animal's health (Honest & Wolfensohn, 2010).

### *3.7 Regulation of primate keeping*

PSGB recognises the importance of existing UK laws, regulations and Codes of Practice that apply to the keeping of animals, such as primates, in captivity. Educational and scientific use of primates is subject to regulatory oversight that has considerable public and expert, including PSGB, support. The difficulties of providing adequately for any primate in captivity and their very specific requirements mean that, in our expert opinion, it is virtually impossible for the private individual to meet the appropriate needs of a pet primate and it is equally difficult to evaluate the adequacy of husbandry and care provision without sufficient expertise. It is unlikely that existing licencing and inspecting authorities possess such expertise. Further considerable difficulties exist around the clear demonstration of sourcing the animal from an appropriate and licenced supplier. In many cases chains of ownership are unclear and subject to fraud with wild-caught animals being passed-off as captive bred.

### *3.8 Captive breeding of primates*

Primates may be justifiably bred in captivity for a variety of purposes (e.g. conservation, education and research) by a variety of regulated organisations and institutions. PSGB does not believe that the captive breeding of primates for pet ownership is justified and we oppose it.

## **4. Conclusion**

The IPS policy to which PSGB subscribes makes a clear case against the keeping of primates as pets. This written submission has sought to add to the summary points in the IPS policy to provide greater weight to the case against keeping primates as pets. A basic inability to provide adequately for their social, cognitive, environmental, veterinary, and in some cases dietary needs alone should rule them out as legal pets. A paucity of adequate expertise for

the existing assessment, licencing, inspection and enforcement of regulations relating to keeping primates as pets simply adds weight to the argument. All our evidence applies to primates that may be kept as trained aids to people with disabilities. In short, the personal benefits to handlers and breeders resulting from the trade in primates as pets are small compared to the costs in terms of animal welfare, human safety and the conservation of intact wildlife habitats. Primates do not make good or appropriate pets; a case powerfully made in a short video about marmosets (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r89ZWByApLE>).

### **PSGB Captive Care Working Party Members**

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