

The case for a ban on monkeys and other primates being kept as pets

RSPCA CYMRU BELIEVES PRIMATE OWNERSHIP IN A DOMESTIC SETTING IS CRUEL AND DANGEROUS

Current position

Keeping a primate in a domestic setting is entirely legal within Wales. We believe there is a hidden problem which is causing the unnecessary suffering of primates that are being kept as pets. With monkeys and other primates being readily sold as pets online, RSPCA Cymru is concerned that there is an unknown population of primates - hidden victims - which are suffering behind closed doors.

Currently in Wales, there is a lack of detailed legislation regarding the keeping of primates and no statutory Code of Practice exists under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, in the same way as they do for dogs, cats, horses and rabbits.

The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (DWAA) covering the UK includes a Schedule that lists the specific species of primates (and other species) that are required to have licences. However, the Act is largely focused on keeping people safe and is very inconsistently applied. Rates of non-compliance are also thought to be very high¹. As a result, it does not provide for the welfare of the animals it covers. Although most primates are covered by the Act, the most commonly kept primates that are kept as pets, as found by RSPCA Cymru research, are not covered by this UK legislation as they do not require a licence.

In 2010, Defra published a "Code of Practice for the welfare of privately kept non-human primates"² to cover primates in England. However, RSPCA Cymru believes that the code has totally failed to achieve the original intention of restricting primate ownership - the only way of achieving this is through a ban.

Due to the lack of legislation and registration, there is currently no systematic way to know how many or where primates are being kept in domestic settings in Wales as the main primates kept as pets do not require a licence. Based on research by RSPCA Cymru, in conjunction with Wild Futures, looking at online sales and licences for primates under the DWAA, we estimate that there are around 120 primates being kept as pets in Wales, out of an estimated 5,000 across England and Wales³.

RSPCA Cymru has undertaken two surveys looking at the online sales of primates. Over the course of eight weeks in 2015 and 2016, RSPCA Cymru found for sale online 19 marmoset monkeys in the Ammanford, Cardiff, Pontypridd and Rhondda Cynon Taff areas.⁴ The primates were mostly sold as individual monkeys, with some being as young as three months old, for between £600-£800 per primate. RSPCA Cymru is concerned, as detailed below, around the ownership of young and individual primates as their needs cannot be met leading to the suffering of the primate.

During RSPCA Cymru's research it was discovered that some websites, such as Gumtree, already do not permit the selling of primates on their websites "because they need specialist care and could risk going to someone who isn't

¹ See Case Study of Boo Boo the capuchin monkey, below, or in *Wild Animal Welfare Indicators*, RSPCA Cymru. 2015. p12 <http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Wild-animal-welfare-indicators-bilingual.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-privately-kept-non-human-primates>

³ *Wild Animal Welfare Indicators*, RSPCA Cymru. 2015. p13

<http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Wild-animal-welfare-indicators-bilingual.pdf>

⁴ Online survey data collected by Positif Politics between 3 and 28 August 2015 and by RSPCA Cymru between 15 August and 9 September 2016.

experienced enough to handle them”.⁵ Companies that sign up to the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) voluntary minimum standards do not permit the advertising of primates as pets online, a clear indication of the seriousness that these companies take animal welfare.⁶

Need for a ban of primates as pets

RSPCA Cymru believes that the keeping of these intelligent, sociable and complex animals in a household environment is incompatible with the primates wild nature and that their needs cannot be adequately met in a domestic setting, leading to the primate suffering and their welfare compromised.

RSPCA Cymru concerns include:

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Primates are highly social animals and a lack of socialisation can cause the primates to become seriously depressed, to self-mutilate, pluck their hair until bald and show abnormal behaviours such as rocking, self-hugging, and even a premature death.

EARLY WEANING

Like humans, young primates are dependent on their mother and other family/group members for socialisation and in the wild common marmosets would remain with their parents for at least the first year. When young primates are removed early from their mother, it has severe, long-lasting harmful effects including aggression and abnormal behaviours. RSPCA Cymru research has shown that primates as young as three months are being sold online without their mother.

HOUSING

Following RSPCA investigations, in England and Wales, primates have been found in a variety of “homes” including parrot cages, glass-fronted cupboards, aviaries and sheds located under stairs, in living rooms and garages, offering little or no access to the outdoors. Poor housing can lead to more abnormal behaviours and a lack of sunlight can cause, crucially, Metabolic Bone Disease, more commonly known as rickets and osteomalacia, which can lead to fractured and/or misshapen bones.

POOR DIET

A lack of understanding, by owners, of the correct diet for a primate means that they are regularly fed “human” food such as junk/fast food, sweets and chips. This diet does not adequately meet the needs of the primate and does lead to health problems, such as obesity, diabetes and malnutrition.

Case studies

LORRAINE BARRETT: “ONE OF THE MOST TRAUMATIC SITUATIONS OF MY LIFE”

Former Assembly Member, Lorraine Barrett, bought a monkey from a pet shop in Penarth in the early 1980s after seeing him tied up with a collar and feeling sorry for him. Borrowing £200 from her brother, Lorraine bought the monkey called Spike and she received no advice from the pet shop, and the only advice she had was from reading a book from the library.

Lorraine recalls an incident where the monkey attacked her, commenting, “He was wild. We had a wild animal in our house. One time he was on the top of the cupboard and jumped on my son’s head. I went to grab him and he bit me all around my arm. We were all just screaming. It was crazy. I know it can’t have been the monkey’s fault - it must have been such an incredibly stressful experience for him.

“Looking back, it was so scary how little information was available about how completely inappropriate it is to keep a monkey in a domestic environment. The only advice people need is that primates should never be kept as pets.”

You can watch Lorraine’s story in a special video produced for RSPCA Cymru here: <https://youtu.be/q0wFzk66WnQ> or at www.youtube.com/RSPCAcymru

⁵http://help.gumtree.com/articles/General_Information/Posting-Rules-Pets-Category?retURL=%2Fapex%2FknowledgeFAQs%3Fc%3D Pets%26k%3Dmonkeys&popup=false&at=Rules%20in%20Pets&c=Pets&k=

⁶ <http://paag.org.uk/about-paag/faq/>

Boo Boo THE CAPUCHIN MONKEY

Boo Boo was brought from Wales to be traded in a car park for £2,000 plus two marmosets. Both the seller and new owner thought her to be a male monkey, which is why the cost of the exchange was relatively low, as female monkeys are worth much more within the primate trade as they are used for breeding.

Her new owner kept her for six years, alone, at the end of the garden, in a cage 10' x 7' x 10' with a hatch to a heated 8' x 3' x 7' shed. A TV was left on between 8am and 6.30pm and the owner visited when he had time.

During her life there, Boo Boo never saw a vet and was never licensed under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act even though not being licensed is illegal. After she started to show signs of aggression – a common development in primates as they mature – had bitten someone and had escaped several times, her owner contacted Wild Futures to provide her with a “better life”.

A fecal test showed strongoloides parasite just before Boo Boo arrived at the specialist sanctuary. She was overweight, attributed to the fact that she was denied the opportunity to exercise adequately in her small cage and also fed a diet that included a lot of fruit, as well as milk, cheese and human sugary sweets like marshmallows and lollipops – recommended by the person who sold her.

She displayed neurotic pacing and head-twisting behaviours, which could be the result of severe boredom and stress or an inappropriate environment, and she seriously lacked social skills. Her integration with other monkeys was difficult and it took many months due to the fact that she had been denied the opportunity to interact with her own kind from such a young age.

Happily, Boo Boo now lives in a social group and has many friends – her social skills continue to improve.

Public opinion

A YouGov poll for RSPCA Cymru in 2015 found that 72 percent of people in Wales support a ban on the keeping of all primates as pets.⁷ A ban on keeping primates as pets is also supported by vets, primatologists and other organisations including the British Veterinary Association, Wild Futures, Primate Society of Great Britain and Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.

Elsewhere, there are currently 15 European countries that have banned keeping primates as pets, including France (certain species), Italy, Romania and Sweden.

RSPCA Cymru recommendations

RSPCA Cymru believes that the following recommendations should be taken to protect primates:

- A full ban on the keeping of all primates as pets;
- A grandfather clause allowing for a transitional period for primates currently kept as pets to be registered within three months of the ban coming into force;
- A scheme, with a Code of Practice, to be introduced to include an inspection system of those primates registered to monitor their welfare for the remainder of their lives;
- The breeding of primates currently kept as pets to be prohibited;
- Code of Practice for the legitimate keeping of primates e.g. in licensed sanctuaries etc and primates kept as pets in the transitional period.

⁷ YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,036 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th–22nd August 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).