



**Testimony regarding H.R. 3135, the Captive Primate Safety Act  
to the House Committee on Natural Resources,  
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife  
July 29, 2021**

The Humane Society Legislative Fund and the Humane Society of the United States thank Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and the members of the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife for holding the hearing today on a slate of bills that includes H.R. 3135, the Captive Primate Safety Act. We appreciate the opportunity to express our views.

We strongly support H.R. 3135, the Captive Primate Safety Act. This urgently needed legislation prohibits the harmful practice of keeping primates such as chimpanzees and monkeys as pets, and restricts physical contact between these very dangerous animals and the public. Although approximately 25 states currently prohibit keeping some or all primate species as pets, their ready availability from exotic animal breeders and dealers across the country, at auctions, and on the Internet demonstrates the need for a federal solution. To that end, the bill amends the Lacey Act to prohibit interstate commerce in monkeys, chimpanzees, and other primates as pets. The bill is narrowly targeted to the pet trade and does not affect zoos, universities, or wildlife sanctuaries.

Primates are not pets; they are wild animals. Keeping them as pets can be a recipe for disaster. Just last month, a chimpanzee kept as a pet in Oregon attacked a woman who subsequently barricaded herself in a bedroom. The victim's mother instructed sheriff deputies to shoot and kill the chimpanzee so that emergency responders could reach her daughter to provide medical assistance. This is just the latest tragic example of the urgent need for H.R. 3135. In Arizona, a woman's marmoset monkey attacked her newborn grandchild, scratching and biting the baby's face and splitting open one nostril. In New York, a neighbor's pet capuchin monkey bit off a 22-month-old girl's finger when the child stuck her fingers through a backyard fence. In Tennessee, an escaped macaque monkey attacked and severely injured a woman washing a car in her driveway; the woman's injuries required surgery and doctors said she was lucky she was not killed. In Virginia, a man described being attacked by his capuchin monkey as worse than war, which he claimed was "a breeze compared to my little fight with [the monkey, who] cut the vein, tore ligaments out of my wrists. I'm pumping blood all over."

Since 1990, more than 540 documented safety incidents involving captive primates have occurred in the United States. More than half were attributed to primates kept as pets, and some of these incidents caused permanent disability and disfigurement. Many more incidents likely go unreported. And it is not just their owners that the animals attack. People have been injured by escaped pet primates while shopping, eating at restaurants, walking dogs, jogging, riding bikes, playing outdoors, and visiting parks and festivals. Others have been attacked while on the job, including police officers, mail carriers, bank tellers, Target and Home Depot employees, a hospital security guard, and a utility worker.

Primates maintain their wild instincts even when born in captivity and raised by humans. Even the smallest primate species are incredibly strong and can inflict serious injuries with their teeth or nails, including puncture wounds, severe lacerations, and infections. Purchased as cute and manageable infants, all primates inevitably become aggressive, unpredictable, and territorial when they reach sexual maturity, often attacking their owners and other people, escaping cages and homes, and causing damage to household items and property. Pet owners, in a futile attempt to make the animals less dangerous, often mutilate primates by having their teeth removed—a painful procedure that may result in chronic health problems and does not prevent the animals from inflicting harm. Over time, weary of their pet monkeys' attacks on people and destruction to the home, owners often relegate the animals to lives of isolation, loneliness, frustration, and neglect. As an example, authorities in Kentucky found a 24-year-old baboon kept in a cage in a dark corner of a family's garage, suffering with serious health issues including diabetes, sores, and bad teeth. The owners had purchased the animal when she was 5½ months old.

Primates can also spread deadly viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections that pose serious health risks to humans, such as tuberculosis, shigellosis, campylobacter, klebsiella, herpes B virus, simian immunodeficiency virus, and poxviruses. Up to 90 percent of adult macaque monkeys—popular in the pet trade—are infected with the herpes B virus. Infected monkeys are often asymptomatic, yet human exposure through monkey bites or bodily fluids can result in fatal meningoencephalitis. Infants, young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable. In Missouri, a 7-year-old boy who was attacked by a neighbor's escaped pet rhesus macaque was subjected to a two-month ordeal of doctors, needles, tests, and the fear of contracting the deadly herpes virus.

Illness can spread in the other direction too. Last April, pursuant to the discovery that nonhuman primates are susceptible to COVID-19, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued an advisory recommending that zoos and other captive wildlife facilities prevent the public from coming within six feet of these animals, and that such facilities suspend hands-on encounters between the public and primates.

And of course, the primates themselves suffer immensely when kept as pets or used for public contact activities. To be sold for these purposes, infant monkeys are forcibly removed from the nurturing care of their protective mothers within just hours or days of birth—a practice that is cruel and traumatic for both the mothers and the babies. The Humane Society of the United States videotaped one such separation during its undercover investigation of Natural Bridge Zoo, a roadside zoo in Virginia that breeds primates to sell in the pet trade: a baby capuchin desperately clung to the back of her protective mother, who darted around the cage trying to dodge a keeper chasing her with a net. Such early separation may deprive infants of nutrition and immunity against disease, as well as interfere with their psychological development. Human-reared primates almost always develop dysfunctional and neurotic behaviors such as rocking, spinning, body clapping, self-biting, over-grooming, and hair plucking that results in bald patches.



All primates are extremely intelligent and have complex social, physical, and psychological needs. In the wild, they lead busy, active, and stimulating lives. Most species naturally live in pairs or family groups with whom they travel, groom, play, build nests, sleep, and raise offspring. They have excellent climbing abilities, and many are arboreal. Even the most well-meaning pet owner simply cannot provide primates with the life elements they require—mental stimulation, sufficient exercise, proper diet, interaction with others of their kind, and the ability to express natural behaviors.

We applaud the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee for prioritizing this commonsense legislation to reduce the number of primates in the pet trade and to restrict physical contact between primates and the public. H.R. 3135 will spare primates from lives of suffering and neglect as well as safeguard public health and safety. We hope the Natural Resources Committee will hold a vote on the bill soon.