

**REPORT ON
MONKEY TOWN PRIMATE CENTRE
SOMERSET WEST**



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ON BEHALF OF ANIMAL RIGHTS AFRICA**



Animal Rights Africa

The complaints, discussions and subsequent visit indicate that there are very serious welfare, legal, ethical and conservation concerns at Monkey Town, with inadequate to absent management, maintenance, husbandry and veterinary care of the animals to the extent that there is blatant neglect, negligence and in some cases cruelty.

Sadly this has not been a short term or temporary situation to appear to have been ongoing and with further deterioration and no apparent effort or willingness on behalf of the owner to rectify the situation or address the problems.

Without the commitment of the volunteers, the situation would be considerably worse and they have, within their limited capacity and with limited resources, tried to improve life for the animals.

Something needs to be done urgently about the conditions at Monkey Town.

At the request of ARA, after reviewing the complaints and reports received and meeting with two of the volunteers Dr Bruce Peck and I visited Monkey Town on the 7 November 2008.

The report is divided into four sections:

1. Review and comments on the written reports received.
2. Comments on the meeting with volunteers from Monkey Town
3. Report back on findings of visit
4. Suggestions actions and follow –up



1. Review and comments on the written complaints

Both written complaints received clearly indicate that there are very serious welfare, legal, ethical and conservation concerns and major management problems at Monkey Town.

Details are contained within the reports, one of which ARA already has and the other is appended.

Some of the complaints constitute cruelty in terms of the Animals Protection Act.

Both reports highlight a complete lack of management, maintenance and husbandry to the point of neglect.

Veterinary management is completely lacking with injuries left unattended, diseased animals untreated, no quarantine, no supportive care or nursing.

Cages are in such poor repair and design inadequately and this is resulting in serious and permanent injuries; deaths and escapes which to date have not been recaptured or seen again.

Lack of cage maintenance and repair; lack of management and veterinary care is directly compromising the well being of the animals and to the extent that it is a cruelty issue; but also poses serious threats to human and public safety. Not to mention the conservation concerns of escaping exotic species.

Both reports indicate that there is alleged illegal sale and keeping of animals. Monkeys of a variety of species are bred and sold, with babies being pulled from the mothers. This is incredibly distressing for the mother and also results in further breeding at a rate which compromises her health. The babies are sold to members of the public and the vicious and cruel cycle of pet primate is perpetuated.

I have not detailed the contents of the reports in this report as both are available but the meeting with volunteers and subsequent visit clearly support and confirm many of the concerns detailed in both of the reports.

2. Comments of meeting \ discussions held with volunteers

We met with two of the volunteers to discuss the complaints and events. Both have previous primate experience at reputable primate organizations and had a good working knowledge of primate husbandry and behaviour.

Both volunteers have tried on numerous occasions to address their concerns directly with the owner and it is in desperation and because their attempts have been ignored and that the situation is becoming worse that they have felt it necessary to pursue external routes for assistance in preventing further suffering to the animals.

It should be noted that both Dr Peck and I gave both the volunteers quite a grueling time in that we wished to ascertain the validity and motivation of their complaints and also to put their knowledge of primate behaviour and husbandry; and to this end find their concerns and complaints credible.

Discussions with volunteers confirmed the contents of the complaints. On three separate occasions, monkeys were able to bite each other through the wire, sustaining very serious wounds to their hands, including complete severance of the top part of the fingers. In all three cases, veterinary treatment was withheld and

only on the instruction of an SPCA officer, 10 – 15 days later, was treatment given to the injured animals. This contributed to pain and suffering and permanent maiming injuries.

A monkey lemur sustained an eye injury which was initially left untreated and later treated with the incorrect medication. This resulted in a permanent loss of sight in that eye.

In other instances, volunteers were instructed to administer 'Baytril' a broad spectrum antibiotic. Not necessarily suitable and in fact contra indicated in young growing animals.

TB was diagnosed on one of the animals and this as left untreated and the animal subsequently died. No attempts were made to nurse or quarantine the animal and no protection was given to staff, public or volunteers.

The centre advertises itself as a sanctuary. But continue to breed and trade with animals.

Pet animals have been donated to the Monkey Town in the belief that their pets would be cared for in a sanctuary - two pets pigs were slaughtered shortly after being received. Donated primates are sold on to first available buyer and African greys parrots have died within four days of arrival at the centre and the original owner is still told that they are 'happily in with the others'.

'Drop off' animals re not recorded or reported to conservation authorities.

In spite of signs all over the centre dissuading people from having primates as pets, Monkey Town breed and trade both legally and allegedly illegally in pet monkeys. Babies are pulled from the mothers and sold directly to buyers. Monkeys panic staff when staff or volunteers enter the cage knowing that yet another baby will be ripped from them.

Electric fences are faulty and animals are frequently and regularly electrocuted\shocked through leakages shorts on the fences. There have apparently been some deaths due to these electrical faults. In spite of repeated requests by volunteers to repair electrical system, nothing to date has been done.

Animals do not get bedding and sleep on cold concrete floors.

Poor or absent cage maintenance has resulted in not only escapes and injuries but there has also been cross breeding and hybridization. The offspring of which have allegedly been hidden from conservation officers.

There are no case records or veterinary records for the animals and no preventative medicine protocols.

There is allegedly no suitable or committed \ delegated animal husbandry and care manager. So all husbandry is handled on an adhoc basis.

One of the most disturbing issues raised in both reports and in meetings with volunteers is that dead and already decaying carcasses of animals have been found in the cages.

Volunteers apparently struggle to get adequate and suitable food for the animals and much of the food is donated.

There is a leaking toilet pipe which leaks directly into a cage and forming a trickle and puddle from which animals drink.

Volunteers have attempted to rectify the situation and addressed their concerns and complaints to the owner with no results. They have personally carried veterinary expenses and attempted to repair cages and implement environmental enrichment. But are hampered by lack of resources and co-operation or support from management.

Volunteers were clearly distressed and tired by the circumstances.

3. Comments on visit and observations

It was decided to visit Monkey Town as normal visitors on the basis that we would go in with an open mind and that should everything be ok – we would simply have been legal visitors.

Unfortunately it was obvious that there are serious problems but we were unable to find any person in authority to whom we could introduce ourselves or announce our presence.

Volunteers have told us that a camera crew was due to arrive that special effort had been made that particular day - even with this apparent special effort, we found that there are very serious welfare concerns that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

General

The overall appearance of the centre is dilapidated with cages and facilities in very poor condition. Cages are dirty with large amounts of both new and old litter in the cages; many of the climbing frames, doors, perches etc are broken and lying on the floors of the cages. There were obvious areas in cages which were broken and served as an escape route or source of injury to animals.

Broken shelters and sleeping boxes littered the floors of many of the cages and there were broken wires, metal frames with protruding sharp points etc in the cages.

Water bowls, were present were dirty and contained green algae; in other cages there was no water or make shift plastic containers had been tipped over; the water provision in the farmyard area was too high for smaller and young animals to access.

Most of the cages had no food in the cages. Primates forage throughout the day and there should be food available. Whilst some of the cages are large and have vegetation in the cages, this vegetation does not provide adequate nourishment.

There were only two cages with locks on them and many of the doors did not close properly.

Many of the monkeys at the facility have skin problems with bald areas and very patchy fur and inflamed skin - this could be due to parasites and/or poor nutrition.

Some of the cages have inadequate or no shelter or protection from the wind or weather.

A small amount of old dirty bedding was visible in the chimps cage but not other bedding was visible.

Stereotypic stress behaviour was observed in three of the capuchins in the form of head rolling and hair pulling. Severe forms of stress and abnormal behaviour were observed in the chimps and hamadrayas baboons.

NB There were a number of visitors in the centre and adults pay a R60 entrance fee. The centre is open all year round, and seven days a week. According to staff and volunteers, there is a good, constant flow of visitors to the park. Donations of feeds etc are actively solicited and there are numerous requests for financial assistance and donations throughout the park. Apparently both financial and in

kind donations are received. The centre actively breeds and trades in animals and this apparently contributes a substantial amount to the income. Thus there is no financial excuse for poor and inadequate husbandry of the animals but it appears that very little money is expended on the care of the animals or upkeep of the facility.

Small monkeys

Due to the size of the marmosets and small primates, it is easier to provide for their care. Whilst the cages were old and in need of repair. There was natural vegetation in the cages and volunteers were busy feeding and cleaning the cages. Many of the smaller monkeys were pregnant or had young with them. Apparently there is a demand and heavy trade in these smaller species from the centre. Generally the condition of the smaller primates was not bad. But volunteers report various mortalities and a lack of veterinary care.

Mixed cage

There is a large central cage that covers most of the area with tunnels through the cage. A mixed variety of primates are housed in this cage and the primates all move freely around the cage. There is a lot of vegetation in the cage. Four feeding platforms are provided and food is placed on this at set times for visitors. No other food was available in the cage and apparently the first food of the day is given at 1 pm. The medium sized primates, capuchins and spider monkeys are able to get the food and bully or chase the smaller ones away. The squirrel monkeys in this cage are thin and in very poor condition as they do not get access to until after the other have eaten.

There was a large amount of litter in the cage (papers, plastic and broken containers). Due to the cage condition, there is a movement of monkeys from the larger cage to surrounding cages and vice versa. I witnessed a fight between a monkey that tried to get through the wire to the central cage to access food and was chased and bitten by a spider monkey.

Water points, in the form of small concrete troughs were dirty and slimy.

Birds

The birds generally looked better than the mammals but food and water provision is inadequate.

The domestic \ farm section, chimpanzees and hamadrayas baboons are the three areas of most concern and need urgent attention.

Domestic animals \ farmyard section

In the front section, a horse, goat and bull were housed in a very small, dirty, broken down pen. Condition of the horse and goat were poor with low body weight and dull coats. No food was in the cage and water was dirty and almost empty.



The second section of the domestic animal section was larger but in total disrepair with broken doors and fences. No bedding was available with the exception of a pile of very old bedding and faeces.

There were two puddles of foul smelling mud and rotting vegetables and this was the only food available. Goats are very thin and in poor condition. Broken glass, wire and litter were spread throughout the cage. Plastic bags and old feed bags were littered about and pigs were trying to eat the plastic bags.

Water was provided in a few old enamel basins balanced on top of one another but they were almost empty and were green and slimy. The smaller and younger animals would not have been able to get to the water and the only available water was a dirty, slimy, smelly muddy puddle.

Three of the piglets had soiled rectal areas and appeared to have bad diarrhoea.

Hamadrayas baboons

Along with the chimps this was the most distressing cage \ group of animals.

The troop is housed in a relatively large enclosure by zoo standards but was totally bare of any vegetation or furniture except a very rickety and broken frame. There were two artificial rock outcrops. The cage was littered with plastic bottles and rubbish. No water or food were visible in the cage.

The group consists of two adult males, two three females and two sub adults and a very young baby. The one male of very obviously dominant and bullied the other male incessantly - threatening and displaying . The subdominant male has large areas of bald patches and was observed pulling out chunks of hair. He has areas that are raw and skin and fur are poor condition. Low body weight and condition.

The group displayed totally abnormal behaviour and paced restlessly and no troop cohesion or normal bonding behaviours.

Both Dr Peck and myself were very distressed and concerned about this group and believe that they should be removed from the facility.

Chimpanzees

The chimpanzees are of great concern. The cage is inadequate and the doors, climbing frame, ball etc are all broken and falling apart. The large climbing frame is so rickety that a small female climbing it caused the entire frame to rock.

There was no normal interaction between the three and all appeared lethargic with the exception of a female who masturbated with a plastic bottle obsessively for the full 2 and half hours that we were at the centre. Both females kept inserting toys and plastic bottles into their vaginas.

The cage was littered with broken plastic bottles, sweet and chip packets and papers, No toys or any form of environmental enrichment could be seen and no food was present. The sleeping quarters were dark and dirty and again littered with broken plastic bottles etc, A small amount of old bedding covered small areas of the concrete floor.

The only water available was in the moat surrounding the camp and this too was dirty, green, slimy and had litter floating on it.

Again both Dr Peck and myself we very distressed and concerned about the conditions of the chimpanzees.

Given that we saw the centre as visitors and on a day in which some effort had been made for a camera crew, combined with both the complaint reports and interview with the volunteers, we believe that there are grave areas of neglect and concern and in some cases cruelty. The situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Suggestions and Actions

1. Contact veterinarian and get veterinary reports.
2. Contact local SPCA and get copies and details of their visits and instructions.
3. Urgent meeting with permitting authorities and site inspection followed. The conservation authorities issue the permits and thus need to take active responsibility for the unacceptable conditions at the centre.
4. Whilst there has obviously been cruelty in terms of lack of veterinary attention etc it is going to be difficult to get a conviction due to the lack of action of a period of time by other welfare groups and permitting authorities.
5. If something is not done though – the potential for further pain, suffering and cruelty is rife.
6. The hamadrayas and the chimpanzees should be moved to another facility - the capacity to cope with these species is not within the abilities of this centre.
7. Major changes and improvements need to be ordered and implemented as soon as possible and failing this, suggestions made that the permit be revoked \ and or animals confiscated.
8. Conservation authorities need to implement strict permit conditions and demand a record keeping system.
9. The centre should not be allowed to advertise as a sanctuary under false pretenses – if they are to function as a sanctuary then animals must be sterilized and breeding stopped immediately.
10. The centre is member of PASA and PASA should be approached to assist and intervene.
11. Public need to be made aware of the situation so as not to take animals to the centre and not to donate under these false pretenses.
12. An approach to the owner with clear directions and time spans should be given and if no action taken charges of cruelty laid.