

“ A monkey on my Shoulder”

by Mike Tovey

Baby monkeys!!! Big eyed, cute and cuddly. So much like a soft toy than the wild animal that nature intended. Who can resist their appeal as an adorable family member? Across North America thousands of monkeys are purchased by families and individuals captivated by the monkey's charm and intelligence. An internet search reveals a thriving trade in just about every species of primates, from capuchins to chimpanzees. Prices range from \$1500.00 to \$50,000.00. Even endangered species like Diana monkeys, lemurs and gibbons, are for sale.

So, you have purchased your new monkey friend and companion. It can be a long relationship. Monkeys typically live from 20 - 40 years. That cute, cuddly , dependent baby monkey soon reaches adulthood. What then? Adult monkeys are strong, agile animals demanding constant challenges. Confined in a cage, or home, they are deprived of the companionship of their own kind. Unless allowed to develop as the wild animal they are, boredom leads to behavioral traits that are self-destructive. Home wrecking can become a normal daily activity. Additionally, monkeys are messy. They cannot be toilet trained and sometimes engage in distasteful activities involving their feces and urine. Is this something you visualised in later years when taking that cute, cuddly animal into your home? However, many people still remain undaunted by the risks of adopting primates into their homes.

Adult primates can be very unpredictable in their actions. Once they reach sexual maturity, experts warn, monkeys can be very aggressive. Even toward the human who has become their close friend and companion. Some primates harbor deadly diseases, like herpes B, that can be passed on to humans via bites and scratches. Likewise, health problems that are comparatively minor to humans can be deadly if passed on to primates.

A large percentage of a primates life is spent swinging through trees in the wild. Unless a vast enclosure, with trees and foliage, can be provided, the expensive hanging lights in the lounge do not provide a good substitute. Being very intelligent creatures, primates deprived of natural activities with other animals of their kind, turn to other destructive activities.

What options are available to owners of primates, taken into hearts and homes with all good intentions, when they become a problem to which there is no humane solution? The very limited number of sanctuaries that take in unwanted primates are stretched to the limit. What other alternatives exist? Primates bond with their human companion and to sever that bond can be devastating. Reselling into the booming exotic animal market is a possibility. There is also the roadside zoo or research laboratory. There are no easy answers to this question.

Wild animals are not, and never should be, human playthings. With modern technology humans can observe and enjoy, in the comfort of their home, the natural activities of a multitude of wild animals. Likewise, the animals can continue to enjoy, in the comfort of their home in the wild, life as nature intended.

