

BRIEFING NOTES FOR MPS: ANIMAL WELFARE (KEPT ANIMALS) BILL – PRIMATES AS PETS

SUMMARY

- Born Free welcomes legislation restricting the private keeping of primates. Nevertheless, we are extremely concerned by the introduction of a licensing system rather than a complete ban.
- There is no justifiable reason why the private keeping, breeding and commercial trade in primates should continue. We fear that allowing such actions to continue under licence will not significantly reduce the number of primates kept privately.
- It is vital that if a licensing scheme were introduced that it is centrally coordinated by DEFRA.
- Ensuring the “basic welfare needs” of primates does not go far enough. Species-specific welfare standards should be developed, based on the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and associated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Privately Kept Non-Human Primates.
- The Bill should specify that only “competent veterinary surgeons” with suitable knowledge and experience of primates are selected to carry out any inspections.



Photo: Born Free Foundation



Born Free opposes the keeping of wild animals as pets, and the associated trade in live animals. Born Free investigates and exposes the 'exotic pet' industry and challenges both the legal and illegal trade in wild animals. We campaign for national and international legislation to reduce and, where possible, end this practice.

Born Free welcomes legislation restricting the keeping of primates as pets. However, the Bill in its current form falls seriously short in a number of areas. All non-human primates are wild animals, and none are native to the United Kingdom. A captive environment in the UK can never provide them with conditions where their complex and species-specific physical, social and psychological welfare needs can be fully met. The welfare provision for captive primates is on a spectrum, with some suffering more than others, but primates are fundamentally unsuited to captivity – regardless of the experience of the person keeping them.

BAN NOT LICENSING SYSTEM

In their [2019 manifesto](#), the Government committed to ban the keeping of primates as pets. However, the [Bill](#) in its current form falls well short of fulfilling this commitment, in that it creates a licensing system that will allow private individuals to continue to keep, breed and trade in primates. We call on the government to make good on its commitment and introduce a comprehensive ban the private ownership of primates, with existing owners grandfathered under a registration scheme focussed on addressing welfare concerns, with a condition of no breeding and no trade (commercial or otherwise). The two-tier standard the Bill in its current form would introduce will lead to a perpetuation of the keeping, breeding of and trade in primates by private individuals, for no clear conservation purpose and with ongoing associated welfare concerns. All primates suffer when held captive and there is no reason for this practice to continue to be permitted.

CENTRAL COORDINATION & COMPETENT VETERINARY SURGEONS

We recognise that an immediate ban on the private keeping of primates is likely to result in at least some primates having to be rehomed to sanctuaries or to other rescue facilities. Furthermore, it is also feared that the transition period as currently worded will result in primates having to be rehomed, euthanised or licenced after 24 months and pressure will be placed on Local Authorities to issue a licence rather than face having to rehome primates. As sanctuaries are currently at capacity, it is highly likely that new facilities may need to open up to meet the demand. As there is currently no legal definition of a sanctuary and no associated licensing system, we believe that the “specialist keeper” licence may be useful in these circumstances to allow primates to be legally rescued and suitably cared for the remainder of their natural lives. Until a licensing system for sanctuaries is established, sanctuaries should be required to meet [globally accredited standards](#). We would strongly recommend that the “specialist keeper” licence is contingent on the licensee undertaking not to breed animals, nor to acquire animals (except for the purpose of providing temporary or permanent sanctuary care for surrendered animals), nor to participate in any trade (commercial or non-commercial) in primates. This would allow for existing and new legitimate sanctuaries to operate legally while ensuring that the law is not legitimising the continued breeding, keeping and commercialisation of these animals.

Any such licensing scheme should be centrally coordinated by DEFRA. Local Authorities are currently overstretched and do not have the necessary expertise or resources to effectively carry out inspections or scrutinise licence applications. Inspectors should be drawn from an identified pool of recognised independent experts who are able to assess the welfare conditions of primates in captivity to a consistent level using both input- and outcome-based criteria. If this is to be veterinary surgeons as indicated by the Bill, it should be restricted to “competent veterinary surgeons” with suitable knowledge and experience of primates.



WELFARE NEEDS

The standard required for any remaining privately kept primates must be clearly articulated by DEFRA and understood by owners, and should, as a minimum, ensure compliance with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the associated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Privately Kept Non-Human Primates. Current language in the Bill stating that the “basic welfare needs,” of primates must be met is wholly insufficient. There is the potential that some animals will be held in captivity for decades, so owners must have a clear understanding what the minimum standard required of them is and the authorities must be able to effectively assess each individual situation against the required standards. Currently, many primates are being kept in poor conditions despite the long-term existence of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and its associated Code of Practice. Specificity of standards is essential but, to date, has never been achieved. This failure to properly develop and articulate standards has, in our view, directly contributed to the poor conditions that animals are currently being held in.

We thank you for taking an interest in this very important section of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill and hope that you will consider raising the points highlighted in this briefing during the Committee stage of the Bill.

CONCLUSION

You can help by:

1. Pushing for a ban on the private keeping of primates as pets, rather than a licensing system.
2. Highlighting that there is no justifiable reason why the keeping, breeding and trade in primates by private individuals should continue.
3. Calling for improved and species-specific welfare guidance for existing pet primates so owners and authorities have clear, assessable standards they are required to meet
4. Stressing the importance of central coordination and that “competent veterinary surgeons” with relevant knowledge and expertise in primate welfare are responsible for carrying out inspections

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