



June 22, 2017

Karim Benzema
via social media

Dear Mr. Benzema,

We write to you in response to your recent Instagram photo of you snuggling an infant chimpanzee in Dubai.

Your post condones the practice of having a “pet” chimpanzee, which gives the world a very inaccurate message about these complex and intelligent animals. Encouraging contact between humans and exotic animals is harmful and dangerous to all involved. As experts in the field of primate care, we implore you to reconsider promoting such irresponsible treatment of animals.

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is a coalition of eleven of the leading primate sanctuaries on the continent. In our sanctuaries, we care for over 700 primates, many of whom were formerly privately owned as “pets”. Infant primates bred for private ownership are removed from their mothers at a very early age – *years* before they would naturally separate. We see daily evidence of how this affects primates throughout their entire life, including social disorders, self-injurious behavior and depression.

NAPSA members are contacted constantly by people who – perhaps because they saw cute primates on television or social media – purchased an infant primate and then lived to regret it. Chimpanzees quickly grow to be strong, cunning and difficult to manage. They can transfer disease and destroy homes. Attacks from chimpanzees can be fatal. It is simply not possible to fulfill the unique needs of a monkey within a private home. Illegal poaching of chimpanzees (partly for the pet trade) is decimating wild populations and causing very real harm.

Attached is NAPSA’s Position Statement on the private ownership of primates so you may learn more about why keeping a monkey as a pet is so harmful, and why this is not something that should be promoted to your millions of social media followers.

Chimpanzees like the one you met are forced to cuddle and dance for tourists like yourself. Behind the loving snuggles you think you had with this orphaned chimpanzee are decades of cruelty and suffering, for her and for the others out there condemned to the same fate. Please reconsider the message you send with such posts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erika Fleury". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erika Fleury
Program Director



Advocacy Position Statement Private Ownership of Primates

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is opposed to the private ownership of primates.

Unlike dogs and cats, apes and monkeys are not domesticated animals. Non-human primates are extremely social animals whose normal development requires the company of others of their own kind. Ideally, primates should live in the wild. Their natural habitats include species-typical social groups that allow them to learn from their families and have a rich emotional life. In reality, however, there is an active industry that breeds primates to sell as pets in human homes.

As infants, primates in the pet trade are removed from their mothers years before they would naturally separate, which causes psychological suffering that manifests throughout their entire life. Teeth are often removed for ease of handling, which can limit the foods they can eat. Qualified veterinary care for pet primates can be difficult, if not impossible, to find.

Primates are inquisitive animals whose proper care requires daily mental stimulation and extensive physical activity, which is often impossible for the average household to provide. Primates kept in human homes are rarely, if ever, monitored by animal welfare officials, which means they are often kept in unsuitable living conditions resulting in neglect, mistreatment, and myriad psychological and physical ailments that can lead to death. There are a range of zoonotic diseases that are transmitted by primates and can be harmful, even fatal, to humans.

Once primates reach adolescence, which can be just a few years into a 40+ year lifespan, they inevitably become too unmanageable to handle. Primates can and will bite. They have strong jaws and sharp teeth, and bites can result in significant and potentially fatal injuries to humans. Realizing that living with an adult primate is not sustainable, owners often seek to surrender their pets or are forced to surrender them due to a threat to public safety.

Many primates that were privately owned end up living in roadside zoos, recycled as breeders to produce the next generation of ill-fated pets, or in other abusive situations. In the best cases, former pets may end up in a NAPSA member sanctuary, where they live their remaining years in an enriched environment more typical to their species. Even in sanctuary, former pets often struggle with learning how to socialize with other primates and many exhibit abnormal behaviors for the rest of their lives.

The private ownership of primates is never in the best interest of the animal or the owner.

For more information:

["Resolution and Policy Recommendation Addressing the Private Possession of Dangerous Wild Animals,"](#) American Bar Association

["White Paper: Personal Possession of Non-Human Primates,"](#) Association of Zoos and Aquariums

["The Phenomenon of Monkeys as 'Surrogate Children',"](#) Linda J. Howard

["My Child is a Monkey,"](#) and ["The Perils of Keeping Monkeys as Pets,"](#) National Geographic

["The Science Behind Why Chimps Are Not Pets,"](#) PBS

["Significant Zoonotic Disease of Non-Human Primates,"](#) Walter Reed Army Institute