



May 24, 2018

Sun Gazette

via email: editor@thesungazette.com

Dear Editor,

I write to you in response to your recent article "[Whiplash the Cowboy Monkey Rides Again!](#)" While it may seem amusing on the surface, the monkeys used in these spectacles are poorly treated. Although the records of many monkey rental operators are generally less than stellar, and training and housing conditions can be incredibly stressful (and often abusive), the simple fact that the monkeys are forced to dress up and perform on cue in a terribly unnatural situation is reason enough for many people to boycott such events. The attached documents include many expert concerns related to monkey rodeos.

An increasing number of attractions have forsworn this archaic form of entertainment, including the Northport Firemen's Fair (NY) and the Alachua County Fair (FL.) Negative publicity and protests have occurred outside fairs hosting monkey rodeos. Minor League Baseball teams The Williamsport Crosscutters, The Lexington Legends, The Sugar Land Skeeters, The Long Island Ducks, and the Hartford Yard Goats, as well as Northwoods League team The Kalamazoo Growlers and the Madison Mallards have all chosen not to hire monkey rodeos any longer. Atlantic League team The York Revolution decided not to schedule any monkey rodeos in 2017 after protests and negative publicity in 2016, which the Hartford Yard Goats also experienced this year.

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is a coalition of ten of the leading primate sanctuaries on the continent. In our sanctuaries, we care for over 730 primates, many of whom were formerly used in entertainment. We see the damage wrought by exploitive monkey rodeos, yet we also see an increasingly compassionate public who is disinterested in such exploitive forms of "entertainment". I encourage the Sun Gazette to use its platform to promote more responsible treatment of exotic animals. When the spotlight turns away from monkey rodeos, Whiplash - and the others like him - won't be forced to ride anymore.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Erika Fleury'.

Erika Fleury
Program Director



Position Statement Monkey Rodeos

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA), a coalition of ten primate sanctuaries in the U.S. and Canada, which cares for over 730 nonhuman primates, is opposed to “monkey rodeo” shows.

While it may seem amusing on the surface, the monkeys used in these archaic spectacles are poorly treated. Although the records of many monkey rental operators are generally less than stellar, and training and housing conditions can be incredibly stressful (and often abusive), the simple fact that they are forced to dress up and perform on cue in a terribly unnatural situation is reason enough for many people to boycott such events. "Inappropriate portrayals of non-human primates in such a manner have extremely negative consequences for both the welfare of the individual animal and the welfare and conservation concerns of primates in general," explains Elizabeth Lonsdorf, PhD, Professor of Animal Behavior at Franklin and Marshall College, and former Vice President for Education and Outreach, the International Primatological Society.

The entire lifetime of a primate is negatively affected when they are exploited for entertainment. As infants, they are removed from their mothers at a very early age – *years* before they would naturally separate. They are trained using methods that intimidate and inhibit their innate behaviors. Even then, the intelligence and unpredictable nature of these wild animals means that they often can only be used for a short time as actors before they become too independent, unmanageable, and dangerous. Primates are then deemed useless to the entertainment industry, and sold into situations that range from uncomfortable to downright harmful. The lucky ones are able to spend the remaining years of their life in a primate sanctuary.

Monkey rodeos are dangerous and frightening to the monkeys, and potentially harmful to the audience as well. Monkeys can carry diseases transmissible to humans, and they can attack. They are wild animals and remain wild, regardless of how many years they have been forced to “train” with a human being.

Increasingly, corporations and other organizations, including sports teams, are wisely and compassionately forswearing the usage of primates to entertain. We encourage the public to avoid monkey rodeos, for the health and safety of the human and nonhuman primates in attendance.

“Cowboy Monkey” Acts are Abusive to Primates

“[T]his is a thoroughly disreputable practice, animal abuse for cash, cheap thrills for a few bucks and all at the monkeys’ expense.”

Gary Kuehn, DVM,
zoo veterinarian for
23 years (retired)

“These monkeys are being put in a stressful situation where they could be seriously injured or killed.”

Kristin Mealiffe,
Primate Keeper,
Oakland Zoo

“The high accelerations coupled with abrupt turns and stops ... may result in head, neck, or back injuries.”

Margaret Whittaker,
consultant with 25
years of experience
working with captive
wildlife

“It is my expert opinion that these cruel and inhumane spectacles should be stopped immediately.”

Gail Laule, President,
Active Environments

“Cowboy monkey” acts feature one or more capuchin monkeys dressed in a cowboy outfit and tethered to a saddle on the back of border collies who run at high speeds around a field herding sheep. The dogs can reach speeds of up to 30 m.p.h. and abruptly stop, start, turn, lie down, and stand up, causing the monkey to be violently jerked forwards and backwards and slide wildly from side to side.

Inhumane and Demeaning Spectacle

Although marketed as an “amusement” act, many people find this show offensive and upsetting as they recognize that it is undoubtedly frightening and harmful to the helpless monkeys who may suffer psychological distress and risk serious physical injuries.

Subjected to high, repetitive head accelerations—similar to what rodeo participants or passengers involved in motor vehicle accidents experience—the monkeys are especially vulnerable to neck injuries, such as whiplash. The dog may also inadvertently run the monkey into objects, such as walls, fences, and poles. In one online video, a dog stumbles and rolls near a fence with the monkey on his back, which could have resulted in the monkey being seriously injured or killed had he struck the fence.

Public Safety Concerns

Capuchins are small, but dangerous monkeys who can be aggressive and have been involved in numerous escapes and attacks. During “cowboy monkey” events, the monkey is not under the control of a handler. The public would be at risk if a monkey got loose from the dog or if a dog became startled, frightened, or distracted and charged off the field. Primates can inflict severe injuries and transmit deadly diseases.

Substandard Living Conditions

Capuchins are highly intelligent, curious, and energetic primates who, in the wild, spend most of their time in trees—foraging, climbing, jumping, socializing, and exploring their surroundings. In traveling animal displays, the monkeys are confined to small cages, often alone, and are unable to express natural behaviors. These grossly substandard living conditions cause primates to develop neurotic and self-destructive behaviors.

Exhibitor Problems

Tim Lepard of Wild Thang Productions performs under the name “Team Ghost Riders.” In 2011, Lepard was issued two summonses by New Hampshire Fish and Game for failure to obtain a state exhibitor permit and for allowing the public to touch the monkey. Lepard has also been cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for violating the minimum standards of the federal Animal Welfare Act, such as keeping animals in unsanitary conditions, failure to provide adequate crowd management and safety barriers, inadequate shelter, improper food storage, failure to dispose of expired deworming and heartworm preventative medications, and repeatedly being unavailable for animal welfare inspections. Several years ago, Lepard’s monkeys, dogs, and sheep died in his travel trailer from carbon monoxide poisoning.

In 2012, the USDA issued an official warning against Tommy Lucia, who performs under the name “Whiplash the Cowboy Monkey,” for exhibiting without a federal license. Lucia has also been cited by the USDA for failure to provide a program of veterinary care and environment enrichment plan to promote the psychological well-being of primates. Lucia’s monkey reportedly attacked a boy, scratching him on the cheek while filming a commercial.



FACTS ABOUT “MONKEY RODEOS”

This is a rare example of animal abuse that affects two species at the same time. Not only are monkey rodeos cruel and inhumane for both monkeys and the dogs forced to carry them, they set a terrible example for society in condoning the treatment of animals as mere playthings.

—Dr. Craig Stanford, Professor of Biological Sciences and Anthropology, University of Southern California (USC); Co-Director, USC Jane Goodall Research Center

Inappropriate portrayals of non-human primates in such a manner has extremely negative consequences for both the welfare of the individual animal and the welfare and conservation concerns of primates in general.

—Dr. Elizabeth Lonsdorf, Professor of Animal Behavior, Franklin & Marshall College

Performing primate acts are harmful to monkeys and children. These performing acts cause monkeys physical discomfort and psychological distress. They send the message to children that it is OK to bully, disrespect, and exploit other beings to entertain oneself.

—Christine L. Buckmaster, Primatologist

When I observed these ‘cowboy monkeys’ performing, I saw fear, anxiety, and—the saddest of all—a blank expression of resignation and hopelessness, what psychologists refer to as ‘learned helplessness.’

—Kari Bagnall, Founder and Executive Director, Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary

The public learns from these spectacles that monkeys are disposable and can be used for sadistic entertainment purposes. Is this what communities wish to promote?

—Dr. Dorothy Fragaszy, Former President, International Primatological Society, and Author of *The Complete Capuchin*

Monkey rodeos are dangerous and frightening to the monkeys and potentially harmful to the audience as well. Capuchin monkeys are wild animals and remain wild, regardless of how many years they have been forced to ‘train’ with a human being.

—Erika Fleury, Program Director, North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance

These cruel rodeos are completely unnatural, frightening, and stressful for monkeys. These highly intelligent, yet extremely wild creatures, are powerless to escape the repeated trauma of exhibition and the long hours on the road to the next show.

—Dr. Carla Haddix, D.V.M.