



## Primate Introductions

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is a coalition of the leading primate sanctuaries on the continent who care for over 800 nonhuman primates (including over 700 chimpanzees) who are retired from the entertainment, biomedical research, and exotic pet industries. NAPSA members are experts in providing enriched lifetime care to captive animals and have overseen thousands of primate introductions.

Primate sanctuaries are tasked with providing a place to thrive for numerous apes, monkeys, and prosimians in need. The sheer number of primates in need dictates that these sanctuaries house very large populations; with any given sanctuary oftentimes housing many more residents than are kept at any given zoo. Many of these primates have extremely limited social experience. However, in order to thrive, it is critical for a primate to live in a rich social environment. It is therefore foundational to the mission of all primate sanctuaries from both a welfare standpoint, and a logistics standpoint, to introduce primates to each other within larger social groups. Primate introductions are central to primate welfare and husbandry.

**While the vast majority of introductions of captive primates are successful, many primates are territorial species with the potential for spontaneous and unpredictable intercommunity aggression. Even in stable groups, conflicts occur, sometimes resulting in serious injuries. Despite occasional volatility or conflict arising during leadership changes or other social upheavals, many primate species thrive in large social groups, and all primates in captivity benefit from some social contact with others of their species. Forming groups in captive settings may involve increased aggression during the introduction process, however, the welfare benefits of having many social partners almost always outweighs the risks of aggression.**

Important considerations:

- Sanctuaries fill an important role by providing humane lifetime care to primates in need.
- All primates are social to some degree, with many species evolved to live in large groups.
- Most captive primates in the United States have never lived in the wild, do not have the skills to survive in the wild, and cannot be sent to live in the wild due to

potential danger to themselves as well as to endemic groups. They must live in captivity.

- There are many reasons that sanctuaries introduce individuals to new groups including physical and mental health considerations, shifting group dynamics, more extensive and species typical social opportunities, and the need to create space for more primates.
- Captive primates may have experienced trauma if they were reared by humans and may have limited social experience with their own species, which can cause them to have unpredictable reactions to other primates throughout their lifetime.
- Individual welfare is the priority at sanctuaries, who use evidence-based care. Thus, smaller social groups may be considered for individuals who struggle socially or have physical handicaps that may put them at higher risk during a large group introduction.
- Studies show an 86% success rate for chimpanzee introductions, with equal rates of injury independent of group size (including groupings as small as pairs and trios) (Brent et al., 1997).
- There is no one “correct” way to introduce primates to one another because every situation, facility, and primate is unique.
- There is a limit to what humans can do to safely intervene during conflicts. However, all reputable sanctuaries have multiple methods they can utilize to attempt to safely intervene.
- While most introductions are successful, some can result in severe injury and even death. This is true for primates in the wild when they meet unfamiliar individuals as well as during introductions in captivity.
- The mental and physical benefits of creating dynamic social groupings for captive primates far outweigh the risks.

For more information:

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