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PET CHIMPANZEES HAVE BEEN IN THE NEWS THIS YEAR. Travis, who attacked a woman in Connecticut, was shot to death. Timmie was shot in Missouri when he escaped and attacked a deputy. There are countless more pet chimpanzees living in private homes throughout the United States. This edition of the Chimpanzee Chronicle discusses this serious issue. Please share it with others.
WHY CHIMP ANZEES DON’T MAKE GOOD PETS

By Linda Brent, PhD, President and Director

When chimpanzees become pets, the outcome for them or their human “family” is rarely a good one. Chimpanzees are large, wild animals who are highly intelligent and require a great deal of socialization with their mother and other chimpanzees.

Sanctuaries most often hear about pet chimpanzees when they reach adolescence and are too difficult to manage any longer. Often, they bite someone or break household items. Sometimes they get loose or seriously attack a person. Generally speaking, these actions are part of normal chimpanzee behavior. An adolescent male chimpanzee begins to try to dominate others as he works his way up the dominance hierarchy or social ladder. He does this by displaying, hitting and throwing objects, and sometimes attacking others. Pet chimpanzees do not have the benefit of a normal social group as an outlet for their behavior, and often these behaviors are directed at human caregivers or strangers. Since chimpanzees can easily weigh as much as a person—but are far stronger—they are obviously dangerous animals to have in the house!

Pet chimpanzees may end up dead, abused or neglected. Various methods to try to control them include pulling out all their teeth, giving them psychotropic drugs, or beating them. Chimp Haven’s Henry, the chimpanzee who was rescued from a Houston area home, is an example of a neglected chimpanzee. He was left in a small cage in a garage without proper food or care. Had it not been for a neighbor calling for help, he would have surely died. Henry still bears the scars of his ordeal with his twisted spine and esophageal ulcers. Henry was one of the lucky ones, because he ended up in a professionally run sanctuary like Chimp Haven.

Many chimpanzee owners are looking to place their pets in sanctuaries. Unfortunately, there is not enough room at sanctuaries to care for them. But with a combination of stronger laws prohibiting wild animals as pets and increased financial support for professional sanctuaries, the problem of pet chimpanzees can be solved.

ON THE COVER:
Henry, critically ill when he was rescued from a private home in November 2008, continues his recovery at Chimp Haven.
Chimpanzees who are part of the pet trade are often taken from their mothers when they are only days or even hours old. In contrast, mother-reared chimpanzees aren't weaned until they are four to five years old. They spend most of their early years learning from their mother and becoming confident, socially adept adults. In their first two years, chimpanzee infants spend the majority of their time clinging to their mother's belly or her back, with the ability to nurse whenever they please. They find comfort in the warmth of their mother’s body and the vibration of her heartbeat.

Chimpanzees reared by humans are often fed on a rigid schedule. So, the young chimpanzees suck their thumbs to simulate nursing during times they aren't being fed. They may cling to other objects like a blanket or even hug themselves when they cannot cling to their mothers. Rocking in place may simulate the near constant motion of their absent mother.

Chimpanzees who observe and learn from their mothers know what to eat, how to use tools, how to make a nest, how to climb a tree, and even how to act like a chimpanzee and get along in a group. They learn how to respond to chimpanzee vocalizations and chimpanzee signals of friendship and dominance in appropriate ways. Baby chimpanzees, just like infant humans, need contact with others of their kind to learn, thrive and grow.

Once pets, the babies stand a good chance of never seeing another chimpanzee. They have a difficult time if they are ever lucky enough to meet one. It is like moving to a foreign culture where they do not know the language or the customs of the group. They may not know their own strength when interacting with other chimpanzees and could accidentally hurt them. Often, they do not realize how to navigate a chimpanzee dominance hierarchy – either being too aggressive or too submissive because they are so frightened.

Recently Chimp Haven introduced Henry, a 26-year-old former pet chimpanzee to Paul, an older chimpanzee who has lived in different groups over the years. On their first day together, Henry did not seem to understand how hard he was hitting when he and Paul interacted. He made Paul cry many times before he began to figure out what he was doing wrong. Paul was patient with Henry, but another male chimpanzee may not have been as understanding. Henry was directing facial expressions that he had learned from humans at Paul, and this seemed to confuse Paul. Henry did not respond to Paul in the way that he was accustomed to other chimpanzees responding; so communication between the two was difficult at first. But Henry is learning. We have great hope that he will soon demonstrate proper chimpanzee behavior and understand how to live with other chimpanzees.

Henry (left) and Paul meet for the first time, displaying typical chimpanzee play faces.
Private owners of chimpanzees are often characterized as treating their chimpanzees with the same amount of devotion as they would their human children. This misplaced affection has the potential to bring tragic results. While chimpanzees share 98.6 percent of our genetic makeup, they nonetheless are quite different and require specialized care.

Malnutrition is a major concern for chimpanzees living in a human environment. When a chimpanzee sits down at the family dinner table even for a reasonably balanced human diet, he may well be putting his health at risk. Chimpanzees eat primarily fruits and vegetables. Their systems are not meant to take in processed foods, refined sugar, and a great deal of meat. Without a proper chimpanzee diet, their immune systems can be compromised, increasing their risk for infection and disease. Certain vitamin deficiencies may occur as well. For example, without enough vitamin C, there is a risk of scurvy and softened gums which leads to loss of teeth. This may have been the case with Henry, who arrived at Chimp Haven in February with all of his front incisors missing. He also may have suffered from a vitamin D deficiency, which could account for his stooped and hunched posture. Henry was literally starving to death when he was rescued. Travis, the chimpanzee in Connecticut who attacked a woman a few months ago, was morbidly obese, pointing to both poor diet and inadequate exercise.

It is important to remember that part of the chimpanzees' eating ritual requires that they find their food, which means they get considerable exercise in the process. Time spent foraging for food accounts for 50-60% of a wild chimpanzee’s day. Here at Chimp Haven, we often hide food in our habitats so that the chimpanzees will have to spend time looking for it.

Pet chimpanzees who live among humans are exposed to dangerous bacteria and viruses. Chimpanzees are especially susceptible to respiratory viruses. At Chimp Haven, we go to great lengths to reduce exposure of the chimpanzees to human disease, which can be fatal to them. Preventative medicine is critical to the health of the chimpanzees. The chimpanzees are given routine physical examinations and vaccinations. They are de-wormed on a regular schedule to prevent parasites. Visitors are required to stay far from the chimpanzees. Produce is washed to reduce the chance of food borne infection. Toys and bedding are continually washed and disinfected. We even go so far as to have staff tested for tuberculosis every six months. It is doubtful that chimpanzees living in private situations have this level of prevention.

We provide Chimp Haven’s chimpanzees with all the possible safeguards for their health and welfare. My wish for the privately owned chimpanzees is that they might one day enjoy the same quality of life.
Who Foots The Bill?

By Karen Allen, Director of Organizational Advancement

Chimp Haven gets at least a call each month from frustrated or even frightened owners of pet chimpanzees. Their cute infant chimpanzees have morphed into young adolescents who are uncontrollable and often aggressive. When the owners decide they can no longer handle the behavioral situation, they often assume they can drop off their chimpanzee at a zoo or sanctuary.

Accredited zoos have closely managed chimpanzee groups; so they seldom have room for pet chimpanzees. Professionally-run sanctuaries like Chimp Haven are willing to take pet chimpanzees and provide them with an appropriate physical and behavioral environment. However, owners seldom consider or have the means to provide for the lifetime cost of keeping a chimpanzee. Therein lies the problem.

Chimp Haven can only take in the number of chimpanzees we can responsibly care for. We must have the space for them as well as the funding for their long-term care. Annual costs are approximately $10,000 per chimpanzee. Lifetime expenses for a 10-year-old male chimpanzee arriving at Chimp Haven today and living to 60 years old are nearly $550,000. As a responsible organization, we must identify enough funding to assure that we can provide continued care to the new chimpanzee as well as the rest of the colony.

It is heartbreaking to think about the number of chimpanzees doomed to a life of isolation and misery at the hands of desperate owners. Our dream is to give as many of them as possible an appropriate home. But our ability to take in more “rescue” chimpanzees depends upon the sustained support of our donors. Please consider making a contribution to Chimp Haven’s Rescue Fund. Putting it in the form of a monthly pledge can help us plan into the future. Please call me for more information, Karen Allen 318-402-9008.
Chimp Haven is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization and all donations are tax deductible.

So, you think you’d like a pet chimpanzee?

- Chimpanzees can live to be 50 to 60 years old and cost anywhere between $350,000 and $1,000,000 for lifetime care.

- Chimpanzees are only small and cuddly for a few years and quickly grow into powerful, intelligent animals.

- Chimpanzees are not manageable after they reach adolescence, around 6-10 years of age.

- Chimpanzees are not domesticated, like dogs and cats, but are wild animals to be respected.

- Chimpanzees need to be with other chimpanzees and require large, expensive and strong housing.