

Can we eliminate the primate pet trade in the United States?

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Abstract

International laws and conventions have gone a long way in reducing the number of wild primates entering the United States of America (US) for the pet trade. However, breeding primates for sale to private owners in the United States continues, and individual states present a bewildering array of laws and regulations on the holding of primates as pets. As primatologists we can act to decrease the demand for primate pets by (1) speaking out on the inappropriate use of primates in mass media and especially in social media; (2) not posing in photographs in close proximity to primates; (3) continuing to educate about why primates do not make good pets; and (4) contributing to the science that underlies state and federal legislation with the goal of eliminating captive breeding of primates for the pet trade. We encourage primatologists and others in related fields to be cognizant of the persistent commercialization of primates and be willing to take action to deter it.

KEYWORDS

CITES, commercialization of primates, Lacey Act, primate welfare, social and mass media

1 | INTRODUCTION

Primates involved in the pet trade include habitat-country primates that are illegally captured and exported specifically for the pet trade, or as a front for another illicit activity (Maldonado et al., 2009; Nellemann et al., 2016; Shanee et al., 2017); primates that are kept as pets in habitat countries (e.g., Duarte-Quiroga & Estrada, 2003; Reuter et al., 2016); and primates that are bred in the United States and sold for the pet trade (Seaboch & Cahoon, 2021). Here, we focus on the US primate pet trade. Mott (2003) estimated two decades ago that 15,000 primates were held as pets in the United States of America (US), and Stephen Ross (personal communication, July

2021) warned that there is no reason to believe the number has declined.

As primatologists engaged in primate conservation, education and research, we focus our commentary on primates that are legally or illegally bred for the pet trade in the United States and highlight factors that (1) influence the desire to have a primate as a pet, (2) provide opportunities to reduce the desire to have primates as pets through mass media and targeted educational messaging, (3) identify the scope of the legal protections for primates bred in the United States that are destined for the pet trade, and (4) suggest actions that primatologists and global citizens can take to become actively involved in helping to reduce the number of primates kept as pets.

Abbreviations: ASP, American Society of Primatologists; CITES, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; CoP, conferences of parties; CR, critically endangered; EN, endangered; ESA, Endangered Species Act; H.R., House of Representatives, United States of America; HIV-AIDS, human immunodeficiency virus; IACUC, Institutional Care and Use Committee; IPS, International Primatological Society; IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature; LC, least concern; NT, not threatened; S., Senate, United States of America; TRAFFIC, Trade in Wild Species, international NGO working on the sustainability and legality of wildlife trade globally; UN, United Nations; US, United States of America; VU, vulnerable.

2 | SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF PRIMATES AS PETS

To meet the global demand of primates as exotic pets, the international trade in live animals for exotic pets is driven by opportunity or the need for local people to supplement their income; existence of pre-existing trade routes; the promise of lucrative sales particularly of rare species; and inadequate funding and action by law enforcement (Norconk et al., 2020; Shanee et al., 2017). The increased acquisition of indigenous animals for the pet trade, either intentional or incidental (e.g., through hunting), is likely to be impacted by the exponential increases in human population densities and pressure on local habitats (Estrada, 2013; Hill, 2002; Oates, 2013).

Additionally, the accessibility and size of audiences on media platforms have played a major role in the dissemination of information on the availability and influenced demand for primate pets in the last decade (Bergin et al., 2021; Grasso et al., 2020; Krishnasamy & Stoner, 2016; Nekaris et al., 2013; Spee et al., 2019). While the internet is an effective way to reach potential buyers globally, recent studies suggest that the motivations for purchasing exotic pets vary and are culturally specific (e.g., Warwick et al., 2018). Bergin et al. (2021) and Campbell et al. (2021) found that buyers have pre-existing interests depending on personal experience, social influences, and availability of animals on the internet, in markets and in pet stores. A study of online exotic animal marketplaces in the Middle East found that viewers were more likely to respond with positive emojis than negative ones to depictions of celebrities holding pets or interacting with the exotic birds and mammals (Spee et al., 2019). Videos were especially popular. Live orangutans (*Pongo* sp.) appeared in 7.4% ($N = 31$) and gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*) in 0.7% ($N = 3$) of social media posts ($N = 418$) (Spee et al., 2019, tab. 2) and half of the species featured were classified by Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as Appendix 1, which includes the world's most endangered species. Although she characterized the continued use of "primate actors" in films from 1990 to 2013 as "low but steady," Aldrich (2018, p. 5) demonstrated that many of the films reviewed for the study have been popular as measured by box office income and audience ratings. More than 80% of film trailers ($N = 38$) reviewed exhibited primates with a human companion in an anthropogenic setting (e.g., a house) (Aldrich, 2018, fig. 4). The continued use of primates as actors in mass media counteracts efforts to protect wild primates and is a concern for the welfare of primates in the United States (Ross et al., 2011). While the ownership of a primate pet is influenced by their availability and enhanced intentionally or unintentionally by the media, the decision to purchase a primate appears to dependent on cultural variables and individual preferences.

3 | CONTEXTS IN WHICH THE PRIMATE PET TRADE FUNCTIONS

Ownership of "nondomesticated companion animals," is a key driver of the ever-expanding global wildlife trade (Lenzi et al., 2020), and research into the attitudes of current exotic pet owners suggest that the practice is very resilient. Former owners of exotic pets in China, Brazil, the United States, and Vietnam indicated very high interest (>75%) in purchasing another exotic pet compared with approximately 25% of those who had never owned one (Moorhouse et al., 2021). Similarly, in their survey shared via WeChat in China, Weldon et al. (2021) found significant interactions between acceptability of exotic pet ownership, knowing someone who owned an exotic pet, and searching for an exotic pet on the internet. In a study of exotic pet owners and those who intend to purchase an exotic pet in Japan, presumed "healing properties" was the highest-ranked driver closely followed by "cuteness" (Bergin et al., 2021). These authors also found that age of the prospective buyer made a difference, with older respondents indicating little interest in acquiring an exotic pet compared with individuals younger than 35 years of age. The relationship between age and prospect of owning an exotic pet may also be an effect of differences in the relative use of social media to increase awareness or perceived access to exotic pets. Apart from Moorhouse et al. (2021), we are unaware of studies in the United States that are focused on attitudes of primate pet owners.

Efforts to reduce the intention to obtain wild animals as pets have focused on three perspectives: (1) reinforcing the danger of contact and spread of zoonotic diseases, (2) emphasizing the rapid decline of animals in their native habitats, and (3) educating the public on the poor captive conditions to which wild individuals are often subjected during transportation and ownership. Of these, prospective buyers of exotic pets appear to be most deterred by the likelihood of the transmission of zoonotic diseases (Green, 2020; Moorhouse et al., 2021) (but see Morcatty et al., 2021 on the resilience of the online exotic pet trade during Covid-19 lockdowns in Indonesia and to a lesser extent in Brazil).

The current presence of Sars CoV-2 (Covid-19) in human populations worldwide, as well as the prevalence of other life-threatening diseases, for example, Ebola, HIV-AIDS, yellow fever (Bicca-Marques et al., 2017; Chomel et al., 2007; Keesing & Ostfeld, 2021; Lappan et al., 2020) has discouraged some potential buyers of exotic pets. Although nonhuman primates among mammals are not the most frequent sources of transmission of pathogens to humans, primates are among the top five mammalian orders labeled as the most common sources of zoonotic diseases (Keesing & Ostfeld, 2021).

In a large study that included interviews of prospective buyers of exotic pets in Brazil, China, the United States, and Vietnam, more than one-quarter of respondents lowered their interest in obtaining any exotic pet if told that ownership increased the risk of disease

transmission (Moorhouse et al., 2021). Fewer than 20% of respondents indicated they had concerns about conservation or the animal's welfare, that is, "I can give an exotic pet a better life than it would have in the wild" or "I'm not worried if buying exotic pets decreases wild populations," highlighting the disconnect between the exotic pet trade and decline in wild populations. Attitudes expressed by respondents in the United States were not significantly different than those in Brazil, Vietnam, and China (Moorhouse et al., 2021). While a prospective buyer of a marmoset in the United States from a pet store or online source may be aware of some risk of disease transfer, the argument that the purchase would impact species conservation in Brazil is less likely to be a concern. Marketing of the animals online or through social media conveys the sense that they are available, if not also abundant, and if abundant in the United States, why would one suspect that their populations are declining in their native habitats? In studies focused on chimpanzees, Ross et al. (2011) that the very common practice of portraying images of primates in proximity with humans not only increased the respondent's desire to own a chimpanzee (also see Leighty et al., 2015), but also encouraged them to view their conservation status in the wild as "healthy." We suggest that using the intellectual approach of citing population declines in the wild may not be as effective a deterrent as educating the public on the physical and emotional needs of primates. For example, Savage et al. (2022) showed that highlighting the close genetic relationship between humans and nonhuman primates, the social deprivation of isolation from family and members of their own species, and the care required to support a relatively long-lived animal deterred interest in owning a primate pet among Colombian children.

4 | PRIMATE WELFARE AND PRIMATES AS PETS

It is critical that primatologists articulate the reasons why nonhuman primates make poor pets. Characteristics such as their long lives, high level of intelligence, and overall behavioral and social complexity distinguish them from most animals in the exotic pet trade (i.e., reptiles and amphibians, Altherr & Lameter, 2020; Elwin et al., 2020). Chimpanzees may live more than 40 years in captivity (Havercamp et al., 2019) and small-bodied marmosets may live 10 years or longer (Tardif et al., 2011). Their long lifespan puts the commitment to care for nonhuman primates on a much different scale than that for most domesticated pets.

Captive nonhuman primates have been exploited for their intelligence, curiosity, and human-like behaviors by the media (Aldrich, 2018; Bockhaus, 2018; Grasso et al., 2020; Krishnasamy & Stoner, 2016). The raised arms of slow lorises in response to human fondling is the best-known example of how an evolved behavior is misinterpreted by prospective pet buyers as cute, funny, and desirable (K. A. I. Nekaris et al., 2013). All 100 online videos of privately owned slow lorises analyzed by Nekaris et al. (2016) found that the owners violated at least one of the "five freedoms" of animal

welfare (e.g., many individuals showed stressful behavioral characteristics, were overweight because of a poor diet, showed evidence of infections related to tooth removal, or were held by humans). The very common practice of separating primates prematurely from family groups and housing them alone with private owners tends to result in long-standing emotional and behavioral disorders in which the animals lack species-typical behaviors and are at risk of injuries to self or to their human caregivers (Bee, 2017; Freeman & Ross, 2014; Fuller et al., 2018; Lopresti-Goodman et al., 2012; Soulsbury et al., 2009).

Nonhuman primate pets also require specialized and experienced veterinary care, regular health monitoring, and emergency care that may not be immediately available to private pet owners (<https://primate.wisc.edu/primate-info-net/pin-factsheets/pin-factsheet-primates-as-pets/>). Finally, suitable foods are likely to be overlooked with primate pet owners assuming that a human diet is appropriate and easily shareable with a nonhuman primate (Seaboch & Cahoon, 2021). Primate species evolved dietary adaptations to local environmental conditions in the wild (e.g., Garber et al., 2015) that are not easily reproduced in captivity. Feeding primate pets primarily human foods, harmful foods (e.g., high-energy foods to howlers or colobines) or omitting required nutrients (e.g., vitamin D to platyrrhines) (Ceballos-Mago & Chivers, 2010) compromises health and shortens the lifespan of captive primates. Could an emphasis on primate welfare, supported by clear, effective regulation help reduce the population of primates in private homes in the United States?

5 | REGULATORY OVERSIGHTS IN THE EXOTIC PET TRADE

The attraction of exotic animals held as pets dates to the 18th century in Europe (Nijman & Healy, 2015) and is embedded in various cultures in source countries (Asia, Africa, and tropical America). The two sources of legal protections for animals (and plants) in the United States are the Lacey Act of 1981 that regulates overhunting and interstate trade, and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 that provides funding for habitat restoration and regulates international trade in conjunction with CITES recommendations (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) (Table 1).

The ESA, passed by Congress in 1973, provides federal assessment, regulation, and funding to protect species from extinction and rehabilitate habitats on which endangered species depend. Although conceived as a mechanism to protect US species and habitats, about one-third of the species listed by the ESA in 2020 are not indigenous to the United States (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/R46677>). The predecessor of the ESA, the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969, supported a United Nations resolution to "ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of species" (Sheikh et al., 2021, p. 2). The global treaty for the protection of animals, plants, and their products or "The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora" (CITES) came into effect in 1975.

TABLE 1 Regulatory bodies and legislation impacting the primate pet trade in the United States.

Regulatory body	Jurisdiction, date of origin	Intention	Enforcement	Extent of primate protection
CITES	International (import/export trade regulations); United States 1975	Agreement between countries to regulate or ban trade based on species vulnerability (Appendices I, II, III); Conference of Parties (CoP) (currently 184 member parties) meets every 2–3 years to review conservation status based on field assessments (Most recent: CoP 19, Panama City, November 2022).	Self-determined by individual countries and signatories.	Primates are on either Appendix I (prohibited from trade, with exceptions); or Appendix II (export permit required).
Endangered Species Act (ESA)	United States, 1973 (Preceded by the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966) to preserve native species; amended by the Endangered Species Conservation Act (1969) extended to species in danger of extinction worldwide.	Conservation of endangered or threatened species. As of 2020, 692 foreign species are protected by the ESA (Congressional Research Service https://crsreports.congress.gov/R46677). In 1969, the ESCA supported UN resolution (1963) for formation of international treaty leading to CITES.	US Fish and Wildlife Service (US Department of Interior). The ESA is the regulatory body of CITES in the United States.	Species are classified as "Endangered" or "Threatened." Endangered species are protected from international transfer; also applies to threatened species on a case-by-case basis.
Lacey Act	United States, 1981	Prohibits trade in wildlife, fish, or plants that have been taken, transported, or sold illegally according to state, federal or foreign laws (Anderson, 1995). Amended in 1988 to strengthen requirements for documentation and increase penalties of some actions from misdemeanor to felony offenses.	US Fish and Wildlife Service; USDA	Not specific to nonhuman primates.
Captive Primate Safety Act	US H.R.3135/S.1588 in the 117th Congress, 2021–2022	Proposed amendment to the Lacey Act to restrict the inter-state transfer of all primates in the pet trade. Exempts primates housed in research institutions, accredited sanctuaries, and zoos.	Same as the Lacey Act	Would prohibit breeding and transfer of primates for the pet trade in the United States.
Animal Welfare Act	US care and treatment standards for animals, 1966; amended several times	Enacted to ensure that animals in research and exhibition (e.g., zoos) are provided with humane care. Amended in 1976 to include provisions for transportation. Amended in 1985 to provide for the establishment of Institutional Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) (Cardon et al., 2012).	Permitting to breed, transport, and exhibit animals overseen by USDA.	Does not regulate pet stores, pet owners, or home sellers.

Abbreviations: CITES, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; Endangered, in danger of extinction throughout all or most of its range; Threatened, likely to become endangered within all or a significant portion of its range in the foreseeable future (determined case by case).

Currently, there are 185 signatories (countries or territories) of CITES that have agreed to monitor the status of their wild populations of plants and animals and impose trading limits across international boundaries. All countries with indigenous populations of nonhuman primates are signatories of CITES (CITES Secretariat, 2022). Species listings are reviewed and updated every 2–3 years with input from taxonomic specialist groups working under the auspices of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Cotton et al., 2016; IUCN, 2019). In turn, the IUCN Species Survival Commission informs CITES decision-making and, indirectly the ESA, as to the population status and risk of extinction of plants and animals.

Although regulators in both CITES and the ESA consider conservation trends in populations of species, they differ somewhat in terminology and the mechanisms used to “up list” or “down list” species. The ESA uses two threat categories, Endangered or Threatened, whereas CITES uses several categories, but we focus on three that are equivalent to the ESA categories: Critically Endangered, Endangered, and Vulnerable. Unlike CITES in which a convention of parties (the signatories to the treaty) meets every 2–3 years to reassess the threat levels for vulnerable species, changes to the ESA generally take several years and can be initiated by individuals or groups who petition the US Secretary of the Interior. A recent ESA petition from individuals and organizations removed the split listing of captive and wild chimpanzees (Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, 2015). Wild and captive chimpanzees were listed as Threatened in 1976; wild populations were raised to Endangered in 1990; and deliberations to raise captive chimpanzees to “Endangered” status began in 2010. The designation was finalized in 2015 after extended professional and public input (Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, 2015).

CITES lists nonhuman primates in either Appendix I (species threatened with extinction; exportation prohibited) or Appendix II (controlled trade required to reduce population decline; trade possible with export permit. The importing country may have additional requirements). Nijman and Healy (2015) found a dramatic decline in the international trade of wild-caught primates after 1970 with the successful of implementation of CITES agreements globally. However, they also noted an increase in the trade of captive-bred individuals, starting in the 1990s, exceeding 50,000 individuals/year by 2010 (Nijman & Healy, 2015). An unknown number of captive-bred primates are traded as pets. The most direct and potentially impactful measure leading to a ban on pet primates in the United States is the recently proposed amendment to the Lacey Act, introduced to Congress in 2019 and subsequent congresses as the “Captive Primate Safety Act.”

The Captive Primate Safety Act, currently identified as H.R.3135/S.1588 (117th Congress), is notable for two reasons. First, it would provide the broadest protection yet for primates by eliminating the interstate trade of primates as exotic pets. The bill would “prohibit the importation, exportation, transportation, sale, receipt, acquisition, and purchase in interstate or foreign commerce, or in a manner substantially affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or possession, of any live animal of any prohibited primate species” (H.R. 3135—117th Congress: Captive

Primate Safety Act, GovTrack, 2022). The language “...any prohibited primate species” is clarified in Section 2g as “any live species of nonhuman primate.”

Second, primates in research facilities licensed by the US Department of Agriculture, accredited zoos, and sanctuaries are exempted from the interstate trade regulations of the bill. Thus, the Captive Primate Safety Act would both regulate the traffic of primates bred for commercial purposes in the United States and acknowledge the legitimacy of research facilities engaging in primate research and education. In a letter in support of the bill, Stephen Ross and colleagues from Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago noted the potential for added protection for some primates, “The number of smaller primates such as monkeys has not undergone the same change (in legislation as chimpanzees) despite the same public safety and animal welfare concerns” (S. Ross, personal communication, 2020).

While we cannot provide a current assessment of the scale of the pet trade in the United States, a recent study suggests that the trade is very active. Seaboch and Cahoon (2021) monitored the sale of 550 nonhuman primates on exotic pet websites from June 2019 to June 2020. More than two-thirds of the primates were platyrrhines and one-third of those were marmosets. This preference is likely related to their small body size (compared with catarrhines) resulting in the overrepresentation of diminutive primates in the US primate pet trade. It is also noteworthy that 79% of the primates sold were <1 year, and 62% were male (Seaboch & Cahoon, 2021), possibly indicating a preference for young animals from a buyer's perspective, and the retention of females for breeding from a breeder's perspective. This study was limited to a survey of exotic pet websites and did not consider primate pet offerings directly from breeders or on other social media venues.

Our perspective is that primates should not be available as pets in the United States, but current regulations have been insufficient to restrict the trade. The Captive Primate Safety Act would reduce the incentive for breeding primates for the pet trade by banning the transfer of primates as pets across state lines.

6 | WHY THE UNITED STATES HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO BAN THE SALE OF PET PRIMATES?

We identify three factors that may contribute to the continued proliferation of primates in the United States pet trade.

1. Regulations of primates in the pet trade are inconsistent among states and often confusing. Permission to obtain and keep a primate in a private home in the United States ranges from complete absence of statutory oversight to a partial ban that may permit ownership of small-bodied primates, to permit/licensure schemes that do not prohibit primates in private homes, to a comprehensive ban on primate pets (Figure 1).
2. K. A. I. Nekaris and Jaffe (2007) found multiple species of phenotypically similar, but genetically distinct, species of slow lorises in the Javan pet trade. They highlight the difficulty of

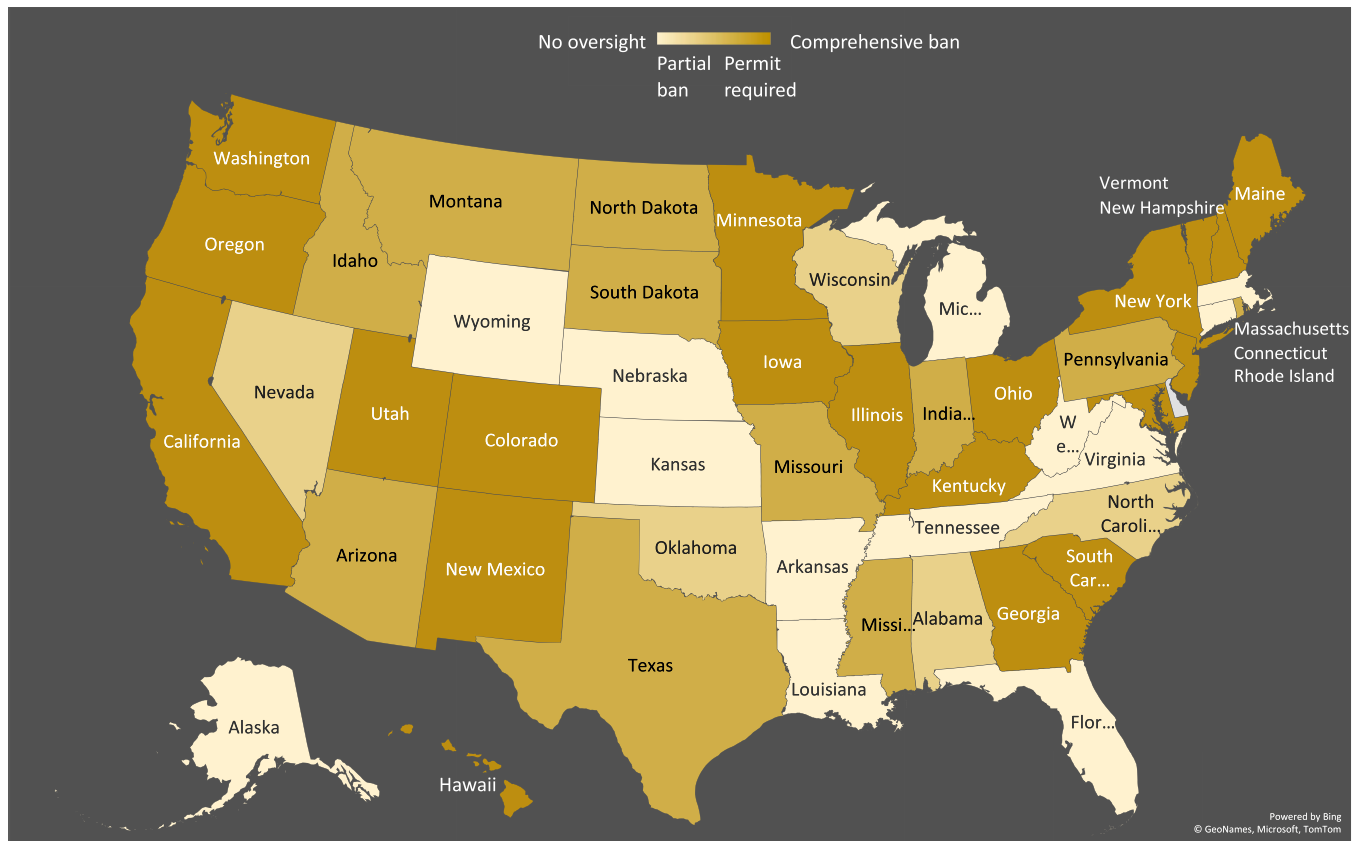


FIGURE 1 Map of the United States with primate pet trade designation by state ranging from no ban to comprehensive ban, with two intermediate categories (partial ban and permit required). Data from the Michigan State University College of Law (2020).

TABLE 2 Primate genera from the Americas found in the US primate pet trade and their conservation status in existing national and international laws or conventions.

Genus/species	English common name	ESA	CITES (Appendix)	IUCN Red List
<i>Alouatta</i> spp.	Howler	EN	I or II	LC, NT, EN, VU
<i>Aotus</i> spp.	Night monkey	-	II	LC, VU, NT, EN
<i>Ateles</i> spp.	Spider monkey	EN	I or II	VU, EN, CR
<i>Callithrix</i> spp.; <i>Mico</i> spp.	Marmoset	EN	I or II	LC, VU, NT, EN, CR
<i>Cebuella pygmaea</i>	Pygmy marmoset	-	II	VU
<i>Cebus</i> spp.	Capuchin	-	II	LC, VU, NT, EN,
<i>Saguinus</i> spp. & <i>Leontopithecus</i> spp.	Tamarin	EN	I or II	LC, VU, NT, EN, CR
<i>Saimiri</i> spp.	Squirrel monkey	(EN)	I or II	LC, NT, EN
<i>Sapajus</i> spp.	Brown capuchin	-	II	LC, NT, EN, CR

Abbreviations: CITES, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; CR, critically endangered; EN, endangered; ESA, Endangered Species Act; IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature; LC, least concern; NT, not threatened; VU, vulnerable.

discerning among closely related species by field officers of regulatory agencies. We identified the diversity of IUCN Red List and CITES statuses of platyrrhine genera (Table 2) potentially leading to confusion over regulated and nonregulated species. While the ESA or state laws could be amended to provide more

up-to-date and specific protections, primates are more likely to fall into colloquial categories (e.g., “capuchin” that nearly runs the gamut of IUCN categories from “Least concern” to “Endangered”) (Table 2). Some taxa that are relatively common in the US pet trade, that is, night monkeys (*Aotus*), pygmy marmosets (*Cebuella*),

and capuchins (*Sapajus* & *Cebus*) are not listed in the ESA (also see Cooney et al., 2021—a call to reassess CITES threat categories). The most comprehensive way to reduce confusion of species identification would be to ban *all* primates from the pet trade in the United States by supporting the proposed amendment to the Lacey Act, H.R.3135/S.1588.

3. Breeding primates for the pet trade in the United States is heavily commercialized and highly lucrative (Norconk et al., 2020; Seaboch & Cahoon, 2021). This headline in the Tampa Bay Times notes resistance to the Captive Primate Safety Act: “Congress moves to make monkey trading illegal across state borders: A Florida monkey breeder says legislation would hurt business.” Our goal is not to increase or decrease the profitability for breeders, but to abolish the practice of breeding primates for the pet trade. It should not be a business proposition.

7 | WHAT CAN PRIMATOLOGISTS DO TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PRIMATES KEPT AS PETS IN THE UNITED STATES?

Among educational actions that can be taken (e.g., including the challenges of the legal and illegal trade in live primates in conservation courses in college-level training and field schools) here are three immediate actions that we can take.

First, primatologists have a responsibility to remove photos of themselves or other humans holding or being close to nonhuman primates from websites, blogs, films, and other publicly accessible media. These are powerful and seductive images that present nonhuman primates as suitable pets (Aldrich, 2018; Ross et al., 2011) and are also a violation of the IUCN’s “Best Practices for Responsible Images of Primates” (Waters et al., 2021, <https://human-primate-interactions.org/resources/>). Photos that portray primates as tame and charismatic enhance the attraction of monkeys, lemurs, lorises, and apes as pets and put individual primates at risk of permanent cognitive deprivation and ill health. Such images should be replaced with a clear statement that the apparent availability of captive-bred primates does not reflect the reality that most primate populations are declining in the wild (Estrada et al., 2017, 2022).

Second, primatologists should take an active stance on social media condemning the exploitation of primates as pets on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and so forth. Social media is the most powerful and uncontrolled influence in the desire to have monkeys as pets. As a community, primatologists could develop simple statements that are easily understandable to the public so that we can respond directly and intentionally to posts with a combination of emotional and factual points. A study of the content and cultural influences on wildlife trade social media posts in Indonesia suggested that providing professional information that highlights specific issues (e.g., species characteristics, behavior and welfare issues, and differences between domesticated species and nonhuman primates) may be more effective at educating prospective pet owners than emotional appeals (Feddemma et al., 2020).

Third, we should expand our efforts to share expertise in primate biology and conservation to educate students and the broader public about the exotic pet trade and other threats to primates. Specific actions may involve contacting congressional staffers charged with developing new legislation; volunteering to improve the outreach of our professional societies; and adding content to course curricula addressing the impacts of the national and international primate pet trade on the well-being of primates.

We encourage the American Society of Primatologists (ASP) and the International Primatological Society (IPS) to clearly state their opposition to the primate pet trade in prominent positions on their websites. Other excellent sources of information on the exotic pet trade include The Revelator (e.g., <https://therevelator.org/social-media-illegal-pet-trade/>; <https://therevelator.org/pet-trade-pandemics/>) and TRAFFIC (an NGO working on wildlife trade, e.g., <https://www.traffic.org/publications/search/page3/?q=pet+trade>).

Fourth, we invite you to become part of and promote the ASP Conservation Committee’s plans to conduct an awareness-building campaign as a source of information about the perils of the primate pet trade, using the ASP website, social and print media, and public-interest webinars. The campaign will employ a strategy used to keep “The World’s 25 Most Endangered Primates” list active in the media (Acerbi et al., 2020) by creating a regularly updated blog that highlights primate species that are found in the US pet trade. The campaign will serve to debunk perceptions that having a primate as a pet in the United States will improve their conservation status or individual well-being. As primatologists, we should be united in expressing our grave concern about the primate pet trade to a general audience (<https://speakingofresearch.com/2022/06/09/an-important-thing-the-guardian-and-peta-can-do-to-protect-primates/>); decry the breeding of primates for the pet trade in the United States as a commercial activity for the benefit of the breeder or trader and not the primate; acknowledge that the underlying genetic similarities of human and nonhuman primates not only increase their attraction as pets, but also increase the transmission of zoonoses or human diseases to nonhuman primates; and recognize that most primates are purchased as infants, have the potential to become dangerous to their owners as adults, are not domesticated and therefore cannot develop normally outside of their natural social and ecological environment, and generally face an uncertain future if they survive.

We encourage our readers to take action by sharing your knowledge and passion for keeping primates out of the pet trade in the United States; becoming involved with the ASP Conservation Committee; carefully choosing images to portray primate characteristics and behaviors; or contacting the authors for more information.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Marilyn A. Norconk: Conceptualization (equal); writing—original draft (lead); writing—review and editing (equal). **Sylvia Atsalis:** Conceptualization (equal); writing—review and editing (equal). **Anne Savage:** Conceptualization (equal); writing—review and editing (equal).

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The authors are willing and able to share any publications or other resources cited in this publication.

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