

ACTION FOR PRIMATES (AfP)

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Dr Nedim Buyukmihci, veterinarian and co-founder of Action for Primates, stated: "Keeping baboons or other non-human primates in laboratories is inhumane. Regardless of their source, non-human primates are wild animals; they have not developed the domesticated status of animals such as cattle or dogs. It is axiomatic that life in the laboratory is infinitely poorer than in a natural setting; the individuals' wide spectrum of needs, desires and options for welfare and well-being cannot be provided adequately in such a setting. Baboons are highly intelligent and active individuals and will become withdrawn (obtunded) or exhibit stereotypical behaviour (repetitive, purposeless behaviour) in cages. It is well-known that no amount of physical or social enrichment will completely ameliorate the negative aspects of laboratory housing.

"The signs seen in Jemma, the adult olive baboon being held captive at Eastern Virginia Medical School, are typical of the negative effects of being in a laboratory setting: loss of weight, loss of hair and serious self-inflicted damage (so called self-injurious behaviour). Her suffering, psychological and physical, has been compounded by the multiple episodes of anaesthesia and surgery to which she was subjected for the removal of her gestating infants as part of the experiment. The one infant who Jemma was allowed to give birth to was permanently removed from her at eight months of age. The mother-infant bond is one of the most important aspects of non-human primate development and well-being, not only for the infant, but also for the mother. Removing infants results in intense psychological trauma for mother and offspring, something that is likely to last a lifetime. The fact that Jemma was subjected to multiple such deprivations is unconscionable.

There is no reason, however, why Jemma could not be relocated to a sanctuary where she can live with other baboons. I have worked for many years with monkeys, including baboons, who were relocated to a sanctuary after being used in research. All were remarkably resilient in overcoming almost all their psychological and physical traumas. This was accomplished by providing them with considerable space in large, outdoor enclosures comprising earth, plants and fresh air, and then carefully introducing them to other monkeys so that they could have the socialisation they desperately needed. I never saw a 'failure', even in those individuals who were severely traumatised. In Jemma's case, it may take a while to socialise her to others and she may never lose all her stereotypical behaviour, but her quality of life would be substantially better than remaining where she is.

"Although the immorality of keeping non-human primates in laboratories is unquestionable, it is also scientifically proven that the profoundly abnormal conditions of laboratory housing compromise the credibility of any data derived."