BABOON FACT SHEET

The baboons are some of the largest non-hominid members of the primate order; only the Mandrill and the Drill are larger. Baboons have long dog-like muzzles, close-set eyes, heavy powerful jaws, thick fur except on their muzzle, a short tail and rough spots on their rear-ends called ischial callosities. These calluses are nerveless, hairless pads of skin which provide for the sitting comfort of the baboon (and other Old World monkeys). Males of the Hamadryas Baboon species also have a large white mane. There is considerable variation in size and weight depending on species. The Chacma Baboon can be 120 cm (47 inches) and weigh 40 kg (90 lb) while the biggest Guinea Baboon is 50 cm (20 inches) and weighs only 14 kg (30 lb). In all baboon species there is pronounced sexual dimorphism, usually in size but also sometimes in color or canine development.

Baboons are terrestrial (ground dwelling) and are found in savanna, open woodland and hills across Africa. Their diet is omnivorous, but is usually vegetarian. They are foragers and are active at irregular times throughout the day and night. They can raid human dwellings and in South Africa they have been known to prey on sheep and goats. Their principal predators are man and the leopard, although they are tough prey for a leopard and large males will often confront them. Baboons in captivity have been known to live up to 45 years, while in the wild their life expectancy is about 30 years.

SOCIETY:
Most baboons live in hierarchical troops of 5 to 250 animals (50 or so is common), depending on specific circumstances, especially species and time of year. The structure within the troop varies considerably between Hamadryas Baboons and the remaining species, sometimes collectively referred to as savannah baboons. The Hamadryas Baboon has very large groups comprised of many smaller harems (one male with four or so females), to which females from elsewhere in the troop are recruited while still too young to breed. The other baboon species have a more promiscuous structure with a strict dominance hierarchy based on the female matriline. The Hamadryas Baboon group will typically include a younger male, but he will not attempt to mate with the females unless the older male is removed. Baboons can determine from vocal exchanges what the dominance relations between individuals are. When a confrontation occurs between different families or where a lower-ranking baboon takes the offensive, baboons show more interest in the exchange than exchanges between members of the same family or when a higher-ranking baboon takes the offensive. This is because confrontations between different families or rank challenges can have a wider impact on the whole troop than an internal conflict in a family or a baboon reinforcing its dominance.

MATING AND BIRTH:
Baboon mating behavior varies greatly depending on the social structure. In the mixed groups of savannah baboons, each male can mate with any female. The allowed mating order among the males depends partially on the ranking, and fights between males are not unusual. There are however also subtler possibilities; some males try to win the “friendship” of some females. To garner this friendship, they may help groom the female, help care for her young, or supply them with food. Some females actually prefer such “friendly” males as mates.
A female initiates mating by presenting her swollen rump to the male. But ‘presenting’ can also be used as a submissive gesture and is observed in males as well. In the harems of Hamadryas baboons, the males jealously guard their females, to the point of grabbing and biting the females when they wander too far away. Despite this, some males will raid harems for females. In such situations it often comes to aggressive fights by the males. Some males succeed in taking a female from another’s harem. This is called a ‘takeover’. Usually every other year, and after an approximately six month gestation, the female gives birth to a single young. The young baboon weighs approximately one kilogram and is colored black. The females tend to be the primary caretaker of the young, although several females will share the duties for all of their offspring. In mixed groups males sometimes help in caring for the young of the females they are “friendly” with, for instance they gather food for them and play with them. The probability is high that those young are their offspring. After about one year, the young animals are weaned. They reach sexual maturity in five to eight years. Males leave their birth group usually before they reach sexual maturity; females are ‘philopatric’ and stay in the same group their whole life.

PETS:
Although they may appear to be friendly and nice and can resemble human babies for some people, monkeys should not be kept as, or seen as, pets. While baby monkeys are usually as easy to keep clean as a human infant (by diapering), monkeys that have reached puberty usually remove their diapers and cannot be toilet trained. They require constant supervision and mental stimulation. They usually require a large amount of attention. Monkeys cannot handle being away from their owners for long periods of time, such as family trips for example, due to their need of attention. Bored monkeys can become extremely destructive and may even go so far as to smear or throw their own feces. There needs to be a lot of time set aside for cleaning up whatever mess the monkey might make. Most adolescent monkeys begin to bite unpredictably and pinch adults and children. Any surgical means to stem this behavior (such as removing the teeth or fingertips of the monkey) is widely considered cruel, and it is usually difficult to find veterinarians who will treat them: even exotic animal veterinarians may not be familiar with them. Monkeys eventually have to grow up, and in most cases become wild and not easy to control. The monkeys may also become aggressive even to their owners. They can change from one minute to the next without warning, making it hard for the owner to fully understand them. The majority of monkey owners have to find other homes for them, such as zoos and monkey rescues. Monkeys are known to get attached to their first owner so it is not easy for a monkey to get used to their new environment. Monkeys need to be placed in social areas. It might be bad for the monkey to place them in non social areas which could lead to problems. It is not cheap to bring up a monkey. It becomes very costly when it comes to buying food and housing them. Some monkeys may even have special needs such as diets. In most large metropolitan areas in the U.S. it is illegal to keep monkeys in the home; even in places where they are legal, a Department of Agriculture permit is usually required. Their legal status as pets varies in other countries. Permits may be issued to those who qualify in the caring of monkeys.

LAB MONKEYS:
Monkeys are widely used in animal testing facilities. This is primarily because of their relative ease of handling, their fast reproductive cycle (compared to apes) and their psychological and physical similarity to humans. Use of monkeys in laboratories is cruel and produces little information of value.

ENTERTAINMENT:
Animal acts and exhibits are designed to provide “entertainment” to patrons. Kept in small, barren cages, forced to sleep on concrete slabs, and imprisoned behind iron bars, performing animals often suffer from malnutrition, loneliness, the denial of all normal pleasures and behaviors, loss of freedom and independence, even lack of veterinary care, and filthy quarters. Attracting customers is the first consideration and the animals’ welfare is often the last. Even when the mere display of the animals themselves is the “draw,” the animals rarely receive proper care--and almost never the socialization and stimulation they crave. Animals used for entertainment are subjected to rigorous and abusive training methods to force them to perform stressful, confusing, uncomfortable, and even painful acts; training methods can include beatings, the use of electric prods, food deprivation, drugging, and surgically removing or impairing teeth and claws. Confined to tiny cages and gawked at by crowds, animals in exhibits and acts endure constant stress. They may suffer from temperature extremes and irregular feeding and watering. Without exercise, they become listless, their immune systems are weakened, and they become prone to sickness; many resort to self-mutilation in reaction to stress or boredom. Mental illness is rampant among confined animals. Torn from their families and deprived of all dignity, every part of their lives is controlled by their captors. While zoos and aquariums may appear to be educational and conservation-oriented, most are designed with the needs and desires of the visitors in mind, not the needs of the animals. Many animals in zoos and aquariums exhibit abnormal behavior as a result of being deprived of their natural environments and social structures. Some zoos and aquariums do rescue some animals and work to save endangered species, but most animals in zoos were either captured from the wild or bred in captivity for the purpose of public display, not species protection. The vast majority of captive-bred animals will never be returned to the wild. When the facility breeds too many animals they become “surplus” and often are sold to laboratories, traveling shows, shooting ranches, or to private individuals who may be unqualified to care for them.