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## CAPUCHIN FACT SHEET



**KINGDOM:**

Animalia

**PHYLUM:**

Chordata

**CLASS:**

Mammalia

**ORDER:**

Primates

**FAMILY:**

Cebidae

**SUBFAMILY:**

Cebinae Bonaparte, 1831

**GENUS:**

Cebus Erxleben, 1777

The capuchins are the group of New World monkeys classified as genus *Cebus*. Their name comes from their coloration, which resembles the cowls worn by the Capuchin order of Roman Catholic friars. *Cebus* is the only genus in subfamily Cebinae. The range of the capuchin monkeys includes Central America (Honduras) and middle South America (middle Brazil, eastern Peru, Paraguay). Capuchins generally resemble the friars of their namesake. Their body, arms, legs and tail are all darkly (black or brown) colored, while the face, throat and chest are white colored, and their head has a black cap. This general pattern varies from species to species, as well as among individuals within a species. They reach a length of 30 to 56 cm (12 - 22 inches), with tails that are just as long as the body. They weigh up to 1.3 kg (2 lb, 13 oz).

Like most New World monkeys, capuchins are diurnal and arboreal. With the exception of a midday nap, they spend their entire day searching for food. At night they sleep in the trees, wedged between branches. They are undemanding regarding their habitat and can thus be found in many differing areas. Among the natural enemies of the capuchins are large falcons, cats and snakes. The diet of the capuchins is more varied than other monkeys in the family Cebidae. They are omnivores, eating not only fruits, nuts, seeds and buds, but also insects, spiders, bird eggs and small vertebrate. Capuchins living near water will also eat crabs and shells by cracking their shells with stones.

Capuchins live together in groups of six to 40 members. These groups consist of related females and their offspring, as well as several males. Usually groups are dominated by a single male, who has primary rights to mate with the females of the group. Mutual grooming as well as vocalization serves as communication and stabilization of the group dynamics. These primates are territorial animals, distinctly marking a central area of their territory with urine and defending it against intruders, though outer zones of these areas may overlap.

Females bear young every two years following a 160 to 180 day gestation. The young cling to their mother's chest until they are larger, when they move to her back. Adult male capuchins rarely take part in caring for the young. Within four years for females and eight years for males, juveniles become fully mature. In captivity, individuals have reached an age of 45 years, although life expectancy in nature is only 15 to 25 years.

Capuchins are considered the most intelligent New World. The Tufted Capuchin is especially noted for its long-term tool usage, one of the few examples of primate tool use other than by apes. When it sees macaws eating palm nuts, cracking them open with their beaks, these capuchins will select a few of the ripest fruits, nip off the tip of the fruit and drink down the juice, then seemingly discard the rest of the fruit with the nut inside. When these discarded fruits have hardened and become slightly brittle, the capuchins will gather them up again and take them to a large flat boulder where they have previously gathered a few river stones from up to a mile away. They will then use these stones, some of them weighing as much as the monkeys, to crack open the fruit to get to the nut inside. Young capuchins will watch this process to learn from the older, more experienced adults. During the mosquito season, they crush up millipedes and rub the remains on their backs. This acts as a natural bug repellent. When presented with a reflection, capuchin monkeys react in a way that indicates an intermediate state between seeing the mirror as another individual and recognizing the image as self.

#### **PETS:**

Easily recognized as the "organ grinder" monkeys, capuchins are also kept as pets, even when import of these animals is forbidden. 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. In the United States, around 50,000 non human primates, most of them monkeys, have been used in experiments every year since 1973; 10,000 monkeys were used in the European Union in 2004. Highly sociable animals, monkeys are kept in many different environments. 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. 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.