



House of Commons  
Environment, Food and Rural  
Affairs Committee

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**Primates as pets:  
Government response  
to the Committee's  
Eleventh Report of  
Session 2013–14**

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**Second Special Report of Session  
2014–15**

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 10 September 2014*

## Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated bodies.

### Current membership

[Miss Anne McIntosh](#) (*Conservative, Thirsk and Malton*) (Chair)  
[Richard Drax](#) (*Conservative, South Dorset*)  
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[Neil Parish](#) (*Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton*)  
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[Mr Mark Spencer](#) (*Conservative, Sherwood*)  
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### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/efracom](http://www.parliament.uk/efracom) and by The Stationary Office by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/efracom](http://www.parliament.uk/efracom).

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Weir (Clerk), Anna Dickson (Second Clerk), Sara Priestley (Committee Specialist—Environment), Sarah Coe (Senior Committee Specialist—Agriculture), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Lisa Stead (Committee Assistant) and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer).

### Contacts

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# Second Special Report

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported to the House on *Primates as pets* in its Eleventh of Session 2013–14, published on 10 June 2014 as HC 984. The Government’s response to the Report was received on 24 July 2014.

## Government response

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### Introduction

The Government is grateful to the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for its report on the inquiry into primates as pets. Defra welcomes the contribution that this report makes to improving the welfare of primates. Primates are complex animals that require specialist attention; something abundantly clear from the report and the evidence provided to the Committee. The nature of these animals means that their welfare must be paramount. The report is timely given the Government intention to review the Primate code. The Government’s detailed response to the recommendations is set out below.

#### *Recommendation 1:*

**1. We recommend that Defra commission independent research on the number and type of primates being traded and kept as pets in the UK. To increase the reliability of this research, we recommend that private keepers be given six months to register their primates before research begins. This call for registration should be supported by a publicity campaign explaining the benefits of registration, or a sanction. The Government should inform us of the results of this research within six months of receiving them, along with its plans for securing the welfare of pet primates in light of these results.**

The Government agrees that there are varying estimates of the number of privately held primates. However, there is no evidence to support the higher level estimates of the numbers involved which might justify the considerable effort and public expense involved in research in this area.

The Government notes the evidence from Andrew Greenwood of the British Veterinary Zoological Society that “*the numbers are way overestimated, possibly by a factor of 10. The numbers of primates in this country is probably fewer than 1,000. We have had figures cited up to 9,000; they are completely out of the air*”. There is also no guarantee that such an exercise would produce a figure or range that was any more accurate than the estimated ones we have currently.

The Government has noted some of the higher estimates of primates are based on a misquotation from the 2001 review of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (DWAA). The report was incorrectly attributed as indicating that there was an 85% to 95% non-

compliance rate with the DWAA. However, the report did not suggest this and in fact stated the following: “*Estimates from animal keeping organisations and the pet trade suggest an 85–95% rate of noncompliance, however we have found no proof to support non-compliance of this magnitude*”. We therefore consider that some of the higher estimates (7,500+) to be based on misleading information.

On that basis the Government does not consider it would be the best use of public resources, which need to be prioritised, to undertake independent research on the number and type of primates being traded and kept as pets in the UK.

It is also worth remembering that under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to fail to provide for the welfare needs of an animal. Keeping a primate as a pet would compromise its welfare and therefore be an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Defra will continue to work with key stakeholders to raise awareness of primate welfare and to ensure that the key message that primates should not be kept as pets is disseminated as far as possible.

### *Recommendation 2:*

**2. We recommend that the Government take the opportunity presented by its forthcoming review of the Primate Code to ensure that the Code is drafted in a clear and precise manner that makes it easy to enforce and comply with. We also recommend that species-specific appendices are added to the Primate Code. The Government should begin its review with immediate effect.**

### *Recommendation 3:*

**3. We recommend that the Government adopt a “primate-centred” approach when it reviews the Primate Code. This should include raising the standards in the Code to a level equivalent to zoo standards and ensuring that the Code adequately covers all stages in the life of a privately kept primate, including breeding and transportation.**

Defra will ensure that the recommendations about the primate code are fully considered as part of the review.

### *Recommendation 4:*

**4. We recommend that Defra review the Pet Animals Act 1951 to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in the internet age. (Paragraph 62)**

The Government considers that regardless of the age of the Pet Animals Act 1951, it still provides appropriate protection for the welfare of animals sold as pets. The 1951 Act makes clear that a pet shop is: the “*carrying on at premises of any nature (including a private dwelling) of a business of selling animals as pets...*”. This would therefore include businesses selling primates over the internet. Even a business selling over the internet must have premises where the animals are held and therefore should be licensed and subject to inspection.

However, we also consider that it is necessary to educate both internet advertisers and potential owners about how to sell or buy an animal. To this end, Defra is working with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG—a group of animal welfare organisations and pet-keeping interests) to encourage on line advertisers to apply PAAG’s minimum standards for the online advertising of pets. The standards were launched in September 2013 at an event in the House of Commons and are endorsed by Defra. The standards are important because the internet is an established medium for people who wish to buy and sell pet animals. Standard 13 states clearly, among other things, primates should not be offered for sale. (See: <http://paag.org.uk/standards/>)

As a result of the application of the standards and moderation of the sites by PAAG volunteers, a number of inappropriate adverts have been removed by the sites. In some cases it has been possible to report advertisers to the police and trading standards for their consideration.

Lord de Mauley has held two meetings with the major advertising sites to emphasise the importance of the standards, and the efforts being made to improve the advertising of pets online. A further meeting is planned later this year to check on progress.

#### *Recommendation 5:*

**5. We recommend that Defra launch a public education campaign to raise awareness of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and the Primate Code among local authorities, primate keepers and members of the public. (Paragraph 79)**

In taking forward publicity regarding the keeping of primates, Defra will make sure that this includes publicising the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and the Primate Code.

#### *Recommendation 6:*

**6. We recommend that Defra issue its guidance to local authorities on the provisions and implementation of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 without further delay. This guidance should include advice to authorities on employing experts from the zoo licensing inspectors list or those with diplomas in zoo and wildlife medicine. (Paragraph 84)**

Defra agrees that guidance on the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 is overdue. We will ensure therefore that it is published in the next 12 months and includes a reference to the potential use of zoo inspectors or zoo vets for accommodation inspections which involve the more exotic species, such as primates, prior to the grant or renewal of a licence.