

Good research paper about capuchin monkeys

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



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INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always had a fascination with primate species; in them, many see similar morphology, behaviors and interactions most reminiscent of humans. This has spawned years of endless dedicated study and the development of a new anthropological branch, primatology. These are people dedicated to the understanding of how primates live, how they structure their society, how they learn and how intelligent they are? The great apes, like Chimpanzees and Gorillas have recieved a great deal of attention, but they are not the only primate species of great interest to primatologists, the capuchin monkey is, as well. Capuchin monkeys got their name from the similarity between the species crown of hair and sideburns, much like the headdress and hairstyle of capuchin monks. Capuchins are a neotropical species; they are found in all South American countries except Chile and Uruguay. The species can be traced back more than 60 million years ago to an ancestor called, simply, Cebus. There are a few different

species of capuchins accepted by science, however, the potential for new species or subspecies is possible. The accepted species include, the black-capped capuchin (*C. apella*), white-faced/throated (*C. capucinus*), yellow-breasted (*C. xanthosternos*), white fronted (*C. albifrons*), weeper or wedge-capped (*C. olivaceus*). There are a number of subspecies acknowledged, including 11 that fall under the weeper and wedge-capped species alone. Capuchins are small in stature, averaging between 6 and 9 pounds, with lighter fur around the shoulders, necks and, sometimes, face (Monkey Sanctuary Organization 1). Most capuchins are primarily dark brown in color. The face has far less fur and can be more light tan, white or pink in color. The small monkey, also, has a long, prehensile tail that benefits these, almost exclusively, tree-dwelling species.

Deemed to be one of the most clever of primate species, the capuchins fascinate human researchers with their apparent high intelligence, tool use and behaviors in their group environments all speak to getting the most vivid and full picture of the capuchin species. Capuchin monkeys may be native to South America, but thousands reside in other countries, including the United States as zoo attractions, pets, in rescue facilities and owned by entertainment trainers (The Monkey Sanctuary Organization 1). In fact, the capuchin monkey is the one most associated with the “organ grinding monkeys, left, see throughout history. The manifestation of tool use and behaviors could and do differ when living in differing environments, be it wild or captive. For this reason it is beneficial, for researchers to discuss and monitor wild capuchins in their natural habitats, but also in zoos, rescue sanctuaries and within human homes. Comparing and contrasting these

issues of tools, behaviors and overall intelligences is a great means of understanding this clever primate species.

TOOL USE AMONG WILD CAPUCHINS

Bearded Capuchin monkeys living in the wilds of Brazil were the first identified and using tools as part of the process of eating. It says a lot about the intellect and learning potential of a species when it uses tools. Capuchins are quite adept at choosing the nuts most desirable, finding a flat stone to use as an anvil and taking rocks, sometimes as large as their own heads, and smashing the nuts to break them open and the capuchins can claim their “prize.” (Fragaszy 2). However what makes the wild Capuchins tool use so fascinating to researchers and scholars is because they not only use the tools, they use them skill and finesse; this speaks even more to the species cleverness and intellect. They are not only specific in their use of tools they are discriminating in the making of tools. For example, knowing how to strip a stick to make it into a proper tool or knowing which rocks can be used for smashing and which are best as anvils. Understanding the multi-use potential of any given tool is also a sign of higher than expected intelligence. Capuchins have rather complex rituals when it comes to preparing their food. Palm nuts must first be deemed suitable for harvest, when it is the capuchins will strip the husk away with their teeth and then leave the nuts to dry for several days to a week. Then they are prepared to crack their nuts and enjoy the meal. A study was conducted to test this skill. Researchers introduced wild capuchins with a cache of special palm nuts. Before presenting them, the researchers mark each nut to identify its flattest and therefore, most secure surface with which to place the nut on the anvil, for the best results.

Nearly 95% of the ten monkeys that participated were able to recognize the most secure side and successfully crack the nut and keeping the desirable meat of the nut from flying off the anvil (Pappas 1). This is high indication of their skills as tool using nut crackers. The researchers then did the same test with human beings. Time and again, the humans and capuchins both were equally clever enough to successfully position, crack and retrieve the nuts. Their cleverness also extends to using containers as a means to carry water to a desired location. One of the most intriguing tool uses is manipulating soft fibers, like sponges and leaves as a means of sopping of water or liquids. They also use sticks to pull syrup from small holes, as well as, using sticks to extend into ant holes and then eat the ants that climb along it. They are also known to use rocks and sticks as weapons against predators and for settling inter-group conflicts among other members of that group (The Monkey Sanctuary Organization 2).

CAPTIVE CAPUCHINS

As mentioned Capuchins thrive in their native lands of South America, but there are also many capuchins living in one form of captivity or another. Zoos, of course, have populations of capuchin groups on display in maintained habitats. Capuchins are also very popular as pets. Their small size and human-like features make them seem cute and ideally easy to train and control. While that may work out for some pet owners, many find that capuchins are anything but easy to control and can even be rather aggressive; many end up surrendered to sanctuaries and rescue organizations when the humans can no longer manage them (Mott 2). This is the sad reality for many wild animals that human beings have tried to train

as pets. That said the behaviors seen in capuchins in the wild may differ from those behaviors seen in captive capuchins. One of the greatest challenges faced by capuchins in captivity has less to do with behavioral variation, but physical repercussions that may not be beneficial for the species as a whole. Some of the morphological changes seen in captive capuchins include the shape of the skull, cranial adaptations, digestive tract differences and most significant overall smaller brain size. These physical changes could have a huge impact and literal “dumbing-down” of the species with captive environments (O’Regan and Kitchener 215). Living in captivity capuchins are still seen using tools, but their need to use them is far less. They have less need to create and manipulate tools in such settings. In captivity good food is provided therefore there is little need for many of the monkeys to be discriminating in finding and identifying food, something they would have to have learned in the wild. Many worry that captivity will show diminished cleverness and limiting of intellect under captive condition (Santos de Freitas, and Bicca-Marques 80-81). That said the greatest challenges facing captive capuchins is that they are not being challenged enough and that is having a negative effect on their intellect and potential. The monkeys that struggle the most in captive situations are those who were wild and have been caged and forced into captivity, these capuchins do not always come to thrive in captive environments and often have a difficult time interacting with other captive capuchins that have never been wild (Lynch-Alfaro, Izar and Renata 2-3).

COMPARISON & CONTRAST WILD AND CAPTIVE CAPUCHINS

Wild and captive capuchins alike are highly intelligent, adaptive and social animals that continue to show themselves as gifted tool users and tool makers, especially in the wild. These traditions and tasks are taught through learning and observation. That said in captive environments, monkeys from differing locales, be it wild or captive, may have a hard time communicating and functionally working together because there is a metaphorical language barrier. Capuchins in differing captive environments may not interact as successfully when introduced to new groups (Perry 988). In the wild, without negative human intervention, then these monkeys have a rather rich and defined organization that has been practiced by the primates for generations. In the wild capuchins are challenged by nature each and every day and finding food, water, and maintaining survival is non-optional. In captivity, especially monkeys born to captivity, have no real worries or threat of predation or starvation and therefore are not as challenged to find ways to secure those goals (Santos de Freitas and Bicca-Marques 81). Food, water and shelter are free and available in captive situations; the underwhelming level of challenge could be contributing to the morphological changes that may be negatively effecting the evolution of the capuchins intellect (O'Regan and Kitchener 215-216).

Capuchins in the wild thrive on the social interactions that are the base of their "culture" and social order; not unlike human beings. Traditionally, capuchin groups average 16 to 30 members, with member being both male and female. Females will spend their whole life with the birth group, while most males will leave once they mature. There are strict hierarchies

dictating the acceptable behaviors of both male and females (The Monkey Sanctuary Organization, 2). The constant social interactions are highly important to the development of individuals within the species. However, in captive settings, particularly, when kept in a home as a pet. When a pet owner has a monkey they generally only have one. This means that when you are not around, the capuchin will not get the proper and needed social interactions and one-on-one attention they require; this can leave the little primates in a state of genuine depression, which can lead to unpredictable behaviors (Mott 2).

At the end of the day we know that animals thrive far better when left to their natural environments, but for many reason, be it endangered status or poaching issues, placing some of the members of a species into a protected or sanctuary environmnets is often the only way to protect the species. Zoos often are not just an opportuntiy to see animals from all over the world, that most people would ever see in a day-to-day lives, its education (Fragaszy, 2). This awareness can result in an education on the need to preserve and protect animals and the habitats that they call home. Capuchins are not presently in danger of exticntion, but encroachment and more regualr internaction with humans, the two world are merging. That said many of these primates may begin to emulate actions they seen humans doing, such learned behavours may be, again, passed on to other members of a group. Changing how they intenract, in that instance in a postive way; but that may not always be the case.

Capuchins are one of the most fascinating and endearing primate species that people associate with being small, cute, human-like and entertainingly

intelligent. However, science is learning that that intelligence may be far more advanced, evolutionarily speaking, than ever previously given credit. The only other species to use tools for multiple differing tasks regularly are chimpanzees; who are often credited with being the tool using, most intelligent and most close relative to human beings (Santos de Freitas and Bicca-Marques 1-2). Capuchins, while not a member of the great apes, is proving to have an intellectual capability that is not generally expected from most monkey species.

The sad reality is that captivity is not benefitting that intellectual development and does not provide the species with enough of a day to day challenge to encourage ingenuity and invention. The tool use by captive monkeys is not always required depending on how they are fed and the acts become less about survival and more about passing time. Captive capuchins are physically being "de-evolved" by lifetimes spent in captivity. As mentioned researchers are seeing capuchin in captivity are actually showing smaller brain at maturity (O'Regan and Kitchener 215). That said it is very likely that living an unchallenging and "soft" life is actually going to cause the intellectual potential of these capuchins to drop. The less clever they become the less they may pass to their offspring and the creative tool use so unique to the Capuchins will be lost; especially if something negative happens to the wild populations throughout South America.

CONCLUSION

Capuchins are one of the smallest of primate species and yet one of the most clever. The ability of wild populations to use tools, to choose and adapt tools to multiple needs and ability to actively transfer these skills to offspring

makes them more similar to the great apes in intelligence than monkey species. Zoos and preserves, usually, have good intentions, offering their residents safety, food and a chance to participate, unknowingly of course, in information that may contribute to the well-fare of their species in the future. However, such facilities are proving to not be the most ideal solution if the maintenance of that unique intelligence is the goal. If captive capuchins are developing differently and showing smaller brain and cognitive abilities then the species is not being positively served. That said being kept as pets in people's homes seldom works out, no matter how dedicated a human keeper may be, and results in the primate being surrendered to unfamiliar surroundings. The best and most appropriate locale for capuchins to live is, of course, the natural habitats they belong to in South America. The reality is that wild capuchins have a mission, goal and purpose; they must procure food, water and shelter in order to guarantee their own survival, which is extintual. This need has aided the capuchin populations to learn to use tools to make those tools more effective and efficient. Tool use among captive groups is present but it is not as common or as imperative. In captive environments the urgency is simply not present; there survival is handed to them, therefore the need for intellectual inspiration, biological need and the challenge to adapt is absent. To maintain the integrity of this clever primate species it is necessary to protect their wildness and the environments they call home. The alternative is the inevitable "dumbing down" of a clever species under-challenged in cages instead of free in the trees.

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