

## wild about Cornwall

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**BELOW:** KODAK THE CAPUCHIN WAS CAPTURED AS A YOUNGSTER FROM THE WILD IN SOUTH AMERICA IN 2003, HE LIVED IN A CAMERA SHOP UNTIL HIS OWNER REALISED HE SHOULD HAVE THE COMPANY OF OTHER CAPUCHINS **TOP LEFT:** THE WILDFLOWER MEADOW WITH A TREMENDOUS VIEW OVER THE SEA

## the monkey sanctuary

After living in Cornwall for well over 20 years and with an obvious passion for wildlife, I am a little embarrassed to admit that I had never been to the Monkey Sanctuary. I decided to put that right in spring, and during my visit I was keen not only to learn more about their support of monkeys but also to see how the environment around the sanctuary is being managed for the benefit of some very special wildlife.

The Monkey Sanctuary was established in 1964 by Len Williams, a music teacher from London. He was given a woolly monkey as a pet, but soon realised that monkeys are social animals inherently unsuitable for keeping in isolation. So he decided to buy this wonderful

house near Looe and convert it into a monkey sanctuary.

During its 50-year history, the sanctuary once successfully bred woolly monkeys for release programmes, but it ceased this operation in 2001 because the chance of successful release became more remote. Since ➤



then, the sanctuary has continued to rescue monkeys from the UK pet trade.

Over the years, the Monkey Sanctuary has grown and now houses 38 monkeys of three different types: capuchins, woolly monkeys and Barbary macaques. I was surprised to learn that even in today's enlightened age, there are around 5,000 monkeys kept as pets in homes around the UK.

Many of the monkeys which find their way to the sanctuary have horrific backgrounds. Generally, they have been loved by the people who kept them, but the love translated into neglect through ignorance of their needs. It just isn't possible to give a monkey what it wants, and needs, in a domestic environment - and some monkeys can live for 50 years, meaning that monkeys can quite easily out-live their keepers.

Take Joey, a capuchin that spent nine years in a 6ft by 4ft cage. He never met other monkeys and was given a totally inappropriate diet - including sweets - lacking in the minerals and vitamins required for healthy growth. As a result, he will always be deformed by metabolic bone disease caused by years of poor diet and lack of exercise. Joey was rescued by the Monkey Sanctuary, and after a long period of treatment and socialisation with other capuchins, he is now at home with a social group which accepts him. There are many other heart-breaking stories of monkeys coming from similar backgrounds.

To take in a monkey has significant costs for the sanctuary. Typically in the first year, monkeys need extensive treatment from vets and staff. This consists of both physical and psychological programmes, and in the first year alone costs about £6,000. For this reason, the sanctuary can only take in five monkeys per year.

Tackling the problem of mistreatment of monkeys in the UK requires a wider approach. The trade in monkeys is illegal in many parts of the world, but it is still legal in the UK because the issue isn't regarded as a sufficiently high priority by our politicians. So education and campaigning are clearly two very important roles which need to be undertaken.

In 2009, it was recognised that the name of the organisation which was then the Monkey Sanctuary Trust didn't properly reflect the broad range of work being undertaken, so it was changed to Wild Futures. The Monkey Sanctuary is one of the flagship operations of Wild Futures, but the new name has enabled the charity to raise its profile nationally and internationally, helping it to achieve more in the many projects in which it is involved.



The face of Wild Futures in Cornwall very much remains at the Monkey Sanctuary, where visitors are a vital part of the fund-raising work required to keep the residents happy. During my own visit, I was impressed by several factors. Firstly the enthusiasm and passion of all of the staff - I found them all welcoming, but most importantly without exception they are all passionate about the well-being and protection of the monkeys. Secondly, the facilities for the monkeys are very good. Their system of cages is all interlinked so they can be moved from one area to another, which allows them to be rotated into different areas for more stimulation. Finally, I was impressed by the environment in which the sanctuary is set. Overlooking the south coast and set in quite mature woodland, the whole location is idyllic.

In keeping with the aims of an environmental charity, the grounds in which the sanctuary is based are managed for wildlife. Wanting to discover more about the gardens, woodland and surrounding coastline, I met up with Paddy Saunders, who serves as part-time wildlife gardener at the Monkey Sanctuary. Paddy's other professional activities revolve around his passion for insects - he loves bees and butterflies, is a committee member of Cornwall Butterfly Conservation and runs his own ecology business, Kernow Ecology.

Together we wandered around the gardens and into the wildlife hides. Video footage from various nests is beamed live into the wildlife hide so we could watch swallows and jackdaws feeding young. In another building, I learnt about

the important maternity roost of lesser horseshoe bats which can be found in the cellar of the Monkey Sanctuary. To be able to listen to their calls while watching them hanging around was amazing.

On the coastal slopes around the Monkey Sanctuary is a colony of very rare pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. One of only four colonies of this species found in Cornwall, these are also probably the earliest pearl-bordered fritillaries to emerge in the UK, with adults seen on the wing in mid-April. For many years now, Paddy has been undertaking management work for the butterflies and monitoring them each year with the support of the Monkey Sanctuary.

Paddy took me to one of the locations where the butterflies can be seen, and explained why they find suitable habitat here when so many of their other colonies have died out. This is quite an unusual coastline in Cornwall because it has quite mature woodland in an area where there are regular landslips ➤



**INSET LEFT:** PADDY SAUNDERS, ECOLOGIST AND WILDLIFE GARDENER  
**ABOVE:** THERE IS A MAZE OF INTER-CONNECTED CAGES FOR THE MONKEYS; DOG VIOLETS ARE THE FOOD-PLANT OF THE PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARY CATERPILLAR; THE PEARL-BORDERED FRITILLARY HAS A PATTERN OF ORANGE AND BROWN TYPICAL OF ITS FAMILY; LILY, THE WOOLLY MONKEY.



ABOVE: THE TREE-TOP CAFE

on unstable slopes. These punch holes in the trees, allowing sunlight to reach the ground encouraging spring flowers to grow. Paddy told me: "It is rare to find such early-successional habitats naturally occurring in a mature woodland."

The fritillaries need violets for their caterpillars to feed on but they also enjoy the warmth of the sun in the woodland glades. Paddy explained that the landslips provide a lot of bare stony ground which "acts like a night storage heater, keeping the warmth of the sun for long periods on this south-facing slope". A layer of bracken growing up around the violets protects them from the sun during the summer and dies back to create a blanket of low, dry cover through the winter. This blanket keeps the caterpillars of the fritillaries warm enough to hibernate and gives them a good start in the early spring.

Paddy's work involves a lot of brush cutting to keep on top of encroaching scrub. This helps violets to flourish in areas where landslips haven't done the job naturally, and encourages other flowers which provide sources of nectar for the adult butterflies. He also grows violets to transplant onto the slopes to increase the availability of food for the caterpillars.

With Paddy's help I was able to spend a lovely sunny afternoon with a these wonderful butterflies. If you would

like to do the same then make a note in your diary for next April when he will be leading a guided walk for Cornwall Butterfly Conservation. In the meantime, take a trip to the Monkey Sanctuary and have a great day out. 

*David is giving a talk on the wildlife of Cornwall at the Riverside United Church, Quay Road, West Looe starting at 7.30pm. This talk will help to raise funds for local conservation charities.*

## information

- ▶ For more about the Monkey Sanctuary, visit [www.monkeysanctuary.org](http://www.monkeysanctuary.org)
- ▶ For more about Wild Futures: [www.wildfutures.org](http://www.wildfutures.org)
- ▶ For more about Paddy Saunders and his work, visit [www.kernowecology.co.uk](http://www.kernowecology.co.uk)
- ▶ Cornwall Butterfly Conservation lead many guided walks. For more details, visit [www.cornwall-butterfly-conservation.org.uk](http://www.cornwall-butterfly-conservation.org.uk)
- ▶ Don't miss the Monkey Sanctuary's Wildlife Day on August 25. Many local wildlife groups will attend, making this a great family day out with many attractions. Check the website for details.