
Naturewatch

Eye on Animal Welfare

Brain-damaging primates for research

Experiments which deliberately brain-damage monkeys are ethically abhorrent. We at Naturewatch believe that they should therefore be banned, and we are asking for your assistance to make this happen.

The legislation which governs animal experiments, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), enshrines the belief that only certain experiments are permissible – namely, those whose benefits to man outweigh the harms inflicted on animals. Despite the soundness of the underlying principle, its application has come under recent scrutiny, such as in the campaign by Uncaged on the pig-to-primate organ transplants, and the thorough review by the Animal Procedures Committee which has highlighted weaknesses in the application of the Cost-Benefit Analysis.

At Naturewatch we recognise that animal experimentation is not going to be ended until there are adequate alternatives. Nevertheless we believe that **certain procedures are so ethically abhorrent that there can be no justification for them** – such as those which involve the deliberate brain-damaging of primates. A graphic description of this kind of experimentation is provided by 'Kate', an investigator for BUAV who worked undercover at Cambridge University:

"Some monkeys (under anaesthetic) had their head clamped and the top of the skull removed with a surgical saw - one of the researchers described this like 'taking a lid off a monkey'. Others had holes drilled in their skull and toxins injected into parts of their brain. This induced artificial brain damage that was supposed to mimic symptoms of human disorders like Stroke or Parkinson's disease... Around me the researchers were laughing and joking about the whole thing..."

Even the obvious bias of a BUAV investigator cannot overplay the hideous nature of the experiments. In a recent debate in the House of Lords, the Conservative peer Lord Lucas – a supporter of animal experimentation – observed that some of the procedures were 'unbelievably cruel' and later added:

"The practice which causes me the greatest distress is giving the symptoms of Parkinson's disease to

monkeys... which visibly causes a great deal of suffering"

Since it is widely recognised that monkeys have more highly developed cognitive skills than other animals, and thus an enhanced ability to suffer, we believe that it is appropriate to single out primates from other families of species, in order to exempt them from these procedures.

British law already acknowledges that some medical experiments are unethical:

- They may not be performed on humans except under the circumscribed conditions of a clinical trial. Failure to observe this basic tenet is usually taken as a sign of barbarity.
- Those which cause severe harm to animals for trivial scientific gain are banned under ASPA.
- Great Apes cannot be used because of their enhanced capacity to suffer.



Primate experiment in Israel

For obvious reasons it is difficult to obtain similar images from the UK. Nevertheless undercover investigations by BUAV and others show that this picture may be taken as sufficiently representative. © ISAV.

There are **alternative methods for studying the internal operation of the brain** without using invasive techniques, such as MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and PET (Positron emission tomography). Since they are used directly on humans with minimal ethical difficulty, this eliminates the issue of how reliably experiments on marmosets can be extrapolated to deduce information about the much more complicated human brain. These techniques are being refined in order to provide high temporal and spatial

resolution simultaneously – for example, so that they may be used for nanotechnology applications in medicine. It is therefore unlikely to be beyond the ingenuity of bright scientists to be able to adapt these and other techniques to obtain the data which has otherwise been derived from damaging the brains of monkeys.

We are therefore calling for an immediate end to such experiments through Early Day Motion 234:

This house believes that any scientific procedure which causes brain damage to monkeys or any other primate is ethically abhorrent, and calls on the Government to ban such procedures forthwith.

We urge you to join with us in calling for the end to this barbaric practice.