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Lisa Wathne
Captive Exotic Animal Specialist
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

Dear Ms. Wathne,

I have reviewed the video you sent me of the Amarillo Wildlife Refuge(AWR), several times. I wish I could say I was surprised; but after thirty-five years working with zoo and exotic animals from caretaker to veterinarian, I am not. The conditions are appalling and disgusting. Unfortunately, the conditions seen on this video are all too common in these private unaccredited "sanctuaries", and even in some zoos. AWR seems to be well below the very minimal standards of the Animal Welfare Act.

The following comments are pertaining to the short scenes on the video you sent. I trust that this is AWR, since there is nothing in the video identifying where the animals are. The chimpanzees, spider monkeys, capuchins, and caracal are all suffering. Suffering from neglect and indifference from our species. The flies and maggots pose a direct disease risk. Flies can carry bacterial contamination from rotting and spoiled food. The stagnant and fetid water can cause sickness and death. I would be more than a little astonished to find these animals free from diarrhea and debilitation. I am sure the flies are keeping the chimp's ear wound opened and preventing healing. The chimp is clearly tormented by the flies. From the video I see no source of fresh air, no fresh water, no fresh healthy food and no clean interesting enclosure...the very basics of animal husbandry.

With respect to the psychological appearance of the primates, I can make some deductions based on my experience and the video. I see no evidence of opportunity for behavioral enrichment, something that is critical for any captive primate species. They are lackadaisical and debilitated from the boredom of their environment. These poor animals appear to have a wretched existence.

Refuge is defined as shelter or protection from danger, trouble, etc. A place of safety; shelter; a safe retreat. These animals are not free from the danger or threat of disease, nor the pernicious strain of chronic stress which is documented as the initial factor causing animals to succumb to disease. In short 'happy' animals can fight off disease. Bored and 'unhappy' animals have a weakened immune system and cannot.

In closing, I commend your efforts to help these animals. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely

Dr. Mel Richardson
VETERINARIAN