



Primates: Natural Social Groupings and Compatibility

While all primates may benefit from social interaction, the pairings or social groupings they prefer vary by species. What is compatible for one species may not be for another.

For example, some species rarely do well with same-sex pairings or groups. You may improve your success with setting up compatible social housing by understanding the natural social groupings for the species in your care.

DID YOU KNOW?

Compatible social groupings also depend on the individual animal and each primate's temperament, past social experience, and current health status.

Primates that have had limited social experience with others of their own species, especially during young ages, are often harder to socialize as adults.



Harem Groups

- Do best with only one adult male in the social group
- Females can be housed together successfully
- Males of some species may be housed together when there are no females ("bachelor groups")

Examples: gorillas, patas monkeys, drills, and many guenon species

Family Groups

- Do best when housed as a mixed-sex pair with offspring, if present
- May have difficulty with same-sex pairings of unrelated primates
- Aggression tends to be over territory

Examples: marmosets, tamarins, and owl monkeys



Multi-Male/Multi-Female Groups

- Offer the most options in composing pairs or groups
- Aggression tends to be over social dominance
- Aggression may also be over resources, but that usually stems from an underlying dominance issue

Examples: macaques, capuchins, squirrel monkeys, spider monkeys, and baboons



Solitary, But Social

- Do not tend to live in true social groups in the wild
- May do best with free access to solitary spaces

Examples: nocturnal prosimians (e.g., bush babies, lorises) and orangutans



FIGHTING

Aggression does not necessarily mean that primates are not compatible. Aggressive interactions are a normal part of how many primate species establish and maintain their social relationships.

Careful planning and continuous monitoring are crucial to help make sure primates are safely separated when aggression is too intense. Fighting that results in serious wounds or relentless aggression are clear indicators that the primates should be separated.

PRACTICAL TIP



A primate behaviorist can offer helpful guidance on setting up stable social partners for your primates.

This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to help with promoting psychological well-being in primates. Topics covered in the series include social grouping, supporting species-typical activities, and special considerations.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov

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