

## PROFILE

# Kari Bagnall

Founder & Executive Director, Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary



There are some unlikely residents living in the trees of Gainesville, Florida. Along with insects, butterflies, birds, and squirrels, there are 120 monkeys who call the place home. They live peacefully at Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary, where they spend their days swinging from branches, munching on leaves, and digging in dirt. They didn't always have it so good. In fact, their current lives are a far cry from the ones they once led before they arrived. Founded in 1996, Jungle Friends provides permanent care for monkeys recovered from research, the exotic pet trade, and other exploitative industries. In the following interview, AAVS talks with Kari Bagnall, Founder of Jungle Friends, about her work as caretaker and advocate for animals.

**AAVS: As a sanctuary that has many animals relinquished from labs, how do you walk that thin line of working with the research industry to release primates, while also trying to ensure that new ones will not take their place?**

**KARI:** Some labs will not allow their retirees to come to Jungle Friends because we are considered too "animal rights." But, for the most part, if labs are inclined to retire their monkeys, they want them to go to the best sanctuaries, and Jungle Friends has a very good reputation. When monkeys are released to Jungle Friends, we are usually required to sign a confidentiality agreement, meaning that we are not allowed to publicize where the animals came from. However, to get grants from some foundations, they require a statement from the lab that the monkeys will not be replaced, and some labs have done this.

**How do you start communication with the labs?**

Actually, the labs always come to us. Someone from the lab usually e-mails or calls me—it can be anyone from a technician to the researcher himself. In one case, the National Institutes of Health was funding a non-invasive study, but told the researcher that in order for him to continue to receive grants, he needed to do brain mapping research, which is very invasive. Well, he opted to find homes for all 70 of the monkeys. It took us a year to locate homes for them and I accepted 10 special needs monkeys. This researcher got the

university to pay for their new building here at Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary, vasectomized all of the males, and he still donates to Jungle Friends every year!

**That's wonderful! But we can't just expect labs to willingly turn over monkeys, can we?**

We have had some monkeys come to us because USDA told a psych lab that they could not use positive reinforcement any longer. You see, the positive reinforcement they were using was food rewards. To be sure the animals were always hungry, they free-fed them, and then took away 20% of their food. Well, after one group of students moved on and the next group came in, they deducted 20% more of their food. So, in essence, the monkeys were fed only 60% of what they needed. One nearly starved to death. An inspector suggested the monkeys come to Jungle Friends.

**Thinking back from when you first started the sanctuary until now, how have your operations evolved?**

The sanctuary is unrecognizable! We just keep building bigger and better habitats for the monkeys. They have large naturalistic habitats with birds flying through (yes, they catch them from time to time) and squirrels grabbing their leftover food (they can't seem to catch the squirrels). They dig for worms, climb trees, eat bamboo and banana plants. We do as much as we can, and it is still never enough; they need to be in the wild!

**Psychologically, what do these animals need?**

Before I got involved with monkeys, I worked as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for abused and neglected children for eight years. I see the same atypical behaviors in these monkeys as I saw in the children—they both self mutilate: children use knives on themselves, and the monkeys bite themselves; they both rock, self-grasp, digit suck, and so on. What needs to happen is that these primates, human and non-human, all need to feel safe. With kids, after three bonds have been broken, they are less likely to bond again; they just do not want to go through another loss. I believe it is the same with these monkeys. Some will never trust again, not a human or another monkey; others will learn to trust. But all need to feel safe. They also need to have the least amount of stress. Grooming is the best stress reliever in monkeys, and for that to happen, monkeys need to live with other monkeys. Overall, monkeys just need to be allowed to be monkeys, and that can be really labor intensive. It is much easier and more efficient to simply hose out a cage with a concrete floor, rather than mow, rake, weed, re-plant, and mulch natural habitats. But it is well worth the effort!

**Is the healing process different for monkeys from labs versus animals from the pet and entertainment industries?**

The monkeys are so individualized it can be difficult to say for sure; however, we have had the worst luck with monkeys retired from labs. We have nine capuchins who were stolen from their jungle homes and families when they were adolescents, and lived for nearly 20 years in small, species-isolated cages. They were used in iron toxicity studies. We call them The Ironmen. At one time or another, they have all had companions, but in the end, they fight and need to be separated, and then we try again. Another group of squirrel monkeys, coincidentally from the same lab, have had similar problems. We did get them all paired with companions, but it was after several trips to the vet for stitches. It seems that the monkeys who have been species-isolated, even without human companionship, do much worse.

**It seems like a balancing act to provide modern care on a small budget, and continue to take in new animals. It must be hard if there is an emergency.**

Right now we are in that predicament. We accepted a large group of capuchins from a facility that went under. I was originally told we would receive a monetary gift from a company that did a story on their placement. I was also told that they were one group of capuchins living together so, I would have enough to build two habitats. In actuality, there were three white-faced capuchins in this group of 25 who really lived on the periphery and should be in their own habitat and a mother rejected her baby in transport, so the baby monkey, who was just a few months old, is now being bottle fed by our staff. Fortunately another two-year-old monkey has taken in the baby as her own, he is even riding on her back! To further complicate things, Jungle Friends received just one tenth of the promised gift. I have, however, raised over \$7,000 of the \$15,000 needed to build the habitats, and I will find donors to help us; but it can be pretty overwhelming. So, yes, it is always a balancing act!

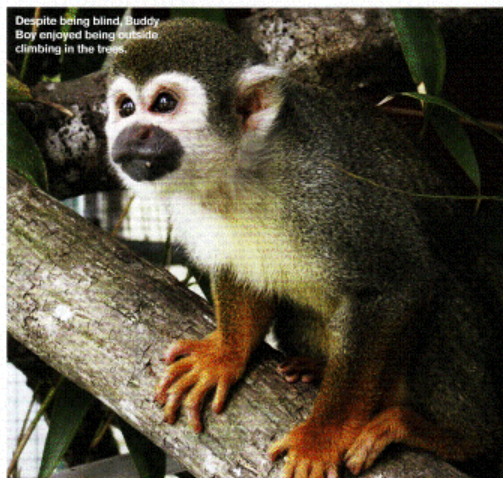
**Another area that Jungle Friends seems to keep in balance is care and advocacy for animals. How do you do that?**

We try to save as many monkeys as we can, of course, but we also try to educate everyone to live a more compassionate life. We have screenings for films like Earthlings and The Skin Trade to bring awareness, and we have a Volunteers to Vegans program to promote the vegan lifestyle. We also do presentations at animal conferences, schools, clubs, universities, retirement homes—wherever they will let me.

**Why do you include animal advocacy and education in Jungle Friends' mission?**

Because all wild animals should live in the wild, and we want to be out of the monkey business! Most people just don't know, so it is our job to inform them. About 20 years ago, I bought

a Maltese from a pet shop. I did not go in to buy a dog, but she was just so cute. Well, she had very bad [kennel] cough, so I called my vet. He sat me down and told me all about puppy mills and how these dogs were manufactured for humans. If it were not for him advocating for dogs, I would not have known about the horrors of puppy mills. It is our obligation to make people aware of animal abuse. If more people got involved and advocated for all animals, including the human animal, the world would transform!



Despite being blind, Buddy Boy enjoyed being outside climbing in the trees.

**Can you tell us about one monkey whose struggles and tribulations in a lab especially resonate in your heart?**

Buddy Boy was very close to my heart. He was a favorite here at Jungle Friends, and was such a sweet squirrel monkey with a wonderful soul. He was blind, but always made the best of everything, even to his last day. Buddy was stolen from his home in the rainforest and was housed alone in a lab for nearly 20 years. Because he was blind, we weren't sure if Buddy would want to go outside. It took about a year, but Buddy did go outside and he loved it! He climbed around, and even on his first day outside, didn't seem nervous. We could tell he loved to feel the wind on his face and nearly every warm day, Buddy would spend his time laying in the sun. I'm happy that Buddy was able to spend his golden years out of the lab and at Jungle Friends. **AV**