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September 30, 2007

Ape on the run is shot dead

Maurice Chittenden and Daisy Collins

A runaway chimpanzee was shot dead by staff at Whipsnade zoo yesterday after he and another animal escaped from their enclosure.

The second chimp gave herself up to a keeper in a nearby field.

Hundreds of visitors were told to lock themselves in their cars or were led to shelter in a gift shop while the animals were being traced.

The drama began just after the wild animal park opened yesterday morning when the two adult animals, Johnny and Koko, were found to be missing from the their enclosure.

The two had been moved to Bedfordshire from Regent's Park zoo in north London last year.

Johnny, 41, who underwent a vasectomy five years ago, was considered the more dangerous. In a profile written in 2003, staff described him as “a bit of a thug”. He was shot dead in the zoo grounds by a keeper using a rifle a few minutes after the escape was discovered. Soon after, Koko, gave herself up without resistance. “She seemed keen to get back inside,” said a zoo spokeswoman.

The zoo, which is owned by the Zoological Society of London, said in a statement: “As soon as members of staff were aware of the occurrence, the escaped animal procedure was immediately commenced. . . in the interests of public safety, Johnny was shot.”

Dr Alison Cronin, founder and director of Monkey World ape rescue centre in Dorset, said: “Chimpanzees are naturally aggressive ... The decision to destroy one of the escapees ... was a sound one.”

Despite their friendly images, chimps can be killers - adults in captivity can typically weigh up to 12 stone and have the strength of six adult humans.

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Janice Turner

You don't mess around with these animals because that's what they are, dangerous animals. They go crazy and are indiscriminate. There was an instance a couple of years ago when four chimps escaped from an animal sanctuary in California. One attacked an onlooker, quote "St. James Davis, 62, lost all the fingers from both hands, an eye, part of his nose, cheek, lips and part of his buttocks. He also suffered injury to a foot and his genitals."

In this case two chimps were shot and killed. In the time it takes a tranq to work, the chimp could kill someone. You just can't take chances.

Gman, Bradford, England

Funny how an episode like this brings out so many 'experts'!

As a keeper I know what lengths are taken to practice safe escape drills for just such a situation.

Yes humans have made zoo's a necessary place and now some of us do our best to make these places the best we can.

No one will be more disappointed and upset than the keeper who had to take the shot against the chimp.

I, like everyone else on this story was not present at the incident nor do I have the full facts but it is undoubtly the case that, sad as it is, this would have been the correct decision BEFORE a member of the public was hurt or killed.

My sympathesise to all at Whipsnade and especially the professional person who pulled the trigger.

A. Greenyer, Dumfries, Dumfriesshire

Even if anesthetics may have made the chimp more dangerous as the zoo has coaxed other ape 'experts' to say. Wasn't it at least worth the trouble of trying first. You can always shoot this poor monkeys brains out after the tranqs don't work. I can't help but wonder if the 'bit of a thug' rep the chimp had influenced the decision by it's keepers. He wasn't appropriately deferring to the people that were imprisoning him, and probably didn't have many friends among the 'gaurds'. They make movies about the heroic nature of people who escape prison camps all the time. I guess it's different when the prison camp is full of animals.

Billy J Pringle, Austin, USA/Texas

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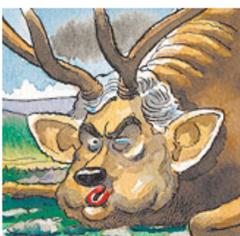
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