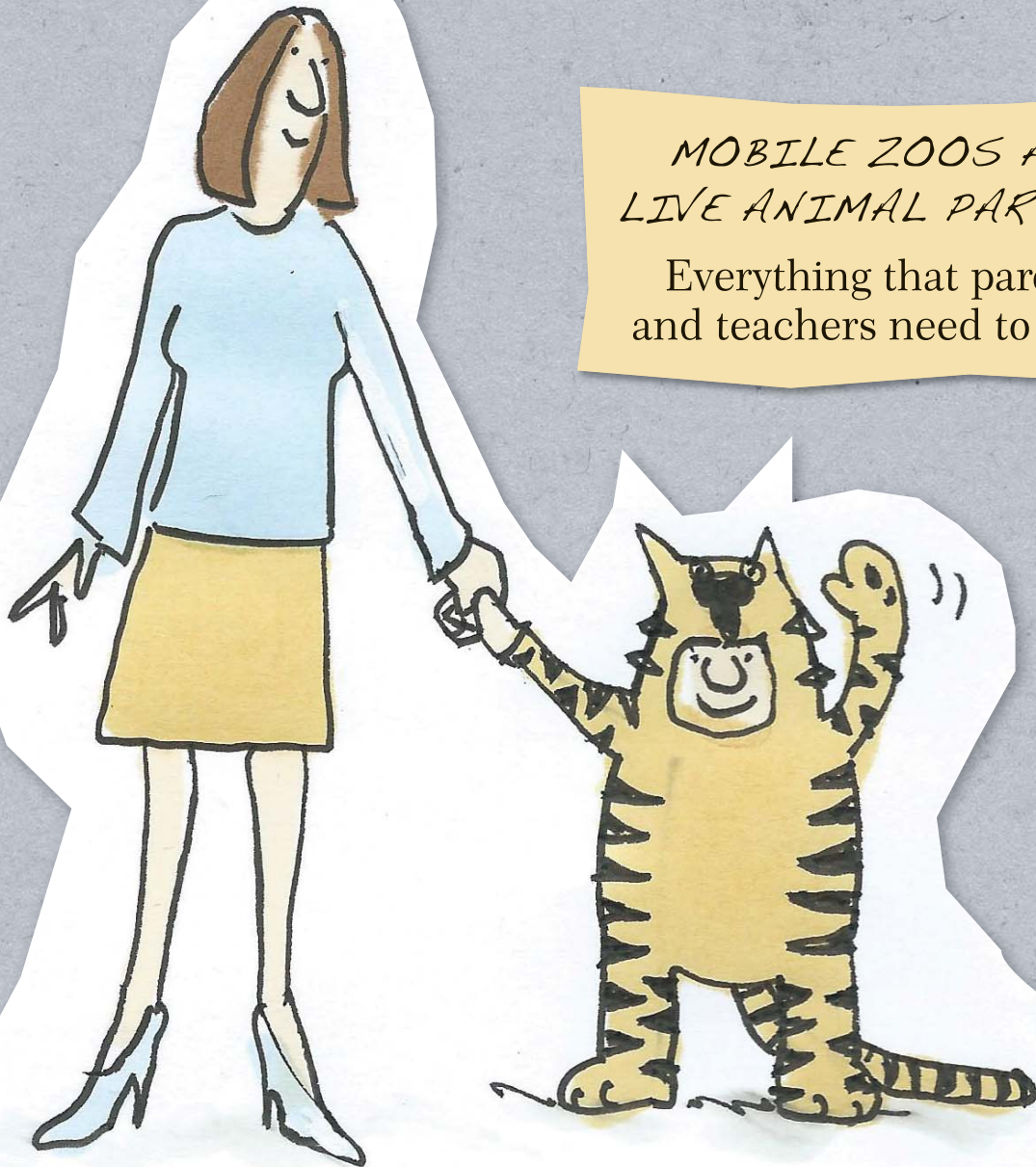


*MOBILE ZOOS AND  
LIVE ANIMAL PARTIES:*

Everything that parents  
and teachers need to know



Are you the parent  
of a child with a  
passion for animals?



Are you a school  
teacher thinking of  
ways to encourage  
your students to  
develop empathy with  
other living creatures?

If so, have you ever  
considered hiring a mobile  
petting zoo for your child's  
birthday party or for your  
class to enjoy?





*Creepy Crawlies! Parrots!  
Skunks! ...and all sorts  
of other animals!*

### **Sound like a good idea?**

Then let us introduce you to the award-winning mobile petting zoo company, Tropical Inc. Their brightly-coloured website is full of pictures showing happy, healthy animals ranging from mischievous meerkats to slithery snakes being handled by delighted children as part of educational workshops is sure to encourage you to make a booking for that animal lover in your life. The events are pricey, with one hour costing £150 and a full six hour day costing you £400, but reading some of the testimonies of happy customers is sure to convince you that it will be money well-spent if you are in two minds.

### **Are you ready to make your booking yet?**

Before you make a commitment, let us share some more details with you about Tropical Inc. to ensure that you know you have made the right decision.

Turn the page to find out more...

Thrilled schoolteachers, parents and partygoers cannot speak highly enough of the business.

*"I would just like to send Tropical Inc. a huge thank you for providing a fabulous birthday party for my son".*

*"Your company visited us at school on Thursday. The children had a fantastic time and went home full of excitement and talking enthusiastically about the animals".*

*"Thank you for a wonderful evening last week. You had our club members enthralled with your fantastic presentation".*



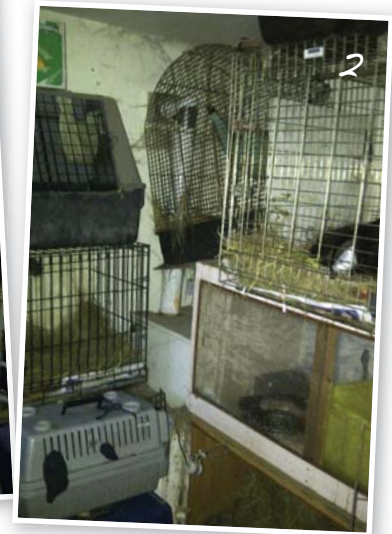
In November 2013, the owner of Tropical Inc. was charged with 34 offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and a further seven for offences relating to illegal trade in wildlife.

Photographs were released of the living conditions of the animals when they were not being used in displays and talks. They showed filthy animal carriers stacked on top of each other in pitch black rooms; a far cry from the happy, healthy animals shown on the company's website.

Workers told the court that the smell of ammonia from urine was overpowering when the door to the hidden rooms where the animals languished were opened. The animals lived with this heady stench day-in and day-out.

One photograph showed a tiny meerkat named Sasha peering out of the filthy pet carrier that served as her home. The little animal was surrounded by the carcasses of dead chicks, which were given as the main source of food for most animals. An open container, which could be seen in the middle of the room, was overflowing with the bodies of countless more dead chicks. Dried dog food was also on the menu.

Shortly after a photograph of two endangered cotton-topped tamarin monkeys, kept in a small cage, was taken, workers confirmed that rats had chewed through the wires which lit this room, plunging the animals, whose health relies on access to high levels of sunlight, into 24-hour darkness.



The court was told that some of the animals had been living in these stinking, boarded-up rooms for over two years.

Of the 74 animals seized by the police and the RSPCA from the squalid conditions, four were sadly in such poor health that they had to be put to sleep shortly afterwards. The remaining 70 were moved to safety.

The owner of Tropical Inc. was also charged with breaking strict conservation laws in place to prevent the illegal trade in endangered species.



1. *Sasha the meerkat lived in this dirty cat carrier*
2. *Cages stacked on top of each other containing mammals, birds and reptiles*
3. *This coati lived in this filthy cage in a pitch black room*
4. *These two monkeys were denied light and heat vital to their health*

## *Still want to make that booking?*

The story you have just read is true. The Captive Animals' Protection Society (CAPS) was contacted by a brave whistleblower in late December 2012 who provided the harrowing photos which helped to lead to the company owner's conviction. CAPS acted quickly, providing information to the RSPCA who, working with the police, secured a warrant. Just a few days after the whistleblower contacted us, dozens of animals were removed and taken to safety. But Tropical Inc. is just one of over 160 mobile petting zoo businesses in the UK and is part of a growing industry which is almost completely unregulated.

And it is not just animal welfare that is at stake, but disease risks associated with handling exotic animals used in mobile petting zoo experience have led experts to call for parents and schools to avoid them altogether. If you are a parent or teacher please read on to find out more.

## *Animal welfare worries*

It is likely that if you are considering booking a mobile petting zoo or animal party, you have a genuine interest in animals and their welfare. What you may not know is that the welfare of animals used in mobile petting zoos can be put at risk by their use in this way.

The mobile petting zoo industry is effectively unregulated and so the conditions in which the animals are kept whilst not being used remain largely unseen. Wild animals need large, naturalist living environments where they can display their natural behaviours, be housed in appropriate social groups, and have their physical and behavioural needs met. There is no way of establishing whether these needs are being met by the majority of mobile petting zoo companies.

In 2013, the owner of one mobile zoo, which advertised itself as “award-winning”, was charged with 34 offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 as it was revealed that, behind closed doors, the animals were kept in squalid conditions when not being used in parties and shows. Whilst it is hoped that this is an extreme case, it is possible that other mobile petting zoo companies keep animals in poor conditions, which may result in severe animal suffering.

Many of us will recognise signs of stress or worry in domesticated animals such as cats and dogs as we are accustomed to sharing our homes with them and have learned to interpret their behaviour to some extent. Due to the difficulty in recognising the same reactions in different animal species, exotic animals such as reptiles and birds used during displays and parties may be stressed or frightened without us being aware.



*Can you tell how to recognise fear or stress in a reptile?*

The regular handling of animals, some of whom belong to wild, rather than domesticated, species can cause stress or injury. Animals such as owls, who are regularly used by mobile petting zoo companies, are naturally nocturnal and yet will often spend hours tethered to perches under bright lights before being passed around to be handled at parties and events. Regular transportation is a known cause of stress for animals and yet those used by mobile petting zoo companies are transported on a regular basis. This alone may result in the welfare of the animals being compromised.

It is not just exotic animals that are at risk. Domesticated animals who are naturally timid, such as rabbits or guinea pigs, can also suffer stress due to repeated handling or as a result of introduction to strange, noisy or otherwise highly stimulating environments.



Mobile petting zoo companies offer your child the chance to get up close and personal with unusual animals. Whilst this may be an exciting experience for children, for the animals it may be frightening and stressful. For the animals it means being regularly transported from place to place and may involve being held in poor living conditions for their entire lifetimes.

## *Disease and injury risk to your child*

Most mobile petting zoo companies promote themselves to parents and teachers as a great activity for young children to enjoy. What many parents and teachers will not realise is that close contact with exotic animals may put the health of children at risk.

**‘Zoonoses’ involve bugs that can be passed between animals and people. It is thought that around 61% of human diseases are of potentially zoonotic origin, and there are at least 70 known zoonoses linked with captive exotic animals. Salmonella, for example, can be passed from reptiles to people and is estimated to be responsible for around 6,000 infections each year in the UK alone. Over half of the animals used by mobile petting zoos are reptiles.**

Research has shown that even thorough hand washing after handling animals may not offer adequate protection from zoonotic diseases because germs easily spread into the surrounding area and may prove difficult, if not impossible, to remove altogether. Hiring a mobile petting zoo may also mean that your home or classroom becomes contaminated and later poses a risk of infection to

If you are thinking of booking a mobile zoo company, please reconsider and, instead, explore the animal and child friendly alternatives at the end of this report or visit our website to download further resources [www.mobilezoo.org.uk](http://www.mobilezoo.org.uk)

new visitors and children. Experts advise parents and teachers to avoid petting zoo experiences altogether.

Animals may also bite, scratch or otherwise injure children during handling experiences and some illnesses may be passed from children to animals too.

*Thanks to the Emergent Disease Foundation ([www.emergentdisease.org](http://www.emergentdisease.org)) for providing some of the information included in this section.*



## *An unregulated industry*

There are currently around 160 businesses operating as mobile petting zoos in the UK with thousands of animals of a number of different species being used by them.

Despite this, there is no law dealing specifically with this type of business, meaning that the animals are vulnerable due to lack of legal protection. Indeed, according to research carried out in 2013, up to 66% of mobile petting zoo businesses appeared to be operating illegally as they have failed to register with their local council; something which has, until recently, been required by law. Legal opinion released from Government department DEFRA in late 2013 suggested that, going forward, these businesses might not even have to comply with any system of registration, meaning that the animals used by them may be even more vulnerable to abuses.

Unlike zoos, which can only operate if they have been inspected and issued with a licence, anyone can set up a mobile zoo without any scrutiny. No inspections are carried out and no licences are required. This is despite the fact that at least some of the animals used in mobile petting zoos are the same species as those held in zoos.

The case of Tropical Inc. clearly demonstrates the risk to the animals used in this, almost completely unregulated, industry.

The lack of control over the industry also means that there may be more risk to your children as there is no requirement for the health of the animals to be checked by vets before they enter your home or classroom. Concerns over transmission of disease from animals to children (and children to animals) have been raised by experts. *See: 'Disease and injury risk to your child' section for more information.*



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## *What about education and conservation?*

Many mobile petting zoo companies advertise themselves as a great opportunity for children to learn about important conservation issues and many parents and teachers book animal parties and events for this very purpose. But the vast majority of animal species held by the companies considered during research carried out in 2013 belong to species that are not threatened in the wild.

On the other hand, earlier research has shown that endangered wild animals being presented in human-oriented settings may actually damage public perceptions of conservation efforts. So whether threatened in the wild or not, mobile zoos do not seem to be beneficial to conservation.

**There is little to learn about conservation from mobile petting zoos as the animals used for parties and handling sessions are very far removed from their natural habitat and cannot possibly behave as they would in the wild. As such, seeing a wild animal as part of a staged display gives children a distorted idea of that animal. The use of exotic animals in these types of event may also give rise to demand for the exotic pet trade which has implications for both animal welfare and conservation.**

## *Choose an animal-friendly activity instead!*

There are a whole host of fantastic ideas for children's parties that don't involve animals at all. Magicians, performers, puppet shows, pool parties and traditional party games are all great ways to entertain youngsters. But if you want something specifically tailored to the young animal lover in your family, or if you want an activity for your class which is fun but educational, why not choose from some of the following ideas? You can find more resources and activities on our website [www.mobilezoo.org.uk](http://www.mobilezoo.org.uk)

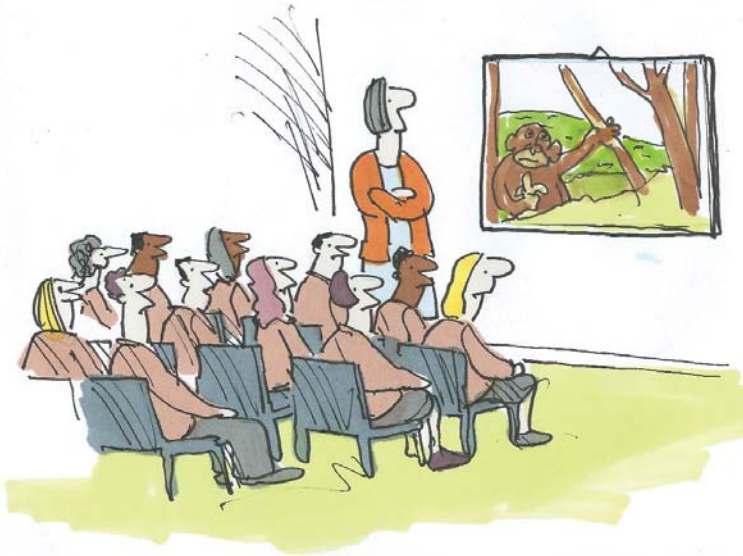
### *Become a wildlife detective*

Get outdoors in the fresh air and explore the local wildlife of your nearest nature reserve or wild area. If you have a back garden, you can even start there! Insects, birds, amphibians and mammals are all around us; we just need to look for them. There are a fantastic range of books, games, equipment and even mobile phone apps which can help to make an afternoon searching for wildlife rewarding, exciting and educative.



### *Create your own wild space*

If you don't have a wild space near you, then why not create one! Even if you live in an apartment with no outside space, you can create a window box which will encourage birds and insects to visit you. Each child can make their own window box, bird or bug house and take it home with them. Not only will this be great fun to do, but will create a lasting home for wildlife!



### *Educational talks from an animal charity (no live animals required)*

This activity is particularly good for school groups! Many animal or conservation charities offer school talks, youth group presentations or activities with other groups of young people. Combining exciting activities and great opportunities for education, your children will have fun, learn and perhaps even build

a lasting connection with a charitable cause. It may take a little research to find the right talk for you but it will be worth it! Be sure that the talks do not include live animals before booking.

### *Animal fancy dress*

You don't need live animals when you have a room full of little monkeys! Why not have an animal-themed fancy dress party where each child becomes their favourite animal? Animal themed games and prizes will add to the excitement.

### *A great film or documentary*

If you have time to plan ahead, keep an eye out for screenings of nature films at cinemas near to you. Teachers may want to see what is coming up during the year and plan a class trip to see a really great nature documentary. With increasingly technical and advanced filming techniques, the learning opportunities are immense. Particularly good for older children but there are an increasing number of animated films which deal with important animal and conservation issues aimed at younger audiences.

### *Animal face painting*

Perfect to go with a fancy dress theme you can either hire an entertainer to paint faces at your child's party or, if you have an artistic flair, you can have a go yourself!

### *Balloon animals*

A party classic and sure to delight younger children. Instead of live animals, go for balloon animals that everyone can take home with them.

### *A good book*

Tried, tested and loved. Many people develop love and respect for animals by learning about them in books. Don't overlook this simple and effective way to teach your child about the natural world!

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