

Darwin not an appropriate pet, expert warns **Full-grown monkey could be dangerous, she claims**

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OSHAWA -- Darwin, the monkey at the centre of a legal battle in Durham Region, could well present a danger to its owners if forced to live as a domesticated animal, a primatologist warns.

"I wouldn't have one in my home," Lisa Whiteaker, a Las Vegas-based expert, said in an interview Friday. "It's a loaded weapon."

Ms. Whiteaker's name arose Thursday during arguments between lawyers for Yasmin Nakhuda, the Toronto woman fighting to regain possession of Darwin, and Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary, the Sunderland facility where the monkey is being held.

Kevin Toyne, lawyer for the sanctuary, said correspondence between Ms. Nakhuda and Ms. Whiteaker may reveal evidence Darwin has been mistreated.

Ted Charney, Ms. Nakhuda's lawyer, flatly denied any abuse, calling Mr. Toyne's claims "wild speculation".

In a telephone interview Friday, Ms. Whiteaker wouldn't discuss allegations of abuse but did say she feels Ms. Nakhuda -- like most people without experience who take primates as pets -- is ill-equipped to properly care for Darwin. She cited issues such as nutrition and discipline as concerns.

"In the situation with Yasmin there were a few insights that troubled me -- actually shocked me," Ms. Whiteaker said.

"I don't believe a Japanese macaque belongs in a family situation. This monkey is going to be 45 pounds when it's fully grown."

Darwin became an Internet sensation when video of the tiny monkey, dressed in a coat and toddling around a North York IKEA store, emerged in early December. The monkey, a prohibited animal, was seized by Toronto animal control officers and sent to the Sunderland sanctuary.

Ms. Nakhuda has launched a lawsuit aimed at getting Darwin back, claiming animal control doesn't have the authority to seize the creature. She says she signed a document surrendering the monkey after she was threatened with criminal charges.

Thursday she went to court in Oshawa seeking an order granting her custody of the monkey as she awaits the outcome of the lawsuit. Superior Court Justice Michael Brown ruled Friday Darwin will stay at the sanctuary, but recommended Ms. Nakhuda be allowed to visit it. Ms. Nakhuda declined an offer of access.

Mr. Toyne has hinted he may seek a court order to obtain the correspondence between Ms. Nakhuda and Ms. Whiteaker. Ms. Whiteaker said Friday that she would comply with such an order.

"I will open up as soon as the court says to," she said. "I will admit right now, our correspondence will be shocking."

Ms. Whiteaker said that while video images of Darwin depict a cute wee simian, he'll soon grow into a large monkey.

"Darwin is going to be 45 to 50 pounds when he's full grown," she said. "His canines (teeth) are going to be half an inch."

"You're talking about a massive monkey with power," Ms. Whiteaker said. "The bottom line is, is this monkey safe to be in her home?"

Ms. Nakhuda's lawsuit returns to court Jan. 31.