



SMACC **SPOTLIGHT** REPORT

**The cruelty you don't see:
The suffering of pet macaques for
social media content**

**SEPTEMBER
2023**

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INTRODUCTION

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It is crucial to understand that animal cruelty is not limited to the direct physical abuse of animals.

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INTRODUCTION

The keeping and portrayal of macaques as pets on social media are among the most common and concerning issues that the Asia for Animals (AfA) Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) regularly documents. From innocent-seeming videos or well-meaning owners to videos that show extreme violence, the many forms of cruelty that macaques face for the sake of social media content are devastating. Baby macaques, sometimes removed from their mothers at only a day old, are faced with years of maternal deprivation and social isolation, forced to live in unnatural settings that do not meet their innate needs. These monkeys are made to perform for the camera in hopes of viral popularity and financial gain. Unfortunately, content creators have learned that pet macaque content can become extremely popular, which incentivizes its creation. Much of this content portrays macaques in clothes or feeding on milk bottles, but as we have found, the prospects of this seemingly innocuous exploitation degenerating into more blatant and extreme forms of cruelty are high.



Young stump-tailed and pig-tailed macaques, kept as pets. SMACC ID: rec0jEwtgYuLFjgUV 1

It is crucial to understand that animal cruelty is not limited to the direct physical abuse of animals. Experts agree that keeping primates as pets is inherently cruel, and results in a multitude of issues that severely compromise their welfare. Their popularity on social media has devastating consequences for both individual animals and wild populations. By allowing such content on their platforms, social media companies are fueling an already dire situation. Furthermore, many content creators go beyond just sharing photos and videos of their pet macaques; they purposely film them and post on social media to generate likes and views, forcing the monkeys to perform or to cope with stressful and distressing situations.

By learning how to identify such content, refusing to engage with it and knowing how to act when confronted with it, social media users have the power to shift this trend for the better for the animals. Animal welfare groups, including SMACC and its member organizations, also play an important role in tackling this issue, by raising awareness, collecting data, communicating with the platforms and holding them accountable. Some organizations are able to investigate cases and facilitate the rescue of animals, and in some cases local authorities have the power to arrest and prosecute individuals and confiscate animals. Crucially, action by social media platforms, which provide a literal platform to those sharing animal cruelty content, could result in positive changes for animals. Ending online animal cruelty content requires a multi-faceted approach, with us all acting together to create positive change.



*Young macaques kept as pets, wearing clothes and encouraged to stand on their back legs.
SMACC ID: recmusmx9WzqJBO7g*

With 1,266 links featuring over 2,800 different types of cruelty, SMACC identified 10 different species of macaques involved in pet macaque content, alongside other wild and domesticated animals. Thirty-five percent of the macaque species featured are classified as Endangered, and Critically Endangered species were also found. More than 60% of the links contain forms of overt physical abuse to these pet macaques. These shocking numbers illustrate how problematic such content is on social media, and that it is necessary to understand the trends in depth to make sure that such abuse ends.

WHO WE ARE

The Asia for Animals Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) aims to shine a light on the hidden world of online animal cruelty in all its forms, and to lead the way in ending it. SMACC seeks to collaborate with social media platforms to end the availability, spread and profitability of cruelty content, and to ensure that there are no benefits to the creation or promotion of cruelty content.

SMACC is a collaboration between various animal protection organizations: Action for Primates, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), Animals Asia Foundation, Born Free Foundation, Born Free USA, Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organizations (FIAPO), Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS), Humane Society International (HSI), International Animal Rescue (IAR), International Primate Protection League (IPPL), Korea Animal Rights Advocates (KARA), Lady Freethinker (LFT), Panthera Africa, Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA), PETA Asia, RSPCA UK, Susy Utzinger Stiftung für Tierschutz (SUST), Taiwan SPCA, Welttierschutzgesellschaft e.V (WTG e.V) and World Animal Protection (WAP).





1. DEFINITIONS

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Animal experts agree that macaques, and indeed all primates, are not suitable to be kept as pets and should not be kept as such.

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DEFINITIONS

- **Cruelty**

A range of human behaviors, performed intentionally or unintentionally, that cause animals harm or suffering which may be immediate or long-term, physical or psychological.

- **Nonhuman primates**

The Order (a taxonomic group) of animals known as Primates is made up of monkeys, apes (including human beings), and other closely related animals like lemurs, tarsiers and lorises. Throughout most of this report, when we refer to “primates”, it should be understood that we are referring to all of the animals in the order Primates, apart from humans (i.e., nonhuman primates).

- **Pet**

Definitions of the word “pet” vary to a surprising degree. For the purposes of this report, we define pets as “animals kept for companionship, enjoyment or status.”[1] Despite the unsuitability of certain animal species as pets, we do not restrict its meaning to any particular taxonomic group.

- **Macaques as pets**

In this report, the terms “macaques as pets” and “pet macaques” are used to describe macaque species kept in domestic settings by humans. However, animal experts agree that macaques, and indeed all primates, are not suitable to be kept as pets and should not be kept as such.[2]



Infant baby macaque, kept as pet. SMACC ID: recZnp4m3iDtMtj1c

- **Wild vs domesticated**

Domesticated animals, like dogs and cats, have evolved over thousands of years to be able to thrive alongside humans and in human-dominated environments.[1] They differ from their wild ancestors not only in their sizes, shapes, and colors, but also in their behaviors. They are often dependent on human beings for their survival.

Wild animals, such as lions, monkeys, or snakes, are perfectly adapted to survive and thrive free in their natural environments, and have not adapted to life in domestic settings. Those bred in captivity are no exception; they have not undergone the evolutionary changes necessary to consider them “domesticated”. They retain their wild instincts, needs and behaviors and cannot thrive in human households.[2]



Stump-tailed macaques kept as pet, dressed in clothing and displaying fear grins.
SMACC ID: recsR8SPEu3R6WZbR 1

- **Pet owners/content creators**

In the report we interchangeably refer to those who keep macaques as pets and use them to create social media content as “content creators” or “pet owners”. There are instances where the content creators may not be the owners of the macaques featured, however the majority appeared to be in the content analyzed for this report.

As indicated above, we hold the position that wild animals such as macaques are not suitable as pets. However we choose to use this term in the report, as we accept that “ownership” of non-human animals is possible in a legal sense, and that this term is the widely accepted language to describe a person who keeps an animal privately.

- **Range-states**

A range state is the area a species would naturally inhabit. For migratory species this can include all habitats lived in, even when in different countries or regions at different times of the year.[3]

- **CITES**

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species. [4]

- **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an international organization working on conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Their Red List is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of biological species, using different categories to define their conservation status.[5]

IUCN Red List Categories



- **Taxonomic groups**

The word species is used to define a taxonomic group of animals of the same type, who usually live, breed and communicate with one another in a variety of ways. Taxonomic groups include Kingdom (for example, Animalia), Order (for example, Primates), and Genus (for example, *Macaca*). The word taxon (plural taxa) can be used to refer to any or all taxonomic groups. In this report, we sometimes refer to the number of taxa we have identified: this means that in some cases the animals have been identified at the species level (for example, *Macaca fascicularis*) and in others at a higher taxonomic level (for example at genus level, *Macaca*).



2. THE DATA

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The videos analyzed in this report have been watched over twelve billion times. These videos are just a fraction of the content available online, meaning the total views are likely to be much, much higher.

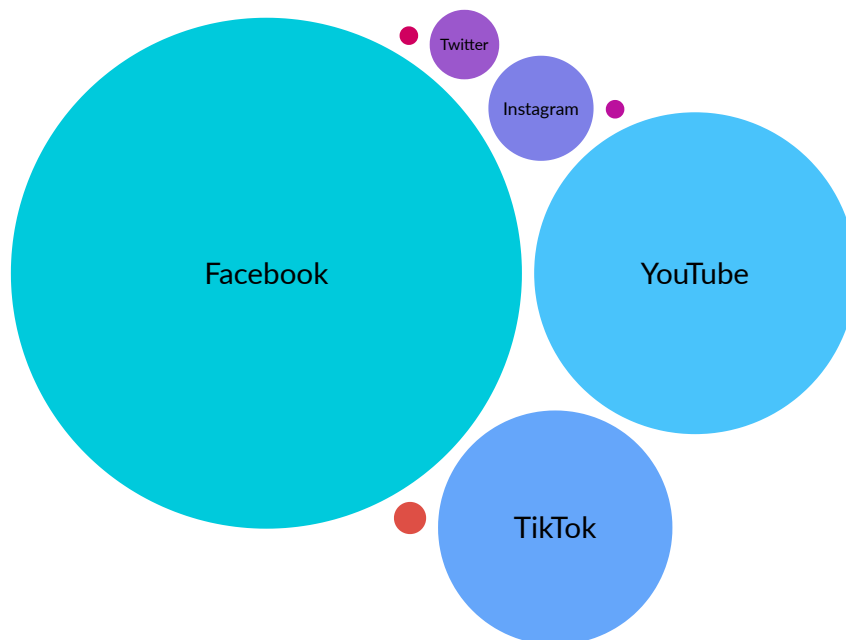
”

1. THE DATA

RESEARCH METHODS

The data used in this report were collected mainly from four social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube between September 2021 and March 2023 by SMACC research volunteers, SMACC coordinators and SMACC member organizations. Data relating to content found on other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Telegram and Snapchat, are also included. Between September 2022 and January 2023, a team of volunteer researchers searched specifically for content that depicted the keeping of macaques as pets.

 **Figure 1: Proportion of online cruelty content found on each social media platform. See Appendix 3**



All data were logged via SMACC's public reporting form.[6] A single primary theme and an unlimited number of subthemes and specific abuses were selected to describe the content of each video. See Appendix 1 for details of themes, subthemes and specific abuses.

All data were spot-checked for missing or erroneous information and analyzed by SMACC coordinators. Before analysis, the database was scanned for duplicates and these were removed. Content that was no longer available at the time of analysis in March 2023 was excluded from analysis.

All of the content we analyzed for this report had been reported to the relevant social media platforms, but at the time of analysis had not been removed.

CONTENT and ABUSES

The keeping of primates as pets is the most common theme in SMACC's database, and is the subject of many of the enquiries that SMACC and its member organizations regularly receive from the public relating to social media animal cruelty content. It is clear that this widespread problem, so pervasive on social media, merits closer examination. We examined a sample of 1,266 videos and photos posted on social media depicting macaques kept as pets. It is important to note that our researchers were volunteers, **with limited time. At no point during data collection was the supply of new content exhausted. It is likely therefore that our findings represent a small proportion of the total available content.** With limited resources and the lack of accessibility to the platforms' internal data, it is impossible to quantify the scale of the problem or document all animal species and individuals involved. What is clear is that such content is common and popular on social media platforms, making it a vital issue to tackle.

In this report, we address the issue of macaques kept as pets in general and paint a picture of the abuses to which they are regularly subjected. However, macaques are by no means the only wild animals kept as pets that suffer abuses as a result. For more information on the keeping of wild animals as pets, the disastrous human, animal welfare and conservation consequences of such practices, and the role of social media platforms in these trends, please refer to our Spotlight Report *Wild animal "pets" on social media: a vicious cycle of suffering.*[7]

Having documented over 2,800 incidents of cruelty, we categorized the abuse perpetrated upon pet macaques on social media into 37 different types (themes), ranging from the subtle and possibly unintentional to deliberate and obvious cruelty (see Appendix 1 for the complete list). The latter category includes but is not limited to monkey hatred (89 records), appearing to be drugged (58 records), sexual abuse (53 records), causing or prolonging death (31 records), dismembering (7 records), and crushing (1 record).

The three most common types of abuse recorded were deliberate psychological torture (13%),

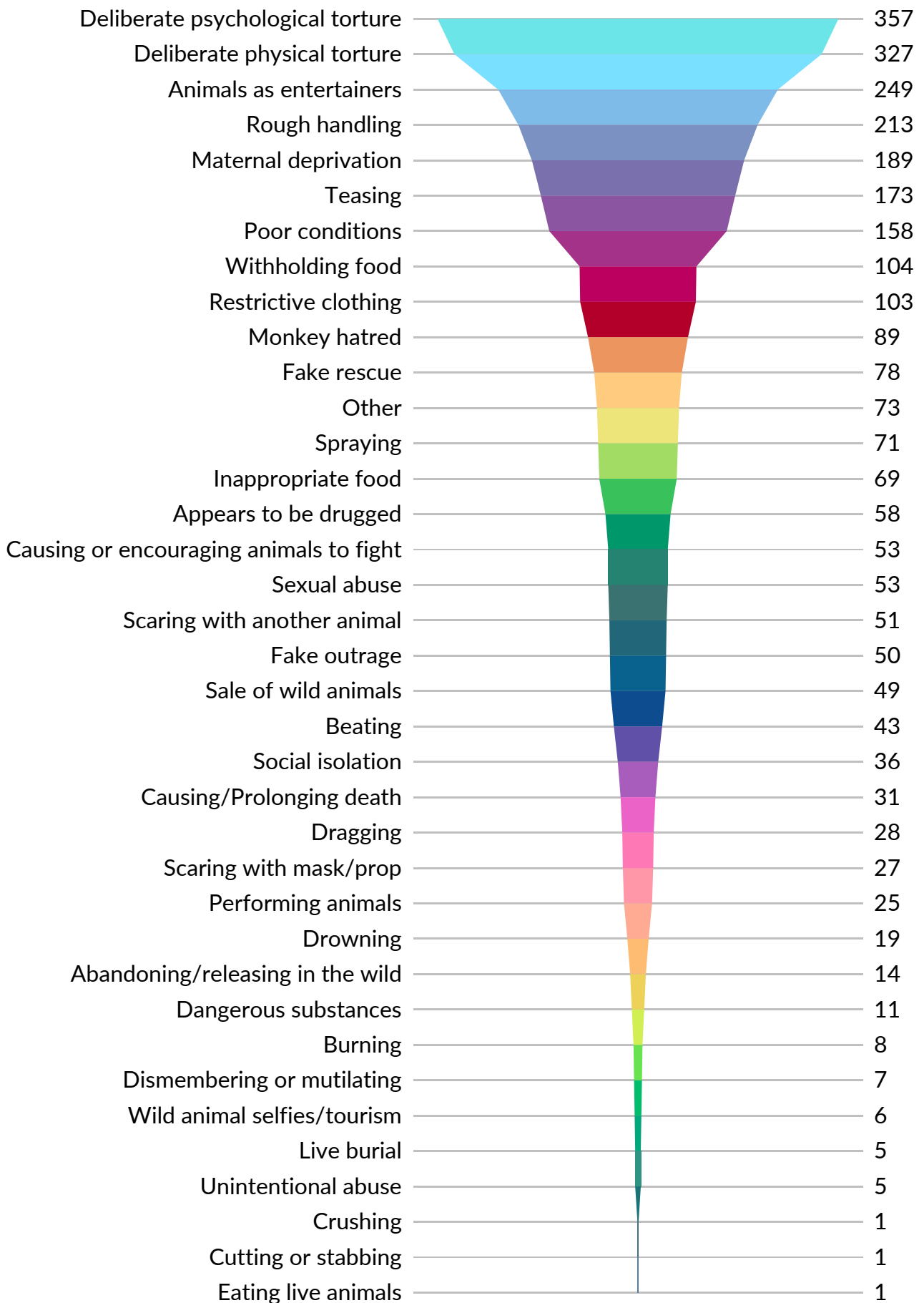
deliberate physical torture (12%) and animals as entertainers (9%). More generally, 60% of all abuses recorded constitute physical abuse to macaques.



Young macaque being roughly handled and physically abused. SMACC ID: reco2sQf67uzw4P3u



Figure 2: Themes of animal cruelty found in the 1,266 links analyzed, from the most to the least common.

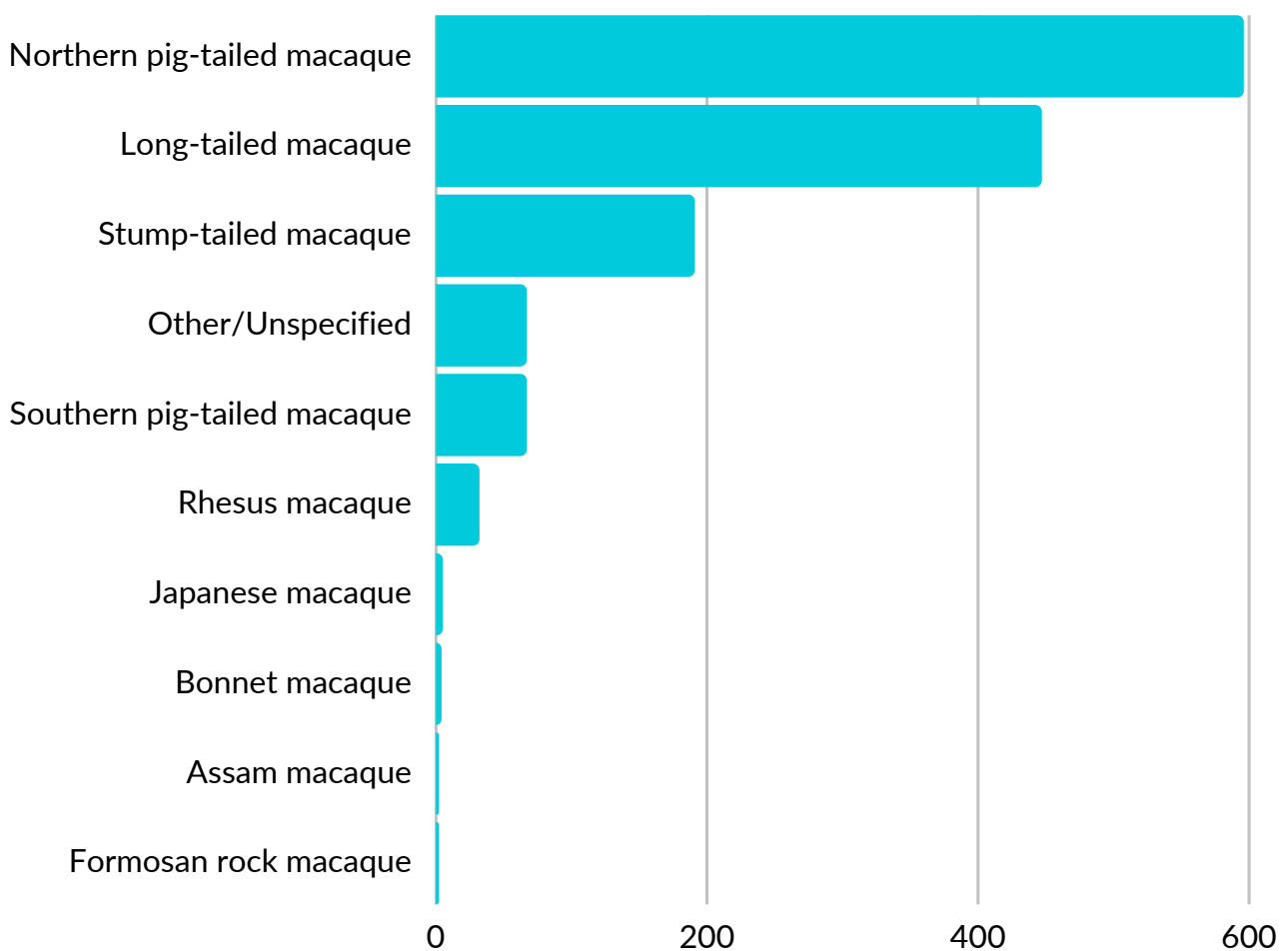


ANIMALS

Fifty-one different animal taxa appeared in the 1,266 posts that we analyzed. All the posts featured macaques, but in some cases, other animals were also present. We did not record the number of individual animals that appeared in these posts, but posts containing multiple animals of one or more species were common. Thus, the number of individual animals involved, while not precisely known, is likely to far exceed the number of posts.

While our sample of content may not be representative of the wider circumstances in which macaque species are kept as pets and displayed on social media, certain species are clearly particularly targeted: **northern pig-tailed macaques featured in 39% of the videos we assessed, followed by long-tailed macaques (29%) and stump-tailed macaques (12%). The majority of these were babies, who sometimes appeared to be only days old.** Macaques are regularly kept as pets in many parts of Asia but also around the world, in spite of the fact that it is illegal in many countries.

 **Figure 3: Macaque species found in our data analyzed for this report.**



Other animals kept as pets, both wild and domesticated, are also portrayed in content featuring macaques as pets, such as cats and dogs, tigers, other primates (baboons, gibbons, capuchins, chimpanzees, lemurs, langurs, marmosets, orangutans, etc.), alligators and other reptiles. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the full list of animals featured in these posts.

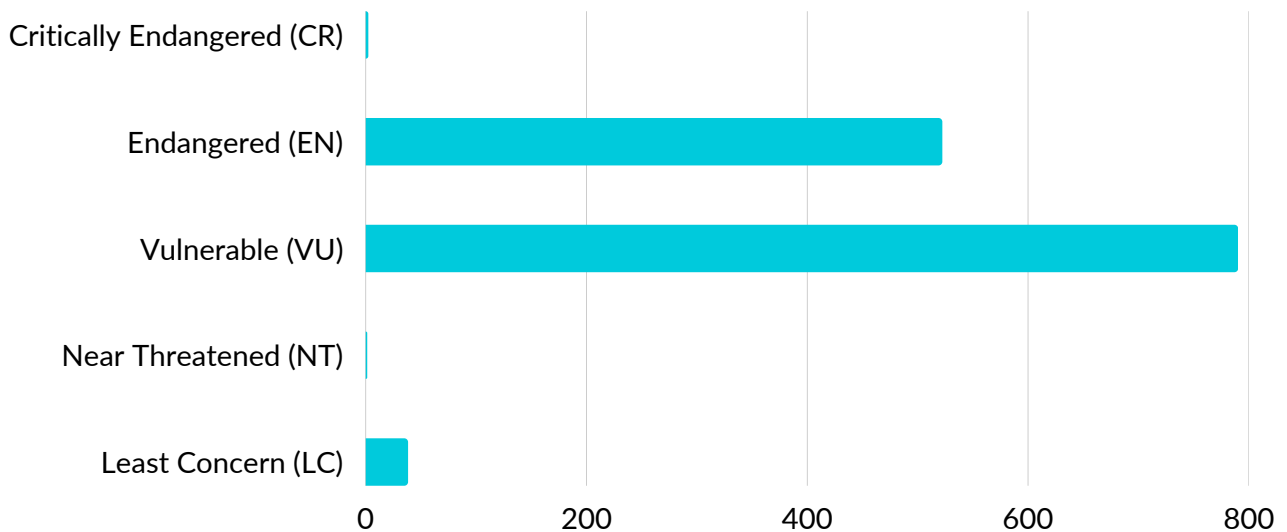


Young macaques with a baby pig and a dog. SMACC ID: recC00Sj6afLswR5f 1, recbfUPamHsbLASrS



Young macaques with a baboon and tiger, and ducklings. SMACC ID: rechFoxwEZBSGbyIM 1, recEhXMskLGZkPHa6 1

Worryingly, 35% of the species that were recorded are Endangered, and 53% are Vulnerable, according to the IUCN.[5] We also documented two instances of Critically Endangered species. As it was at times difficult to identify the macaque to the species level, these numbers could be even higher.



These findings are extremely worrying as Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered animals require urgent protection. The pet trade, along with other forms of human exploitation, add compounding pressure to the survival of these species, which are already threatened by numerous factors including habitat loss, climate change, persecution, and trade for commercial purposes.

VIEWS

The videos analyzed in this report have been watched over twelve billion times. These videos are just a fraction of all the content available online, meaning the total views are likely to be much, much higher.

12,054,378,907

twelve billion, fifty four million, three hundred and seventy-eight thousand, nine hundred and seven

TOTAL NUMBER OF VIEWS FOR THE 1,266 LINKS RECORDED



3. WHO ARE MACAQUES?

AND WHY SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT THEM

“ *Nearly 80% of the remaining macaque species, each of which has been assessed, are threatened with extinction, and even those that are not currently considered to be threatened are far from safe.* ”



3. WHO ARE MACAQUES? AND WHY SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT THEM

Approximately 75% of all primate species are in decline, and around 60% are presently threatened with extinction. Some of the most threatened species have just dozens of individuals remaining in the wild. In addition to habitat loss, bushmeat hunting and the illegal trade of primates as pets and primate body parts are among the primary drivers of primate species decline, along with emerging threats, such as climate change and anthroponotic diseases.[8] Macaques are one of the most targeted primate groups for trade purposes.



Newborn macaque being unboxed. SMACC ID: recgn2ZpW NX75u1oT 2

Macaques are a group of closely-related monkey species who share certain characteristics and a relatively recent (on an evolutionary scale) common ancestor. Some macaque species, like the lion-tailed macaque, are quite distinct-looking and difficult to confuse with others. Other species are harder for many people to tell apart: for example, Taiwanese macaques (*Macaca cyclopis*) could easily be mistaken for rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*), especially in the absence of context. To confuse matters, some macaque species naturally hybridize in the wild, meaning that in certain places and in certain cases, quick and accurate identification is not always guaranteed.[9]

A single macaque species occurs naturally outside of Asia: the Barbary macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*) which is indigenous to the Atlas Mountains of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco. The remaining species are spread widely across Asia, from as far west as Afghanistan and Pakistan, northeast through to all but the northernmost of Japan's islands, and south throughout India, Sri Lanka and the Indonesian islands. There are approximately 25 recognised species of macaque - the exact number is a matter of debate. For example, some consider the Buton macaque (*Macaca brunnescens*) to be a subspecies of the booted macaque (*Macaca ochreata*), but *M. brunnescens* is assessed by the IUCN Red list as a distinct species.[10]

There are broad similarities in the ways that different macaque species behave and organize themselves socially.[11] There are also physical similarities: for example, all macaques have cheek pouches that allow them to collect and temporarily store food. There are also differences: Tibetan macaques (*Macaca thibetana*), the largest species, can occasionally near 30 kg in weight,[12] while the smallest macaques, toque macaques (*Macaca sinica*), weigh in at a maximum of around 5.5 kg.[13] Levels of social tolerance also differ between macaque species, with some behaving more aggressively and maintaining much stricter social hierarchies than others.[11].



Tibetan macaques.

The sela macaque (*Macaca selai*) was given species status in 2022, and its conservation status has not yet been assessed by the IUCN. Nearly 80% of the remaining macaque species, each of which has been assessed, are threatened with extinction, and even those that are not currently considered to be threatened are far from safe: rhesus macaques, for example, are considered to be pests and treated accordingly throughout much of their range.[14] The species has recently been removed from the list of protected species in India.[15] Nepal is currently exploring the possibility of exporting rhesus macaques,[16] presumably for use in the biomedical trade, a practice that reduced their numbers to dangerously low levels in India in the 1960s and 1970s until such exports were banned on conservation grounds.[17] Long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*; also known as crab-eating macaques, cynomolgus monkeys or Java macaques), were uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable in 2020 and then to Endangered in 2022 based on a suspected population decline of at least 40% over the previous three generations, due in part to extremely high levels of exploitation. In spite of this they are still thought of and treated as overabundant all over Asia, and continue to be unprotected and heavily persecuted throughout much of their range.[18]



Long-tailed macaque sexualized and used as entertainer.
SMACC ID: reczcodEZdL1qTTd4 2

This report relates primarily to the macaque species most often exploited on social media: northern (*Macaca leonina*) and southern pig-tailed macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*), long-tailed macaques, stump-tailed macaques (*Macaca arctoides*) and rhesus macaques. Each of these species is also regularly exploited for other purposes across Asia and around the world:

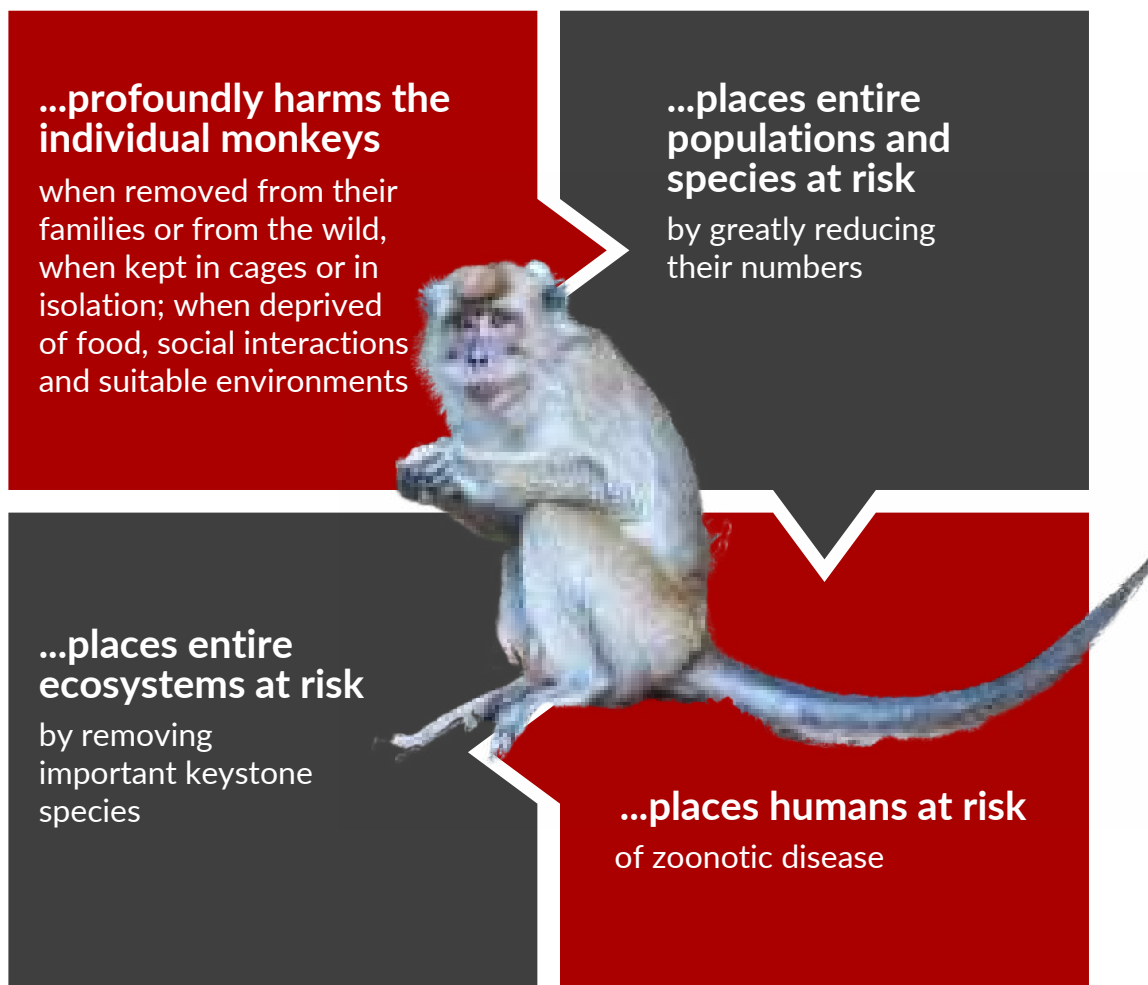
- Long-tailed macaques are the most heavily-traded primate for use in biomedical research and toxicity testing.[19] They were also the most frequently documented primate species in a survey of wildlife markets in Indonesia between 1997 and 2008. [20]
- Southern pig-tailed macaques are used to harvest tree crops such as coconuts in Thailand and elsewhere,[21] and are persecuted as pests when they forage on the oil palm plantations that have replaced their native habitats.[22]
- All five species are regularly confiscated and taken into rescue centers, usually having been kept illegally as pets. For example, in Vietnam, between 2015 and 2019, 490 individuals were brought to government-run rescue centers.[23]



Two stump-tailed macaques and a southern pig-tailed macaque kept as pets.
SMACC ID: rec4XSgiMqclLwAC 1, recGQPzBBkiucFGeP

These are just a few of the many ways that these species are harmfully utilized by humans across their ranges and beyond. Such exploitation causes harm at many levels: it places entire populations and species at risk by greatly reducing their numbers; it places entire ecosystems at risk by removing important keystone species; it places humans at risk of zoonotic disease, serious injury or death; and it profoundly harms the individual monkeys whose lives are destroyed when they are removed from their families or from the wild, when they are kept in cages or tethered in isolation from others of their own kind; when they are deprived of the food, the social interactions and the environments that they need to survive.

MACAQUE EXPLOITATION...



Macaques are highly intelligent and emotional animals who form strong bonds with their families and peers. Although they are incredibly adaptable and can survive in adverse conditions, they are extremely vulnerable to human-induced pressures, and cannot adapt and thrive in circumstances where their physical, biological, social and behavioral needs are not met. Life as a pet denies them these basic needs. This means that even the best-intentioned and best-provisioned macaque “owner” is guilty, on some level, of causing their beloved pet monkey to suffer profoundly and unnecessarily.



4. WHY MACAQUES?

“Content creators have learned that pet macaques make popular social media content and that posts showing pet macaques in clothes or expressing human-like behaviors have the potential to generate benefits such as online “likes” and popularity, and content monetization. ”

4. WHY MACAQUES?

Historically, nonhuman animals have always played an important role in human culture, whether in households, for social status, in art, literature, or otherwise. The biophilia hypothesis posits that humans feel a connection to nature,[24] largely due to our evolutionary needs, and that nature provides us with many emotional, cultural and social benefits. Studies also show that humans are naturally interested in other animals, and that this interest is expressed through learned behavior. For example, teaching children to interact positively with animals and apply their interest to living things in positive ways will result in children respecting living beings and nature. Without this sort of input, and especially with exposure to negative ways of interacting with and relating to animals, acts of cruelty may result.[25] Other studies have demonstrated that owning pets may have several long-term benefits for owners, whether they be social, stemming from the companionship animals provide, or health-related.[26]

It is evident that our connection to nature and animals persists today, and social media has become the perfect vector and lens through which to view the place animals hold in our daily lives. Indeed, animals and nature can be found everywhere in social media content, and it has been demonstrated that the presence and quantity of natural elements (plants, landscapes, animals) are usually associated with more positive emotions and states.[27] This helps to explain why social media content featuring animals is so popular. Not only is such content entertaining, seen as “funny”, or “cute”; it may also reflect our natural attraction to animals and nature.



Young macaque kept as pet. SMACC ID: reczaxhP0afhFWKJT 1

However, what may initially appear to be innocent entertainment and fun may evolve into more problematic content. When it comes to animals, the line between entertainment and cruelty can sometimes be difficult to draw. This report goes into detail about the issues relating to the keeping of macaques as pets, but we should begin by exploring why people would want to keep a macaque as a pet in the first place.



A man is forcing this young macaque to wear goggles. The video shows the young individual screaming and trying to remove the goggles multiple times. SMACC ID: recMbzs5e4IC8wndd 6

The primate pet trade is not new. Humans have been trading and keeping primates - including macaques - for thousands of years.[28] Notably, despite this long history, no primate species has undergone the process of domestication. The welfare issues associated with the practices that are described in this report exist independently of social media or the internet. However, as outlined in this report, popular media, and in particular social media, has a major influence on the popularity of wild animals as pets, including macaques and other primates.[29,30,31] Content creators have learned that pet macaques make popular social media content and that posts showing pet macaques in clothes or expressing human-like behaviors have the potential to generate benefits such as online “likes” and popularity, and content monetization (see section 6C for more on the monetization of cruelty content). The popularity of this type of content incentivizes more people to obtain baby macaques and use them to create more content. The fact that in many countries, macaques or young primates are easy to acquire, either legally or illegally, ensures that macaques are a popular choice for people seeking to own an unusual or “exotic” pet. The lack of law enforcement in many countries in which owning such animals as pets is illegal means that there is little fear of retribution.

The popularity of videos featuring baby macaques as pets can be attributed to a variety of factors, including perceived entertainment value, the close similarities many social media users perceive between nonhuman primate babies and human babies, and misinformation regarding the ease of keeping such animals as pets. It is rare that such content covers the very real dangers these animals pose, including zoonotic disease transfer and physical attacks resulting in serious injury. The physical and behavioral similarities between humans and primates can evoke a feeling of a deep connection to primates and an interest in primate content. **Some viewers erroneously interpret behaviors, expressions and gestures that they do not understand as pleasure, happiness or joy - for example, assuming that a monkey is smiling with pleasure when they may in fact be grimacing in fear.**[32] False understandings and erroneous assumptions can result in problematic content being considered “entertaining” and “harmless”, normalizing the poor treatment of animals.

Additionally, films, TV shows, and social media clips that portray young, small, and seemingly helpless primates interacting with humans in artificial environments and using human objects, promote misinformation. The false idea that primates are safe to interact with, are not threatened in the wild, and that they “enjoy” being featured in exploitative content, removes them entirely from their natural habitats and social groups.[33]



Young macaque displaying a fear grimace - and not a "smile". SMACC ID: rec8ANeCXruYaEqlm 2



5. CRUELTY CONTENT

“

Among the most disturbing fake rescue trends we have seen on social media are videos of very young, emaciated baby monkeys, either on the brink of death or dead already, and who sometimes appear to have been drugged.

”

5. CRUELTY CONTENT

A. THE SEEMINGLY INNOCENT

Macaques are frequently portrayed on social media as pets, usually in domestic settings. This content usually shows macaques living with humans, sometimes dressed in clothing, being bottle fed and living a human lifestyle. To the average viewer who may not be aware of the negative implications of such content, seeing baby macaques cared for by a human in this way might appear endearing. Creators of this type of content may claim to have “rescued” or “adopted” the monkey in their care, providing them with a new, improved life. As such, many viewers comment on how cute the videos are, on how well-cared for the macaques are, and have no reason to think that such content, which does not contain physical aggression or violence, could possibly depict any form of animal cruelty. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth.



Young pet macaque, held by their owner. SMACC ID: reclvoeOB8rlePCnD 2

In the wild, macaques are physically dependent on their mothers for a year or longer, and live in complex multigenerational social groups that cannot be replicated in captivity.[34] Equally, macaques naturally inhabit a wide variety of complex habitats and often occupy vast home ranges. It is simply not possible to accommodate their innate needs for socializing, foraging, climbing and traveling in domestic settings. Macaques, like all nonhuman primates, are wild animals who are not well-adapted to life in captivity.

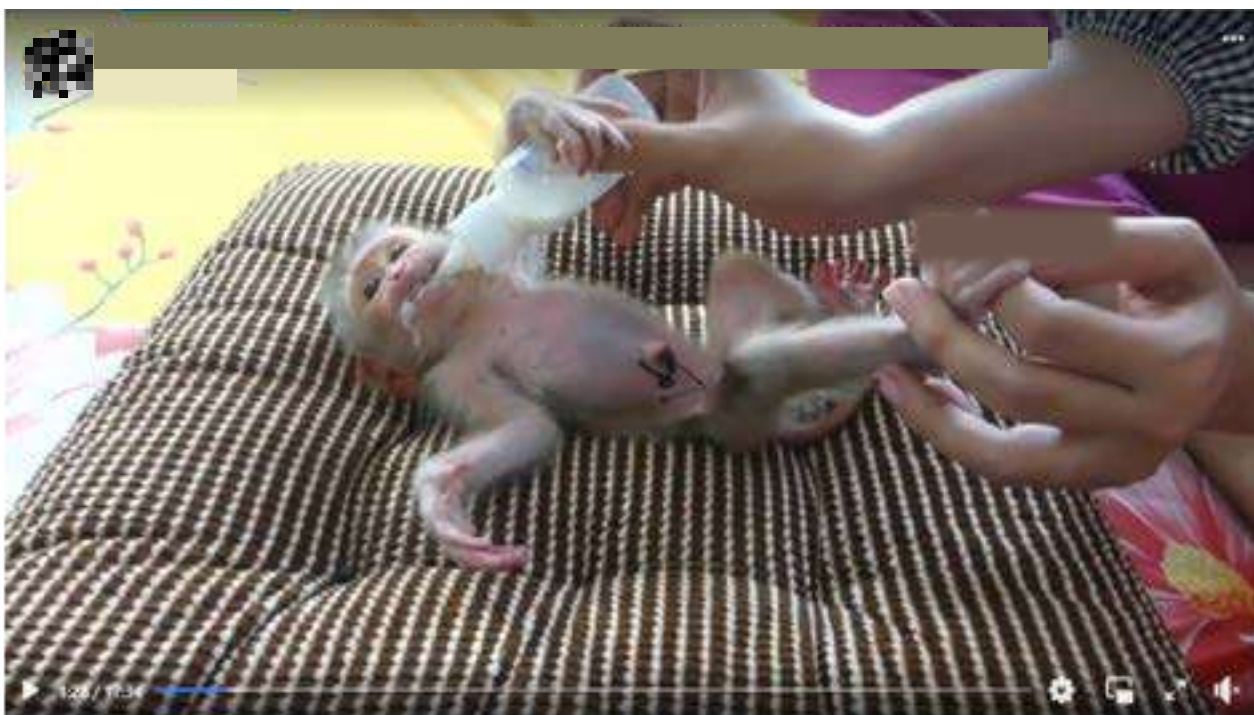


Infant pet macaque. SMACC ID: rec2W71JKbV1aStPP



Young macaque held and treated like a human baby. SMACC ID: recibJp6fjsO25MVT 5

Macaques in the pet trade suffer from the time they are infants. For wild-caught macaques, mothers and other family members may be killed in order to obtain the infants. For captive-bred individuals, the conditions in which animals are bred, kept and sold are often extremely poor. In many social media videos featuring pet macaques, the monkeys are newborns, only days old. Some posts explicitly describe that this is the case, and others show monkeys so young that their umbilical cords are still attached. In many pet macaque videos, humans refer to themselves as “mom”, “dad” or “parent”, feeding baby monkeys milk bottles and changing their diapers.



Newborn macaque, the umbilical cord is still somewhat attached. SMACC ID: recDd2H0Z0ff1bScK 2



Infant macaque having their diaper changed. SMACC ID: recyY7yQh1WOPICcz 1

The screenshot below, taken from a video on YouTube, highlights such an example from a video titled “Mom feeds formula milk to 1 day old newborn Michael.” This video was posted in February 2022 and has over 320,000 views, with comments that include “so cute,” and “a new member of the family.”



Newborn macaque, bottle-fed. Photo: LadyFreethinker

These videos may also mask the fact that they are depicting animal cruelty, not animal care.

For example, in a video posted on YouTube in March 2022 which has racked up nearly 250,000 views, a woman cradles in her arms a baby monkey in a swaddle, with a pacifier in his mouth, and kisses his cheek. The video has the text, “I love you, Mom!” with a heart between the monkey and the woman.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

Without proper context, such content is likely to appear heartwarming and harmless. The infant macaque, however, has been removed from his real mother, which in itself is incredibly damaging (see section 6A for more details about welfare concerns). His welfare is further compromised as a result of the restrictive swaddling in which he is tightly wrapped.



A young pet macaque is tightly wrapped in restrictive clothing. Photo: LadyFreethinker

A YouTube video with similar language, titled in part, “Give Mom a Special Kisssssss,” shows a young macaque in a diaper and a dress with a woman who kisses the monkey on the face. Behaviors that humans typically associate with affection, love and care do not necessarily convey similar meaning with other species. In fact, such gestures, movements or expressions could be perceived as threatening, causing undue stress and even heighten the risk of bites, scratches or attacks as the animal attempts to defend itself.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

CASE STUDY

Results from data collected between January 2019 and March 2022 by the Taiwan SPCA and other animal organizations in Taiwan revealed that of 127 reports of macaques being kept as pets, 30 cases (24%) were found via online content on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok).[35] Of the 22 cities/counties in Taiwan, reports of macaque pet-keeping occurred in 18 of them. Of the 127 reports, 60 cases involved macaques being kept in personal residences, 19 cases of macaques seen in stores/shops, 18 cases of macaques being brought out in public as a pet, 16 cases of macaques kept at campsites or bed and breakfasts, and three cases involved the illegal sale of macaques. 70% of the cases involved young macaques under the age of three.

All of the cases involved the improper rearing of macaques, such as keeping the animals in barren cages or on a leash, and not allowing the animals to exhibit natural species-specific behaviors, such as living in social groups, foraging, locomoting or allogrooming.[36] In some cases, the macaques were seen in public with their owners in a car or riding on a motorbike.

One specific case involved a macaque named Handsome who was used as a magician's assistant in magic shows.



Photo: Taiwan SPCA

Media outlets reported on his story in the news. According to the magician, the animal was “rescued” as a baby. When Taiwan SPCA visited, Handsome was locked in a cage and seemed frightened and stressed as he was brought out of his cage.

In some of the cases reported, the owners showed photos or videos of the macaques as babies feeding on bottled milk or even sleeping alongside them. **However, as they grew into adults, the animals were typically locked in cages or had their movements restricted because people could no longer control the animals safely. Many of the owners explained that the animals had become more aggressive, scratched people, or made a mess in the house.** One owner admitted that she even consulted an animal psychic to help with her pet macaque's “behavioral problems”.

Examples like these suggest that many people, including the media, fail to understand how the keeping of these wild animals as pets is detrimental to the animal's welfare and that these animals do not adapt well to life under human care.

BATHING

Another common type of content that masks cruelty features people bathing baby macaques. While this act may seem benign, it can cause significant suffering for the animals involved.



Young pet macaque being bathed with large amounts of soap. SMACC ID: recyhdyYf0jj34WW 1

There are serious health and welfare issues with washing captive baby monkeys. Foremost, from a welfare perspective, handling baby monkeys, because they have been taken from their mothers, is stressful and results in fear and anxiety. It diminishes the wellbeing of the individual. From a medical perspective, repeatedly washing a baby monkey using any form of soap or similar surfactant agent will remove essential oils from the hair and skin of the baby, resulting in the potential for infection by microorganisms or infestation by parasites. It may also result in harmful chemicals being able to penetrate the skin. Although baby monkeys get wet under natural conditions and, depending on species, may even immerse themselves completely in water and swim, this is done voluntarily (they are not forced as with people) and no soaps or other chemicals are involved.

Nedim C Buyukmihci, V.M.D., co-founder & veterinary advisor at Action for Primates



Some species of monkey are not comfortable in bodies of water. Often, the baby macaques featured in this kind of content are washed and rubbed rigorously, handled roughly, forced in and sometimes even under the water. These are extremely stressful situations. It is possible that additional “invisible” harms are also present in these videos: the water may be freezing cold or boiling hot, sparking intense reactions when the monkeys are immersed, or strong chemicals may be used to irritate the skin and cause the animals to make frantic movements. Often, these videos are described as the babies having “tantrums”, “needing discipline” or being “very angry”, which are all states and emotions that people may relate to and find amusing. Indeed, to an ill-advised viewer, a “cute” baby monkey being bathed by their (human) “mom” and “throwing a tantrum” as they do not want to be washed and cleaned might seem to reflect situations they have experienced with their children. However, with knowledge of the reality of how these situations are likely experienced for the monkeys, there is nothing remotely cute about bathing videos.



*Macaque chained, bathed and forced underwater.
SMACC ID: recMpuF9WQELFOkpZ 1, recMpuF9WQELFOkpZ 2*



Macaque covered in large quantities of soap, which may irritate their eyes and skin.

*SMACC ID:
recQ6umDm62xva2tF 2,
recocbAcjdNrsNx1 2*

Disturbingly, bathing videos are immensely popular, despite the monkeys' outward displays of discomfort and stress. **The animals often scream out or try to get away as water and soap pours down their faces.**



Young macaques distressed from being bathed. SMACC ID: recdvdW2KvbuRbTsV 3



Young macaque are often extremely roughly handled when they are being bathed, which causes intense distress and may cause physical injuries.

*SMACC ID: recGFjQFje3IKPtDd 3,
recPvDcs3drtZUEN3 1, recnOhjuJpLDfMFFp 1*

“ **The animals often scream out or try to get away as water and soap pours down their faces.** ”

A video whose title describes “drowning in the water” was posted to Facebook in March 2022, showing a baby macaque being bathed in a plastic basin. The infant is seen trying to climb out and starts vocalizing but he/she is returned to the water by the owner. The infant appears unable to support themselves in the water and lands face down with their face fully submerged. The owner allows the baby to remain submerged for periods of time and sometimes adjusts the macaque's body, allowing he/she to once again be submerged face down.



SMACC ID: recRQdMno2QRRKZ8J 2, recRQdMno2QRRKZ8J 3

In another video posted in April 2023, a man washes his pet baby macaque as the monkey sucks on her own fingers relentlessly (a coping behavior), squeals as soap pours down her face, and attempts to get away.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

CLOTHING

Many videos depict pet macaques dressed in clothes, including dresses, costumes or school uniforms. Clothing is unique to humans and is restrictive and even damaging for wild animals. It may hinder macaques from moving freely or may irritate the skin. Many videos show macaques that have purposely been dressed in restrictive clothes, to disable the use of their hands, arms or legs. For example, we have seen many videos of macaques who could not use their fingers to grab food as their hands were covered by gloves or fabric, could not use their feet to walk or had their arms tied behind their back so they would have to walk on their hind legs.



Young pet macaques wearing restrictive clothing that prevents them from using their arms and hands.
SMACC ID: rec7ZKk9zqaTe8BzA 1



Young pet macaques wearing restrictive clothing that prevents them from using their arms and hands. SMACC ID: [rec9e2bAd193Bypj5 1](#), [recmctI0v8VjW3BDn](#), [recJV8ZVxVxpUFF7W 2](#)

A video posted on YouTube in March 2022, which has been viewed over eight million times, shows a female monkey in a dress, having ballerina slippers put on her feet by a woman. The monkey gets up and is clearly distressed – she kicks them off immediately. The woman puts them on the monkey a second time, and the monkey again kicks them off and runs away.



Photo: [LadyFreethinker](#)

In another YouTube video posted in January 2021 with nearly 15,000 views, a newborn baby monkey is filmed wearing a hat and gloves. Many baby monkeys suck their fingers – a coping mechanism that helps them deal with separation and loss from their mothers or con-specifics.[37] Video makers sometimes force the animals to wear gloves to prevent them from doing so.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

A monkey with a collared shirt, trousers, shoes and a backpack is seen in a video posted to YouTube in December 2021 with more than four million views. When the monkey walks, they are clearly struggling – they shuffle their feet and lean from side to side. The video's caption notes that it was the monkey's "first day of school." The clothing worn by this macaque is extremely tight, seemingly forcing them to walk on their hind legs.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

Baby macaques in clothing may seem cute at first sight, but the reality is that their welfare is often extremely compromised by being clothed, especially if it has been purposely designed to restrict their movements. Content showcasing baby macaques in clothing also conveys damaging messages, normalizing macaque pet keeping and humanization.

B. MACAQUES AS ENTERTAINERS

Macaques, sometimes clothed, are often seen in online content that depicts them performing human-like behaviors, which may follow a narrative, for the purpose of entertainment. “Animals as entertainers” is the third most common theme of cruelty in the data we have analyzed, with 249 links being categorized as such.



Young pet macaques wearing clothes, including socks, hats and pyjamas, are made to pose laying down on a bed holding teddy bears as if they were human babies having a nap.

SMACC ID: recEORWwx2dkRLyZx 3

Some videos have depicted several infant macaques lined up in a row, in dresses, sometimes matching, as if on display. They may be eating food or playing with flowers or other apparently innocuous activities. The aim of these videos is to entice social media users with cute content, to gain views and likes. In these videos, macaques being “disciplined” is common, with the monkeys portrayed as having “misbehaved” like unruly children.



SMACC ID: *rec5VUFqkxAwpKSb3 4, rec1V4sKqw177PcBq 9*



SMACC ID: *reco51c3DaQWBeVwE 2 9*

They are typically made to walk on their back legs to appear more human-like, and carry shopping bags, backpacks, or other items related to the activity they are being made to perform. The apparent intention is to make the macaques appear happy and content in the videos, as they are shown “smiling” in seemingly positive contexts.

Some of these videos appear to be professionally produced, with sets and environments created to look like houses, gardens or shops. Some animals are even placed in remote control cars, or on bicycles. They are filmed as though they were actors or characters in a story. Sometimes the macaques are dressed in costumes or have makeup applied to their faces.



SMACC ID: *rec49pGURiL0l4pkt*

However, such grins in primates usually express fear or extreme submission, not joy or contentment (see section 6A on Misinterpreted behaviors). Some content creators have dedicated entire channels to this type of content, with their videos appearing as episodes in a series. As with all social media animal cruelty content, this can generate income through advertising, incentivizing creators to continue to produce content (see section 6C on Monetization).

Macaques used as entertainers or performers in this way are forced to perform unnatural behaviors to generate online content. Such use, and the methods used to train and manage them, negatively affect their welfare.

Ensuring individuals perform the desired behaviors requires intensive training. Most training methods use some degree of negative reinforcement, which means that the animals are physically punished or food is withheld when they do not comply with commands or perform the required behaviors or tricks.[38] The use of dominance, fear and in some cases abuse, negatively affects both short- and long-term welfare.[39] Although the content described in this section does not usually show such punishment occurring directly (though it may be inferred in the post's description or through gestures), the macaques who feature in it consistently provide clues that punishment is used, for example, by displaying fear grins, cringing, screaming and withdrawing in the presence of their owner on screen.



SMACC ID: recWFgaZI9xi5dRdC 7



Macaque showing fear grins. SMACC ID: recSzj3NlcG0BLkOn 2, recityvDuiK1lyCot 2

Primates used as entertainers are often kept in poor conditions and may be chained, isolated and housed in small, barren cages severely restricting their physical abilities. An investigation by organizations Lady Freethinker and Action for Primates found that many of the baby macaques forced to perform unnatural acts while dressed in doll-like costumes for social media views are, off-camera, kept in barren wire cages, fed junk food, and deprived of attention and of the ability to engage in natural behaviors.



SMACC ID: recdN9XCt2TR1sFDi 2

Such environments provide little or no security or stimulation. In some cases, cages even lacked bedding material to provide comfort when resting.[40]



Young macaques kept in a barren cage. SMACC ID: rechHfGyIAaqrPh8F

Videos involving teasing or pranking, in which macaques are taunted and filmed to provide entertaining content, are also popular on social media. This includes videos that show young macaques having food presented to them only to have it withdrawn, being frightened by humans wearing masks or by props, and being forced to interact with predator species such as snakes. SMACC released a Spotlight Report on the issue of teasing in 2022.[41]

B. FAKE RESCUE TRENDS

Social media content creators know that animal rescue content has the potential to be extremely popular. With increased popularity, viral content can generate substantial financial benefits for the content creators as well as the platforms themselves. Savvy content creators have accordingly seized the opportunity for potential profit by creating fake rescue videos designed to lure traffic to their accounts. Falsely positive and heartwarming narratives of animals being heroically saved from dire circumstances attract social media users who believe they are watching or supporting real rescue efforts.

“ ***Fake macaque rescue videos often begin by showing macaques in apparently dire but manufactured situations, for example stuck inside objects or in unusual positions or situations*** ”



Young pet macaque, who is likely to have been placed here to create fake rescue content.

SMACC ID: [recVmhWuGtkZGGUoz 1](#)

Fake rescue content targets all animals, and is a cruelty trend that features heavily in SMACC's database. Macaques can also be the target of fake rescue content by creators. In our analysis, 78 links featured macaque fake rescue content.

Fake macaque rescue videos often begin by showing macaques in apparently dire but manufactured situations, for example stuck inside objects or in unusual positions or situations. Typically, a person will then intervene, freeing the macaques from where they are stuck on fences, entwined in bike wheels, trapped in containers, or being threatened or attacked by dogs. The narrative typically includes the macaques heading home with their rescuers. Viewers then express joy that the macaques are now safe and will experience a better quality of life than they would have in the wild, where they would have had to fend for themselves, forage and avoid predators.



Various examples of fake rescue videos. Macaques stuck in fans, ropes, plastic bottles, bikes or other items are filmed in these distressing situations, with captions feigning shock and sentiments of pity towards the young individuals. Some videos show the animals being rescued from their ordeal. SMACC ID: [recapgRA87Au8QxXa 1](#), [recVmhWuGtkZGGUoz 3](#), [recLUUUrAu1aU6AkK 1](#), [recZCmNUtwOYI9cRg 1](#), [rec7NXSB2U47DI7VR 1](#)

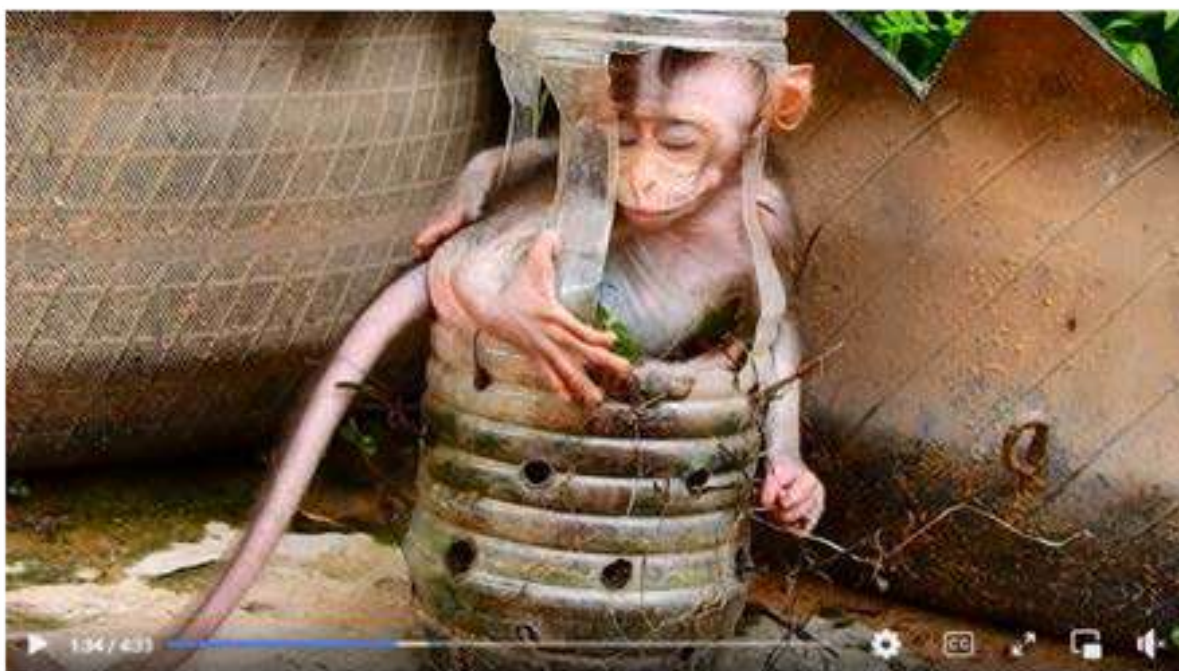
While fake rescue videos involve the animals being released from dangerous situations, there is a related theme which SMACC refers to as “fake outrage” in which content creators - who again, have most likely put these animals in these situations - share the content claiming shock or outrage at the suffering of the animal, when they are actually responsible for it.



SMACC ID: recN4GaaxEMQqmUXE

In a video on Facebook, an infant macaque dressed in clothes is said to be “trapped” underneath a wooden structure and is then rescued by the owner. This appears to be a staged situation as it is unclear how the monkey would have become trapped of his/her own accord.

In another video, an infant monkey is seen stuck inside a plastic bottle with the sides cut out. After several minutes of filming the monkey struggling to escape, a person is then seen pulling the monkey out.



SMACC ID: rece0q6MxdVZur9cK 3

“ ...we have seen on social media videos of very young, emaciated baby monkeys, either on the brink of death or dead already, and who sometimes appear to have been drugged.

RESUSCITATING MONKEYS

Among the most disturbing fake rescue trends we have seen on social media are **videos of very young, emaciated baby monkeys, either on the brink of death or dead already, and who sometimes appear to have been drugged.** These individuals are filmed while their owner is pressing on their chest to administer CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) or administering liquids into their mouth in the hope to resuscitate them. Some of these baby macaques have clearly been starved, or roughly handled as they present with clear signs of injuries or illness. From the videos themselves, it is impossible to know the exact circumstances that led the baby macaques to become so frail or to die. Such videos seem to be the creator's last attempt to gain views and engagement whilst the monkey is still alive. Because of their extremely emotive nature, such content attracts many viewers who express their sadness and sympathy about the death of the young monkey. This can also be a way for creators to generate money. (See section 6C for more on the monetization of cruelty content.)



SMACC ID: [recsYHH4ch7ZcdhcE 5](#), [recEsTJKPza3ngYKv 2](#), [recTGZBKcUVtR9UWc 2](#)

In one video posted on Facebook, two different attempts to resuscitate two different monkeys is shown. The first monkey appears unconscious part of the time but appears to be breathing. The second monkey appears lethargic but conscious, however the person in the video continues to attempt resuscitation.



In another, a young macaque is seen vomiting and then slowly appears to die. Filming continues as a person attempts CPR on the monkey, who cannot be resuscitated. The fact that such an incident was filmed suggests this was not a random event.

SMACC ID: [rectcA49GGFdm0VcB](#), [rec9cRBhqP6wj0Wft 2](#)

D. ABANDONING PET MACAQUES IN THE WILD

Owners of pet macaques regularly release their pets back into the wild, with or without other macaques, either because the individual is ill, has become too aggressive to be kept as a pet, or simply because they are no longer interested in keeping them. Such practices are irresponsible and potentially dangerous as they disrupt social groups, and abandoned monkeys have subsequently been found injured or dead. Animals who have only known captivity do not develop adequate social or behavioral skills necessary to survive in the wild, such as foraging, staying safe from predators or learning to navigate wild habitats. This lack of knowledge severely hinders their chances to survive in wild environments. The rehabilitation of wild animals, and primates in particular, is a highly specialist field that requires considerable professional expertise, experience and resources.



SMACC ID: reccuNOPIG1nMoOTc 2. Channel name is covered.

In a YouTube video posted in April 2023, a pet monkey who was reportedly abandoned is attacked by another monkey. When pet monkeys are released near existing troops, they may be seen as a threat and are often attacked.



Photo: LadyFreethinker

Newly released animals may not possess the social skills necessary to integrate safely into a troop. Not knowing how to read and understand social cues from their conspecifics may trigger conflicts.[42] The isolation that this lack of skills creates can put released individuals in a vulnerable position that can severely limit their ability to survive.

E. SEXUAL ABUSE

Our data analysis shows that 53 of the links analyzed contain sexual abuse of macaques. Some posts may be explicit, with no doubts on the nature of the content. However, other content may seem to simply showcase certain aspects of macaque pet ownership, such as footage of macaques having their diapers changed or baby powder applied. These videos, however, are sometimes created for particularly sinister reasons.

SMACC has documented content featuring close-ups of pet macaques defecating or having their diapers changed. Sometimes the owners rub cream, oil or powder into the macaque's anus. Wearing diapers or having substances applied to their skin, especially in such sensitive areas, is not beneficial to baby macaques. On the contrary, these practices can cause discomfort, irritation and pain. We have classified this sort of content as sexual abuse because of the clear focus on the macaques' genitalia and because of the abundance of similar content that is often found on channels where it appears. Content creators appear to be targeting a very specific audience of social media users with such videos, which have become popular and widely shared or engaged with.



SMACC ID: [reck5S5AJAYVSuZ4B](#) 2, [recUNiWV6hQ5auUPA](#) 2, [recvb2ZhNYCOXcusP](#) 1

We have also documented many videos showing the more obvious sexual abuse of macaques, with humans rubbing the macaques' penises to stimulate them, inserting objects into their genitalia, or inciting young macaques to suckle on their own penises. These videos are extremely disturbing, not only for the animals involved who are often seen struggling to escape such treatment, but for the viewers who may be confronted with such content, as these posts' descriptions usually infer an animal in distress who is being helped by a human, or with humorous undertones. Many comments on these videos denounce these practices. However, engagement with such content only incentivizes content creators to create similar content as it increases the content's reach, regardless of the intentions behind such engagement (see section 6C for more information on content monetization). A Facebook video showing a human poking tweezers in a macaque's genitalia to allegedly remove an insect has amassed more than 1.5 million views, and most comments describe users' anger at the situation.



SMACC ID: *recKmjiVsB8egpN8d 2*

This deeply disturbing content may also specifically appeal to zoophiles and encourage others to perform similar acts. Links between animal abuse, child sexual abuse and violence exist: children victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse are respectively three and five times more likely to commit animal abuses. In families that experience child abuse, animal cruelty is reported 80% of the time. Between 1 in 4 and 2 in 3 adult violent offenders have a history of animal abuse.[43,44,45,46] Indeed, animal cruelty is a proven predictor of current and future violence, including assault, rape, murder, arson, domestic violence, and sexual abuse of children.[47,48]

F. MONKEY HATRED

Deliberate physical torture is the second most common type of cruelty found among the links we have analyzed, with 327 posts showcasing various forms of physical harm on macaques. Overall, when combining all forms of other physical harm themes, over 60% of our data features forms of physical harms on pet macaques, which makes physical violence the most common type of cruelty on pet macaques.

Monkey hatred, which is typically focused on baby macaques, is a deeply disturbing problem that has escalated online in recent years.

Monkey hatred content can take many forms including the filming of wild macaques to portray them in negative ways, purposely putting pet macaques in difficult or strenuous situations to mock them, or content that is filmed to provoke or feed into already-existing monkey hatred. Monkey hatred can also involve the sexualization of macaques by applying make-up or marker pen on their faces, or performing fake medical procedures, such as teeth pulling, teeth filing or tail chopping.



One form of monkey hatred content: applying marker or make up to monkeys.
SMACC ID: recS4M0Cz1B2B8LaA, recGr5IWdwACqP2yu 4, recQTGJtxbHiUuyXj 2,
recJa7Ay5Z7w0RgOy 2, recUueyrx4hqMna8X 1



Monkeys trapped in jars filled with water, dunked in pots and pans, roughly handled or thrown things at are example of monkey hatred content that is readily available on social media platforms.

SMACC ID: [reclyi0ZXCzrLFzQG 3](#), [recy8VaxPkWJ85JM6](#), [recGFjQFje3IKPtDd 1](#), [recwR5dl5sXfap567 2](#), [rec8XADUV7SdT3fF4 1](#)

Monkey hatred can reach extremes and manifest itself in the deliberate torture and killing of monkeys on camera for online entertainment.

Long-tailed macaques are particularly targeted, partly due to existing negative opinions of this species in range states. Negative interactions between people and free-living long-tailed macaques have increased in several countries, due to human activities such as the destruction of monkey habitat for use as human settlements and crop production, which has brought humans and macaques in greater proximity to each other, sometimes resulting in conflict.[49] The species is often condemned as a “pest” with no or inadequate legal protection.[50]

However, the persecution of macaques appears to be popular across the globe, as monkey hatred content is consumed by social media users in many different countries. Indeed online networks exist where viewers can buy videos depicting the torture of macaques, and even pay for certain acts to be carried out on the animals. It is believed that many of these videos are filmed in countries where long-tailed macaques are native, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia. However, their production may be coordinated in part from overseas. An undercover investigation by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), found individuals in the UK and US involved in the circulation and coordination of the creation of such content.[51]

CASE STUDY

In June 2021, animal protection organizations Lady Freethinker and Action for Primates, were alerted to the formation of a US-based “Monkey Haters” private online group, where members paid to have baby monkeys, especially long-tailed macaques, tortured and killed on camera in Indonesia. Members of this group met via channels on YouTube dedicated to sharing videos of young monkeys being intentionally disciplined or tormented as entertainment. They used social media platforms as a space to discuss what types of cruelty and torture viewers wished to see inflicted on macaques, with many paying content creators to film for them. Over time, the types of abuse inflicted escalated to even more perverted and violent activities involving baby macaques being sadistically tortured and killed.

Examples of the brutality inflicted upon the baby monkeys at the request of the group members include the cutting off of body parts such as a finger, ear or arm; tying monkeys up and piercing ears, noses, tongues, cheeks or eyelids with hat pins; setting parts of their body alight; beating monkeys into submission; hanging a monkey by his genitals and submerging him in ice-filled water.

After the exposé of this group, it was closed down.[52] However, more private groups formed on Telegram and there was an escalation in cruelty, violence and abuse inflicted upon baby monkeys, some just a few days old. This included macaques being impaled, stabbed, bones broken, body parts removed and monkeys being squeezed into small jars.



In 2022 it was discovered that many of these extreme videos had started to appear on public social media pages, in particular Facebook, despite purported policies against allowing such abuse on the platforms. Those people facilitating monkey torture videos have posted their contact information on social media platforms, offering to make private torture videos, as well as providing links to their private groups.

SMACC ID: recMMInYBa82rvY9W 1, rec3a2wFxRtE6qmOS 1

By allowing these people to operate for months or even years posting monkey torture content, social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and others, have and continue to enable animal cruelty enthusiasts to connect and escalate their cruel activities to extreme and grotesque levels.



6. WHY IS IT ALL PROBLEMATIC?

“ *The dark reality of life for these monkeys (...) is one of extremely poor welfare and inadequate conditions that these primates experience when the camera is not filming.* **”**

6. WHY IS ALL THIS PROBLEMATIC?

A. WELFARE CONCERNS

Few viewers are likely to be aware of the cruelty behind social media content that features pet macaques. It can be hard to imagine the likely experience of an individual animal from a short video. The dark reality of life for these monkeys is missing from the frame; the reality is one of extremely poor welfare and inadequate conditions that these primates experience when the camera is not filming.



SMACC ID: recl2tlr8KSoTOISG 1

'The fundamental cruelty inherent in imprisoning these infants is integral to all the videos made and distributed through social media platforms. Depriving infant monkeys of their mothers and extended families is extremely cruel and detrimental to all. The infants will never be normal and will experience continued psychological distress exhibited by abnormal behavior. Initially, confused, bewildered and frightened, they may spend their time crying out for their mothers, and may reach a state of learned helplessness and appear obtunded - no interest or engagement in their environment. The people involved further compound this cruelty by subjecting the infants to situations which may appear like 'harmless fun', but which add to the stress and distress endured. Examples include seemingly endless bathing; forced bipedal walking; wrapping hands and feet; tormenting by preventing access to food displayed in front of them; and continually prodding and poking.'

Dr Nedim Buyukmihci, veterinary adviser and co-founder, Action for Primates



A LIFE OF SUFFERING

Primates kept as pets are usually isolated from others of their own species and are certainly deprived of the opportunity to live in the large, complex social groups to which they are naturally adapted. The individuals used to produce online content are very often infants who have been taken away from their mothers. Maternal deprivation has a severe detrimental impact on primates' physical and psychological well-being. The lack of opportunities for undertaking appropriate social behaviors may result in stress, aggression and both short- and long-term behavioral and physiological abnormalities.[39,53,54] Welfare is negatively affected; physical health is compromised; brain function is altered and life expectancy is lowered.[55]

The keeping of macaques as pets is abhorrent to anyone who cares about animals. It is never acceptable to keep a monkey in captivity, whether with the intention of being cruel or kind to it. Macaques suffer terrible psychological and physical damage through living in confinement and being forced to behave in a way that is completely unnatural to them. As for the deliberate abuse and torture inflicted on so many macaques and posted on social media, it's hard to find words to describe the perpetrators and the individuals who view these horrific scenes. Their behaviour is depraved beyond belief and every action must be taken to stop it.

Alan Knight OBE, President, International Animal Rescue (IAR)



Newborn macaque kept as pet. SMACC ID: recTyOURySURfg9sN 1

Behavioral deficits may be further exacerbated by the inability of private owners to provide species-specific spatial and environmental needs (most of which are impossible to replicate in captivity), resulting in malnourishment, stunted growth, physical deformities, illness, injury, or boredom.[56] Veterinary medical associations, including the largest veterinary organization worldwide – the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA 2008) – and the British Veterinary Association (BVA 2014) along with organizations such as the International Primatological Society (ISP 2021) are opposed to the keeping of non-human primates in private homes, largely because it is considered inhumane and a public health problem.[57,58,59]



Young pet macaque looking malnourished and exhausted. SMACC ID: recQTpQbcgCIMvWQb 2

“Because nonhuman primates pose significant risks to the health of the public and domestic animals – including the possibility of severe injury to the humans and domestic animals with which they come in contact – the AVMA opposes private ownership of these animals. Furthermore, the AVMA also does not support the use of nonhuman primates as assistance or service animals because of animal welfare concerns, the potential for serious injury, and zoonotic risks.”

Dr Justine Shotten, Senior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association, was quoted as saying in 2023, “Some exotic animals, such as primates, have such specific needs that it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to meet these in a domestic setting.”[2]

“ The need for medical intervention is rarely detected or prioritized by owners. As a result, pet macaques are likely to suffer from chronic health issues, debilitating injuries or abnormal brain development.

Social isolation and reduced space allowance can increase aggression and stress, resulting in abnormal or repetitive behaviors that are detrimental to the macaques' physical and psychological health.[60,61]

Referred to as “stereotypic behaviors”, these may be the result of frustrated needs or be a coping mechanism developed to address a current or previous inadequate or stressful environment. The presence of stereotypic behavior is generally acknowledged to be an indicator of current or previous poor welfare;[62] such behaviors often include hyper-vigilance, aggressive outbursts, excessive fear and self-directed aggressive behaviors such as self-biting, hitting themselves, hair plucking and rocking.[63]



Long-tailed macaque self-biting. SMACC ID: recBMfldaZsTIXw5p



Stump-tailed macaque displaying stereotypical behaviors, in this case, self-biting. In the video, the same individual is also seen overgrooming and displaying fear grins to their owner. SMACC ID: recityvDuiK1IyCot 5

Due to a lack of species-specific knowledge, pet macaque owners are likely to feed macaques a poor-quality, inappropriate diet. In social media videos, macaques are often seen being fed junk food like ice cream, fizzy drinks, sweets, bottles of milk and unhealthy amounts of sweet fruit. The natural diet of macaques varies between species but they are generally omnivorous opportunists, feeding mainly on roots, fruits, seeds, bark, herbs, insects, crop plants and small animals.[64,65] Pet macaques are often deprived of the nutrients necessary to function properly, may become under- or overweight and develop diseases such as diabetes, tooth decay or metabolic bone disease.[66,67] As access to specialist veterinary care is not always possible and **the need for medical intervention is rarely detected or prioritized by owners. As a result, pet macaques are likely to suffer from chronic health issues, debilitating injuries or abnormal brain development.**



Pet macaques are fed fruits, bread, but also alcohol, cake, and other unhealthy foods. This can lead to individuals becoming overweight and developing health issues such as diabetes.

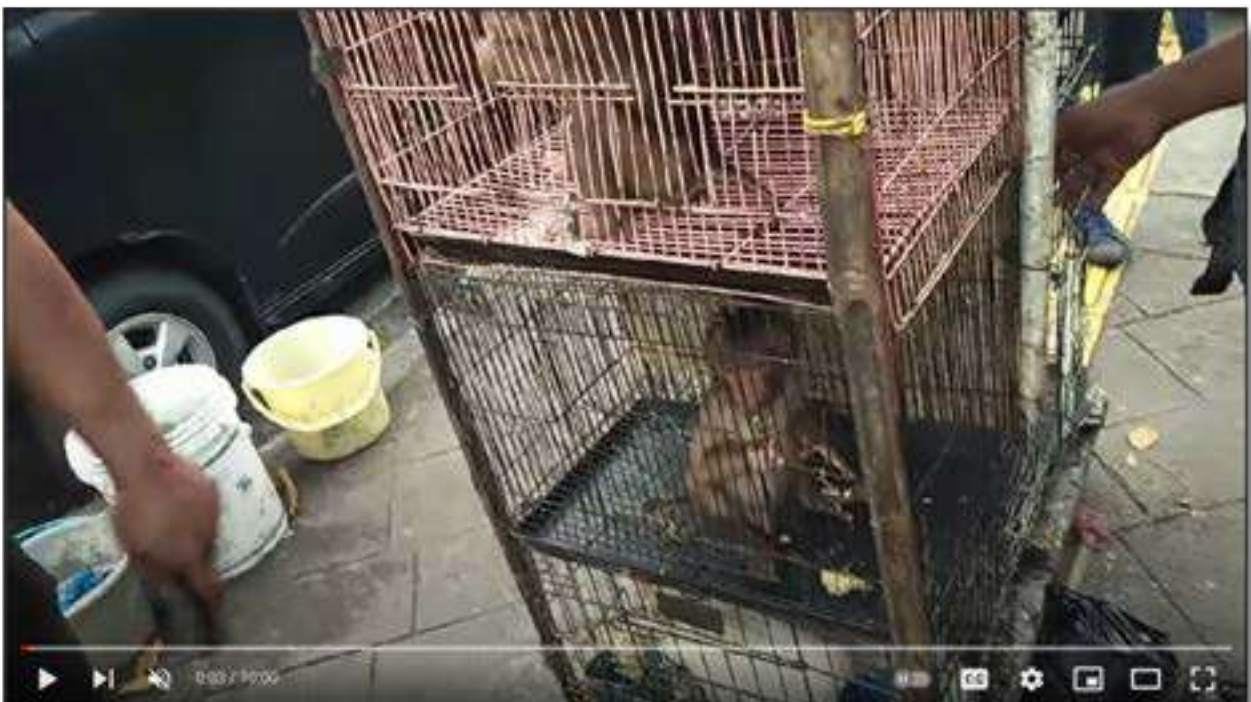
SMACC ID:
recYEEHoL5U0XvDtm 1,
recUdNICiaTOd7AQa 2,
rec08b6baazC6fo0 1

Pet macaques are often discarded by their owners once they reach adolescence, when they may become unpredictable or aggressive or otherwise difficult to handle. At this point, depending on the circumstances, they may be sold to a zoo, circus or a collector, abandoned or even killed. Those who keep macaques in order to create social media content are then likely to obtain another young animal to generate further online content, and the whole cycle is perpetuated.

FUELING THE PET TRADE

Macaques and other primates can often be found for sale on social media platforms. Sometimes sellers will openly post on social media, advertising them for sale, and others use misleading language like “monkey for adoption,” presumably to appear more amenable to those looking to help a monkey in need.

All stages of the trade in live wild animals, including capture or captive breeding, transportation, holding, and eventual placement, compromise individual welfare. Based on conservative estimates of the trade in live wild animals, three animals die for every one animal traded.[68] Further, when captured from the wild, multiple animals may die in the process of trying to protect the target animal from harm, with potentially devastating impacts on the stability and integrity of the remaining wild population. Entertainment and pet purposes are often reported as the most common reasons for trade in live wild animals at markets, with illegal trade occurring more frequently than legal trade.[69] The conditions at market vendor stalls demonstrate little consideration for animal welfare, including using cages that severely restrict movement, isolating individuals from conspecifics or holding them in close proximity to other species, and failing to provide access to water, food and shelter from the heat or sunlight for extended periods of time.



Macaques sold at a market, kept in tiny barren cages, stacked on top of each other, in a busy street.
SMACC ID: reclZ2PJU0AAhVDP5 1

Primates for sale in markets are usually kept in extremely unhygienic and stressful conditions that exacerbate the possibility of transmitting disease-causing pathogens to humans (zoonotic disease).

“ **Herpes B virus, which is carried asymptotically in some macaques, can infect people when the macaques carrying the virus are stressed, such as in a laboratory. Although transmission to and disease in humans is rare, the resulting disease is often fatal if untreated.**



Macaques sold at a market, kept in tiny barren cages, stacked on top of each other, in a busy street.
SMACC ID: reclZ2PJU0AAhVDP5 2

Concerningly, non-human primates may harbor hundreds of pathogens that, if transmitted to susceptible humans, may cause serious disease including Ebola, herpes and SARS. The risk of zoonotic potential has been summarized recently. [70,71,72]



SMACC ID: recy37eobek04Xe2D 1

Herpes B virus, which is carried asymptotically in some macaques, can infect people when the macaques carrying the virus are stressed, such as in a laboratory. Although transmission to and disease in humans is rare, the resulting disease is often fatal if untreated. Despite these clear risks, non-human primates remain among the most popular animals featured as pets and entertainers online.

Markets are not the only place where pet macaques are sold. Much of the trade has now shifted online, making it easier for sellers to go undetected while reaching a broader market.[73] Social media platforms allow sellers to connect easily with buyers and to showcase the animals they wish to sell. As such, many people turn to social media to purchase their pet macaque. This is despite some of the major platforms prohibiting the sales of animals (see Section 8, Regulations).

Monkey “unboxing” videos are also present on social media. Unboxing videos normally feature a content creator filming themselves removing a new product from its packaging. Monkey unboxing videos reveal baby macaques who have been packaged up in boxes, which are opened by the content creator who has presumably purchased them. Little is known about the origins of these animals. Kept in small, sometimes empty, cardboard boxes, it appears that the young monkeys are shipped to the buyer’s house, with no food, water or comfort available to them during transport. We have documented content in which several macaques were kept in the same otherwise barren box, and other videos in which the **young monkeys were just newborns. In some, the individuals were already dead by the time they were unboxed.**



Newborn macaques purchased as pets and being unboxed.
SMACC ID: recAVM63u6r8LYpj1 1, recAVM63u6r8LYpj1 2

“ (...) the young monkeys were just newborns. In some [videos], the individuals were already dead by the time they were unboxed.



Newborn macaques being unboxed on camera.
SMACC ID: recenBSkUKoia9HaM 1, recenBSkUKoia9HaM 2

These primates often include species that are threatened with extinction according to the IUCN, and protected from international trade under CITES in order to protect fragile wild populations. [74,75,76,77]

(See section 7B for more details about trade regulations.)



Newborn stump-tailed macaque, shipped and unboxed by their new owner. The young monkey shows signs of injury.
SMACC ID: recq6Rz41bCX6olaG 1

MISINTERPRETED BEHAVIORS

For most primate species, a wide grin resembling a human being's smile expresses fear, nervousness or extreme submission. However, many viewers believe that a "smiling" monkey is expressing joy or some other sort of pleasure.[78] Not surprisingly, **images of grinning primates are ubiquitous on social media. This serves to perpetuate the misconception that "smiling" monkeys are happy monkeys, while their suffering remains unrecognized.**

Similarly, an open-mouthed threat that typically involves raised eyebrows, often interpreted as a look of playful shock or surprise by social media users, signifies a highly aggressive behavioral display frequently observed before a primate engages in a dangerous physical attack. In macaques, these behavioral displays indicate high stress, fear and aggression.



Young macaque grinning, a sign of fear. SMACC ID: recXMvdsHdk58hgZU 6

“ Images of grinning primates are ubiquitous on social media. This serves to perpetuate the misconception that “smiling” monkeys are happy monkeys, while their suffering remains unrecognized.

This is not a smile



Young macaques displaying a fear grimace - and not a "smile".

SMACC ID: recwOKe9evefARgpY 1, recrQSB0y8A8oh9AL 12, recGacqzRd4ekG5BW 2, recdPaNxjUIxRRC2T 1, recW84sp2UxwdYI3z 1, recMOk6neppQZVwGv 2.

CASE STUDY

In Taiwan, an urban myth perpetuates the idea that macaques should not be allowed to drink water. Some claim that if macaques drink water they will grow big in size, so water is restricted in order to keep them small in stature. Some owners also claim that macaques acquire their water intake from their diet, so extra water is not necessary. Of course, this could not be further from the truth, but urban myths like this get passed along generations, misleading people and endangering the welfare of the animals.



In one case in Taiwan, a female macaque named Ahou was found as a baby in the mountains of Alishan by her current owner. Ahou grew up feeding on cold cow's milk and over-the-counter flu medicine for when she was not feeling well. Taiwan SPCA visited the owner and asked them if they knew why Ahou was sucking on her own fingers and rocking back and forth with a blanket over her head.

The owner said that these were all normal behaviors, as Ahou had been exhibiting them since she was a young macaque, and that her rocking back and forth was to dodge flies in the room. These misconceptions and misinterpreted behaviors completely failed to identify signs of pronounced psychological distress.



Photo: Taiwan SPCA

B. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Cruelty content in which animals are victims of extreme violence and torture is generally easy to identify, because the acts committed are easily recognizable as violent, injurious and negative for the animals involved. The response of the animal may be clear too, if they are cowering in fear, trying to escape, screaming or perhaps displaying injuries. However, when it relates to other less violent forms of content, in which welfare and cruelty concerns are not as obvious to viewers without specific knowledge, cruelty may not be so apparent. This may be why content featuring macaques as pets is so popular on social media. People may not recognize or consider the monkeys' lived experiences and the suffering they are likely to experience.

A quick search on any social media platform brings up a great deal of content about life with macaques as pets, and even at times, content that advertises baby macaques for sale or "adoption". Despite the fact that the majority of this content depicts macaques engaged in unnatural behaviors, many of the responses to such videos are positive, with viewers "liking" the content and adding positive comments, with some even expressing a desire to own a macaque themselves. Some of these videos have hundreds of thousands of "likes".



SMACC ID: recjcMee5zowVtbWe 1

If you care about animals, you can only be deeply shocked when seeing those videos and photos of macaques in human care – but they are among the most popular animal cruelty content on social media. While these wild animals are pampered like babies, careless users give the content even more impetus with their belittling and glorifying comments. This does not only harm the animals, but can also weaken the animal welfare awareness in the population. Both the networks themselves and legislative bodies must urgently put a stop to this animal suffering!

Wiebke Plasse, Welttierschutzgesellschaft e.V.



Such false perceptions are particularly damaging not only because they enable and promote direct harm to the individual animals shown in the content, but also because they promote behavior that harms other animals. Slow loris videos provide a good example of the harm that is inflicted on the featured animals.

A 2013 study focused on one of the most popular and publicly acclaimed pet slow loris videos on social media. It found that the conditions in which the animal was shown violated all five of the animal welfare freedoms, which define the most basic requirements necessary for a captive animal to achieve neutral or good welfare, including freedom from hunger/thirst, discomfort, pain, injury, disease, fear and distress, and the ability to express natural behaviors.[79,80]

Studies conducted on social media posts featuring a variety of primates and other animal species have found a link between such content and the desire to keep wild animals as pets.



*A pet slow loris being "tickled".
SMACC ID: recBZ85trFcVUIDxH 1*

The slow loris study discussed above found that despite the poor animal welfare evident in the videos, most viewers that watched these unnatural online depictions believed slow lorises would make suitable pets and that their populations in the wild were stable. [28, 81,82]

A 2022 study showed the impact of social media depictions of galagos (bushbabies), on influencing the public to buy one as a pet. The study examined almost 22,000 comments under videos showing galagos on TikTok and Instagram, and found that 95% of the comments were positive (e.g., "I want one", "They are cute"). The term "galago pet" on Google search increased over time, with an increase in the number of live galagos being exported in the same period. [83]



A pet galagos wearing a hat. This type of content is often seen as cute and harmless and may encourage people to obtain similar animals as pets. SMACC ID: reckSJ7X2v2BaWzDI 3

Another study measured the impact that images of capuchin monkeys, squirrel monkeys and lemurs in different types of settings had on viewers' attitudes towards primates. Results showed that images of these animals in anthropomorphic settings (e.g., human-built, household- and office-type settings) while in contact with a human, increased viewers' desire to have one as a pet. Such images were also linked to beliefs that the species shown were not endangered.[84] Studies using imagery of chimpanzees came to similar conclusions.[85,86]



The portrayal of pet lemurs, chimpanzees, capuchins and other primates on social media conveys detrimental messages that these species are suitable pets and not endangered.

SMACC ID: reclx8Fw3Vccf59TZ, recuoetWLeaRQU1u 2, recRKaCjd0ugQE1GJ

Among the frequent “I want one” comments on pet macaque content that SMACC documented, were apparently serious enquiries about how to get one, with one person posting their address and asking to pay in installments. It is impossible to know how many of these people will go on to actually acquire a macaque as a pet, but it is clear that social media content is driving the desire to do so.

Responses to fake rescue content (outlined above in section 5C Fake Rescue) also vary. As above, viewers often appear to be responding to how they interpret what they can see in the video, praising the content creator for assisting the animal in need. Unfortunately few viewers take the time to investigate the content further to determine whether it is genuine.



Video titles often describe monkeys being stuck accidentally and needing rescuing. Some viewers may be grateful for the person filming and helping, while some content creators may use such content to ask for money.

SMACC ID: recNzWhGeA890zjhV 1

Some viewers do recognize the concerns around macaque content on social media and express these concerns in their comments. Unfortunately, any engagement, whether negative or positive, adds to the content's reach, with the consequence that these well-meaning comments feed into the content's visibility and contribute to its popularity and even profitability.

Viewing such content may also raise concerns for the well-being of viewers themselves, when exposed to animal cruelty. Witnessing the abuse of animals has a negative psychological impact, especially on children. Children exposed to animal abuse in the home have been shown to be at greater risk of becoming abusers of animals and humans themselves,[87] due to the normalization of such behavior.[88]

As engagement with online animal cruelty content increases, its creators are encouraged to continue producing new content, increasing the suffering of existing pet macaques and incentivizing the procurement of more animals.



Baby monkeys put in distressing situations for online content. Videos in which monkeys that have strong reactions are seen as more entertaining. This incentivizes creators to find new ways of making content that will become popular. Here, a young macaque is terrorized of a crab that their owner throws at them repeatedly.

SMACC ID:
recbfgErGoTnNeBRi 1

To sustain interest, content creators may broaden the ways in which they use or interact with the animals, placing them in ever more stressful situations or subjecting them to increased abuse. Creators who see other content becoming popular for treating macaques in a certain way, may try to emulate their success by doing the same, or going even further.

C. MONETIZATION

Popular content on social media can often be monetized. This means that content creators can make money from the placement of advertisements on their content on social media platforms. For example, on YouTube, adverts may be placed before, after or even during the video. The content creators can earn income each time the adverts are played.[89] To be eligible for monetization, content creators must meet certain criteria, such as a set minimum number of subscribers or views of their content. As long as content is not detected as breaching YouTube’s “Advertiser-friendly content” guidelines, it may be eligible for monetization. This means much of the content featuring macaques as pets, which is not currently captured by the platform as being in violation of its policy, could be eligible, generating money for those creators abusing animals.

Popular videos such as those previously described can generate a great number of views. In 2020, Lady Freethinker examined a sample of 2,000 videos that collectively amassed over one billion views, and estimated that content creators could have accumulated up to US\$15 million and YouTube up to US\$12 million in advertising revenue.[90] The opportunity for making money from social media content incentivizes creators to create more videos, and encourages others to start their own social media accounts with similar content.



SMACC ID: recwKk19eYrH2dlcU 5

“ **As long as animal content is profitable for the content creators and for the platforms, more and more animals will suffer.**

Monetization is just one of the reasons SMACC advises the public not to watch or engage with any animal cruelty content seen on social media, so as to avoid increasing the popularity of such content and inadvertently supporting those abusing animals (see section 8. What you can do).

Some content creators can also make money by directly asking viewers for funds. For example, on fake rescue content, as discussed previously in section 5C, some creators pretend to be involved in genuine animal rescues and ask for donations to “help animals” or towards “veterinary costs”, sharing links to donation pages.

It is likely that the generation of income by the creators will only incentivize them to create more animal cruelty content for social media. **As long as animal content is profitable for the content creators and for the platforms, more and more animals will suffer.**



How engaging with content fuels monetization for content creators. Every interaction with cruelty content increases its reach, so it is always better to avoid engaging and reporting the content to the platform instead.

D. BEYOND THE VIDEOS

Organizations operating sanctuaries for primates (and other animals) are often approached with requests from members of the public, asking them to take action on a particular animal or animals in neglectful or cruel situations. Whether it is an animal seen on social media, on the internet, or animals they have seen directly in their day-to-day life or while traveling, there appears to be an expectation that sanctuaries are able to intervene in cruelty cases and simply remove the animals from inappropriate or cruel situations. In fact, there are severe limitations to what sanctuaries can do in the absence of strong laws protecting animals from harm and the limitations on funding for lifetime care for rescued animals.

As facilities that offer lifelong care to their rescued residents, sanctuaries are by default always operating at capacity. Spaces for new rescues typically only become available if an existing resident passes away or if the sanctuary is able to expand its operation by constructing new enclosures. Based on the operating practices of the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary in south Texas, USA, at 2023 prices, the construction of an enclosure of sufficient size, complexity and security to safely contain a small group of primates is upwards of US\$100,000. In addition, annual care costs for a single primate are estimated to be around \$1,250, meaning that a monkey rescued at under five years of age may cost up to \$25,000 or more over the course of their lifetime. This funding must be provided via the generous donations of members of the public and via highly competitive grant programs.



SMACC ID: recgMjHiu6jZQRzX 1

Due to the general lack of robust legislation protecting primates from harm and banning private ownership, most privately-owned primates who come to sanctuaries are owner-surrenders. These monkeys are usually abandoned into the care of the sanctuaries with no associated financial support. Even arranging transport from their former homes to the sanctuary can incur costs running into thousands of dollars. For those animals seized as part of legal proceedings, lifetime care costs are not usually mandated as part of the penalties and so the cost of ongoing care beyond the court proceedings must be covered in full by the sanctuaries. This creates a substantial burden on the sanctuaries and severely limits their ability to accept new residents, particularly if new enclosures need to be built to accommodate them.

Macaques, like all other primates, belong in the wild. Those who 'own' primates and exploit them, often on social media, continue to fuel the demand for more macaques in the illegal pet trade. Those who view these images on social media often do not realize the cruelty and abuse that lies behind them. While many captive macaques eventually come to sanctuaries, there will never be enough space and other resources for sanctuaries to help the continuing flow of primates in need. We need to work together to end this cycle now and to call on social media platforms to ban animal cruelty content.

Jackie Bennett, Program Director-Africa and Asia, Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries



Those animals who are rescued and provided with sanctuary do not experience an immediate happy ending. Primates are profoundly social animals, and those who have been kept privately with little to no contact with their own kind suffer immensely. This means that many primates who come to sanctuaries must learn from scratch how to “be” a monkey. They will often fear other primates and lack the social and behavioral knowledge to safely interact with them. For some monkeys, their trauma may manifest in stereotypies (pacing, overgrooming, head twisting, self-harming); others show signs of extreme aggression or fear, and others simply shut down when faced with stressful situations. The journey of recovery can take months or years and the animals will carry with them their past trauma.

Importantly, animals arriving at sanctuaries in non-range states are highly unlikely to be candidates for release. This is in part because rehabilitation and release programs are hugely costly operations which are outside of the realms of possibility for most non-profits, but also because privately owned primates rarely make good candidates for release due to their deprived backgrounds and resulting unlikely survivability. Instead, these primates, who by rights should live in large social troops in complex and challenging environments, are reduced to a life of captivity with perhaps a handful of other monkeys if they are lucky.

With the foregoing in mind, sanctuaries are simply not an option for most primates harmed in private hands – whether through ignorance or the infliction of deliberate cruelty. Instead, sanctuaries can provide a home for a tiny proportion of animals in need and are generally overburdened and under-resourced. Stricter legal controls are needed to prevent primates being owned and abused in the first instance, and to address the issue at the root of the problem.

Here at Born Free USA, we have first-hand experience of the long-term harm and trauma that is caused by the trade in macaques as pets. Our sanctuary is home to hundreds of macaques, many of whom were rescued from the pet trade. These complex, intelligent, and profoundly social animals come to us bearing the emotional, and sometimes physical, scars of their unnatural and cruel imprisonment. It can take months, sometimes even years, for these monkeys to be able to safely live alongside others of their own kind as they have been denied any semblance of a normal upbringing and rarely know how to interact safely with other monkeys. Health conditions such as diabetes, heart conditions, and self-inflicted injury are seen far too often. Only a tiny number of expect primates are given the opportunity of sanctuary – most will continue to languish in miserable conditions in private homes for their entire lives. The trade in primates as pets is cruel to animals, dangerous to humans, and must be brought to a permanent end.

Dr. Liz Tyson, Programs Director and Head of Sanctuary, Born Free USA



A cage used to house a rhesus macaque for seven years. Lyla was kept as a pet in Texas, USA until she she was rescued and sent to the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary



CASE STUDY

Lyla is a rhesus macaque who was kept as a pet in a dog crate for seven years in Texas, USA. She was seized by animal control officials after it was discovered that her owner had been keeping her without a permit, and her living conditions were alleged to constitute animal cruelty. On March 3, 2023, the case went to court, and an agreement was reached between the state and the respondent, who confirmed that he couldn't care for her and that Lyla had been "cruelly treated." She is now permanently entrusted to the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary in south Texas.

In almost twenty years of working with rescued monkeys, Lyla's living conditions were some of the worst the sanctuary had ever seen. She was imprisoned in a filthy 2' x 3' cage and had nothing but a dirty, torn blanket to play with and sleep on. When rescuers entered the property to seize her, she was pacing obsessively backward and forward in her tiny space – an indication of long-term compounded stress.

Lyla now lives in a large enclosure with plenty of toys to play with, warm blankets to sleep on, a nutritious diet, and on-hand veterinary care for her needs. Her stereotypies have begun to subside but sow themselves again if she is feeling stressed or excited. It is likely that they will stay with her – to some extent or another – for the rest of her life. Ongoing vet care will be vital for her well-being as it was discovered on examination that she has a heart condition which her captive conditions and poor diet may have caused. Importantly, sanctuary staff will also work with Lyla to integrate her into existing social groups to be with other monkeys for the first time in her life.



Lyla the rhesus macaque. Photo: Born Free USA



7. REGULATIONS

“

Platform policies that do exist largely fail to consider the long term welfare issues such as nutritional deficiencies from a poor diet or physiological issues from living in captivity.

”

7. REGULATIONS

A. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM POLICIES

Social media companies continue to lag far behind animal welfare science when it comes to appropriately regulating animal cruelty content on their platforms. Many of the biggest platforms such as Facebook, Instagram (both owned by Meta), YouTube, TikTok and Twitter do have some policies around content showing the graphic and violent abuse of animals. However, these vary between the platforms, and crucially, their implementation and enforcement can be poor. Indeed, videos showing the extreme torture of macaques have been found on multiple social media platforms, and SMACC has identified many inconsistencies in the platforms' moderation of such content. Some platforms, including YouTube and Meta, took the positive step to introduce specific policies prohibiting fake animal rescue content. Implementation of these policies appears to have reduced certain forms of fake animal rescue content on the platforms, however they require refinement and maintenance by platforms as content creators come up with new ideas for fake rescue content.



Help the baby monkey out of the swamp

Fake rescue video, a man is pretending to save a baby monkey from a muddy swamp. In reality, the young monkey, kept as a pet, has most probably been placed in this situation to create content for social media.

SMACC ID: recYB5zYzgFJ0snS1 1

Messaging services such as Telegram, especially those claiming to offer the highest levels of security and privacy for users, often have very limited platform policies.[91,92] Although some groups sharing animal cruelty content on Telegram appear to have been removed after reporting, it can be difficult to locate such groups or the users behind them. Links to such groups have been found posted on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, showing how some of those people interested in monkey abuse are operating across different platforms, apparently with impunity.

At the time of writing, none of the major social media platforms have specific policies around forms of cruelty such as dressing macaques in clothing, making them ride bikes or forcing them to perform other unnatural behaviors. Platform policies that do exist largely fail to consider the long term welfare issues such as nutritional deficiencies from a poor diet or physiological issues from living in captivity.



SMACC ID: recYNgdTMufS3cWY6 1



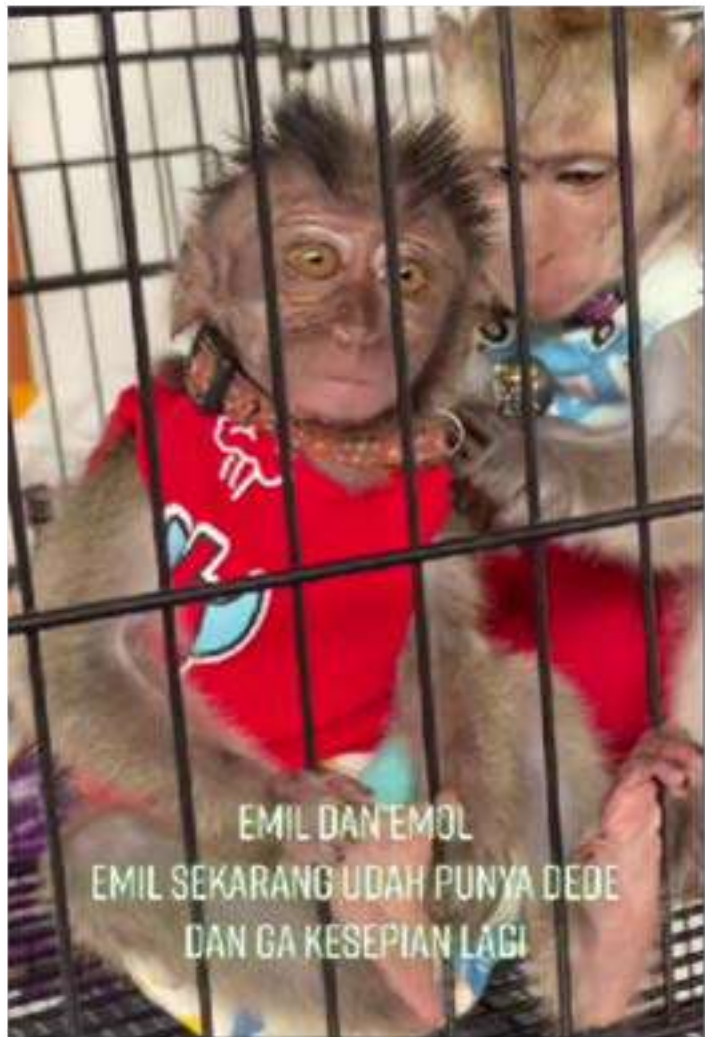
Policies covering psychological harms are even more limited, and often extremely vague. They often do not specifically recognize animals being made to feel scared or distressed, undergoing social and maternal deprivation, experiencing frustration from being unable to perform natural behaviors or the long term impact of living in captivity.

SMACC ID: recTXmTT27YHHcWWi 5

All of these would apply to the macaque content outlined in this report, yet this content remains extremely easy to find on most social media platforms. This is disappointing and deeply concerning when the suffering of macaques is widely evidenced, and when such a large proportion of the abuses macaques face in social media content has a strong psychological element.

Many platforms have policies on the trade in animals, in particular for threatened species. Facebook prohibits all sales of “endangered” species and their body parts on its platform,[93] however, the importance of enforcement is clear.

Research has shown that illegal sales of endangered animals still occur on the platform, as well as many other platforms, despite prohibitive policies.[94] The Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online (EWTO) focuses specifically on this issue with social media companies and other online platforms.[95]



SMACC ID: recvqkNjJ8JE0voxV 2

So much brutality, so much viciousness shown in content like this, people taking so much pleasure in seeing animals suffer. All of this is fueled by comments and reactions from users who actually only want good, but achieve exactly the opposite with their interactions, helping these animal abusers to gain more reach. The platforms that do nothing about it. The horror that money is being made from this, laws that have no power to be implemented... All this catapults us back into the "social stone age". It is our responsibility to stop this spiral of violence, to use and communicate our power as users with expertise, and to convince providers to lower the threshold for removing such content faster or not allow it in the first place. Now.

Myrto Joannidis, Communication at Susy Utzinger Stiftung für Tierschutz (Susy Utzinger animal welfare foundation)



As well as the need for stronger, up-to-date animal cruelty policies, social media platforms have the opportunity and influence to educate their users on animal welfare issues. Educational messages triggered by the search of certain terms or hashtags flagged as problematic (usually related to the illegal trade in wildlife or wild animal selfies) have been implemented by some platforms such as Instagram. However, once again the need for strict enforcement of such policies is highlighted; recent analysis by World Animal Protection indicates that the implementation of this initiative has failed and does not deliver on the platform's initial commitment. World Animal Protection initially searched for as many hashtags as they could that are used alongside Instagram posts depicting images of animal selfies, using elephants as a case study. They found 244 hashtags, all of which were used in at least one post that showed relevant images – only five (2%) of these hashtags, when searched for, triggered Instagram's alert. In other words, 98% of hashtags used with posts showing these particular animal selfies failed to trigger Instagram's alert system.[96]

SMACC has been working with social media platforms since 2021, including TikTok, Meta and YouTube, with the aim of improving policy, moderation and crucially, enforcement. SMACC also has direct escalation channels on all three platforms, to flag content SMACC believes should be reviewed for platform guidelines violations. In 2023, with support from SMACC, TikTok launched its new Animal Welfare Safety Center page and accompanying educational messaging in the app.[97]



SMACC ID: recZxve12RuV6Zsms

These resources inform users of TikTok's animal welfare policies and provide guidance on how to report content for review.

SMACC has not identified severe macaque torture content on the scale and scope that has been found on other social media platforms. However, there is still a great deal of content featuring macaques as pets on TikTok. SMACC continues to consult with TikTok on their Animal Abuse policies as they relate to macaques being kept as pets.

B. PRIMATE PET TRADE REGULATIONS

The trade in and keeping of macaques as pets is subject to both international and national regulations.

All macaque species are listed on the Appendices of CITES, to which the overwhelming majority of countries are signatories. CITES regulates cross-border trade in more than 40,000 species of wild animals and plants, with the aim of ensuring that such trade does not threaten their survival.

Indian lion-tailed macaques (*Macaca silenus*) and the Barbary macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*) of North Africa are listed on Appendix I, with all other macaque species listed on Appendix II.

Commercial cross-border trade in Appendix I-listed species is generally prohibited, while for Appendix II-listed species, export permits must be issued by the authorities in exporting countries confirming that the specimens (in this case the macaques) have been legally acquired and that there is no resulting detriment to wild populations. CITES also requires authorities in exporting countries to ensure that “any living specimen will be so prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment”, and for Appendix I species that importing country authorities should be “satisfied that the proposed recipient of a living specimen is suitably equipped to house and care for it.”

However, CITES only regulates cross-border trade, and has no jurisdiction over activities that occur at a national level. Also, while it does provide authorities with guidelines covering issues such as captive breeding of listed species and live animal transport, it is not a welfare-focused Convention and has no real influence over how traded wild animals are treated in their destination country. For that, we are reliant on national laws.

At the national level, some countries have introduced restrictions on keeping certain types of animals as pets. Some countries have implemented a ban on the keeping of primates as pets whereas others have introduced restrictions on their keeping, including Denmark, Bulgaria, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, 24 US states, Australia, Israel, Mexico and Honduras.[98] Taiwan banned the keeping of macaques as pets following an investigation. Canada and some European countries have introduced or are developing so-called “positive lists” which specify species that can be traded and kept; all other species are banned by default. However, currently the use of positive lists and the animal taxa to which they apply is patchy and inconsistent, and the degree to which countries effectively enforce such legislation varies.

National legislation covering the welfare of wild animals used in the pet trade also varies enormously. Some countries have fairly comprehensive legislation, others very little. In the UK for example, the welfare of traded and kept macaques is covered under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, although its provisions are generic. The Act does contain specific albeit non-binding guidance on the keeping of primates as pets, and there are ongoing discussions on restricting the private keeping of primates to specialist licenced keepers who would be required to maintain their animals in accordance with strict criteria likened to “zoo level standards”. (Although no such zoo standards currently exist in relation to primates). Currently, it is estimated that between 4,000 - 5,000 primates are privately owned in the UK.[99]

In the UK, macaques are also listed on the schedule of the Dangerous Wild Animals (DWA) Act 1976,[100] requiring all private keepers to obtain a DWA license from their local licensing authority. However, the licensing requirements are primarily focused on human safety and preventing escape, rather than the welfare of the animals.

Overall, how well or otherwise the law protects the welfare of pet macaques is something of a lottery.



Newborn macaque. Their toes are taped together. SMACC ID: recbeyCWPaZru9Qqg

“Born Free has long opposed the trade in and keeping of primates as pets. These highly intelligent and socially complex animals clearly don’t belong in people’s homes. As well as causing immense animal suffering, the trade also poses a threat to wild populations, and places the public at risk of injury or illness. The depiction of pet macaques on social media only serves to exacerbate the problem. It’s high time the trade in and keeping of macaques and other primate species as pets was brought to a permanent end.”

Dr Mark Jones, Veterinarian and Head of Policy, Born Free



C. LAW ENFORCEMENT

The lack of coherent and effective legislation protecting macaques from harm, and the global and intangible nature of the internet, make the protection of primates challenging. As discussed in detail in this report, many of the abusive practices seen on social media – removing baby monkeys from their mothers, dressing primates up in human clothes, forcing them to perform – are not widely recognized as inherently abusive under existing law and are rarely subject to legal consequences, if ownership itself is legal. Where laws exist, they are largely concerned with overt cruelty or, in places with more progressive legislation, they ban private ownership altogether. Even in places where ownership is banned, enforcing legislation is difficult.



SMACC ID: recgdXN7va0OI9fBV 1

In Taiwan, the government banned the keeping of macaques as pets in 2022 after the Taiwan SPCA and other animal organizations investigated over 100 cases of macaques kept in abhorrent conditions, where the animals were deprived of even the basic needs. All the animals were suspected to be acquired illegally. Governments around the world need to take legislative action to prevent the suffering of these wild animals, who are not suitable as human pets.

Taiwan SPCA, Executive Director Connie Chiang



CASE STUDY

Since mid-2021, the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary – located in south Texas, USA – has rescued eleven monkeys kept captive as pets in private homes. Nine of those monkeys were being kept illegally by their former owners. Only two of the illegally kept monkeys were seized as part of legal proceedings, the rest were voluntary surrenders by the owners. This demonstrates how easy it is for illegal ownership to go undetected. As most pet monkeys do not receive veterinary care, there is often no record of them anywhere. In the US, where a patchwork of ineffective legislation is in place, it is easy to purchase a monkey in a state where their possession is legal and move them over state border areas where possession is illegal. Estimates suggest around 15,000 primates are kept in private possession in the US. [101]

Where overt cruelty is present, the global and intangible nature of social media and the wider internet means that tracking the source of cruel content is difficult. It can be impossible to pinpoint where videos were filmed, where they were uploaded and by whom. This makes enforcement of anti-cruelty laws extremely difficult without the complete cooperation of the platforms involved disclosing the information they have. Platforms may be reluctant to help due to legal or ethical constraints surrounding privacy, lack of understanding or care around the wider issue, or simple lack of willingness to promote positive change.

Without the existence of strong national laws or effective enforcement of existing regulations on the keeping of primates as pets or animal cruelty, animal protection organizations are limited in what action they can take to help individual animals. This of course is extremely frustrating for those concerned with animal welfare, especially social media users who see cruelty content and want action to be taken to help the animals involved. However, unless strong laws forbid such practices and social media platforms choose to cooperate with the authorities, animal protection organizations can unfortunately find themselves powerless in the investigation, prosecution and arrest of these content creators and, crucially, the confiscation of the animals.

However, organizations do have a role to play and can create long-lasting changes. It is important to remember that quick outcomes, as impactful as they can be (rescuing an animal, arresting a content creator), are not the only ways to create a positive difference for the animals. The reality is that for many organizations such as SMACC and its member organizations, change may come slowly. However, when change does come about, it is usually durable and fuels a long-lasting improved world for animals.



8. WE ALL HAVE A ROLE

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Each of us has an important role to play, and our individual actions complement and strengthen our collective efforts to protect primates.

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8. WE ALL HAVE A ROLE

Some of the content shared on social media is incredibly hard to watch. Let's be clear, this is not entertainment, for 'likes' and 'shares', this is animal abuse. Many of these videos depict extremely violent content showing the intentional abuse torture and killing of macaques.

Macaques are highly intelligent and social creatures. They form relationships and can remember past interactions, they groom each other as a sign of affection and respect. They think and feel and show emotions. Some of these animals will be living in abject fear and terror.

Social media platforms are normalizing the cruel treatment of macaques by allowing these videos to remain on their platforms. They have a responsibility to shut-down these content creators and send a message that animal cruelty is not to be tolerated. These platforms need to proactively step up and take action to stop animal cruelty content being uploaded in the first place.

If you see this type of content – report it, do not engage with it. We all have a role to play.

Dr Neil D'Cruze, Global Head of Wildlife Research, World Animal Protection



Tackling the use of primates in cruelty content is a big challenge. To be effective, we need collective action by authorities, platforms, organizations, groups and individuals. Each of us has an important role to play, and our individual actions complement and strengthen our collective efforts to protect primates.



Pet macaques who are forced to try and eat with restrictive clothing that does not allow them to use their hands or arms, bandages around their head and plasters across their face.

SMACC ID: recT3kEE7PqD4WQgj 2

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

PLATFORMS

- Policy improvement, moderation and enforcement
- Removing content

SMACC

- Public awareness campaigns
- Report publication
- Working with social media platforms
- Representing animal protection organizations

ORGANIZATIONS

- Local investigations (when possible)
- Animal rescues (when possible)
- Can be in touch with local authorities
- Lobbying for legislation changes



MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- Report animal cruelty to the platforms
- By never watching, engaging, commenting or sharing such content, help give these videos no visibility or profitability

GOVERNMENTS

- Responsible for laws and their enforcement
- Responsible for prosecutions and arrests

SMACC



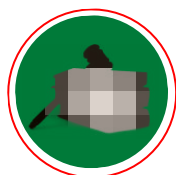
SMACC's role is to bring together all of those who are concerned about primates being exploited on social media. SMACC shares resources and information with the public on how they can help, carries out research into cruelty content, works directly with other organizations on the issue and holds regular conversations with social media platforms to improve policy and moderation. SMACC is a facilitator and central point for all activity on this issue.

ORGANIZATIONS



Local organizations may have a unique possibility of locating those creating animal cruelty content and instigating prosecutions with local law enforcement when such situations are possible. SMACC shares information with those organizations on-the-ground who know the country and the laws, and who have the means to investigate perpetrators of cruelty. SMACC also supports organizations who are lobbying their governments for legal change to regulate animal cruelty content online, and for penalties for those who create or share it.

GOVERNMENTS



In the interest of protecting the public, governments have a responsibility to review the potential damaging impacts of social media and other online media on users. Some countries are developing legislation to address online safety, particularly focused on vulnerable users such as young children and at-risk adults. Such legislation could be used to legally obligate social media platforms to enforce their policies and protect users from exposure to potentially damaging content, such as extreme animal abuse. In the UK, SMACC and other animal protection and wildlife trafficking-focused organizations have been working to secure the inclusion of animal cruelty content in the new UK Online Safety Bill, arguing that as well as being cruel to animals, exposure to animal cruelty content is harmful, particularly on children's mental health.[102,103] Other possibilities are the inclusion of animal cruelty content under national animal welfare legislation, making it illegal to produce or share such content.

PLATFORMS



Social media companies have a great deal of power, and their actions, or lack thereof, have a big impact on this situation. These companies cannot rely solely on members of the public or NGOs to report cruelty content when we find it; they need to proactively search for and remove such content. In addition, social media platforms need to develop, adopt and implement strong policies against animal cruelty content involving primates. Social media platforms also have the opportunity to share educational messages with those searching for cruelty content. For platforms that already have policies in place against certain acts of animal cruelty, implementation and enforcement are key, but are currently often lacking. Failure to monitor and remove content that breaches the platforms' existing policies, hinders efforts to bring an end to cruelty content. **Right now, platforms are providing a literal platform for abusers, and this cannot continue.**

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC



Members of the public are the main consumers of cruelty content online, often unknowingly. As such, they can influence the spread of such content by being knowledgeable on the issue and by taking the right action when confronted with cruelty content.



Right now, platforms are providing a literal platform for abusers, and this cannot continue.



SMACC ID: recwye9A3Rlu2M23a 1



9. HOW TO HELP

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Viewing, commenting, engaging and sharing with animal cruelty content - even to raise awareness or express outrage - add views and visibility to the posts. The best course of action is to give animal cruelty content no space or attention on social media.

”

9. HOW TO HELP

As emphasized in the report, most social media platforms' policies are lagging behind animal welfare science and do not specifically cover most content featuring macaques, so it is even more important for viewers to be aware and take action. To tackle animal cruelty, we need to adopt strategies that align with how social media platforms function. Viewing, commenting, engaging and sharing with animal cruelty content - even to raise awareness or express outrage - add views and visibility to the posts. The best course of action is to give animal cruelty content no space or attention on social media.

Macaques, who are often just days old when they're ripped from their mothers and sold as "pets", are denied everything that is natural and important to them when they're kept in human homes. Videos posted online showing these non-domesticated animals treated like human infants are not only far from "cute", but they also help fuel the wildlife trade and cause immense suffering for these complex and sensitive beings. We urge everyone to never interact with videos depicting macaques as "pets" and to inform others of the hidden cruelty.

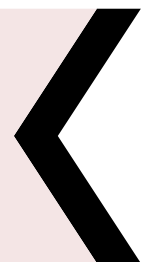
Nina Jackel, Founder and President of Lady Freethinker



LEARN TO SPOT CRUELTY

Members of the public are the users of social media and the consumers of cruelty content, whether willingly or unwillingly. Therefore it is crucial that the public learns how to identify online animal cruelty content, and how to respond (and how not to respond) when exposed to it. It is also crucial for members of the public to have a good understanding of what their actions can achieve for animals.

“ Any content showing macaques either in captivity or being interacted with by humans should be immediately questioned.



SMACC encourages the public to think critically when viewing animal content, to consider the situation shown and the likely experience of the animals involved. The keeping of macaques in captivity should only be permitted in very specific circumstances, by those with the expertise and facilities to do so, such as genuine rescue centers and sanctuaries. **Therefore, any content showing macaques either in captivity or being interacted with by humans should be immediately questioned.**



SMACC ID: *reckWY7nBMeRIVA1i 2*

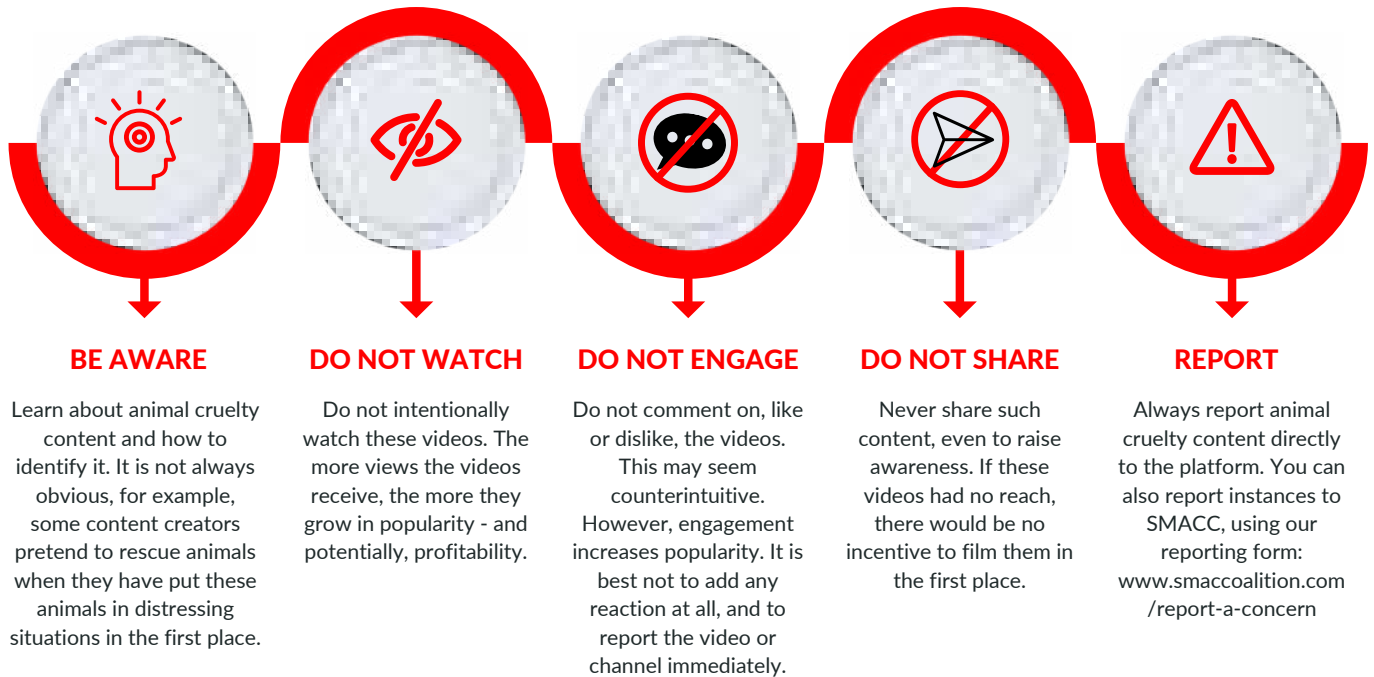
By considering the wider content created and distributed by content creators, it may be possible to get an impression of the kind of people they are, and what their motives might be in creating the content. Legitimate organizations will share further detail on their work, a link to their website and may be registered as a charity or not-for-profit organization with the relevant authority. Crucially there will be information on the animals beyond the videos, their stories, background and ongoing situation. Those simply exploiting macaques as pets or uploading fake rescue videos, may provide a great number of videos showing macaques being exploited, but will be unlikely to offer additional information.

To aid the public in identifying cruelty content, SMACC has created a series of videos entitled “Ask Yourself” showing non-graphic animal footage with guidance on identifying key themes of cruelty content, including cruelty to infant monkeys. Also, this report is part of a series of Spotlight Reports, focusing on specific animal cruelty content types found on social media platforms. Please visit our website to learn more about the keeping of wild animals as pets (not only macaques/primates), the teasing of animals for “entertaining” content and the cruelty behind “pranks” or other types of teasing.

FOLLOW OUR FIVE STEPS

SMACC's 5 Steps were created using knowledge of social media algorithms, to limit the spread of cruelty content and to bring it to the attention of platforms.

PLEASE FOLLOW SMACC'S 'FIVE STEPS TO STOP ONLINE CRUELTY'



BE AWARE

Learn about animal cruelty content and how to identify it. It is not always obvious, for example, some content creators pretend to rescue animals when they have put these animals in distressing situations in the first place.

DO NOT WATCH

Do not intentionally watch these videos. The more views the videos receive, the more they grow in popularity - and potentially, profitability.

DO NOT ENGAGE

Do not comment on, like or dislike, the videos. This may seem counterintuitive. However, engagement increases popularity. It is best not to add any reaction at all, and to report the video or channel immediately.

DO NOT SHARE

Never share such content, even to raise awareness. If these videos had no reach, there would be no incentive to film them in the first place.

REPORT

Always report animal cruelty content directly to the platform. You can also report instances to SMACC, using our reporting form: www.smaccoalition.com/report-a-concern

WHY REPORTING TO THE PLATFORMS IS IMPORTANT

Reporting social media content to the platforms is one of the best tools social media users have to tackle animal cruelty. Reporting content shows social media platforms that animal cruelty content is a significant issue that is of serious concern to their users. It also flags to platforms the kinds of cruelty content that exists. Crucially, it can take multiple people reporting the same piece of content to lead to its removal, so it may take some time to see it removed, meaning we all need to be consistent with reporting to be effective. A review of SMACC's data showed that by February 2023, our volunteers had reported 3,251 links to the platforms, and that 47% of these links were removed by the platforms. SMACC continues to work with platforms to see this percentage increase, and to see animal cruelty content removed from the platforms altogether. Reports from users are vital to ensure this work is successful.

Learn more about reporting, how it works and how effective it is in SMACC's "Report It! Hub" at www.smaccoalition.com/report-it-hub.



CONCLUSION

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As social media users, we have a lot of power, and what we decide to engage with or not can make a significant difference.

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CONCLUSION

When using social media, it is essential for users to adopt critical thinking. This can be applied for any type of content, including, of course, the keeping of primates or wild animals as pets. It can be easy to view all social media content as entertaining, and in an ideal world, social media would provide safe spaces for discourse and the exchange of ideas. However, platforms have been proven to be spaces that can negatively affect their users' mental health, especially in children and young adults. Being exposed to harmful or violent content can be extremely shocking and potentially damaging, and social media platforms have a responsibility to protect their users from such situations, which includes content in which animals are harmed. However, as animal abuse content can be less obvious, it can be difficult for users to know that they have been exposed to cruelty content and, potentially and often unwittingly, have been encouraging it.

Although it may not be immediately evident, videos featuring primates living in any environment outside of their natural habitats (other than a legitimate rescue or rehabilitation center); separated from their own species (particularly infants separated from their mothers); interacting with species other than their own (especially humans); or exhibiting unnatural behaviors (including trained behaviors not included in a species' natural behavioral repertoire or the expression of stereotypes); all result in primates experiencing suffering and distress.



SMACC ID: recffZvSPa8197ixu 2

Overt cruelty - such as hitting an animal - is not the only kind of activity that causes suffering, and may not always be easily observable in social media snapshots. Importantly, more nuanced forms of abuse or cruelty directed at primates also create significant stress and long-term impacts, and inevitably feed into larger and more destructive practices, including the global private trade in primates and the destructive (and sometimes irreversible) population depletion of wild monkeys.

Social media companies provide the platform for such abuse and therefore have a crucial and pivotal role to play in protecting macaques and other animals. They have the power to restrict the many thousands of creator's content showing the exploitation and abuse of macaques, through the introduction of key policies, and improved manual and automated moderation. They also have a unique opportunity to educate their users worldwide about the suffering of macaques. SMACC and our members will continue to work with platforms to remind them of their responsibilities and encourage them to use their place in society to improve the future for macaques.

As social media users, we also have a lot of power, and what we decide to engage with or not can make a significant difference.

By refusing to engage or give visibility to animal cruelty content and by voicing your discontent by reporting such content to the platforms, you help the efforts of SMACC, its member organizations and others tackling animal-related issues on social media. You also help to convince the platforms themselves that such content is not acceptable. Together, we can unify our voices and our asks for a better online world for animals, which will consequently create a better world overall for animals, and for us humans too.



SMACC ID: recDGAqHNKnuJeR7n 11

We stand firm in our mission to protect and advocate for the welfare of captive animals, ending the relentless abuse they endure in the name of entertainment. As we confront the dark corners of online wildlife abuse, this report serves as a stark reminder that the internet remains a battleground for fighting cruelty and exploitation.

The shocking finding of this report is that, in addition to the barbaric treatment they suffer, over 80 percent of macaque species spotted in these types of content are either "endangered" or "vulnerable", emphasizing the urgent need for action. As we forge ahead, each individual holds the power to make a difference - by reporting such content and holding social media giants accountable. Let us unite and work together, sparing no effort to end the horror of online animal abuse, and pave the way for a compassionate and just digital world for all living beings.

Jill Robinson, Founder and CEO of Animals Asia



OUR APPEAL



Our ongoing appeal to YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and other social media platforms includes adopting standardized definitions – across all social media platforms and in consultation with experts – of animal cruelty and cruelty content and ensuring that policies conform with these definitions, expressly prohibit cruelty content and are robustly implemented and enforced.



SMACC ID: recOP26bVdvBNVecp 4

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APPENDIX 1 - Cruelty themes

CRUELTY THEMES	COUNT
Deliberate psychological torture	357
Deliberate physical torture	327
Animals as entertainers	249
Rough handling	213
Maternal deprivation	189
Teasing	173
Poor conditions	158
Withholding food	104
Restrictive clothing	103
Monkey hatred	89
Fake rescue	78
Other	73
Spraying	71
Inappropriate food	69
Appears to be drugged	58
Causing or encouraging animals to fight	53
Sexual abuse	53
Scaring with another animal	51
Fake outrage	50
Sale of wild animals	49
Beating	43
Social isolation	36
Causing/Prolonging death	31
Dragging	28
Scaring with mask/prop	27
Performing animals	25
Drowning	19
Abandoning/releasing in the wild	14
Dangerous substances	11
Burning	8
Dismembering or mutilating	7
Wild animal selfies/tourism	6
Live burial	5
Unintentional abuse	5
Crushing	1
Cutting or stabbing	1
Eating live animals	1

APPENDIX 2 - Featured animals

ANIMALS	COUNT
PRIMATES - Macaques (Northern pig-tailed macaque)	595
PRIMATES - Macaques (Long-tailed macaque)	446
PRIMATES - Macaques (Stump-tailed macaque)	190
PRIMATES - Macaques (all or unspecified)	66
PRIMATES - Macaques (Southern pig-tailed macaque)	66
PRIMATES - Macaques (Rhesus macaque)	31
DOGS & CATS - Dogs	30
DOGS & CATS - Cats	13
PRIMATES - Baboons (Papio spp)	10
DOGS & CATS - (all)	6
FARMED ANIMALS - Pigs	5
FARMED ANIMALS - Goats	4
MARINE LIFE - Crustaceans (crabs/lobster/shrimp)	4
PRIMATES - All/general/unspecified	4
PRIMATES - Macaques (Japanese macaque)	4
WILD FELIDS - Tigers	4
BIRDS - Ducks	3
FARMED ANIMALS - Birds (chickens/hens)	3
PRIMATES - Capuchins (Cebus and Sapajus spp.)	3
PRIMATES - Gibbons (all or unspecified)	3
PRIMATES - Macaques (Bonnet macaque)	3
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS - Snakes (all or unspecified)	3
BIRDS - All/general/unspecified	2
BIRDS - Parrots	2
PRIMATES - Chimpanzees	2
PRIMATES - Langur (all or unspecified)	2
PRIMATES - Lemurs	2
PRIMATES - Marmosets	2
PRIMATES - Orangutans	2
PRIMATES - Vervets/grivets/green/tantalus monkeys (Chlorocebus spp.)	2
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS - (all or unspecified)	2
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS - Lizards (all or unspecified)	2
WILD FELIDS - White tigers	2
WILDLIFE (other) - Otters	2
ANNELIDS - Earthworms, polychaete worms, and leeches	1
COMPANION ANIMALS - Rodents	1
ELEPHANTS - Asian	1
MARINE LIFE - All/general/unspecified	1
MARINE LIFE - Fish	1
PRIMATES - Macaques (Assam macaque)	1
PRIMATES - Macaques (Formosan rock macaque)	1

APPENDIX 2 - Featured animals

ANIMALS	COUNT
PRIMATES - Siamang	1
PRIMATES - Squirrel monkeys	1
PRIMATES - Tamarins	1
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS - Alligators	1
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS - Frogs/toads (all or unspecified)	1
WILD FELIDS - Lions	1
WILDLIFE - All/general/unspecified	1
WILDLIFE (other) - Civet cats	1
WILDLIFE (other) - Giraffes	1
WILDLIFE (other) - Kangaroos & wallabies	1

APPENDIX 3 - Platforms

	COUNT
Facebook	756
YouTube	300
TikTok	159
Instagram	32
Twitter	14
Other	3
Snapchat	1
Telegram	1
TOTAL	1266

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On behalf of the undersigned organizations around the globe and the many millions of members and animals they represent;

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