



Press Release

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS CRUELTY TO MONKEYS KEPT AS 'PETS' FOR ONLINE VIEWS

Think that pet monkeys on social media are cute? Think again. Macaques are being abused as pets on social media, and social media platforms are failing to protect them, animal experts warn

New Delhi, September 21st, 2023: The Asia for Animals Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) has recently released a new report stating Macaques being kept as pets are being physically and psychologically abused for social media content. Compiled by a coalition of 20 animal protection organizations, the report **"The cruelty you don't see: The suffering of pet macaques for social media content"** documents evidence of content creators openly abusing monkeys on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

Bharati Ramachandran- CEO, Federation of Indian Animals Protection Organisations (FIAPO) stated, *"Social media companies have the power to restrict creators that are benefitting off the exploitation and abuse of macaques. In fact, macaques kept as pets are suffering by the very nature of being kept as a pet, as they are not a domesticated species. We urge social media companies to introduce key policies to restrict exploitative content creators, moderate content, and educate users on why wild animals such as macaques should not be kept as pets."*

The Asia for Animals' Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) conducted research into this online trend, which it says is inherently abusive and is being fueled by social media. Between September 2021 and March 2023, SMACC recorded 1226 content links from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, showing macaques kept as pets. The content ranged from seemingly "innocent" treatment to the violent and graphic torture of macaques and collectively had over 12 billion views.

The research found:

- 13% of the content features deliberate psychological torture: macaques were intentionally made to feel fear and distress in response to scaring, teasing and being denied food
- 12% showed macaques being physically tortured, including being beaten, burnt alive, limbs amputated and many of them tortured until death
- Shockingly, 60% of the links showed pet macaques being directly physically abused
- All macaques featured were likely to experience psychological distress due to their treatment.
- Collectively, the links had been viewed 12,054,378,907 times at the time of analysis
- Top three platforms with the most content featuring macaques as pets were Facebook (60%), YouTube (24%), and TikTok (13%).

Videos showing **monkeys kept in households, dressed in clothing and wearing diapers** are popular on social media, with some videos reaching millions of views, and attracting comments on how "cute" and entertaining the content is. This treatment of macaques, usually infants, causes long-lasting

physical and psychological damage. Clothing macaques in dresses and shoes causes them discomfort and can restrict their natural movements. **In a video found on YouTube with four million views, a monkey is seen with a collared shirt, trousers, shoes, and a backpack. When the monkey walks, they clearly are struggling, as they shuffle their feet and lean from side to side. The video's caption states it was the monkey's "first day of school."**

Most of the content features infant macaques, who are typically removed from their parents at a very young age, sometimes just days old, in order to be sold into the pet trade. Such maternal and social deprivation can cause severe psychological and emotional damage, including stress and behavioral issues. Macaques may start to perform behaviors known as stereotypies, such as rocking, pacing and overgrooming. Infant macaques can often be seen sucking their fingers in social media content, a coping mechanism that helps them deal with separation and loss.

Nutritional deficiencies in pet primates are also common, with diabetes being seen in many primates kept as pets, due to unsuitable diets. Restrictive environments impact their physical health, and can increase frustration and aggression. When pet monkeys reach maturity, they can become difficult to handle and may even injure their owners. Many end up being rehomed to sanctuaries, or may even be released into the wild where their chance of survival is very low.

Some behaviors exhibited by macaques may be misinterpreted by viewers as positive, but actually the animal is in distress. For example, macaques seen smiling or grinning, are indicating high stress, fear, and aggression.

SMACC warns that by **liking, commenting and sharing this content, viewers are inadvertently supporting their abuse.** Popular content is further promoted as engagement grows, motivating content creators to create more. Some may even make money from their content, through monetization on the platform.

Animal experts are also concerned that the ease of which such content is available is normalizing the abuse of macaques, and can lead to the escalation of their abuse. In some content macaques are hit and slapped by their owners to seemingly discipline them. Some creators put the macaques in dangerous situations to film their reactions, or to film themselves rescuing the animal. In a series of videos, baby monkeys can be seen hung from logs in a fast-flowing river, in danger of slipping and drowning. Other content creators may intentionally scare or tease their pet macaque, causing fear and distress in order to record their response. Disturbingly, some content creators film the sexual abuse of young macaques, sometimes portrayed as bathing or cleaning of their genitals to appear innocent.

Social media companies need to do more to tackle the problem. Even though some animal-related policies do exist, they are limited and often poorly enforced by platforms.

SMACC is calling on social media platforms to restrict content which shows macaques as pets, and to take proactive measures to remove content showing their abuse. Social media users are encouraged to not watch or engage with such content, but instead report cruelty content to the platforms.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

FIAPO

Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO) is India's apex animal rights organization. Created for the movement, by the movement, FIAPO is India's only federation with more than 165 members and over 200 supporter organizations nationally. FIAPO led the campaign that persuaded MoEF&CC to ban use of dolphins for commercial entertainment. It stopped the establishment of the proposed mega dairy with 40,000 cows in Andhra Pradesh, and teamed up with other NGOs and volunteers to rescue over 150 animals from 16 circuses across India. FIAPO continues to bring to light the horrifying conditions in which animals live through its investigations on the dairy industry, gaushalas, meat shops, etc.

SMACC

The Asia for Animals' Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) is composed of **twenty well-known and respected animal advocacy organizations** who share the aim of stopping the proliferation of animal cruelty content on social media platforms. Social media giants continue to facilitate the sharing, promotion and even monetisation of cruelty content, resulting in astronomical numbers of likes, follows and views for animal suffering and abuse ranging from the subtle to the extreme. SMACC is a collaboration by various members of the Asia for Animals Coalition network.

SMACC MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

1. [Action for Primates](#)
2. [Animal Concerns Research and Education Society](#)
3. [Animals Asia Foundation](#)
4. [Born Free Foundation](#)
5. [Born Free USA](#)
6. [Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organizations](#)
7. [Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries](#)
8. [Humane Society International](#)
9. [International Animal Rescue](#)
10. [International Primate Protection League](#)
11. [Korea Animal Rights Advocates](#)
12. [Lady Freethinker](#)
13. [Pan African Sanctuary Alliance](#)
14. [Panthera Africa](#)
15. [PETA Asia](#)
16. [RSPCA](#)
17. [Susy Utzinger Stiftung für Tierschutz \(Susy Utzinger Animal Welfare Foundation\)](#)
18. [Taiwan SPCA](#)
19. [World Animal Protection](#)
20. [Welttierschutzgesellschaft](#)

WELFARE IMPACTS ON MACAQUES KEPT AS PETS

- Duarte-Quiroga, A. & Estrada, A., 2003. Primates as pets in Mexico City: An assessment of the species involved, source of origin, and general aspects of treatment. *American Journal of Primatology*, 61(2), 53-60.
- Mason, G. J. (1991). Stereotypies and suffering. *Behavioural Processes*, 25(2), 103-115. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0376-6357\(91\)90013-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0376-6357(91)90013-P)
- <http://phys.org/news/2013-09-mother-chimps-crucial-offspring-social.html>

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please refer to the SMACC website as a reputable source:
www.smaccoalition.com

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Images from our data:

[Macaque report: images for press](#)

Regarding image use: We are happy to share links and images as necessary, however we request that any identifying features are removed before publishing. We wish to raise awareness of the issue but not to direct people to the offending content/pages as we do not want to increase traffic and engagement. We request that no links be published, no names of pages or creators, faces blurred and all images to be edited to remove identifying features.

KEY FINDINGS

TOTAL LINKS: 1266

TOTAL VIEWS:

TOP ANIMALS FEATURED:

ANIMALS - MORE GENERAL	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
PRIMATES - Macaques (Northern pig-tailed macaque)	595	38.71%
PRIMATES - Macaques (Long-tailed macaque)	446	29.02%
PRIMATES - Macaques (Stump-tailed macaque)	190	12.36%
PRIMATES - Macaques (all or unspecified)	66	4.29%
PRIMATES - Macaques (Southern pig-tailed macaque)	66	4.29%
DOGS & CATS - (all)	49	3.19%
PRIMATES - All/general/unspecified	35	2.28%
PRIMATES - Macaques (Rhesus macaque)	31	2.02%
OTHER	12	0.78%

NUMBER OF SPECIES IDENTIFIED: 51 in total but 91% of links featured 10 different macaque species

SPECIES CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT:

Species were assessed using the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Identification made from content alone. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/en>

IUCN Red List status	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Vulnerable (VU)	790	53.41%

Endangered (EN)	522	35.29%
Species-dependent	126	8.52%
Least Concern (LC)	38	2.57%
Critically Endangered (CR)	2	0.14%
Near Threatened (NT)	1	0.07%

MOST RECORDED SPECIFIC ABUSES:

ABUSES - no 'Wild animals'	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Deliberate psychological torture	357	12.59%
Deliberate physical torture	327	11.53%
Animals as entertainers	249	8.78%
Rough handling	213	7.51%
Maternal deprivation	189	6.67%
Teasing	173	6.10%
Poor conditions	158	5.57%
Withholding food	104	3.67%
Restrictive clothing	103	3.63%
Monkey hatred	89	3.14%
Fake rescue	78	2.75%

NUMBER OF SPECIFIC ABUSES RECORDED: 37

PLATFORMS:

PLATFORM	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Facebook	756	59.72%
YouTube	300	23.70%
TikTok	159	12.56%
Instagram	32	2.53%
Twitter	14	1.11%
OTHER	3	0.24%
Snapchat	1	0.08%
Telegram	1	0.08%