

## **The IUCN Best Practice Guidelines one year on: Addressing some questions and encouraging primatologists to be responsible messengers**

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As primatologists we take photographs and videos of our study animals, both in the wild and in captivity (zoos and rescue/rehabilitation centres). We use these images across social media (personal and public accounts), on websites, and give them to TV and film crews. We use these images to promote our work and share our findings with colleagues and the general public. We also participate in films where we are often close to primates and some of us work in countries where primates are routinely kept and traded as pets.

In January 2021, after extensive feedback and review from all IUCN Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group members, we as members of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group Section for Human-Primate Interactions published the Best Practice Guidelines for Responsible Images of Non-Human Primates online <https://human-primate-interactions.org/resources/>. Here, we remind readers of the purpose of the guidelines, 41 address some questions raised by readers, and reiterate our call to primatologists to play a key role in delivering suitable messages about primates.

The purpose of the new IUCN guidelines is to use our evolving understanding of the implications of the portrayal of primates in modern media contexts to serve primate conservation more effectively. Sharing images of humans close to primates, interacting with them physically, or even cuddling them, may increase donations to welfare or conservation efforts, because they inspire empathy for primates in some viewers. However, images reach a global audience, so we must consider their broader implications. For example, white expatriates are perceived as the main consumers of chimpanzees as pets in Sierra Leone (Kabasawa 2009) and Guinea Bissau (Ferreira da Silva et al. 2022) and probably in other habitat countries. This is dangerous, because these expatriates are also often perceived as wealthy and of high status, meaning that viewers might want to emulate their actions. Similar perceptions and negative outcomes have been found when celebrities are pictured with wild animals (Seaboch & Cahoon 2021). Therefore, such images promote the idea that keeping a pet primate, especially a rare species, is a marker of wealth and high status. Sadly, the same idea extends throughout Asia, Europe, the Americas and, increasingly, in the Middle East (Bush et al. 2014; Harrington 2015, Reuter et al., 2018).

Primates rescued from the pet trade, surrendered by or confiscated from 'owners' are often so physically and psychologically damaged that they require specialist supportive care and extensive

rehabilitation to recover (Cheyne 2009; Guy et al. 2015; Lopresti-Goodman et al. 2013; Moore, & Nekaris 2014; Robins et al. 2014). Close contact with humans and expert veterinary care are often essential in this process, at least initially. However, photographs of that care can send the wrong message, especially when circulated without appropriate context, perpetuating rather than alleviating the inappropriate demand for primates as pets (Leighty et al. 2015; Clarke et al. 2019; Muehlenbein 2017; Freund et al. 2021).

When many iconic primatologists started out there was no social media and the reach of photographs was more controlled and limited, as was the ability of others to access and reshare these images. There was very little in the way of primate tourism, and no online illegal wildlife trade. However, today, there is increasing evidence that clearly links how we as professionals portray ourselves with wild animals (not only primates) to public misperceptions of wild animals as desirable pets. For example, viewing an image of a human holding a primate increases the likelihood of people wanting a primate as a pet, and detracts from conservation efforts for that species (Ross et al. 2011; Leighty et al. 2015).

Figure 1. Our Photos Matter (Human-Primate-Interactions.org)

The Guidelines include context to help people think through issues related to images of people and primates. The key principle is to consider how images might be perceived by the different audiences they reach (Figure 1). On publication, the Guidelines were very well-received, and they have been supported by recent quantitative research that further highlights the emotive power of imagery of human interaction with primates to supersede any contextual reference (e.g., Freund et al. 2021; Moloney et al. 2021). The Guidelines are now available in 23 different languages and have been adopted by the IUCN Primate Specialist Group Section for Small Apes, Durham University, various primate conservation NGOs, and the North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance. The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries incorporated the Guidelines into the terms of participation for Giving Day for Apes, emphasising the need to use responsible imagery in their fundraising campaigns.



## Figure 1. Our Photos Matter

A year on from the initial publication, some readers have raised questions about specific situations, which we address here. First, should we publish historical photographs which do not comply with the guidelines, if we provide context to explain them? Here, the answer is that this is best avoided because the context can so easily become lost, as we highlight in the introduction to the guidelines. This problem underlies the guideline encouraging people to replace older images of themselves with new images that reflect the Guidelines when possible (Guideline 2). Second, are photographs with an obvious barrier between people and primates acceptable? Here the answer depends on the type of barrier. The Guidelines are concerned with the risk of promoting behaviour that is deleterious to primates, and reciprocal disease transmission. Thus, photographs with an obvious impermeable barrier, such as glass, a wide ditch or moat, between people and primates would be more appropriate than photographs with a barrier that does not prevent such contact like wire-mesh fencing if the distance between the human and the primate is less than 7m and there is no use of PPE.

We hope every primatologist will carefully read the Guidelines on the use of primate imagery. As a minimum, we encourage primatologists to wear personal protective equipment and ensure that it is clearly visible if they are photographed close to or holding primates (Guideline 6). Even better, we applaud those who have taken the lead and now choose only to use images of primates without humans, or of themselves without primates, using binoculars, or holding a soft toy instead of a live animal.

In conclusion, we call on everyone to take a personal and organisational commitment to adhere to the guidelines and contribute proactively to address the problem together.

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