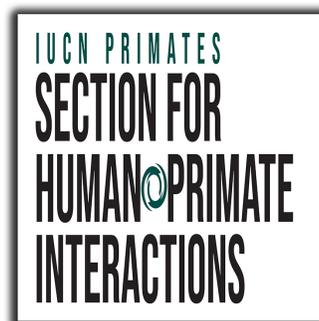


# Best Practice Guidelines for Responsible Images of Non-Human Primates

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Section for Human-Primate Interactions



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## Introduction

Photos or videos (hereafter images) can draw the attention of millions of people to non-human primate (hereafter primate) conservation and welfare. However, if the context of the images is inappropriate, unclear, or lost, people may draw mistaken conclusions about the content. These mistaken conclusions can have unintended, negative consequences for primate welfare and conservation (Aldrich 2018; Wallis 2018; Norconk *et al.* 2019). The potential for the dissemination of images without appropriate context is a particular concern on social media.



In many countries, primates are illegally caught from the wild and used as photo-props for tourism (Osterberg & Nekaris 2015; LaFleur *et al.* 2019; Norconk *et al.* 2019). Adults are often killed to obtain a young primate for use as a photo-prop. The primate's teeth may be removed to stop them from biting. The individual primate(s) in an image may be extremely stressed. For example, nocturnal primates such as slow lorises are extremely susceptible to daylight and flashlight exposure when used as props (Nekaris *et al.* 2015). Tourists and expatriates often purchase such primates, either as pets or in the hope of 'saving' them (Bergin *et al.* 2019; Osterberg & Nekaris 2015; LaFleur pers. obs.; Setchell pers. obs.). Furthermore, in both range and non-range countries, unscrupulous businesses breed 'exotic' wild animals, including great apes, as photo-props (Aldrich 2018). Once these animals become too large or strong to be handled safely, they are disposed of or warehoused. These animals are often kept in poor conditions which the public may be unaware of or ignore (Agoramoorthy & Hsu 2005; Reuter & Schaefer 2016).

Those with greatest access to primates such as professional and student primatologists, conservationists, animal care staff and volunteers in zoos, rescue centres and sanctuaries, government agency employees, and tour guides (hereafter messengers) have a key role to play in delivering suitable messages about primates. It is equally important that donors, high profile conservation presenters, film and television celebrities, government officials and media producers also model appropriate behaviour with respect to primates. After all, the success of imparting information about primates rests on how the message is perceived and not on the messenger's intention.

Here, we explain why all messengers noted above must reconsider our collective use of images especially close by or holding primates. In conclusion, we provide guidelines to reduce the potential costs of primate images to primates, their welfare and conservation *in* and *ex situ*.

## **The problems with images of people very close to primates**

### **Images of people with primates distort public understandings of primates**

Images of humans holding primates on social media negatively influence public perceptions of primates (Ross *et al.* 2011; Nekaris *et al.* 2013; Leighty *et al.* 2015; Clarke *et al.* 2019). Images of people holding or physically very close to primates give the false impression that touching primates is not physically dangerous, poses no risk to health of human or primate and that primates make appropriate pets. These behaviours can lead people to perceive primates as merely sources of entertainment, and thereby underestimate their biodiversity value and threatened status, which can then undermine conservation efforts especially in range countries (Ross *et al.* 2008; Schroepfer *et al.* 2011; Leighty *et al.* 2015, Morrow *et al.* 2017; Aldrich 2018).

### **Images of people very close to primates may be subject to different interpretations across cultures**

While some cultures are detached from nature and tend to draw a clear dividing line between 'humans' and 'nature', or 'wildlife', many others do not do so, and people may not necessarily perceive primates as 'wild' animals, especially in range countries (Aldrich 2018). We can expect interpretations of images to vary with the relationships and interactions people have with primates. For example, perceptions of primates vary greatly between rural and urban residents (Franquesa-Soler & Serio Silva 2017; Ceballos-Mago & Chivers 2010). This variation in perception means that the message we wish to convey with an image from the perspective of one culture or region may not be the message people receive in another.

### **Images of messengers with primates may make the general public want to obtain their own images very close to primates**

Images of veterinarians, carers, wildlife presenters, celebrities, volunteers or tourists cuddling or feeding primates at rehabilitation centres generate the wish to do the same in general public viewers. Obtaining photographs of themselves close to wildlife (including primates) with no impermeable or obvious physical barrier in between has become a popular way for people to capture, share, and validate travel experiences (Shutt 2014). Such images undermine local anti-poaching, anti-pet keeping and conservation messages by showing precisely the forms of human-primate contact that rescue centres, sanctuaries, NGOs and government agencies actually work to discourage. Moreover, photographs of primatologists caring for primates can aggravate local communities, who sometimes perceive conservationists as caring more about animals than people (Meijaard & Sheil 2008; Waters *et al.* 2018).

## Conclusion

As people concerned with primate conservation and welfare, we have a responsibility to consider the direct and indirect consequences of publishing images of ourselves close to a primate (Wallis 2018). Images of primates with people in popular media decrease appropriate public perceptions of primates, increase the potential for cross-cultural misunderstandings, increase inappropriate interactions with primates that can decrease welfare and rehabilitation efforts, and decreases primate conservation efforts in all contexts. The negative effects of publishing such images may therefore outweigh the positive effects, and we must apply the precautionary principle, given the extent of the extinction crisis.

Put simply, **being responsible messengers for primates means we have a duty not to post images of ourselves close to primates on social media that may be easily recirculated out of context and then misconstrued.** This includes those of us who teach, present at meetings, work in the media, and raise awareness of primate conservation. It applies to everyone who works with, or for, primates, but is especially the case for those of us who are well-known for our work with primates due to our ability to influence the public's perception of primates.

We provide the following guidelines to reduce the potential costs of primate images to primates, their welfare and conservation *in* and *ex situ*.

### Best practice guidelines for responsible images of primates

- Ensure you and/or your organisation have a code of conduct regarding the dissemination of imagery by staff, students and volunteers. Where relevant, ensure your marketing and public relations departments or any communications volunteers are fully informed of the code.
- Those who do not have control over ALL images of themselves, such as high-profile individuals whose images have been in the public domain for some time, should offer a different image and explain why the original image is problematic. They also have the opportunity to make a public statement to explain their current position.
- Promote education by explaining the issues related to images of people close to primates for primate conservation and welfare on your or your organisation's website, publications, programmes, presentations and guided tours.
- Where relevant, model appropriate behaviour by photographing people outside captive primate enclosures (unless the primates are captive but free ranging), rather than inside.
- Do not publish photographs of primates in a carer's arms. Replace these with photographs of the primate alone or with conspecifics.
- Do not publish photographs of primates being hand-fed by, playing with or interacting directly with carers, volunteers or donors unless the humans wear appropriate protective personal equipment.
- Ensure a minimum distance of 7 m/23 feet between the person and the primate in images of humans with wild primates that are posted publicly.
- In images promoting primatology as a profession, ensure that the context is obvious by including your facemask, binoculars, notepad, or similar equipment in the image and explain the context.

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