



Recommendations for Responsible Monkey Watching in the Caribbean

A publication of The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions



Kerry M. Dore¹ and Julia A. Horrocks²

¹*IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions & Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA*

²*The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados*

Introduction

While it is typically the warm weather, beaches, and beautiful views that draw tourists to the Caribbean region, travellers to the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis, Barbados, St. Martin/St. Maarten, Antigua, Grenada, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad may find themselves in an encounter with a monkey. With the exception of the Guyana red howler and the white-fronted capuchin, the other two monkeys in the Caribbean, green monkeys and Mona monkeys are not native to the islands. They are African species that were transported to the Caribbean about 400 years ago. Tourists and others watching monkeys in the Caribbean can best protect themselves and the monkeys by understanding the context of the animals' presence on the islands and taking proper precautions to minimise their contact with them.

Tourists interact with monkeys in several different ways in the Caribbean, ranging from participation in guided tours in natural settings, to observing monkeys at feeding sites, to holding baby monkeys to have a photograph taken. In some instances, the only interaction comes when guides imitate calls to attract monkeys for tourists to see (M. Cazabon-Mannette, pers. comm., 2021), but in other instances monkeys are provisioned or tourists are encouraged to have physical contact. Feeding monkeys interferes with their normal foraging behaviour and can cause malnutrition if the diet is not properly balanced. Mothers are often killed to obtain their babies as pets, and this must be repeated as each baby grows up and becomes less cute and more dangerous. Pet traders will often release the young monkeys into the wild once they are no longer useful. Having no family group to join, and no knowledge of how to find naturally occurring foods, these monkeys can become a nuisance or even a danger to people. Facial expressions are very important in primate communication, and it is possible for a monkey to feel threatened by the way a person looks at them, and to become aggressive in response. Finally, since primates are closely related to us, we can transfer diseases to them, and they can transfer diseases to us.

Given the above, we provide a list of recommendations for watching monkeys in the Caribbean.

Recommendations

- Research and use options that will allow your observation of monkeys in their most natural settings, e.g., along trails through the forest. Sometimes tourists will even be able to see monkeys passing through their hotel grounds.
- If on a guided tour, smaller sized groups of tourists are preferable as they will be less likely to cause stress to the animals. Ensure children are properly supervised.
- Do not feed monkeys and keep any food in your possession secure and out of sight. Do not let pet monkeys eat your food or access your drinks. Allowing monkeys to drink alcoholic drinks is abuse.
- Remain at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from primates at all times, including underneath them. Bring binoculars so that you can see primates from a distance.
- Do not approach or follow a monkey or get between a mother and an infant. If a monkey approaches you, keep still and avoid eye contact. Move slowly away.
- Refrain from interacting with monkeys, even at a distance, and especially if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness.
- Take all your garbage with you when you leave.
- Avoid having pet monkeys placed on you for any reason, including photographs. If you do handle a monkey, you should wear a mask and sanitise your hands afterwards.
- Support and enjoy tourist activities and venues that do not involve or keep captive monkeys in inadequate conditions or as entertainment.
- Avoid participating in activities that exploit monkeys as photo props.
- Avoid hotels, bars, and other tourist venues that display live monkeys.
- Follow the [Best Practice Guidelines](#) for responsible images of people and primates if posting photos of your trip on social media.

Further Reading

Dore, K.M. 2017. Ethnophoresy. In: *The International Encyclopaedia of Primatology*, Fuentes, A. (ed.), pp.1–7. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York.

Dore, K. M., Horrocks, J. A. 2023. Recommendations for Responsible Monkey Watching in the Caribbean. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al. Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.