

Monkey Harassment Continues in Angkor Wat

New research reveals video operators are still harassing and harming macaques in Cambodia.

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*Action for
Primates*



INTRODUCTION

Curious and sensitive macaques in Angkor Wat – the most famous ancient temple complex in Cambodia and a UNESCO World Heritage Site – are continuing to be harassed by people who stalk them with cameras, even after Cambodian authorities promised legal action against anyone who harms the animals.

Following an investigation and letters sent to APSARA, the national authority that oversees the temple, and UNESCO by Lady Freethinker, Action for Primates, and Stop Monkey Abuse Asia, APSARA posted a public announcement in October 2022 on their website urging people not to feed or film the monkeys and promised to take action against anyone who abuses them, saying:

*“In order to maintain the harmony of wildlife in Angkor Park, we would like to request the cooperation from the public and relevant authorities working together to prevent all these inappropriate activities that have been negatively impacting management of Angkor Park, which affects national pride and honor. At the same time, we urge national and international tourists to stay away from the monkeys and wildlife to avoid any harm... We will also take legal action against those who have committed crimes against monkeys and other wildlife in Angkor Park **without exception.**”*

However, new research shows that macaques are still being interfered with, chased, picked up, teased, and fed in Angkor Wat, even though Article 49 of the Cambodia Forestry Law strictly prohibits harming and harassing wildlife.

Recent video footage also shows that the trend of abandoning “pet” monkeys in the temple complex is not only continuing but is increasing. This is irresponsible and potentially dangerous as it disrupts social groups and puts those individuals at serious risk for injury or death.

Unfortunately, the motive behind the release of “pet” monkeys is seemingly to create drama and incidents that can be filmed to provide new content for social media, as evidenced by the new, abusive videos tracked by Lady Freethinker, Action for Primates, and Stop Monkey Abuse Asia.

Video operators also pretend to be “rescuers” or animal “rehabbers.” However, the hundreds of videos uploaded showing them harassing, feeding, and chasing the animals in recent months prove that it’s all for clicks and views on social media to generate income. Video operators also ask for donations on social media to “buy food and medicine for the monkeys.”

We’re calling on Cambodian authorities to live up to their promises and take immediate legal action against the individuals tormenting these extraordinary animals.

CHASING MONKEYS WITH CAMERAS



Video footage posted after ASPARA's announcement shows that video operators are still chasing the animals, getting up in their faces with cameras, and following them around relentlessly.

One video posted to Facebook in December 2022 shows video operators surrounding a female and baby monkey and not allowing them to flee from an aggressive macaque. In another video, camera operators relentlessly pursued two monkeys before eventually holding one and pointing a camera at the animal. In a separate video uploaded to YouTube, a video operator puts his camera right in front of a baby monkey's face.



PHYSICAL INTERFERENCE

Online footage also shows that people in Angkor Wat continue to interfere with, tease the monkeys, pick them up, and separate infants from females.

In a video posted to YouTube in January 2023, video operators pick up monkeys and attempt to place them into trees, even though the monkeys struggle to get down. In another video posted in November 2022, an adult monkey holding a baby is pulled by her arm along the path by a video operator with a camera.



Video operators continue to disrupt social groups by ripping monkeys away from one another, including ripping babies away from females.

In one disturbing incident, **a monkey holding an infant was wrestled to the ground as the baby was torn away from her**. In a separate video, one monkey is forcefully pulled away from another screaming monkey while video operators continue to follow and harass them.



ABANDONING 'PET' MONKEYS

Video operators continue to create stressful situations for the monkeys by irresponsibly abandoning “pet” macaques, who were raised in human households, into the existing population at Angkor Wat. These monkeys aren’t part of the established troops and are at risk of serious injury or even death.

In fact, one video uploaded on February 1, 2023 shows a dead infant “pet” monkey, who had been previously abandoned in the forest. A video posted a day prior shows the animal clearly suffering – having difficulties eating – but video operators continued to follow and film the suffering animal, keen to get their online views.



In a video posted in January 2023, an abandoned “pet” monkey is seen with injuries, including a large gash on the side of her head.

In another video uploaded to Facebook in December 2022, six terrified “pet” monkeys are seen being dumped at Angkor Wat, and in a separate video uploaded to YouTube, a distressed “pet” monkey is abandoned. Video operators drag the monkey out of the crate as the animal screams out and appears to be immobilized with fear.





In another, a monkey – who has a chain around the neck – is taken out of a sack and abandoned in the forest.



These videos show that the video operators' main interest is in creating "drama" so their footage will get views online – rather than considering the welfare of the previously captive individuals.

FEEDING

Although wild non-human primates are typically fearful of humans, the feeding of macaques at Angkor Wat has habituated the animals to human beings so that they are less fearful.

Several videos uploaded after October 2022 show video operators deliberately feeding the animals. Many videos show the animals being fed cartons of milk, while others show video operators feeding them plates of food.



This interference by the video operators likely serves to create even more potential for aggression so that the public will be at increased risk of attack and injury. Several articles posted online describe the monkeys' fearlessness and habituation to humans in Angkor Wat, including a tourist who had a monkey jump on her backpack that was full of fruit, and another who had her scarf taken by a macaque.

New footage also shows video operators taking a tourist -- who reportedly paid for food and milk for the monkeys -- over to the animals to watch them be fed.

As long as people in Angkor Wat keep feeding the monkeys, it's likely people will be at higher risk of being attacked by them as a result of their having become accustomed to humans.

CONCLUSION

For the sake of the monkeys and the sake of the public, it's absolutely crucial that Cambodian officials live up to their promises to stop people from interfering with the monkeys at Angkor Wat, including providing food, and to take legal action against anyone who harms and harasses the monkeys.

The footage is clear – the many camera operators involved in making these videos have created an “industry” of following and filming the macaques for the sole purpose of “entertainment” and making a profit.

The abuse must stop now. Please join us in urging Cambodian authorities to live up to their promises and do more to help protest the macaques at Angkor Wat. Sign the petition today and share it with your friends and family.