

# Monkey Madness -- Educational Material from Z.O.O.

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Man animal conflict is one of the most urgent and troubling wildlife threats today. One hardly can pick up a newspaper or magazine without reading reports of wild animals straying into human habitations - tigers and leopards picking off livestock, elephants retaliating against farmers trying to keep them away from their crops, bats being shot and poisoned for eating their fill from commercial fruit trees, monkeys invading neighborhoods, raiding garbage cans, kitchens, picnics, as well as feasting off farm crops.

Are there too many wild animals for the earth? Or has the earth's most clever and versatile primate, Mankind or humans, snatched too much land for himself and invaded the privacy and rights of wildlife?

Let us avoid philosophical discussions and cut to the chase. Nobody is winning this war between man and wildlife. Human beings may think they are winning their war on wildlife when they succeed in driving elephants into other forests, or translocating monkeys to other localities, or capturing leopards and tigers for spending their lives in a zoo or rescue centre. The problems may stop for some time but then reappear in another place, with the same animals, same problems, maybe different people ... maybe people so disenfranchised that they don't complain, or so traditional that they let "Hanuman" bite their kids, steal their crops, and lay waste their kitchens.

Or, how about this story: the Supreme Court of India ordered that 250 confiscated monkeys be released into a protected area, perhaps thinking to appease both irate householders and protective conservationists. Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh was chosen, a locality that had been selected and protected for translocation of Asiatic Lions which have been over-running Gir Forest for some years and needed an alternative habitat. Hundreds of villagers had been relocated and resettled to make way for the lions, yet no one pointed out what monkey

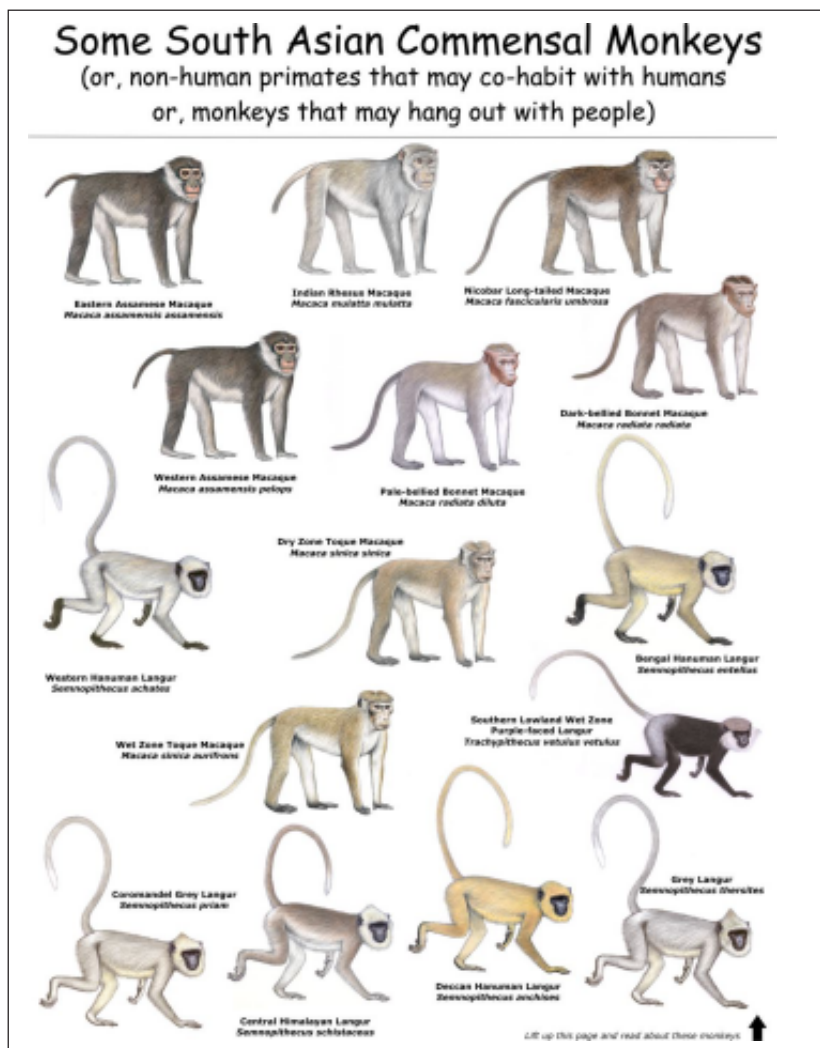
and human inconvenience had been invested and intended, or questioned whether the species of primate that was to be released had ever graced that type of forests before, or what was the forest carrying capacity, or what would happen to either the forest or the monkeys or the other animals dependent on it. A survey was done not long ago and not a single monkey was sighted. Did these primates die due to some problem in the habitat, or did they simply run to the next village or town to continue terrorising humans. Nobody seems to know that or the impact on the habitat either.

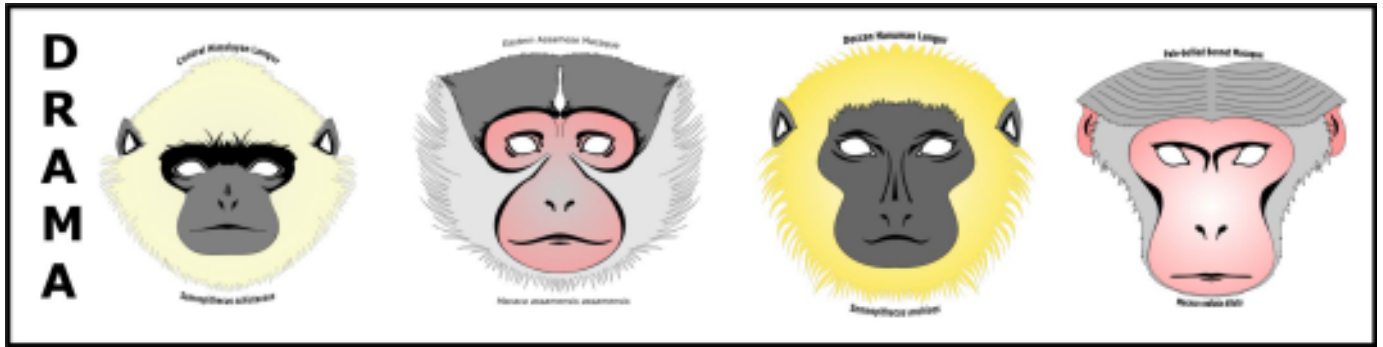
A number of primate biologists and behaviourists believe that current popular methods of dealing with the monkey problems are either useless or worse than useless, meaning that they create a different scenario which

actually exacerbates the problem, rather than solving it. Translocation, sterilisation, outright killing ... all carry the danger of worsening the problem either in and of itself, or for someone else. Yet it continues and is going to keep on ... because all of these methods give an impression of having solved the problem. That's all some agencies seem to want - short term solutions.

## Commensal monkeys

Commensal refers to animals mixing with human beings. Primates documented as known to hang out with humans are the following, with common name, scientific name, and IUCN Status on the following page. Below is an illustration of a colour poster of some commensal monkeys which were identified in S Asia (CAMP, 2003).





Drama is a great way to educate as it provides an effective way to “put yourself in the other man (or monkey’s) place.

### **South Asian Commensal monkeys and their IUCN status**

- Indian Rhesus Macaque, *Macaca mulatta mulatta***, Least Concern
- Dark-bellied Bonnet Macaque, *Macaca radiata radiata***, Least Concern
- Pale-bellied Bonnet Macaque, *Macaca radiata diluta***, Least Concern
- Eastern Assamese Macaque, *Macaca assamensis assamensis***, Endangered
- Western Hanuman Langur, *Semnopithecus achates***, Least Concern
- Deccan Hanuman Langur, *Semnopithecus anchises***, Near Threatened
- Bengal Hanuman Langur, *Semnopithecus entellus***, Near Threatened
- Central Himalayan Langur, *Semnopithecus schistaceus***, Near Threatened
- Coromandel Grey Langur, *Semnopithecus priam***, Vulnerable
- Grey Langur, *Semnopithecus thersites***, Endangered
- Nicobar Long-tailed Macaque, *Macaca fascicularis umbrosa***, Near Threatened
- Western Assamese Macaque, *Macaca assamensis pelops***, Endangered
- Wet Zone Toque Macaque, *Macaca sinica aurifrons***, Endangered
- Dry Zone Toque Macaque, *Macaca sinica sinica***, Endangered
- Southern Lowland Wet zone Purplefaced Langur, *Trachypithecus vetulus vetulus***, Endangered

Although some of these taxa (taxa refers to both species and subspecies — distinct forms of organisms) are common, having been categorised as Lower Risk or Least concern for the IUCN Red List, there are among this group of commensals, seven threatened taxa ... species and subspecies which have been categorised as Endangered and Vulnerable. If they are categorised in any threatened category (Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable) it means the taxa is in trouble. Imagine translocating or confiscating a couple of hundred of these and contributing to the extinction of a species or population! Current proposed solutions of sterilization and translocation threaten the essence of wild populations and can adversely affect population numbers.

Translocation without a specific conservation purpose and value is discouraged by the Guidelines of the IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group. The potential damage which can be done by incorrectly or inappropriately introduced animals to a habitat and its

animals is immense.

Sterilization, another “solution” to the spread of commensal monkeys, aside from being almost useless as a birth control method (a single fertile male overlooked or immigrating from another location can impregnate all the females in a group), affects male behaviour adversely.

There is a government policy pending which may even be made part of the Wildlife (Protection) Act recommending these methods as **THE** solution to human/monkey conflict.

### **Menace Monkey ? Menace Man.**

*In the long term, the only solution or even semi-solution is for human beings to stop their own bad habits.* First of these is over-development perhaps, but that’s too big and the do-ers too powerful. Let’s look closer to home. One reason that monkeys are a problem to humans is that humans practically invite them home by given food.

Monkeys, like other wild animals left to themselves, avoid human beings. They are afraid of them for the most part. Human beings “teach” them to be unafraid by feeding them ... either deliberately for fun, or for religious favour, or for mischief ... or simply by careless disposal of garbage. The monkeys, as they find human habitations less threatening, may attract other monkeys. They may multiply very fast and become strong on the rich diet of leftover and thrown away food of human beings. Many city people are well-off today-they don’t mind throwing out food so much. It is not known exactly what happens as it is different in different places, and very little research has been done to try and understand the phenomenon of current urban monkey behaviours.

Many officials and academics recommend that human beings should stop making it so easy and attractive for monkeys to get food from them. Here at ZOO we have been following this issue and wanted to make a contribution to the solution. We feel that if today’s children grow up knowing the best ways to mitigate conflict for future and also to protect themselves against perhaps inevitable confrontations in the present, then that might make some difference in the future.

Among the recommendations on conflict of the South Asian primate experts at the South Asian Primate CAMP workshop held in Coimbatore in 2002 was to combat the problem with education :

## Recommendations of Primate CAMP experts

- Education should extend to religious leaders: the concept of "monkey-god" and non-requirement of public feeding for pujas should be explained.
- Schools, universities and Municipal councils should be provided with material to use in their institutions and with their members.
- Educational material for cleanup campaigns which cooperate with civic organizations, such as Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc.
- Education in zoos, where there are often free ranging monkeys in addition to captive ones, or other tourist sites, which would include screening of polythene bags before visitors enter and visitors can be requested not to feed the monkeys.

In addition to the commensal monkey problem the workshop felt that Primates, although such an important group of animals scientifically, ecologically and culturally have not received the conservation attention they deserve. Moreover there had been very little organized public education for primates. The group recommended that :

- Forest departments can play a major role in disseminating the facts and conservation needs. Local NGOs can be entrusted as communicators and facilitators to do the same.
- Zoo Outreach Organisation can develop and distribute education packets on primates to various zoos, ngo's and other interested and concerned individuals, institutions, and forest departments can conduct nature camps and education programmes.

Zoo Outreach Organisation, as the host of the South Asian Primate Network, coordinates some of the activities of primate biologists in South Asia, including filling gaps such as public education in their conservation activities on behalf of primates. External zoos and conservation NGOs contributed generously to the **ZOO/CBSG, South Asia Primate Education Project (SAPEP)** which followed the CAMP workshop recommendations. This project has made possible many thousands of educational packets, booklets, colouring books, manuals, and posters to be distributed throughout South Asia.

The SAP-EP programme thus far had concentrated on very basic education.

– identifying a primate, appreciating the characters of primates, the diversity of South Asian primates, the need for protection of primates, etc. according to recommendations of the CAMP Workshop Public Education Working Group. This material also included a few items inspired by the Urban Monkey Working Group.

Now, ZOO has developed a packet and materials specifically directed toward the man/monkey conflict problem. Some illustrations of the packet's contents are shown in this article.

The educational packets include a variety of items to utilize in group teaching recommending "active learning" exercises as opposed to simply handing out material and having a lecture. The packets are offered to conservation NGOs, zoos, schools, divisional forest officers, and even field biologists and academics. It should be noted that field biologists and academics not only can make excellent educators because of their love and knowledge of primates, but can reap benefits for their field work by creating a bond with local people by providing education to their children and even to their parents.

This packet is called "Monkey Manners". Monkey Manners does not, of course, refer to the manners of monkeys, but instead to human beings. The focus is on humans changing their behaviour, calling on kids to be "garbage monitors", to avoid confrontations with monkeys and to avoid inciting them with wrong behaviour if confrontation occurs.

Hopefully organisers of programmes on man/monkey conflict will lead their participants in the drama sequence suggested in the packet or to make up their own. We have developed masks of the different types of commensal monkeys. Hopefully drama and these masks can find a use in educating non-literate people.

While man / animal conflict often seems like an insuperable and practically unsolvable problem, we would not be sincere conservationists and animal welfare wallas if we did not give it our best shot, each according to his ability and inclination. We at ZOO & WILD like simple, practical and long term. We

hope our educational materials packets produce some such results.

**Offer : ZOO will send anyone who is willing to help us sample a packet. We would like you to read through the packet and answer a questionnaire (without cheating). We will also consider proposals for ordering packets (free but for postage / transport) if you will follow our guidelines and organise an educational event with games, play, etc. rather than simply handing over material to people without activities. Email us at: [zooreach@zooreach.org](mailto:zooreach@zooreach.org)**

