



IUCN SSC PRIMATES
**SECTION ON
HUMAN-PRIMATE
INTERACTIONS**



IUCN SSC
PRIMATE
Specialist Group

Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists

SIÂN WATERS, MALENE F. HANSEN *et al.*

Version 1.0



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

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

The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions (SHPI) is an interdisciplinary group of more than 50 experienced human and non-human primate experts, from primate habitat countries or who work in primate habitat countries. The SHPI was established in 2018 in response to increased interactions between humans and wild primates with the goal of better understanding their multi-dimensional nature.



Citation: Waters, S.*, Hansen, M. F.*, Setchell, J. M., Cheyne, S., Mittermeier, R. A., Ang, A., Aldrich, B. C., Andriantsaralaza, S., Clarke, T. A., Dempsey, A., Dore, K. M., Hanson, K. T., Kitegile, A., Maldonado, A. M., Maréchal, L., McKinney, T., Ruiz Miranda, C. R., Niu, K., Svensson, M. S., Talebi, M., Wallis, J., Williams, J., Horrocks, J. A., Gursky, S., Peng-Fei, F., Chetry, D., Behie, A. 2023. *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.

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Produced by: IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions

Available from: <https://human-primate-interactions.org/>



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Foreword

by

Dr Russell A. Mittermeier, Chair, IUCN SSC
Primate Specialist Group



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

With the online publication of *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*, we would like to continue to promote the hobby/sport of *primate-watching*, and its associated activity, *primate life-listing*. The idea for this derives from birdwatching—one of the most popular hobbies in North America, Europe, and Australia, and increasingly elsewhere across the world. Birdwatching has been with us for a long time, and its popularity is growing. It has benefited by an ever-increasing number of guidebooks that cover the entire planet and, in the past 15 years, by the availability of new sophisticated equipment such as phone apps for bird identification using visual and sound information. The most striking example is the phone app Merlin (<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org>), released for free by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, that has an average of 700,000 active users per month, and counting. Huge progress has resulted from more websites connecting birders around the world, and from global bird databases such as eBird (<https://ebird.org>), housed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University (USA), or regional or national databases, such as the Euro Bird Portal (<https://eurobirdportal.org>) where birders report their observations. All of this has been good for conservation, stimulating awareness of and love for birds, and providing many ecotourism-based economic opportunities for communities living in or near bird habitats. The passion for birds has become a multibillion-dollar industry, with at least some of the benefits accruing to the bird-rich countries of the tropics.

If we consider tropical countries with very high bird diversity, such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, and many others, the economic opportunity is also very significant. The National Audubon Society estimated that 150,000 bird-watchers will visit Colombia from the United States over the decade 2017–2027, generating US\$47 million annually and sustaining 7,500 new jobs (Ocampo-Peñuela and Winton, 2017). These authors indicated, however, that the numbers could be an underestimate if Colombia can emulate the recent surge in birdwatching tourism in neighbouring Peru, where the number of birdwatching tourists doubled from 2012 to 2013, yielding an annual gross income of US\$89 million (Lacouture, 2017). Demand for bird-watching tourism appears to be sustainable, as the global market is already very large, with 46 million bird-watchers.

Inspired by the success and impact of birdwatching and bird life-listing, we decided more than 25 years ago to launch *primate-watching* and *primate life-listing* as a formally recognised activity (e.g., Coniff, 2007). There are in fact quite a few of us primate-watchers around already, and some of us have been active for as long as five decades. By comparison with what exists for birds, we have very little in the way of good, published material to identify primates, such as country or regional field guides and other visual and auditory aids.

Fortunately, this is changing. We tried to stimulate primate-watching in 1994 with the first edition of a book on lemurs, and we have since published three more editions of this field guide and a number of other titles on primates, and still more are in preparation. In addition, a number of other authors have produced very useful primate guides, including ones for Central Africa, Asia, Brazil, Colombia, French Guiana, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam, and primate information of variable quality can also be found in a number of other regional or national guidebooks on mammals.

Mittermeier and Rylands also launched a series of Pocket Identification Guides in 2004, first with Conservation International and now with Re:wild. These are small convenient folding guides to identify animals from a particular region. Twenty-four have now been published, 19 of them on primates, including four on lemurs. We have also prepared an App for lemur-watching, which we continue to work on bringing to launch.

Why should we bother? Well, first of all, because primate-watching and primate life-listing are fun. Those of us who are as passionate about these animals as the birders are about their species, really enjoy seeing monkeys, apes, lemurs, lorises, galagos, pottos and tarsiers in their natural environments, and we want more of you to get excited about these animals as well. But it is really about more than just entertainment. First and foremost, we want to stimulate awareness of primates through such activity. Second, primates are found mainly in tropical rain forests and are the most visible mammals in these forests. As such, they have been, and continue to be, excellent flagships for these dwindling habitats and have contributed greatly to tropical rain forest conservation over the past 40 to 50 years. Furthermore, we need more primate-based ecotourism to provide economic alternatives to the communities living in close proximity to the habitats in which primates live. These communities need to benefit economically from the presence of primate populations if we expect them to take a major role in conserving them. To ensure that this happens, we need to go and see these creatures in their natural environments, interact with the communities upon whose survival they ultimately depend, share our excitement and enthusiasm, and, after all is said and done, make a contribution to the local economy. In many places, this may be the only effective tool at our disposal to ensure the survival of Critically Endangered and Endangered primates, and it needs to happen now.

To be sure, some primate ecotourism already exists. In Central Africa, mountain gorilla tourism has been in place for more than 40 years and is an excellent model. What is more, many new primate sites are being developed every year, including other gorilla

species and subspecies in Central Africa, chimpanzee tourism in several countries, and orangutan tourism in parts of Sumatra and Borneo. China has developed several sites for seeing the golden monkey and other snub-nosed monkey species. Many macaque and langur species are easily seen at sacred sites and even in many urban areas in China, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Southeast Asia, and increasingly in natural forests as well. More monkeys can be seen in a wide variety of parks and reserves in Mexico, Central and South America. And of course, the wonderful lemurs of Madagascar can now be seen in a growing number of sites throughout this unique country.



Fig.1: A selection of Pocket Identification Guides produced by the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group and partner organisations

Unfortunately, primate ecotourism has not always been done as well or as carefully as we might like, and we need to improve it wherever the quality is poor or even detrimental to primate survival. However, we need to recognise that it is here to stay, and we simply have to get it done in the most appropriate manner possible to promote the conservation of tropical forests, the well-being of local communities, the economies of the countries where primates occur, and of course, the survival of the primates themselves. What is more our IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group has already published several best practice guidelines for appropriate primate ecotourism, especially for great apes (e.g., [Macfie and Williamson, 2010](#); [Waters *et al.*, 2021](#)), and a number of others are in the works. In any case, we have only started to scratch the surface of the potential that exists for primate-watching, and to demonstrate at a much higher level the economic benefits that it can provide.

Further Reading

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Mittermeier R. A. 2023. Foreword. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.



Introduction

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



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Primate-watching is the activity of observing primates. These can be free-ranging in habitats such as forests, savannahs, mangroves, rocky shores, agricultural lands and urban areas, far from people or in close association with them, or captive in zoological settings. Primate-watching can be a positive experience for humans and contribute to primate conservation by conserving habitat, contributing to local communities, and raising awareness of primates and their threats. However, primate-watching can be detrimental to primates and dangerous for humans if it is not conducted responsibly.

Until now, the only specific recommendations for primate-watching tourists have been the Best Practice Guidelines for responsible great ape tourism which were published in 2010. These guidelines are accompanied by additional education and training materials on the website, Protect Great Apes from Covid-19. We recommend that you refer to both of these websites if you are interested in great ape tourism.

Responsible Primate Watching for Tourists aims to provide easily accessible information about how to watch primates, while having minimal impact on them. The recommendations provide advice on how to behave around primates either in a planned tour or during unplanned encounters, for example, at roadsides or temples.

The recommendations in *Responsible Primate Watching for Tourists* cover various geographical regions and various primate groups, excluding the great apes. We have organised *Responsible Primate Watching for Tourists* so that it can be downloaded as a whole, but also so that each section is available as a standalone document to encourage dissemination of this information among primate-watching tourists via mobile devices.

The concepts of [primate-watching and primate life-listing](#) are explained followed by recommendations for [gibbon watching](#), encouraging primate-watching tourists to be mindful of these apes' vulnerability to human transmitted diseases and to adopt precautionary practices. Monkeys in Africa and Asia provide some great viewing opportunities, but some animals are unafraid of people, posing a potential hazard to both humans and monkeys. [This section](#) provides advice on how to moderate our behaviour to enable us and our companions to avoid some of the more aggressive encounters that can happen when viewing these species. The [lemurs of Madagascar](#) are a popular tourist draw along with the diverse monkeys of [Central and South America](#). Watching these animals in their natural habitats can bring valuable revenue to communities and contribute to conservation if responsibly conducted. Not all primates are native to the places where we watch them and this is the case for the vervet monkeys found in large numbers on some of the Caribbean islands. [This section](#) explains how to practice tourism with caution to avoid exploiting the primates on these islands. The needs of nocturnal primates (found in Africa, Asia and South America) [and set out here](#), are very different to those of diurnal primates. Macaques, baboons and vervet monkeys can often be viewed opportunistically at roadsides, and [this section](#) provides recommendations on how to watch these roadside primates safely and responsibly. Thousands of people view [primates in zoos](#) every year and recommendations are provided on how to enjoy and learn from your zoo visit while being mindful of primate welfare. Unfortunately, primates are often seen as cute and desirable which has led to them being exploited for tourism. In this final section, we provide advice on how to ensure [good primate welfare](#) in tourism hotspots and elsewhere.

We hope that by making this information easily accessible, we will increase the benefits of primate-watching tourism and minimise its negative effects. We encourage everyone to follow the recommendations and share them widely. We will strive to make them available in the languages appropriate for the different chapters, and easily accessible via our website (<https://human-primate-interactions.org/>) and on an application for mobile devices.

Useful links

[Primate pocket guides](#)

Mammal Watching - [Primate-watching and life-listing](#)

[Best Practice Guidelines for Great Ape Tourism](#)

[Best Practice Guidelines for Responsible Images of Non-Human Primates.](#)

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Ramesh Boonratana, Anthony Rylands and Christoph Schwitzer for their input in improving earlier drafts of these guidelines. Siân Waters is very grateful to the Ouwehand Zoo Foundation and Gaia Nature Fund of the Netherlands, and both Siân Waters and Malene Friis Hansen thank the IUCN SSC Section on Small Apes for support while writing these guidelines. Malene Friis Hansen is furthermore grateful to the Carlsberg Foundation (grant number CF21-0473) and appreciates support from the Long-Tailed Macaque Project.

Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., Setchell, J. M., Cheyne, S. M. 2023. Introduction. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.



Primate-Watching and Primate Life-Listing

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



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Introduction

Birdwatching and bird life-listing, which are carried out by millions of people around the world, have contributed to avian research and conservation, and become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Primate-watching can similarly benefit the global scientific community, local tourism industry, local communities living close to primate habitats, and of course, the primates themselves. Primate life-listing refers to keeping and updating a personal list of the species that you have seen in the wild, with the aim of seeing as many species as possible. Fellow primate-watching enthusiasts may view life-listing as a competition, while others may keep track just for personal pleasure. Currently, IUCN recognises 532 species of primates (722 species and subspecies). The principal intent of primate-watching and primate life-listing as a hobby is to encourage people to travel around the world to see primates in the wild - searching for them in habitats where there are native populations, documenting them with photos, videos, or field notes, and sharing their observations with the wider community.

Aside from counting all the primates you see, there are several ways to achieve goals in sub-categories, for instance, trying to see all 81 genera of primates in the wild, trying to see all species or subspecies of a particular genus (e.g., all snub-nosed monkeys *Rhinopithecus*, all spider monkeys *Ateles*, etc.), or all of the primates in a particular country. This can make the competition or accomplishment more manageable, and satisfying goals more readily achievable.

New information provided by primate-watchers, such as the occurrence of a primate population in an area previously undocumented, contributes towards species monitoring efforts. Visits by primate-watchers bring in revenue to the tourism industry and local communities, especially if local field guides are hired and local accommodation such as locally run hotels and homestays are chosen. Primate-watchers also contribute by generating interest in and awareness of the primates, which in turn helps to drive the appreciation and conservation of the species and their habitats.

Overall, we believe that primate-watching and primate life-listing can be an important tool to encourage non-primatologists to contribute toward primate conservation and has the potential to become a significant form of conservation investment.

Introduction

1. Only species seen in the wild can be counted. “Wild” can refer to:
 - Those in their natural habitats such as forests, savannahs, rocky shores.
 - Those in a human-altered landscape, which includes agricultural land (e.g., plantations) and urban areas in close association with humans (e.g., around residential houses; temples).
2. Species seen in the wild under the following conditions can be counted if:
 - You locate the species on your own.
 - You are shown the species by someone (e.g., a guide; a colleague).
 - You locate the species at a site where the primates are provisioned with food, for cultural, research or conservation purposes. (See below and incidental primate tourism.).
 - The primates were reintroduced into their natural habitats from which they were once extirpated.
 - Primates are attracted by using playback for those species that respond to territorial calls.
3. Species seen under the following conditions cannot be counted:
 - Primates in captivity (e.g., in zoos; research/education facilities, etc.).
 - Primates in traps (for research, by hunters, or in wildlife trade/markets).
 - Primates used as photo props in tourist sites.
 - Pet primates.
 - Dead primates (e.g., killed on the road, obtained by the local community).
 - Primates photographed by a wildlife trail camera, but not actually seen by you.
 - Primates located by food provisioning which is specifically for the purposes of attracting tourists.
 - Primates introduced to an area in which they did not naturally occur (e.g., long-tailed macaques on Mauritius; rhesus macaques in the Florida Everglades).

4. Only species you actually see count towards your list. Vocalisations alone are not sufficient. (This differs from birdwatching, where vocalisations alone are often counted).
5. Primate life-listing involves keeping a record of the primate species seen, location and date. Photos and/or videos supplement the sighting.
6. While keeping track of primates below the subspecies level (i.e., different unnamed populations) may be difficult, it is useful, as some of them display significant physical variation. Colour morphs within a species should also be noted.
7. Primate life-listing works on an honour system. There is no official channel for rankings, so it is for your own tracking and reference.

Further Reading

www.primate-sg.org/primate-watch

www.primatewatching.com

Mittermeier, R. A., Ang, A. 2023. Primate-Watching and Primate Life-Listing. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.



Recommendations for Responsible Gibbon Watching

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



IUCN
PRIMATES
SECTION ON
SMALL APES

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Introduction

Gibbon-focused tourism has the potential to be used as an effective conservation tool, helping to protect natural habitats and increase community interest in, and awareness of, wildlife. Gibbon tourism has an important role to play in the sustainable use of forest habitats which are currently under direct threat from illegal logging, agricultural expansion, and human population growth. The health and wellbeing of the guides, tourists and animals must be prioritised at all times, and it is our hope that these recommendations will support this. Ensuring the continued survival of the small apes in the wild should always remain the primary goal of such endeavours. Gibbon tourism can be sustainable and make a positive contribution to conservation efforts and the welfare of local communities.

It is our intention that these recommendations will help to improve conservation policy for this diverse and threatened group of primates, as well as for other primates in the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot, through ensuring the careful design and management of existing and future tourism programmes.

Recommendations

Before Your Visit

- When choosing a tour operator/tour guide, enquire if they are aware of and follow the recommendations listed in this document to reduce negative effects on gibbon behaviour and health.
- Choose a tourism site that promotes conservation and supports local human communities through employment and revenue sharing.
- Where possible contact the provider directly and ask for information regarding their commitment to conservation efforts, the involvement of local communities and how to minimise your impact as a tourist while viewing gibbons (e.g., clothing and behaviour).

- In the days prior to visiting gibbons, be particularly conscious of personal hygiene (e.g., washing hands regularly, social distancing, wearing a mask in crowded places).
- Do not visit gibbon tourism sites during disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (consider supporting the sites remotely during these periods).
- Only participate in tours which can provide information about the potential of disease transmission and how they minimise this risk for you and the gibbons.
- If you feel ill in any way do not visit the gibbons (if possible, reschedule your trip).

During Your Visit

- If asked to complete a health questionnaire, answer all questions honestly.
- Consent to having your temperature checked if asked by guides on arrival.
- Listen and pay attention to the instructions from guides.
- Limit the disturbance of gibbons by:
 - Wearing neutral (e.g., beige, natural greens, brown, grey, black) coloured clothing.
 - Remaining calm and talking quietly.
 - Switching phones to silent.
 - Limiting the use of flash photography.
 - Ideally, restrict numbers in your group. There may be exceptions to this. Ensure exceptions are based on scientific evidence, or at least monitored by experienced guides.
- Visit gibbons while they are naturally most active (generally early morning) and limit observation to a maximum of 1-hour/day.
- Wear protective certified masks while in the presence of gibbons and remember to disinfect and wash thoroughly before and after (while you are not allowed to touch gibbons or any wildlife, but you may accidentally touch trees and other plants).
- Stay at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from gibbons (this may require you to move away from the gibbons if they approach you).
- Do not leave any litter or body waste in the forest.
- Avoid eating near gibbons and keep everything in closed containers when in the forest.

Williams, J., Peng-Fei, F., Cheyne, S. M., Chetry, D., Behie, A. 2023. Recommendations for Responsible Gibbon Watching. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.



Recommendations for Responsible African and Eurasian Monkey Watching

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



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Introduction

These recommendations cover primate tourism over Africa, Asia, and Europe (Gibraltar). We provide advice on how to watch monkeys which spend lots of time on the ground as well as in trees.

While there are opportunities for well organised primate-watching in African and Asian national parks, there will also be many occasions when you will encounter monkeys opportunistically, both inside and outside protected areas. Many monkeys can be observed in urban areas and around temples in Asia. There are additional recommendations for unplanned, unmanaged primate-watching.

Below we provide recommendations for both organised and unplanned monkey watching in Africa and Asia.

Recommendations

Before Your Visit

- When choosing a tour operator/tour guide, enquire if they are aware of and follow the recommendations listed in this document.
- Check with your health provider which vaccinations and tests are needed against diseases that you could transmit to local people or monkeys.
- Avoid visiting primate tourism sites during disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 pandemic (consider supporting the sites remotely during these periods).

- Be particularly conscious of personal hygiene on days prior to visiting monkeys, to avoid contracting or transmitting diseases. For example, wash your hands regularly, physically distance, and wear a mask in crowded places.
- Do not visit primates if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
- Bring masks and hand sanitisers; wear clean clothes to limit disease transmission. You might be asked to wash/sanitise your hands and soles of your shoes before the start of your visit.
- Bring a pair of binoculars to view the monkeys from a distance.

During your visit/when entering monkey habitat

- Stay on trails if they're available.
- Stay at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from monkeys. If the monkeys approach you, back away calmly.
- Avoid touching the animals or their surroundings for their safety and yours.
- Always wear masks. This is crucial, especially if there is a risk that the minimum distance (7 metres/23 feet) between you and the monkeys may be compromised.

Reduce the risk of aggression/stress/injuries for both you and the monkeys

- Avoid eye contact with monkeys, don't make sudden movements or point at monkeys as they might see these actions as threats.
- Be mindful of your surroundings: always leave monkeys an escape route; do not surround or overcrowd them. Do not put yourself between adult monkeys and their infants.
- Never feed monkeys. Avoid purchasing food from local vendors to feed the monkeys and bringing food and drinks to the area, when possible. Otherwise, ensure food and beverages are kept hidden in an enclosed bag. Never eat or drink when you are near monkeys.
- Be sure that each child under 14 years of age is with an adult.
- Do not leave any litter or body waste in the forest or tourist site.

If you are in a vehicle or boat

- Drive slowly (less than 10km/h; 6–7 mph) on roads where monkeys may be crossing.
- Do not leave your belongings unattended where monkeys can get into them.
- Keep vehicle doors locked and windows always closed to prevent monkeys from attempting to seek food.
- Do not leave any waste (personal or otherwise).
- If in a boat, turn off the engine as soon as it is safe to do so when sighting primates.

Respect monkey welfare

- Refrain from trying to attract monkeys' attention by gesturing, throwing objects or making a noise (e.g., snapping fingers, whistling, or shouting).
- Limit the time spent with each monkey group, so they can recover from your visit. We suggest a maximum of one hour per day.
- Support and enjoy tourist activities and venues that do not involve or keep captive monkeys in inadequate conditions or as entertainers.
- Avoid participating in activities that exploit monkeys as photo props.
- Avoid hotels, bars, and other tourist venues that display monkeys.
- When faced with monkeys kept in poor conditions, do not buy one because you will be assisting the illegal wildlife trade. Report to the local authorities and/or complain to your tour guide and operator.

After your visit

- Consider tipping your guides or donating to the conservation/rehabilitation/education centres you have visited to support local communities, and conservation efforts.
- Follow the [Best Practice Guidelines](#) for responsible images of people and primates if posting photos of your trip on social media.

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Recommendations for Responsible Lemur Watching in Madagascar

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



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Introduction

Madagascar is home to unparalleled levels of endemism, including very high levels of primate diversity with over 100 species of lemur. Lemurs are the ambassadors of Madagascar's wildlife. These charismatic primates hold iconic value for the Malagasy, as well as for the island's tourism industry, which generates US \$950 million per year.

Notwithstanding their popularity and draw for tourists, lemurs represent the most endangered group of mammals in the world. Today, 98% of lemur species are classified as Endangered or Critically Endangered and are at risk of extinction. Habitat loss, deforestation, climate change, and illegal hunting and capture for the pet trade are pushing species to the brink of extinction.

While tourism is a key economic asset for Madagascar, there is a trade-off between economic gain and too many tourists, resulting in negative impacts on biodiversity. In recent years, Madagascar has seen an increase in harmful tourist activities, which have become commonplace, such as direct human-lemur contact for feeding or taking selfies. Unfortunately, many businesses, hotels, eco-lodges, and restaurants maintain lemurs illegally and encourage tourists to have one-on-one interactions in various ways with different levels of provisioning. Moreover, many locals and expats illegally keep lemurs as pets. These animals are plausibly wild-caught for the purpose of attracting tourists and for domestic trade. Ultimately, the practice of illegal capture of wild lemurs from already dwindling and at-risk populations is unsustainable. It is crucial, therefore, that we advocate for a responsible approach to tourism.

Here, we provide a list of recommendations that aim to help tourists, guides, tour operators and others to make responsible and conservation-minded choices when engaging and observing Madagascar's wildlife.

Recommendations

Before your visit

- Choose a tour operator/tour guide(s) who follow the guidelines described here. Do your best to find information supporting their adherence to the guidelines.
- Confirm with your tour operator that you *will not* be visiting/staying at any hotels, eco-lodges or restaurants that keep lemurs. Most tourist businesses obtain and keep lemurs illegally.
- Prioritise companies/businesses that are Malagasy owned and/or give back to local communities.

During your visit

- Turn off your cell phone.
- Check with your guide about the rules for taking photos (e.g., flash).
- Speak softly, walk quietly (you will have a better chance to see animals!).
- Smaller groups have better luck finding and observing animals. We recommend a maximum of 5 people in a group.
- Avoid shaking trees or making loud noises to get the attention of the lemurs in order to get that 'perfect' photo.
- Do not smoke in the forest.
- Depending on the place, some lemurs may be very habituated to humans. Do not feed or touch them. They can bite and there is the potential for disease transmission (human-to-lemur and lemur-to-human).
- Always keep a minimum distance of 7 metres (23 feet) from lemurs even when underneath them.
- Limit the time spent with groups: Spending 30 minutes or less is recommended to not stress or disturb the lemurs.
- When viewing nocturnal lemurs, make sure to use a headlamp or flashlight with a red light setting, as this will not disturb the lemur's eyes and will make for better observations.
- Remain at home if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness – primates are closely related to us and we can transfer diseases to them.

- Wear masks and sanitise hands (for the above reasons).
- Avoid bringing food to the area.
- Do not litter.
- Follow the [Best Practice Guidelines](#) for responsible images of people and primates if posting photos of your trip on social media.
- Choose not to purchase souvenirs made from local precious hardwoods (e.g., rosewood, ebony), as they are illegally logged and directly negatively impact lemurs and other wildlife.
- Choose not to purchase precious and semi-precious gemstones (e.g., sapphire), as most of the mining in Madagascar is unofficial and unregulated. Mining has devastating impacts on biodiversity and local communities.

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Recommendations for responsible primate-watching in Central and South America

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



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Introduction

Most primates of Central and South America are small to medium-sized and inhabit forests in remote areas. Tourism can exert pressure to habituate primates and modify habitats. A few species are found in or around cities, and these may be very interactive and approachable, which can provide opportunities for inappropriate interactions. However, if conducted conscientiously, primate-watching can bring valuable revenue to communities, while serving as an educational and conservation promoting tool. Tourism activities can engage local communities in conservation through sharing of economic benefits and participation in other conservation activities that preserve habitats, for example. Primate tourism in cities can contribute to preserving city forests, some of which are large such as the Tijuca forest in Rio de Janeiro, and some which serve as corridors to forests outside cities. Conservation projects in rural or remote rainforest areas can use primate tourism as a source of immediate revenue and long-term support. The key to successful and ethical primate tourism is avoiding negative outcomes of exposure of primates to human visitors.

Below, we outline some general recommendations for responsible primate-watching in Central and South America.

Recommendations

- Choose a tourism operator or agency that uses primate specialists who will not place financial profit over primate wellbeing.
- Ensure vaccinations and tests are up to date for problematic diseases (yellow fever, influenza and COVID), especially if proximity is expected. The risk of disease transmission increases as you get closer to the monkeys.

- Avoid visiting primates if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
- Small groups of tourists are much better than larger groups (avoid groups over 15).
- Ensure children under 14 years of age are accompanied by an adult.
- Ensure your tourism provider supports local human communities and employs local staff and promotes conservation efforts.
- Manage your expectations according to the species in the area and their behaviour. Opportunities to watch secretive primates such as titi or night monkeys or small primates may be brief. Larger species may be watched from afar for longer periods.
- Foster an experience based on nature appreciation, observing natural behaviours, and learning. Habitat watching (or forest bathing) is also part of the experience.
- Bring a pair of binoculars to watch the primates and other wildlife from a distance.
- Avoid behaviours that encourage interactions and proximity. Keep at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from animals.
- Avoid feeding the monkeys or shaking tree branches to encourage them to move.
- Avoid touching the animals or surroundings you encounter for their safety and yours.
- Keep noise to a minimum. There should be no talking if possible, and then limit it to whispering only.
- Turn off your cell phone or put it on silent.
- Do not smoke or eat around the animals. Refrain from drinking alcohol.
- Do not leave any litter or bodily waste in the forest.
- Flash photography in general is not harmful to animals during daytime. Flash use at night may be. Single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras have noisy shutters and flash. Mobile phones are not noisy and seldom need flash in forest environments. (See [nocturnal primate watching guidelines](#) for more information).

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Recommendations for Responsible Monkey Watching in the Caribbean

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



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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.

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Recommendations for Responsible Nocturnal Primate-Watching

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



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Introduction

Nocturnal primates occur throughout the world, with night monkeys in the Americas, pottos, angwantibos and galagos in Africa, lemurs in Madagascar, and lorises and tarsiers in Asia. The increase in primate tourism has also meant increasing tourist activity in relation to these nocturnal primates. This activity includes guided night-walks through nocturnal primates' habitats. Nocturnal primate tourism may also include the animals being displayed in semi-captive environments, encouraged to come to feeding platforms at hotels, or displayed in daylight for tourists to interact with which can affect primate welfare.

Nocturnal primates generally have highly developed senses, such as sight, with many having large eyes in comparison to their body size, and large corneas relative to eye size to compensate for the lower light levels at night. They are, therefore, very sensitive to artificial light (e.g., bright white light, LED light sources and camera flashes), and being subjected to daylight conditions can negatively affect their health. Nocturnal primates also have sensitive hearing, and excessive noise can be harmful and disruptive, in that noise can cause stress and health issues, and reduce their reproductive success. When choosing a tour operator/tour guide, make sure they follow the recommendations below.

Recommendations

Before Your Visit

- Ensure your vaccinations and tests are up to date for diseases that you could transmit to local people or primates.
- Avoid visiting primates if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

- Smaller tourist groups are best, up to a maximum of six people. This makes it easier for the guide(s) to ensure everyone is safe at night. A smaller group will disturb primates less and allow more opportunity to see more primates and other wildlife.
- To avoid disturbing the primates, refrain from using perfumes and if possible, repellents that contain DET.
- Make sure participants bring or are provided with a red-and-white flashlight, not a regular white light, to avoid disturbing nocturnal primates. These animals cannot detect red light, but white light sources will likely blind them. It takes a while for the human eye to get used to seeing under the red light but your eyes will eventually adjust to it. However, if one group member uses a white light at the same time this will not work.
- Many of the nocturnal primates have a reflective layer in their eye, making them easy to spot with the use of a light. However, remember that even the faintest of light will reflect eye shine, so strong headlamps are not required.
- Ensure you have sufficient time for briefing before the night walks.

On arrival

- Turn off your cell phone.
- Review, along with your group, how to properly use headlamps and make sure everyone has used one before.
- Remind your group that many headlamps allow you to change the direction and colour of the light.
- Remember that you can only see eye shine reflections if your light source is near your eyes, so if using a handheld torch, hold it at eye level.
- Bear in mind that not all nocturnal animals have eye shine (tarsiers do not).

During your visit

- Walk slowly and quietly to avoid disturbing primates and other wildlife, giving participants the opportunity to see more animal species in their natural habitat.
- Use white-light sources only while walking on hilly and difficult areas, for safety. Remember to use a red light once you spot a primate or any other animal.
- Limit the time spent with each animal and the time you shine light on each animal to reduce disturbance. We suggest a maximum of 5 minutes.

- If you take photos, refrain from using flash.
- Avoid touching the animals you encounter or their surroundings, for their safety and yours.
- Stay at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from any animal that you encounter.
- Refrain from destroying vegetation to watch primates.
- Do not leave any litter or body waste in the forest.
- Do not smoke near primates.
- Avoid participating in activities that exploit primates as photo props.



Nancy Ma's night monkey (*Aotus nancymae*).
Photo credit B. Wittemann Entropica.

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Unplanned or Incidental Primate Tourism

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



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Unplanned, opportunistic or incidental primate tourism refers to encounters between tourists and primates that occur while visiting cultural sites or landscape features, birdwatching, or hiking. Incidental primate tourism has been documented in a variety of contexts across the globe. For example, at Lamanai Archaeological Reserve in Belize, tourists visiting the Maya cultural heritage site may also encounter black howler monkeys and other wildlife that inhabit the protected area; in Silver Springs State Park, Florida, kayakers and boaters enjoying the Silver River may observe introduced rhesus macaques foraging on the riverbank; and tourists exploring the waterfalls and cave features in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, might look up to find moor macaques travelling across the canopy.

Incidental primate tourism poses distinct challenges for risk mitigation and management. Unlike established primate tourism sites, incidental primate tourism is typically informal, decentralised, and unmanaged. Sites where incidental primate tourism occurs often lack educational material to inform tourists about local wildlife and conservation and to adequately prepare them for possible encounters with local wildlife. Moreover, tourists' recreational goals at incidental sites usually eclipse any interest in learning about primates and how to responsibly observe them. These factors result in high rates of provisioning, heightened primate disturbance, and increased risk of harmful human-primate interactions. For example, primates that spend time at roadsides may suffer injury and/or death from moving vehicles.

Provisioning is common at incidental sites and often occurs despite signs prohibiting it. It is helpful to remind yourself and those in your group that provisioning is discouraged because primates can suffer increased rates of obesity, and aggressive interactions with humans can increase. However, bear in mind that many incidental primate tourism sites have a long history of provisioning due to cultural practices or religious beliefs. It may therefore be impractical—and in some cases, insensitive—to attempt to eliminate provisioning at such sites.

There may not be information indicating primate presence or how to behave when primates are encountered. It is helpful to familiarise yourself with the following recommendations before you arrive at any attraction so you may experience more informed and responsible encounters with primates where tourist sites and primate habitats overlap.

Recommendations

Before your visit

- Avoid bringing food to the area when possible; keep food contained and out of sight.
- Seek tour operators that adhere to local rules and regulations and attempt to minimise disturbance to local wildlife. This includes features such as limiting group numbers, and modelling appropriate behaviour (see below) when wildlife is encountered.

If you are in a vehicle

- If safe to do so, slow down and put hazard lights on to alert other drivers.
- Allow primates to cross or move away from the road before continuing.
- Close car windows to reduce potential contact with primates who may be used to jumping on cars.
- Move any food or plastic bags out of sight.
- Remember to:
 - Adhere to local regulations.
 - Observe from a distance.
 - Be a model for others.

During your visit

- Tour guides and tourists alike can play an essential role in promoting both human and primate wellbeing at the site by modelling responsible encounters with primates.
- Practice and encourage distanced and quiet observation.
- Always remain at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from primates.

- Discourage direct physical contact with primates.
- Discourage harassment of primates, including whistling, shouting, etc., to elicit a response from them.
- If a primate group or individual moves away from the encounter site, do not follow them.

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Watching Captive Primates in Zoos and Sanctuaries

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



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Zoos and wildlife parks offer visitors the chance to see animals that they might not otherwise be able to see in their natural environment. More than 700 million people visit one of the world's 1300 zoos and aquariums each year. For many urban residents, a visit to a zoo or aquarium provides a rare opportunity to connect with nature. Zoological collections and aquariums are therefore in a unique position to educate people about the world's biodiversity and its conservation. The European Association of Zoos & Aquaria (EAZA) alone contributed an enormous €22.6 million to the conservation of over 600 species globally in 2019, and the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums spends an average of US \$160 million on field conservation projects per annum, covering more than 900 species ([AZA, 2022](#)).

In addition to accredited zoos, institutions such as wildlife sanctuaries or rescue centres may provide an opportunity for visitors to view exotic animals face-to-face. Sanctuaries differ from zoos in their goals; while reputable zoos focus on species conservation, reserve breeding, research, and education, sanctuaries focus on providing a safe home for rescued wildlife. The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) provides guidelines for sanctuaries, and visitors can use GFAS accreditation as assurance that the sanctuary maintains high welfare standards. Regardless of the type of institution or their industry regulation standards, all are responsible for maintaining good welfare of the animals they keep, and this should involve a level of visitor education about appropriate behaviour during their visit.

The visitor can play an active role in *respecting the primates' personal space and protecting the primates' physical and mental wellbeing* by following the guidelines below when visiting a zoo or sanctuary. Animals need to feel secure in their homes, to have freedom of movement, and to have choices in how they use their space. With this in mind, we have developed the following guidelines to ensure the welfare of captive primates and enhance the visitor experience.

Recommendations

Primates require specialist diets and are vulnerable to many of the same illnesses that humans are. They also deserve to live free of harassment, loud noises, or other unnecessary stress. Visitors can help in these ways:

- Observe primates at a safe distance; do not climb or lean over the barrier to touch the primates or place hands/ feet or any other part of the body through the mesh.
- Allow the primates to rest/sleep.
- Avoid interacting with, feeding, or having your photo taken with captive primates.
- Be mindful of primates' sensory sensitivity by switching your flash off, not using a torch, and never bang on glass, play music, shout or scream, run, or stamp feet.
- Avoid mimicking the primate's facial expression and behaviours and do not pull faces, torment, or tease.
- Refrain from smoking or vaping near primates, to avoid exposing them to secondary inhalation.
- Do not visit captive primates when drunk or under the influence of legal or illegal substances.
- Avoid giving foreign objects (e.g., cigarettes, toys, phone, pencils, hair bands, paper) to the primate. These may be eaten and may spread germs between people and animals.
- Hold onto hats, sunglasses, and other easily removable items when near barriers, particularly water moats.

In “walk-through” exhibits, visitors should follow all guidelines listed above, plus the following points:

- Avoid eye contact, and move away from any primate moving towards you on the ground or overhead.
- Keep your personal belongings secured close to your body.
- Move buggies, wheelchairs, or mobility aids away from approaching primates.
- Ensure all food is stored securely.
- Do not touch or stroke the primates.
- Observe primates from a safe distance – ideally 7m (23 feet) from the animal.
- Give the primates priority on the path. Stop and allow them to pass you.

- Do not chase primates.
- Observe pathway barriers.
- Rest at designated seating only.
- Do not allow them to sit or climb on you for a photo.

Further Reading

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Tourism and primate welfare

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



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Outside zoos and sanctuaries, primates may be kept in captivity expressly to entertain or engage tourists. These primates are usually taken from the wild as infants. Primate mothers, and sometimes other adults, are often killed to take their offspring. Confiscated primates that have been kept or traded illegally are sometimes sent to captive facilities where visiting tourists can feed and handle them, and take photographs with them (pseudo-sanctuaries). Close encounters with primates are understandably valued by tourists, who are unaware of the harm that these activities can cause to the animals involved.

Some primates may have been bred in captivity for commercial trade as pets or for captive collections. However, *all* primates exploited for tourist entertainment will have been removed from their mothers as infants and deprived of the opportunity to live with others of their kind. Primates deprived of their mothers suffer psychological and physical harm.

Performing primates and those used for interactions are treated cruelly. For example, as part of their training, the performing monkeys used for Topeng Monyet (“monkey mask” shows) in Indonesia are restrained in a manner that forces them to stand bipedally for long periods of time. Primates used as photo props may have their teeth clipped or removed without anaesthesia, often resulting in painful infections. Photo prop Barbary macaques in Morocco are often beaten if their owner perceives that they have misbehaved. Even if not abused, captive primates used for tourism are usually housed in very poor conditions. When kept in bars, shops, or hotels, they may be chained, or confined to small cages with inadequate protection from the sun or rain, and maintained on a poor diet.

Interaction-focused primate tourism can also have indirect negative consequences for primates. Images of people interacting with primates, or of primates in “human” environments, can lead people to assume that such interactions are positive, safe, and harmless, increasing the likelihood that they will take part in such activities themselves.

Tourists often share photos, videos, and stories of their close encounters with primates with others on social media, helping to shape the attitudes, and potentially behaviour, of their families, friends and followers towards primates. In addition, international and national tourists may purchase young primates offered for sale believing they are saving the primate. However, purchasing it only encourages vendors to obtain more young primates from the wild to satisfy demand.

Do not support activities that exploit or harm animals. We can vote with our wallets. By spending our money on responsible enterprises, and avoiding harmful ones, we can change the demand for the above activities. Responsible tourists are those who:

- Support and enjoy tourist activities and venues that do not involve or keep captive primates in inadequate conditions or as entertainers.
- Avoid primate performances, e.g., orangutan boxing matches, circuses featuring performing primates, and “monkey rodeos”.
- Avoid hotels, bars, and other tourist venues that display primates.
- Be aware that terms like “rescue” and “sanctuary” can be abused and learn how to spot a pseudo-sanctuary. Visit <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/truth-about-sanctuaries>.
- When confronted by primates being kept in poor conditions, do not purchase one because you will be contributing to the primate trade. Report to the local authorities and/or complain to your tour guide and operator.
- Refrain from taking part in tourist activities that involve the capture, hunting or consumption of primates.

Further Reading

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