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# Don't export monkeys for research— activist

By  
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A leading animal-rights activist and expert on veterinary medicine has appealed to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to reject applications for a special permit to harvest native monkeys from the wild.

Nedim C. Buyukmihci, speaking on behalf of the group Action for Primates, also asked the DENR to scrap the plan of allowing the export of monkeys for research and development purposes.

Buyukmihci wrote a letter addressed to DENR Assistant Secretary Ricardo L. Calderon after reading the BusinessMirror story titled “DENR official sees revival of native monkey farming amid global virus contagion.” In the story published on April 2, Calderon, the concurrent director of the DENR’s Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), bared the plan to allow the capture of long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis spp. Philippensis*) and allow its export for scientific research.

## Potential carriers

IN the report, Calderon said the DENR-BMB plans to allow harvesting of the species after confirming reports of the spike in the population of the native monkeys in the island Municipality of Banton, Romblon. Native monkeys are aggressive and potential carriers of deadly viruses like Ebola, the DENR said.

In Banton, there are already reports that monkey packs are starting to raid farms in desperate search for food. However, there are is still no report of an unprovoked attack on humans.

Calderon is eyeing a revival of monkey farms in the Philippines, especially because of an expected demand for live specimens by research institutions outside the country to develop cures to deadly virus and diseases in the face of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

## Unsound argument

AN Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Medicine at the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of California-Davis, Buyukmihci said in his letter that the DENR's major justification that "there are too many monkeys creating conflict with people and that they spread disease" is not a sound argument.

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"Conflicts arise primarily due to human population growth and an ever-increasing expansion into and destruction of wildlife habitat," he said. "However, people add to the problem by feeding the monkeys thus reducing the monkeys' innate fear of people."

Buyukmihci added that it is not fair to blame the monkeys for a problem created by humans.

Instead, he said steps should be taken to prohibit people from activities that aggravate the situation.

Furthermore, he said removing animals, though it may result in a short-term reduction in animal numbers, is cruel and it fails to address the issue over a longer period of time.

"It has been shown to be largely ineffectual in reducing damage to human property and crops or in reducing the number of individuals long term," Buyukmihci explained. "For example, despite the trapping and export for research of 10,000 vervet monkeys over a 14-year period in Barbados, this did not have the desired effect of reducing crop raiding, as the population of monkeys, remained stable due to the species' high breeding rate."

## Considerable misinformation

According to Buyukmihci, there is considerable misinformation about what diseases monkeys carry and which might be transmissible to human beings. He added there is very little likelihood that free-living monkeys could transmit any disease to human beings.

“It is more likely that they would become ill from contact with human beings rather than the reverse,” he said.

“The capture and removal of wild primates from their native habitats and social and family groups is, by its very nature, extremely cruel and inflicts great suffering and distress on the animals, as well as resulting in injuries and even death. The substantial negative impact caused by trapping and removal of wild primates from their natural social groups is universally recognized by relevant organizations and official bodies,” Buyukmihci added.

Moreover, citing the most recent entry on the IUCN Red List Category, Buyukmihci said that the *Macaca fascicularis spp. Philippensis* is listed as a “near threatened” species, with a decreasing population, and not a species of “Least concern” as earlier reported.

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## Management plan

Buyukmihci urged the DENR “to adopt an effective management plan that will deal with any human-macaque conflict in the community in a humane way as well as addressing some of the issues that are causing conflict, such as deforestation and inappropriate disposal of food waste.”

He said many countries, including India, Thailand, and Bangladesh, have taken a strong stance over the years in protecting their indigenous population of monkeys and refuse to allow their export for food and research purposes.

“Several of these and other countries have implemented successful methods of managing populations of wild macaques,” Buyukmihci said.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/04/13/dont-export-monkeys-for-research-activist/>