

DENR asked: Initiate ‘humane’ control of Romblon macaques

By [Jonathan L. Mayuga](#) | May 10, 2020



Mother and baby long-tailed macaque

The Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) added its voice to the clamor to protect the Philippine long-tailed macaques on the island-municipality of Banton in Romblon, where the increasing number of the primate is reportedly starting to threaten farming communities.

In a joint statement, PAWS and Action for Primates (AP) called on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to deny permits to capture monkeys on the island.

Their action came following a BusinessMirror earlier report, which quoted Assistant Secretary Ricardo Calderon, concurrent director of DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau, of the plan to allow harvesting of macaques on Banton Island as he sees the revival of native monkey farming amid the contagion.

Native monkey farms operate a captive-breeding program to export offsprings for research and development purposes.

The report has caught the attention of Action for Primates, which, through a letter to the DENR official, appealed to disallow the export of native monkeys.

In his response, Calderon gave the assurance that the DENR is addressing human-primate conflicts on a case-by-case basis.

He also assured animal-rights groups that the DENR will not allow harmful means in capturing the native monkeys, while wild monkey-farm operators will be strictly monitored during captive-breeding operations.

The groups insisted that the long-tailed macaques is listed as Near Threatened with a population that is decreasing based on the most recent assessment by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Among the threats identified for the decline in the number are hunting and habitat loss, the group said in a news statement.

The Philippine long-tailed macaques is listed under Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Being a signatory to CITES, the country has a responsibility to safeguard the conservation status of the primate, they said.

“The trapping of wild primates inflicts immense suffering. Primates are intelligent and social animals. Capturing and removing them from their native habitat, family and social groups are cruel, and can result in injuries and even death. It also causes substantial suffering in the families left behind. Several official bodies and organizations recognize the suffering involved in the capturing of wild nonhuman primates,” they said.

The group quoted the International Primatological Society, which states that “the capture of nonhuman primates from the wild is stressful for the animals and increases the suffering, risk of injuries, spread of disease and even death during capture, storage and transport.”

According to PAWS and AP, one of the reasons given by the DENR for considering an application for the capture of the wild monkeys is the conflict arising between people and the monkeys.

However, they said conflict issues are usually due to human activities, such as the destruction and fragmentation of the natural habitat, forcing primates to compete with people over land and resources.

One scientific report has stated that “unsustainable human activities are now the major force driving primate species to extinction.”

The authors of the report estimate that “about 60 percent of nonhuman primate species are threatened with extinction and populations of 75 percent of nonhuman primate species are decreasing globally because of unsustainable human activities,” they said.

The two groups insisted that there are effective and humane methods that can be used to resolve conflicts between monkeys and people.

These include reproduction control, relocation and, most important, educating communities to modify their behavior that do not encourage monkeys to rely on humans for food. Among them are not feeding the monkeys and only using monkey-proof refuse containers.

“There are humane approaches to population control that can be adopted to resolve conflict, without resorting to the capture and removal of wild macaques for research,” they said.

At a time when there is increasing awareness of the devastating consequences that human activity is having on the natural world, including nonhuman primates, “it is imperative that we learn to coexist with other species rather than just eliminate them when conflicts arise,” said Dr. Nedim Buyukmihci, emeritus professor of Veterinary Medicine and representative of Action for Primates.

PAWS Executive Director Anna Cabrera said the proposed capture of Romblon macaques is inimical to animal welfare and is a direct violation of the Philippines’s Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act (RA 9147), which strictly prohibits the collection and capture of wildlife in the absence of scientific research on wildlife populations.

She also said that contrary to the DENR statement that macaques have been “introduced” to the area, locals have confirmed that these primates have been in Banton, Romblon, long before human activities like farming started there.

The question on who encroached on whose land now arises. Activities seen as acts of “nuisance” by animals are a direct result of humans’ collective failure to protect these primates’ habitats.

According to Cabrera, the DENR can set things right by taking immediate steps to establish a protected area for macaques and to develop eco-friendly systems within human communities to allow them to live in harmony with wildlife.

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