

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS
INDIA

PETA India
PO Box 28260
Juhu, Mumbai
Maharashtra 400049
022 40727382

Info@petaindia.org
PETAIndia.com

Sh. Bhupender Yadav
Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jorbagh Road,
New Delhi – 110003

Via e-mail and post: mefcc@gov.in

5th March 2025

Subject: Urgent Appeal to Reinstate Stronger Protections for Rhesus Macaques

Dear Shri Yadav Ji,

On behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India and our more than 2 million members and supporters, and the undersigned 30 concerned wildlife and animal protection groups, we write to urgently appeal for the reinstatement and strengthening of protections for rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*) under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (“WPA”). The removal of rhesus macaques from Schedule II of the WPA following the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, has raised critical concerns regarding their welfare, ecological impact, and effective management, as detailed below.

The following points are our key concerns:

Alarming Population Decline and Ecological Impact

Several decades ago, the Indian rhesus macaque population saw a staggering 90% decline, and this species may face a similar loss again if protection is not reinstated. According to the 2021 census data, the population of rhesus macaques in Uttarakhand has declined by 25% since 2015. Similar significant population declines of this species have also been reported in the census data for Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. Due to their largely fruit-based diet, large group sizes and home ranges, and resilience, these monkeys are considered effective and necessary seed dispersers. This is vital for forest maintenance and regeneration. Researchers found that rhesus macaques dispersed 84% of the 49 plant species they fed on, either through spitting or defecation. Removing them from natural habitats due to reduced protections can lead to significant disruptions in ecosystem balance.

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- PETA US
- PETA Asia
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (UK)

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Risk of Hunting and Species Misidentification

Since rhesus macaques are no longer protected as a wild animal, the WPA in the current form opens the door for the species to be hunted and killed even in non-conflict regions. This could lead to a significant decline in their population and destabilization of the ecology. Additionally, their exclusion from WPA protection raises serious concerns about the potential misidentification of other macaque species, such as the bonnet macaque (*Macaca radiata*), which remains protected under the Schedule II of the Act. Such misidentification could result in the illegal hunting of bonnet macaques, further aggravating the population decline of an already vulnerable species.

Loss of Authority of the Forest Department

The rhesus macaque is an important wildlife species, and a critical part of the forest ecosystem. Earlier, the Forest Department was the designated authority for dealing with wildlife. With the exclusion of the rhesus macaque from the WPA, there is a loss of authority of the Forest Department over this species.

Civic Authorities Unequipped to Deal with Wildlife

The Department of Animal Husbandry primarily manages domesticated animals used for agricultural purposes like cows and bulls and lacks the expertise, resources, and training required for managing wild animals. For instance, in cases where monkeys cause conflicts in residential areas, due primarily to loss of habitat throughout India and a poor waste management system in urban areas that gives the monkeys easy access to food, only forest officials—neither civic authorities nor animal husbandry personnel—have the necessary skills, knowledge and tools to mitigate these situations effectively and humanely. Now, with rhesus macaques apparently removed from forest department responsibility, human-monkey conflicts are certain to escalate due to unclear responsibilities between agencies. The monkeys will be handled either inhumanely or not at all, increasing the risk to public safety. Monkeys who are mishandled would later act fearfully and potentially lash out in self-defense around humans. Without the intervention of trained forest officials, such incidents will increase public dissatisfaction.

Increase in Risk of Cruelty Against Rhesus Macaques

Prior to the amendment to the WPA, when the rhesus macaque monkeys were part of Schedule II, the species came within the definition of a wild animal and were strongly protected from hunting and killing. Since these protections under the WPA were removed, risks toward rhesus macaques (and the humans who handle them for such purposes) have vastly

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increased, such as the risk of being abducted from their natural habitats, forced into the pet trade, used to 'dance', experimented on in laboratories and killed for meat.

A new report by several animal protection organisations highlights the abuse involved in the trend of keeping rhesus macaques as pets for social media content. Most of these monkeys, often infants, face deliberate acts to induce fear or suffer direct physical abuse, which is often egregious like being beaten, burned or having their limbs amputated, for social media views or reactions by the public. All of these animals face separation from their families in nature, terrifying transport, loneliness from being denied engagement with members of their own species, and often caging, chaining and ultimate abandonment when people who buy them realise they are difficult to maintain as "pets". Exacerbating the problem, experts warn that engagement with such content normalizes abuse, encouraging more such content creators.

Similarly, young rhesus macaques are being dressed up and forced to dance by madaris, despite this practice having been illegal in India since 1998. These animals often have their teeth pulled out and are forced to perform through fear of physical punishment and food deprivation. In 2023, a nightclub in Kolkata, West Bengal, faced severe backlash after a video went viral on social media showing a chained rhesus macaque who appeared drugged during a circus-themed party at the nightclub. In another recent incident, a chained rhesus macaque being held in grim conditions at a temple in Lashkar, Gwalior, was rescued. These disturbing cases are examples of imminent threats faced by rhesus macaques and consequences of reduced WPA protections for this species, highlighting the urgent need for their reinstatement and strengthening.

Global Standards and India's Commitment

Internationally, nations are adopting stricter measures to protect primates. For example, the US recently passed the FDA Modernization Act to eliminate animal testing requirements in drug development, showcasing a shift toward humane and innovative alternatives. India must follow suit to maintain its global leadership in wildlife conservation.

The rhesus macaque is a scheduled species in CITES, which regulates international trade in wildlife and wild animal parts. Considering this, it is strange and concerning that the rhesus macaque has been deleted from the WPA, even though India is the major home of the rhesus macaque. CITES protection alone is not sufficient because it only regulates export, whereas the amended WPA has removed protections against hunting, possession,

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domestic trade, transport, and purchase of rhesus macaques, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation within India.

Threat of Exploitation for International Experimentation

There is some evidence that unscrupulous British, European, and American monkey importers are hoping to pillage India's rhesus macaque population. An office memorandum published by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) on 11 May 2022 (Annexure A), highlights possible attempts by the Laboratory Corporation of America to export vulnerable live monkeys from India. In response, the WCCB alerted field formations to prevent the illegal export of non-human primates from India. It's obvious that Indian rhesus macaques face an imminent threat. Monkeys abducted from their natural habitats by international wildlife dealers in Asia are often crammed into small wooden crates and transported in the dark, terrifying cargo holds of planes for up to 30 hours. In laboratories, monkeys are typically confined alone to small metal cages and cut open, poisoned, crippled, forced to become addicted to drugs, electroshocked, and killed.

Public Health Hazards

Reduced protections for and potential heightened exploitation of rhesus macaques increases the risk of zoonotic disease transmission, putting public health at risk. Research has shown that species like rhesus macaques are major carriers of pathogens that could spill over to humans. The stress of capture and transport makes them more vulnerable to unintended zoonotic pathogens, such as cholera, cryptosporidium, salmonella, hepatitis A, tuberculosis, flaviviruses, and malaria as well as to opportunistic zoonotic infections, including alpha, beta, and gamma herpes viruses, simian type D retroviruses, simian foamy viruses, simian immunodeficiency viruses, and fungal infections.

Cultural and Religious Significance

Rhesus macaques are revered as earthly representations of Lord Hanuman. Mishandling these animals or failing to protect them adequately could provoke public outrage and damage trust in the government's commitment to safeguarding cultural and ethical values.

Once again, we urge the Ministry to act decisively to protect rhesus macaques, uphold India's ecological and cultural values, and ensure animal welfare by reinstating protections for rhesus macaques under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and granting them the highest protection, afforded to many other indigenous species, under Schedule I.

We respectfully request your urgent attention to this matter and a response detailing the Ministry's proposed actions. We remain committed to

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supporting the government in achieving a balanced and humane approach to wildlife conservation. Please feel free to reach out to us via e-mail at aaggawal@petaindia.org or on telephone at 9958840994 for further discussions or assistance.

With the highest regards,



Dr. Anjana Aggarwal
Science Policy Advisor
PETA India

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Co-Signatories

 <p>Wildlife Rescue</p>	 <p>Wildlife SOS</p>	 <p>Conservation Action Trust</p>
 <p>RESQ Charitable Trust</p>	 <p>Resqink Association For Wildlife Welfare</p>	 <p>Wildlife Welfare Association</p>
 <p>Human & Environment Alliance League</p>	 <p>Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre</p>	 <p>Wildlife Research And Conservation Society</p>

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 <p>Wild-CER Conservation • Education • Research</p> <p>Wildlife Conservation, Education And Research</p>	 <p>EARTH BRIGADE FOUNDATION</p> <p>Earth Brigade Foundation</p>	 <p>TWF</p> <p>Think Wildlife Foundation</p>
 <p>WORLD FOR NATURE FAMBLE RESEARCH RESCUE</p> <p>World For Nature</p>	 <p>RiWild</p> <p>RI Wild Sanctuary</p>	<p>FAUNA POLICE</p> <p>Fauna Police</p>
 <p>FIAPO Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations</p> <p>Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations</p>	<p>Mr. V.K. Venkitachalam</p> <p>Heritage Animal Task Force</p>	 <p>PEOPLE FOR CATTLE IN INDIA</p> <p>People for Cattle in India</p>
<p>ABHAY DAANAM</p> <p>Sanathanam Abhay Daanam</p>	 <p>HOLY COW Health Wealth and Devotion</p> <p>Holy Cow Foundation</p>	 <p>Compassion Unlimited CUPA Plus Action</p> <p>CUPA Bengaluru</p>
 <p>CAPE FOUNDATION</p> <p>CAPE Foundation</p>	 <p>CAWA nurturing human animal bond...</p> <p>Compassion for Animals Welfare Association (CAWA)</p>	<p>Padmavati Dwivedi</p> <p>Ex-founder of Compassionate Living</p>

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 <p>Earthlings Trust</p>	 <p>Umeed for Animal Foundation</p>	 <p>Sacred Earth Trust</p>
 <p>Animal Rahat</p>	 <p>India Project for Animals and Nature</p>	 <p>Worldwide Veterinary Service</p>

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Wildlife Crime Control Bureau
वन्यजीव अपराध नियंत्रण ब्यूरो

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
भारत सरकार
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE
पर्यावरण वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय

File No.3-10/WCCB/TRADE/2021-2022 / 3171

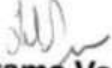
Dated: 11, May, 2022

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Sub.: Issuance of Alert on smuggling of monkeys – reg.

Input has been received from a reliable source that Laboratory Corporation of America is making effort to export live monkeys from India some of which are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

2. It may be mentioned that export of all wild animals is prohibited from India as per Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) of Government of India. As per intelligence input there has been a surge in the demand of monkeys due to surge in the price of monkeys.
3. In view of the above, it is requested to Alert the field formations under your control for prevention of export of non-human primates including monkeys from India.


(Tilotama Varma)
Additional Director
WCCB, BHQ, New Delhi

Distribution

1. Chief Wildlife Wardens of all States.
2. Member of Customs, CBIC of India, New Delhi,
3. Joint Director(I&C), WCCB, BHQ, New Delhi
4. All Regional Deputy Directors of WCCB Regional offices, NR/ER/WR/SR/CR