TEMPLE AND PET PRIMATES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

In Thailand, a predominantly Buddhist country, isolated populations of long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) especially may be found at temples in both rural and urban areas where they are provisioned by people making merit although the monkeys may be shot as agricultural pests in adjacent rice or corn fields in rural areas. At the same time, macaques and gibbons, especially the lar gibbon (*Hylobates lar*), have been kept as pets in both rural and urban areas. Gibbons even are reported to be the “favorite pet for Thais”. The number of primates being offered for sale has risen dramatically as legal and illegal timbering have reduced Thailand’s forest cover to perhaps no more than 12%, peripheralizing primate populations and making them more vulnerable to hunting. A provision in Thai law permitted individuals to possess as many as two primates or other wild animals of the same species — «a potential pair to promote breeding» — even though their capture and sale was prohibited. Changes in Thailand’s wildlife laws governing private possession of wild animals have caused owners to abandon pets to government agencies and temples. Private rescue centers offer acute care and permanent shelter for some of these primates but cannot cope with the numbers involved. Pilot studies suggest that rehabilitation and reintroduction may be feasible alternatives for some former captive gibbons.

Key words: Macaques, *Macaca fascicularis*, gibbons, *Hylobates lar*, Thailand, pet trade, rehabilitation, reintroduction.

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, a predominantly Buddhist country, what are now isolated populations of macaques, especially long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) but also other species, may be found at temples (**wat**) in both rural and urban areas where they have been donated and/or are provisioned by people making merit. A recent, though not exhaustive, survey identified 52 sites throughout Thailand at

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which « semi-tame » macaques are present (Aggimaransee, 1992). At least 2,728
macaques were observed at 36 sites at which the age-sex composition of the
monkeys was recorded, but the total number of temple macaques, as is the case
with populations of wild macaques, is unknown. Khao Paskowee, a limestone
outcropping of aesthetic proportions rising out of Thailand’s central plain in Uthai
Thani province that is not included in the Aggimaransee survey, supports a
population of wild long-tailed macaques which are provisioned by merit-makers.
Although the macaques are tolerated within the temple confines, they may be shot
as agricultural pests if they invade the surrounding rice or corn fields. The species
exploits a niche approximating that occupied in India by the closely related rhesus
macaque - (M. mulatta), which is forest-dwelling in Thailand.

At the same time, in both rural and urban areas, macaques and gibbons,
especially the lar gibbon (Hylobates lar), have been kept as pets. Gibbons even are
reported to be the « favorite pet for Thais » (Treesueorn, 1984). Primates most
frequently are obtained as infants, and in the case of the arboreal gibbon, the
typical method of capture is to shoot the mother in order to obtain her clinging
baby. A provision in the former wild animal act (B.E. 2503) had permitted
individuals to possess as many as two primates or other wild animals of the same
species - « a potential pair to promote captive breeding » — even though their
capture and sale were prohibited. Gibbons were listed under the act as protected
animals of the « first category » in 1961.

On 27 February 1992, Thailand enacted new wildlife legislation entitled
« The Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act, B.E. 2535 » (1). Possession
of protected wild animals is prohibited. Chapter 8, Transitory Provision, section
61(1) provides measures for overseeing protected wild animals that were held by
individuals before the date of notification. The relevant directive in an officially
accepted translation reads as follows:

If the owner or holder of the protected wild animals wants to keep the animals, the officer shall
check if his animal tending condition is safe enough to entitle him to continue to keep the animals,
in which case a temporary license covering the length of life of the animals concerned will be issued
and the license holder shall comply with animal raising instruction therein laid down by the Minister
with consent of the Committee. Whenever there is change in the number of the protected wild animals,
the license holder shall notify the officer in charge.

The new law required the registration of preserved and protected wildlife
species with the Forest Department within 90 days. According to the press, about
12,000 people in Bangkok alone had registered 40,000 wild animals by the end of
June 1992 (Bangkok Post, 2 July 1992). On 1 July 1992, the Director General of
the Royal Forest Department announced that the department would seek the
permission of the Ministry of Agriculture to extend the period of registration of
protected wildlife for an additional 90 days, as required by the wildlife act. In
August 1993, the registration period appeared to have been extended indefinitely
and about one million animals and animal parts had been registered (L. Veijajiva,
pers. comm., 1993). No breakdown by species or higher taxonomic group is
available yet.

(1) The wildlife act was published in the Government Gazette, vol. 109, no. 15, on 28 February
1992, after which date it entered into force.
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The number of primates being offered for sale in Thailand, openly on the streets of Bangkok and in such public institutions as the Chatuchak Market (1), appeared to rise dramatically as legal and illegal timbering reduced Thailand’s forest cover, peripheralizing primate populations and making them more vulnerable to hunting. Chivers (1977) estimated the number of lar gibbons in Thailand, for example, to be 125,000 but projected that the population could experience a 52% decline to 60,000 by 1980. A few spot surveys have been made subsequently, but no recent population estimates have been attempted. In spite of the fact that the lar gibbon is widespread in Thailand, it is considered to be endangered due to loss of forest habitat (Brockelman & Chivers, 1984).

According to government inventories, forest may have covered about 70% of Thailand at the end of World War II. By the Royal Forest Department’s own estimate, forest cover had declined to no more than 29% by 1985. This figure is considered to be inflated, however, because it does not differentiate between primary forest and secondary scrub (Suthisamarn, 1988). Figures released by the World Resources Institute (1990) indicate that 397,000 hectares of open and closed forest were being cleared annually in the mid-1980’s. Current estimates of Thailand’s remaining forest cover (all forests) range from 12% to 20% (The Economist, 1989; Dudley, N., 1991, The Impact of Thailand’s Logging Ban on Deforestation. Draft unpublished report prepared by Earth Resources Research, London, for WWF United Kingdom, Godalming, as cited in Callister, 1992). Myers (1987) had calculated that little forest, especially seasonal forest, might be left in Thailand by 1990. Contributing to this decline has been Thailand’s rapid economic growth, with an increasing commitment to industrialization, especially the manufacture of textiles and clothing, and a change from subsistence farming to huge agri-businesses.

The shifting cultivation of hill folk formerly was attacked as a major cause of forest destruction, even though official statistics on forest loss refer primarily to lowland and lower hill deforestation (Suthisamarn, 1988). Illegal logging and forest encroachment by private concessions, including operations authorized in wildlife sanctuaries and prime watershed areas, recently were identified as the primary cause of forest loss in Thailand. Public outrage at the flooding and mudslides that killed 350 people in southern Thailand in 1988 and were blamed on illegal felling led to two royal decrees banning all logging in January 1989 (Oryx, 1989). Commercial interests in Thailand, reportedly including Thai army officers, subsequently obtained logging concessions in primary forest in border areas of Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and, most recently, Cambodia (The Economist, 1989). The effect on illegal logging in Thailand of the recent decision by the government of Burma to terminate Thai logging concessions on the Thai-Burmese frontier by 31 December 1993 remains to be seen (Callister, 1992; Far Eastern Economic Review, 1993).

HUMAN PERCEPTION OF PRIMATES

My comments on human perception of primates (and other wild animals) in Thailand must be accepted as being anecdotal, but they are based on both

(1) The Weekend Market, relocated from Sanam Luang to a new location on Phaholyothin Road.
participant observation and interviews carried out in conjunction with field research on macaques in west-central Thailand. The mandatory registration required by the new wildlife act may make it possible to undertake a more quantitative assessment through the administration of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews of a representative sample of primate owners. The results of such research might prove invaluable in mounting a campaign to educate the public to stop the exploitation and acquisition of wildlife, which I consider to be an important adjunct to strict enforcement of the new wildlife law.

Sacrality does not appear to be an intrinsic character of macaques or other primates in Thailand. It would appear that the sanctity of location, because of its association with the Buddhist religion, extends to the macaques at a wat such as Khao Paskowee. This could explain the apparent paradox that although monkeys may be fed as an act of making merit while within the confines of the temple the same animals may be shot with impunity, and consumed as food depending on the socioeconomic level of the villagers involved, if they are discovered raiding adjacent crops. Hunting primates is not a means of subsistence for local ethnic Thais, however.

There are more than 551,000 hill folk, highlanders who practice shifting cultivation and may be differentiated racially and culturally from lowland Thais, in north and northwestern Thailand (Bhrukasari, 1989; McKinnon and Vienne, 1989). They comprise only approximately 1% of Thailand’s national population. Ten of Thailand’s 13 primate species, including all five macaque species and the lar gibbon, also are found in the region, however (Eudey, 1987). Neither the Karen, the most numerous group, nor the Hmong, the second most numerous, appear to have proscriptions against hunting macaques. Although the Hmong may hunt gibbons with impunity, traditional (animistic) Karen are forbidden from hunting gibbons, but this taboo appears to break down upon conversion to Christianity (R. Mann, pers. comm., 1993). An increase in hunting pressure on the endemic pig-tailed snub-nosed monkey (Simias concolor) in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia, has also occurred following conversion of the indigenous people to Christianity (Teenza, 1989). The importance of primates or other wild animals in the diets of Karen and Hmong has not been determined.

The relationship of ethnic Thais to other animals may be influenced by the popular Thai Buddhist conception of karma, which as a general concept in Hinduism and Buddhism may be considered to be the sum and the consequences of one’s actions during the successive phases of existence that determine individual destiny. The claim is difficult to substantiate in this context, but many Thais appear to believe that other animals deserve the treatment that they receive, including indifference, abuse, and even callous exploitation, because their incarnation is inferior to that of humans (1). As an example, a young social worker, a graduate of Chulalongkorn University, the most prestigious university in Thailand, assigned to the rural province of Uthai Thani told me in complete candor that while sport hunting her father had shot a female gibbon and brought home a clinging male infant who was incorporated into the human family almost as if he were a faithful servant or younger brother. Likewise, it is safe to assume that the Thais who treat captive gibbons as surrogate offspring — reports of the sucking of

(1) This idea was raised by a former US Peace corps volunteer and acknowledged by a Thai scholar on Buddhist scriptures at a meeting of the Siam Society in Bangkok in April 1986.
ried out in conjunction with field officers. The mandatory registration ke it possible to undertake a more the primate owners. The results of such a campaign to educate the public to wildlife, which I consider to be an re new wildlife law.

The intrinsic character of macaques or other species of location, because of its wild animals may be influenced by the determination. Neither the orangutan, the second most numerous, macaques. Although the Hmong may still be living in the confines of the temple the d monocons can be consumed as food depending on the lived, if they are discovered raiding means of subsistence for local ethnic groups, highlanders who practice shifting kuma, which as a general concept in Thailand, a majority, 30% of Thailand’s national population. Among the five macaque species and the however (Edey, 1987). Neither the Hmong, the second most numerous, macaques. Although the Hmong may be considered (Karen) are forbidden from to break down upon conversion to the preservation of the indigenous people e of primates or other wild animals in their area.

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In this instance, such advocacy is even more indefensible from an ethical standpoint since it may result in gibbons being brought into captivity. How would officially-sanctioned killing deter that of poachers? In Thailand, the apparent willingness of owners to register their wild animals, when the option exists of turning them over without penalty to the Royal Forest Department, suggests a moral commitment to these animals.

Private rescue centers (and individuals) offer acute care and permanent shelter for a small number of primates in Thailand. The two best known are in Bangkok: the Chuma Primate Rescue Centre, operated by M. Himathongkom, and the Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand (WAR), operated by L. and P. Vejjajiva. Initially the philosophy and operations of the two facilities differed. The Chuma Centre accepts young primates and is committed to lifetime care; therefore, the number of primates that can be accommodated at the facility is limited. WAR’s activities are complimentary in that older primates (and some other mammals) are accepted but with the intention of rehabilitation or temporarily placing them at other locations. The two centers may be converging in seeking permanent placement for primates elsewhere, however. Meanwhile, a gibbon rehabilitation project using semi-natural enclosures has been initiated on Phuket island in southern Thailand under the direction of T.D. Morin.

UNWANTED PRIMATES

Euthanasia has been suggested as a solution to the problem posed by the number of "unwanted" gibbons, or former pets, in Thailand. The rationale behind this suggestion is that the care of individual animals may divert financial (and other) resources from efforts to conserve taxa in the wild. Species are valued over their individual members. A similar position is subscribed to by Bennett (1992) in respect to Mueller’s gibbon (Hylobates muelleri) in Sarawak, Malaysia. This kind of economic argument has its analogue in the zoo world in those situations in which captive breeding programs result in "unneeded" animals for which euthanasia is proposed, thereby sacrificing the individual to save the species (and more common taxa to save rare taxa). As elucidated by Lindburg and Lindburg (in prep.), such advocacy strains the credibility of zoo personnel (or field project officers) as "conservators of wildlife." Advocating, at one and the same time, the saving and taking of animal lives is likely to be, at best, a confused message.

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The possibility of rehabilitation and reintroduction of gibbons to the wild requires careful scrutiny as a solution to the problem posed by large numbers of unwanted gibbons in captivity. At the request of the Royal Forest Department, the Captive Breeding Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission is organizing a Thai Gibbon Population and Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) Workshop to be held in Thailand in April 1994 to develop management strategies for wild and captive gibbon populations. One goal of the workshop will be the development of rehabilitation and reintroduction protocols for returning captive gibbons to appropriate habitats.

**REHABILITATION AND REINTRODUCTION**

Two projects in Thailand suggest that rehabilitation and reintroduction are feasible for lar gibbons. Between 1967 and 1970, a free-ranging colony of 20 lar gibbons, never exceeding 14 at any one time, was established on the island (koh) of Klet Kac near Sattahip in the Gulf of Siam as an experiment to breed animals for biomedical research (Berkson et al., 1971; Brockelman et al., 1973, 1974). The project was undertaken by a facility of the US Walter Reed Hospital in Bangkok, formerly known as the SEATO Medical Research Laboratory and subsequently designated the Armed Forces Research Institute for Military Science (AFRIMS), in collaboration with the Delta Regional Primate Center, USA. The program was considered to be too expensive and limited from the standpoint of captive breeding (Berkson et al., 1971), but, from the standpoint of rehabilitation, it was considered to be a success in that four stable groups resulted, each of which produced an offspring.

Subsequently, in 1976, AFRIMS discontinued the use of gibbons in research and released 31 lar gibbons into natural forest habitat at Saiyok, Kanchanaburi (Tingpalapong et al., 1981). A major shortcoming of the project was the failure to followup more systematically the fate of the gibbons. However, Marshall (1992), in a recently published letter, has drawn attention to the following factors as indicating the apparent success of the release: 1) all members of the first two pairs released in the hottest, driest time of year (February 1976), while forest fires raged, survived into the next rainy season; 2) the released gibbons were able to survive in an inhospitable environment of limestone crags and deciduous forest, supporting a thin wild population, and with no surface water during the dry season; 3) some released gibbons joined wild gibbon pairs; 4) at least one released gibbon is known to have survived for 8112 months. Observations made by Marshall (1992) during 15-17 March 1976 on the initial release, and which were not included in the 1981 published report, further substantiate his contention. He observed released gibbons eating wild fruits, buds, and leaves, obtaining rainwater by sweeping it off wet leaves into the mouth by hand, and horizontal branch walking at high elevations, leading him to conclude that «gibbons have instincts governing social relations, climbing, eating, and finding water, and they do not need to be trained for release into the wild» (emphasis added).

Although there may be a large population and other primates, macaques and the keeping of young macaques in Thailand has led to the depletion of primates and the creation of uncontrolled numbers of unwanted animals to deal with the numbers of animals appear to be ethically indefensible (emphasis added). A recent attempt to demand a new consciencemindedness towards primates taken in Thailand suggest that rehabilitation and conservation education campaigns through the Gibbon PHVA Workshop propose strategies for wild populations in conjunction with the two together to make possible the future expansion of rehabilitation and reintroduction programs to wild populations.

En Thailande, pays de réserves naturelles, les gibbons, isolés de Macaca fascicularis que la population humaine ravage les champs de riz en zones rurales et urbaines. Le gibbon est un primate de compagnie préféré des thai qui, de plus, détruit la production de riz. Pour faire face à ce problème, la Coupe de Protection a été mise en place dans toutes les provinces, permettant la reproduction des gibbons, qui sont considérés comme un animal essentiel pour la protection de la nature. Ces programmes de conservation ont permis de limiter la destruction des animaux sauvages et de protéger la biodiversité de l’île. Ce problème a été souligné par les experts de la Commission IUCN, qui ont recommandé des stratégies de conservation pour les populations sauvages et captives, ainsi que des programmes de réhabilitation et de réintroduction de gibbons à l’état sauvage.

Mots-clés : Macaques, Macaca fascicularis, commerce de faune, réhabilitation, conservation, gibbons, Thaïlande.
INTRODUCTION

Rehabilitation and reintroduction are not new concepts. A free-ranging colony of 20 lar gibbons was established on the island (koh) as an experiment to breed animals (Brockelman et al., 1973, 1974). The US Walter Reed Hospital in Medical Research Laboratory and Institute for Military Science Regional Primate Center, USA, had limited success from the standpoint of rehabilitation, while forest fires raged, based gibbons were able to survive in water during the dry season (1); trees; 4) at least one released gibbon survived the fires; 5) at least one released gibbon was seen flying near the released colony; 6) at least one released gibbon was observed feeding on fruit; 7) at least one released gibbon was observed社会 behavior). Observations made by Marshall (1976), while forest fires raged, showed that « gibbons have instincts of finding water, and they do not need the use of gibbons in research at habitat at Saiyok, Kanchanaburi, Thailand, is studying the ecology of wild gibbons.» The goal of the workshop will be the development of management strategies for wild populations and captive breeding populations as well as linking the two together to make possible the return of captive gibbons to the wild.

CONCLUSION

Although there may be a long history of association between the human population and other primates in Thailand such as the provisioning of temple macaques and the keeping of young gibbons as pets, the rapid loss of forest cover in Thailand has led to the depletion of wild populations of gibbons and other primates and the creation of unwanted pets. Current rescue efforts are inadequate to deal with the numbers of animals involved, and the option of euthanasia would appear to be ethically indefensible from a conservation perspective. The situation appears to demand a new conservation strategy. Two projects previously undertaken in Thailand suggest that rehabilitation and reintroduction may be feasible for lar gibbons; therefore, one component of a conservation strategy might be a national gibbon rehabilitation program undertaken in conjunction with a major conservation education campaign (see Eudey, in prep.). The upcoming Thai Gibbon PHVA Workshop proposes to address the development of management strategies for wild populations and captive breeding populations as well as linking the two together to make possible the return of captive gibbons to the wild.

RÉSUMÉ

En Thailande, pays de religion bouddhiste prédominante, des populations isolées de Macaca fascicularis vivent dans les temples aussi bien en zone urbaine que rurale. Ils sont nourris par les offrandes mais sont régulièrement abattus quand ils ravagent les champs de riz ou de maïs adjacents. Les macaques et les gibbons, et spécialement le lar (Hylobates lar) sont prisés comme animaux de compagnie en zones rurales et urbaines. Les gibbons sont même considérés comme « l'animal de compagnie préféré des thaï ». Le nombre de primates mis en vente a rapidement crû à mesure que la coupe légale ou illégale des forêts a réduit la surface forestière à seulement 12 % du territoire, isolant les populations de primates et les rendant plus vulnérables. Un article de la loi thai autorise la possession de 2 primates, ou autres animaux sauvages de la même espèce, par habitant — « un couple permettant la reproduction » — bien que la capture et la vente soient interdites. Cette modification légale a causé l'abandon de nombreux animaux aux agences gouvernementales et aux temples. Des centres de sauvetage privés offrent les soins et le refuge à une partie de ces primates mais ne peuvent prendre en charge la totalité des animaux. Les études pilotes de réhabilitation et de réintroduction proposent une alternative pour une partie des gibbons captifs.

Mots-clés : Macaques, Macaca fascicularis, gibbons, Hylobates lar, Thaïlande, commerce de faune, réhabilitation, réintroduction.

REFERENCES


FOOD COMPANION (CERCOPITHECUS ALEXANDRI) IN BARBADOS: II

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Vervets have been crop pests in Barbados for a number of years, a fact that consists of cultivated land (primary forest) and the secondary or gullies. Conflict between people and animals is a common issue in Barbados. To investigate what factors influence the nutritional composition of crops eaten, we conducted a survey in 1990. We found that the nutritional content of crops eaten by vervets did not predict predation success on crops by vervets. We also found that farmers can use to minimize crop damage by vervets in Barbados. To investigate what factors influence the nutritional composition of crops eaten by vervets, we conducted a survey in 1990. We found that the nutritional content of crops eaten by vervets did not predict predation success on crops by vervets. We also found that farmers can use to minimize crop damage by vervets in Barbados.

Key words: Vervet, Cercopithecoidea, Crop damage, Nutritional content.

Commensalism is generally defined as one party benefits and the other party is unharmed. This definition is often used to describe the relationship between non-human animals and humans, but it is perhaps less applicable in the case of vervets and Barbados. Vervets and their food sources are not the same. Vervets are found in forests and clearings, where they feed on a variety of fruits and leaves. In contrast, the agricultural land in Barbados is primarily used for growing sugarcane and other crops.

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