

# Public perceptions of monkeys affected by the media

February 25 2015

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The way that monkeys are displayed in the media, such as in human settings and in contact with humans, can have serious effects on the way that the public perceives those species, according to a new study that publishes on Feb. 25, in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*.

Previous research had demonstrated that the use of [chimpanzees](#) as performers in media such as television, movies and advertising, negatively affects [public attitudes](#) and the likelihood that someone might seek them as a pet. The degree to which these effects generalized beyond chimpanzees to other primate species was unknown until the current study, co-authored by Steve Ross, PhD of the Lester Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago.

The results suggest that the manner in which monkeys are displayed in media, can greatly influence how people perceive their suitability as pets as well their emotional state. Showing images of monkeys displayed in human settings, such as in a business office, significantly increased their desirability as a pet, which also correlated with increased likelihood of perceiving the animal as not being endangered in the wild.

"People felt very differently about monkeys depending on the context of the images," explained Ross. "Seeing monkeys around humans and in human settings changed the perception of these species from [wild animals](#) that might need our conservation help, to those that might be suitable as a household pet. It's a stark contrast in how these animals are characterized by the public."

The study utilized visitor surveys that included a series of digitally altered photographs that showed three different [primate species](#) in different contexts and with varying degrees of human presence. By comparing how people characterized monkeys in pictures that showed them in human settings to those in more naturalistic contexts, the investigators were able to determine the influence of the different situations.

The use of monkeys as privately owned pets and as trained performers for movies, television and advertisements has been common practice for decades. These practices have been opposed on animal welfare grounds but these are among the first data to demonstrate the degree to which media portrayals might influence the private pet trade in these species, many of which are endangered in the wild.

"After our study of chimpanzee media portrayals, it was important to understand the degree to which these effects could be extended to other species as well," said Ross. "Unfortunately there are many more monkeys kept as pets around the world, and these data indicate that the manner in which monkeys are shown in the media is at least one of the factors driving those practices."

Like chimpanzee "actors", monkeys trained for the entertainment business often live difficult lives. Monkeys are often removed from their mother at a very young age, their teeth removed for handling, and housed individually away from others of their kind.

"All primates, including [monkeys](#) and apes, are cognitively and emotionally complex," he said. "We have a responsibility to ensure these animals are responsibly managed and importantly, that their wild populations are protected for future generations."

Provided by Lincoln Park Zoo

Citation: Public perceptions of monkeys affected by the media (2015, February 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-perceptions-monkeys-affected-media.html>

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