

Cute monkeys perceived as safer, but in reality dominant animals get closer to humans

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People say they are more willing to approach cute-looking monkeys in the wild, but in reality end up getting closer to dominant monkeys they

believe could pose more risk, according to new research.

Researchers at the University of Lincoln, UK, showed a sample of people photos of wild Barbary macaques—a primate which commonly mingles with tourists in Gibraltar and North Africa—and asked them to assess their faces according to a variety of traits including dominance, trustworthiness, cuteness and socialness.

The study participants were also asked how close they would be willing to get to the monkey to feed it or take a photo.

Results showed that people said they were more willing to approach, feed or take photos with macaques that they perceived to be trustworthy, subordinate, cute, social, young, or female. This suggests that they perceive these social traits as safer to approach.

Dominant primates were perceived to pose higher threat than subordinate primates and therefore were deemed to be less approachable. But despite their stated preferences, in field observations people ended up getting closer to more dominant macaques.

Dr. Laëtitia Maréchal, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Lincoln, said: "Despite forming these first impressions based on faces, in reality the interactions we observe don't follow what people say. When people [feed](#) wildlife they are more likely to end up close to dominant animals; the ones people claimed to be less willing to approach due to being perceived as less safe.

"It is important to study wildlife interactions to improve the safety and welfare of both humans and the [animals](#) involved. This is an important step towards understanding how to better communicate with other species. This has great positive implications for human safety and animal welfare."

The research, published in the [academic journal](#) *Scientific Reports*, featured observations of real-life human and [macaque](#) interactions taken at a popular tourist site in Morocco, as well as the image-based tests.

More information: Laura Clark et al, The importance of first impression judgements in interspecies interactions, *Scientific Reports* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-020-58867-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-58867-x)

Provided by University of Lincoln

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