

When Macaques Become Family

Ethical and Scientific Challenges to Animal Law Enforcement

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The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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Abstract:

Macaques, commonly classified as wild animals, are often excluded from consideration as companion animals due to prevailing prejudices and institutional frameworks. However, newly emerging observations reveal that some individuals have formed deep, reciprocal emotional bonds with macaques, integrating them, not merely as pets, but as genuine members of the family. This lifestyle appears to bring greater psychological, intellectual and social fulfillment for the macaques, surpassing the well-being of both their wild and captive counterparts, thus contributing to the emergence of more evolved profiles. These cases challenge among others, the dominant long-standing paradigm that macaques “cannot be pets” or “belong only in the wild” rooted in earlier observations of captive macaques suffering neglect and psychological distress, observations which have shaped current legal and ethical assumptions. They highlight a quiet revolution in human-macaque relationships, rooted in mutual understanding, enrichment and fulfillment, deep emotional reciprocity, and argue for distinguishing macaques integrated into families from the conventional notion of “captivity” which fails to reflect their lived experience.

Despite growing evidence of healthy, enriched, and mutually fulfilling human-primate relationships, many regulatory bodies, continue to operate under conventional non-inclusive convictions, instead of exhibiting scientific curiosity and ethical reflection. As a result, they would intervene in the name of the law to confiscate well-cared-for macaques, sometimes selectively and without conducting any behavioral or welfare assessments, disrupting their lives, causing trauma, withdrawal, and even fatal outcomes, to which authorities nonetheless remain indifferent and unaccountable.

This paper examines the ethical and scientific shortcomings of rigid legal applications and critiques how institutional bias and the unchecked enforcement, particularly through the story of monkeys

Kaka, Mit and Puka, can become a mechanism of harm in the name of conservation and the law, no longer serving an intent to protect, but to punish, deriving the law from its original purpose. This is especially problematic when authority is delegated to NGOs or agencies driven by personal or political agendas rather than genuine concern for animal welfare.

This review challenges assumptions, urges case-by-case welfare assessments prioritizing bonds and quality of life over rigid legal classification, thus advocates for policy reform that incorporates behavioral indicators into legal processes, highlighting the need to distinguish between fulfillment and distress, as confiscation affects abused and emotionally-bonded macaques differently. It calls for making ethics a legal duty to protect animals from being victimized by punitive practices, It also encourages transparency and recognizes that some human-primate relationships are profoundly beneficial.

Keywords: Human-animal emotional bond; Behavioral Fulfillment Spectrum in Macaques integrated as members of a human family vs captive macaques vs wild macaques; Philosophy of Biology; Wildlife conservation ethics, Law enforcement policies and misuse in animal welfare and rights; Philosophy of Law; Animal Ethics and Law; Animals and Public Policy; Wildlife Crime: Theory vs. Reality; Domestic and wild labels redefined; Kaka Mit Puka.

1. Introduction:

The relationship between humans and non-human primates has long fascinated scientists, ethicists, and the public alike. Among these primates, macaques (*genus Macaca*) stand out for their remarkable intelligence, emotional complexity, and adaptability to human environments. Macaques represent one of the most widespread and behaviorally diverse primate genera, comprising 23 recognized species distributed across South, Southeast, and East Asia, as well as parts of North Africa (1). Macaques are tribal and territorial animals with social structures involving complex dominance hierarchies, matrilineal groups, and intricate affiliative behaviors (2).

While macaques have been primarily studied in the context of wildlife biology and medical research, cases of harmonious human-macaque relationships remain poorly documented. Despite their widespread presence in both wild tropical forests and **urban landscapes sharing common spaces with humans** across Asia and parts of North Africa (1) (2), macaques are often misunderstood, particularly in the context of private ownership and human-primate companionship. The dominant narrative promoted by wildlife authorities and some conservation groups, frames macaques solely as wild animals, unfit for domestic life (3) (4) (5), often ignoring compelling evidence of their ability to thrive and form deep, reciprocal bonds with humans under appropriate conditions (6).

Convenient and compassionate owners of macaques remain rare, which may explain why science has historically overlooked or failed to document harmonious human-macaque relationship as family members. Even among experts, the classification of macaques as inherently wild stems from limited exposure to the full spectrum of their behaviors, particularly

when they are raised in enriched, emotionally supportive environments as true integral family members, not merely pets. The traditional misbelief that "macaques are not pets" pushed by NGOs and experts, is also a reflection of human misunderstanding of these evolved complex animals and of their specific human-macaque relationship needs for thriving as a family member within a domestic household. While some individuals adopt monkeys with cruel intentions, seeking to abuse them, the majority of owners adopt monkeys for selfish reasons, primarily to enjoy their cuteness while interacting with them, but they are ignorant about the requirements needed in terms of relating with them, in order to raise fulfilled macaques. These owners often confine the animals to enclosures or cages, much like pet birds, devoting only brief moments of their day to interaction. This only harms the macaque, often rendering him less smart and less fulfilled than their counterparts in the wild. Soon, these ill-informed owners, having failed to establish a genuine mutual bond with their pet macaques, realize the burden of care, and as the monkeys begin to show signs of distress or even aggression from frustration, they are often neglected, die prematurely, or are released into the wild unprepared and vulnerable. These abandoned monkeys typically do not survive long, as they are ill-equipped to face the natural threats of the wild.

However, the existence of negligent or uninformed owners should not overshadow a smaller yet significant group of individuals who have successfully established deep, meaningful bonds with their monkeys. These exceptional owners do not treat the animals as decorative pets or fleeting sources of entertainment but as true members of their family. They share daily life with them, engaging in joint activities, outings, and emotional experiences. These relationships are based on mutual respect, time investment, and most importantly, companionship, happily sharing

together responsibilities, joys, food (they sit together at the table as one family) and mutual care at all times.

The results are remarkable: such monkeys exhibit high levels of fulfillment and display cognitive and emotional development approaching that of humans. Their intelligence surpasses by far that of wild macaques, appearing “too good to be true”. But they are true, so much so that a prejudiced mind, even NGOs would blindly accuse them of “forced to perform”. Moreover, these fulfilled macaques demonstrate strong affection toward their human families, whom they perceive as their tribe, and toward their shared life. They also show protective behaviors towards their human family, their home, their items, their belongings, typical of wild animals defending their group and territory.

Importantly, these monkeys do not display the aggression often associated with captivity, because they do not feel captive or frustrated. Though living within a human context, they experience a sense of freedom and belonging. For this reason, this review distinguishes between macaques kept in cages and those living as integrated family members. Scientific literature has generally applied the term “captive” to any monkey under human care, failing to account for these nuanced cases. It is crucial to recognize this distinction, macaques living as family members, beyond pets, should not be put into the same umbrella “captivity” as the other domestic monkeys kept as pets, as the psychological outcomes for the animals are fundamentally opposite.

Applying laws designed to protect conventionally captive macaques, typically confined and deprived, to these fulfilled, family-integrated macaques does not benefit them. On the contrary, such measures risk causing harm and victimization to individuals who are, in fact, thriving.

Therefore, contrary to public beliefs, the lack of empirical studies in this area does not reflect the impossibility of such bonds, but rather highlights how only recently humans have begun to understand and meet the psychological and emotional needs of macaques, enabling them to coexist as beloved companions and integrated family members.

Drawing from both scientific literature and documented cases, most notably the case of two macaques, Kaka and Mit, this review challenges prevailing assumptions by exploring the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional capacities of macaques, providing evidence that supports not only their potential as family members under appropriate ownership, but also their anthropological cognitive evolution. It also critically examines the legal and ethical frameworks surrounding macaque ownership and highlights the emotional and physical toll of forced separation when bonded individuals are confiscated under blanket legal interpretations that do not distinguish between abuse and companionship, nor between fulfilled and unfulfilled. It therefore exposes the consequences of misapplied animal welfare policies, where the rhetoric of "protection" or "rescue" in these rare cases of thriving bonded animals, becomes a mechanism of harm and crime.

By bringing together ethological studies, legal discourse, and firsthand behavioral insights, this article invites a reevaluation of current practices and offers a more nuanced approach to human-primate relationships, one rooted in science, empathy, and ethical responsibility.

2. Materials and Methods:

This review synthesizes interdisciplinary research and firsthand documentation on Interspecies relationships, particularly human-animal bonds, animal welfare laws, law enforcement and outcomes, policies, behavioral plasticity and emotional adaptation in domestic labeled-wild animals, with a focus on pig-tail and stump-tail macaques raised within human households in Vietnam. Sources include peer-reviewed scientific literature, legal frameworks, international guidelines on wildlife ownership, and public case studies, particularly involving the individuals Kaka, Mit, Puka and Rafus.

Relevant studies were identified through structured keyword searches in databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, using terms including “macaque cognition,” “human–primate bond,” “emotional behavior in primates,” “semi-domesticated wildlife,” and “wildlife law enforcement.” Additionally, publicly available video records, owner interviews, and documented legal interventions were analyzed qualitatively to extract behavioral patterns and assess emotional indicators in real-life human-primate interactions.

This review does not involve experimental procedures but draws from field-relevant observations and documented interactions to highlight gaps between scientific understanding, legal enforcement, and animal welfare considerations.

3. Biological and Behavioral Overview of Macaques:

In the wild, macaques typically live between 20 and 30 years, with longevity depending on species, environmental stressors, and human interference (7). Their cognitive capabilities are

notable among non-human primates: they demonstrate advanced problem-solving, tool use, social learning, and memory retention (8)(9)(10)(11).

Genetically, macaques share approximately 93–95% of their DNA with humans (12), which underlies many of the behavioral and neurological parallels observed between the two species.

Body language further complements these expressions. Emotional expression in macaques, including fear, joy, grief, and even empathy, is often conveyed through nuanced facial expressions, vocalizations, and body postures (13,14). In the wild, macaques engage in behaviors that reflect both survival instincts and emotional intelligence: hugging (15), grooming to reinforce social bonds, vocal "coo" alarms, or screams in response to threats (16), territorial displays, maternal care, and collaborative defense (17) (14) (18).

For survival, they display competitive and self-serving behaviors, particularly around food, which is rarely shared. However, pet macaques raised as family members by responsible owners are typically free from survival-related stress and can be awakened through their conscious and nurturing upbringing, to the satisfaction that emanates from sharing, thereby adding more value into developing prosocial behaviors. For instance, monkeys like Yiyi and Yoyo have been observed offering food to less privileged monkeys. Monkey Kaka does not compete for food with her adopted sister Mit (19). Notably, Yoyo, the elder, refrains from eating until he has first, distributed to Yiyi and his other companion pets, their portions (20) (21). While grooming behavior appears consistent across both wild and companion macaques, the emergence of sharing in the latter suggests the potential for nurtured prosocial tendencies in enriched environments.

Moreover, Wild monkeys often exhibit heightened survival instincts, such as snatching food or

grabbing the maximum food possible either with their hands or filling their pouches, and fleeing immediately, even when food is offered freely and/or massively, reflecting persistent environmental stress and insecurity (22). In contrast, pet or human-socialized monkeys typically feel secure in their environment, often eating calmly in place, a behavior associated with reduced anxiety and perceived safety (23) (24) (25). These differences highlight the impact of social environment on primate behavior and stress responses.

With the recent emergence of cases of happy macaques thriving as members of a human family, interpreting emotional expression in macaques requires now careful attention to context, as many behaviors can carry multiple meanings depending on the emotional and social context. For instance, **mouth-chattering**, a rapid jaw movement, may signify **positive excitement** (26), **social engagement** akin to a human smile or laughter (26). **and responsiveness** to a beloved human (27,28) or non-human companion. It frequently comes with grooming to share **affection, friendliness, gratitude, care, and love** (29,30). However, in other contexts, it can equally express seeking attention (31), **objection** (32) or **fear** (33) or **submission**, especially when directed toward a dominant or unfamiliar individual (26).

The accompanying facial expression and body posture help distinguish the difference: in positive contexts such as offering of a desired experience or meeting a beloved individual after a long time, the macaque tends to approach, hug and engage with the individual such as monkey Lala behaved when she met the person who treated and raised her for months, or monkey Bibi who is always overjoyed to travel by car with his owner (34,35), while in negative contexts, the body may freeze or retreat.

Eye closure in macaques can occur either as a response to feelings of safety and emotional

contentment, such as when being gently held by a familiar caregiver or family member (34) as though to savor each and every moment in the arms of their owner, or as a protective reaction during distressing or abusive situations, to avoid visual exposure to expected threats (36).

Disengaging from eye contact can signal appeasement and avoid escalating confrontations (36). It works as a protective mechanism that reduces arousal and helps prevent potential aggression from dominant individuals (36).

Similarly, **crouching low** to the ground, with the tail between the legs, avoiding direct eye contact, and displaying a tense, grimacing facial expression with tightly folded limbs and saccadic cries, is traditionally interpreted **as a signal of fear or powerlessness**, a common response when facing a threatening conspecific, predator, or abusive human (37). Yet, when performed less nervously towards a person they love, or more deliberately, similar postures may serve as a **solicitation function**, where the macaque seeks **comfort, pity, or social support** from this person, expressing a desire for comfort or to be rescued from an undesirable situation (38) (39). This was observed in the case of monkey Kaka, member of a human family, who, after being confiscated and forced to live away from her human family, would crouch low before her owner during visits, expressing her sadness about her life in exile, and her desire to be picked up, consoled and reunited (40,41).

A "**fear grimace**," characterized by pulled-back lips revealing the teeth (similar to a human grimace) (42), is, depending on the context, a common display of either fear or submission in many macaque species, particularly *Macaca mulatta* (rhesus macaques) (26). In contrast, relaxed open-mouth expressions, often accompanied by eye contact, are associated with **playfulness and joy** (43).

During moments of **grief** or sadness, such as after the loss of an offspring, macaques have been observed to adopt a slumped body posture, reduced facial expressiveness, and overall social withdrawal, sometimes carrying deceased infants for extended periods (44). Moreover, in extreme cases of abuse, young macaques often display a **tragic "freezing" behavior**: rather than attempting to flee, they may remain **motionless** with a **frozen fear grimace**, eyes wide, mouth pulled back, despite being physically assaulted, mutilated, beaten, injured, burnt or abused (45). This phenomenon, called **tonic immobility**, a manifestation of **learned helplessness**, has been widely documented in abused primates and reflects a last-resort survival response when escape is perceived as impossible (46). In contrast, a **joyful** macaque may exhibit bouncy, exaggerated movements or "**play bows**," similar to dogs, which Mr. Le Nhu Ngoc, the owner of Macaque Kaka jokingly calls "the hip-hop dance" (47,48).

Both wild and domestic macaques also exhibit signs of **empathy** and **consolation behaviors**, such as grooming distressed groupmates in the wild (49), or comforting abandoned or suffering individuals, and tending to their troop members, or their human family members, depending on the case.

Grooming is frequently performed by domestic monkeys who love their owners. **Grooming** is their way to share **tenderness, love, affection, acceptance and care** to their owner or a family member, or to other familiar pet animals regardless of the species (50), gently touching them (27,51) (52), suggesting an advanced level of emotional intelligence (53). These behaviors underline the profound emotional complexity of macaques, highlighting that their emotional lives are not fundamentally dissimilar from those of humans, especially in socially enriched or fulfilling domestic settings where the monkey is a cherished member of a human family.

Vocalizations also play a major role: short, sharp "alarm calls" are typically used to signal fear or danger to warn either each other in the wild, or their owner, while softer "coo" vocalizations often accompany affiliative, friendly interactions and moments of contentment (54). **Pant-threats**, a sharp exhale while baring teeth, are used to express aggression or displeasure (54).

Such observations stress the necessity of nuanced, empathetic interpretations of macaque emotional expressions, particularly in human interaction contexts like in captivity (farms, laboratories, or under abusive or unfulfilling ownership), versus in harmonious domestic setting where the monkey is a cherished member of the human family, versus in the wild.

Misunderstanding subtle signals can lead to severe welfare oversights. Recognizing these emotional expressions is crucial, particularly when evaluating the well-being of macaques. Their nuanced communication reflects not only immediate emotional states but also longer-term psychological conditions, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of owners or the authorities to either ensure or preserve the emotional fulfillment and security of the macaque in his environment.

4. Indicators of Fulfillment Versus Unfulfillment or Chronic Abuse in Domestic Macaques:

Macaques exhibit a spectrum of behaviors that serve as reliable indicators of their psychological and emotional well-being. Under conditions of deprivation, abuse, or unfulfilling care, macaques often display behavioral abnormalities rarely seen in their wild counterparts. These behaviors progress in tandem with the severity of unfulfillment, deprivation, or abuse (55). On the other hand, macaques integrated as members of a human family such as the famous KaKa and Mit before their confiscation (56,57), Monkey Lyly (58), Bibi and Lala (59), Zim (60), Lily (61),

Cutis (62), Yaya and Shally (63), Yoyo and Yiyi (64), appear to display yet both a different and broader range of behaviors, unobserved in both wild and captive contexts, relevant of a higher level of psychological fulfillment than their wild counterparts.

The **basic indicator of unfulfillment** prevalent in young macaques subjected to isolated or unstimulating environments such as being confined in cages or left alone for extended periods, is **finger-sucking**, one of the self-soothing behaviors. **signaling inner insecurity and disrupted mental development** (65,66). The more the inner insecurity, the longer the finger-sucking. The most insecure macaques suck their thumb all the time, even between one spoon and another during their feeding time. Such macaques appear disconnected, dumb and have no real bonding with their owners and are used merely as toys, either for sadistic pleasure or financial gain exploiting their unconditional cuteness. While such behaviors are rare both in the wild and in enriched, fulfilling domestic environments where macaques are integrated as family members, they may occur in orphaned infants experiencing maternal loss, suggesting parallels between maternal separation and psychological trauma (66).

Monkeys confined to small cages often appear sedentary, apathetic and disoriented, displaying panic when introduced to open spaces or naturalistic settings. They start shouting, lay on their side, refusing to stand, and seek to cling back to their owner. Conversely, those housed in larger enclosures with conspecifics may exhibit heightened agitation, excessive vocalization, or stereotypic pacing, symptoms indicative of internal stress, boredom and lack of psychological safety (65), **reflecting discomfort, unrest and internal turbulence due to the lack of stimulating tasks**. However, fulfilled macaques raised as members of a human family tend to exhibit a calm, intelligent, and socially engaged demeanor. They appear capable of understanding and

integrating with their surroundings, responding from a place of confidence and empathy rather than from fear or instinctual greed.

Other signs of inner irritation and discontent include **excessive scratching** (66) (67) (68), which shows that the monkey isn't comfortable in his own skin. This behavior was observed in **Kaka and Mit** after their confiscation, as their repeated emotional pleas to reunite with their human family were completely ignored by the authorities (69). Excessive self-grooming can also be a sign of deep sadness, becoming an automatic response to distract from intense inner pain (68). This was also observed in monkey Kaka, as her suffering intensified when she realized she was no longer allowed to be held and hugged by her owner during his visits. She perceived it as rejection, unaware that he was no longer even allowed to touch her (70).

Other expressions of sharp anger caused by abuse or by inconsiderate teasing from the owner may include **swirling** (68), or the so-called **floating limb syndrome** (66), a condition where the macaque's arm lifts involuntarily, as if pulled by an invisible force, and the monkey tries to bring it down with the other arm (68).

Self-biting is also common (66,68) especially biting the arms when the monkey is instantly angered or provoked. In cases of provoked jealousy, such as when an owner feeds or holds one monkey while deliberately ignoring another in full view, **aggression may be redirected** toward themselves or each other, as can be seen in captive monkeys being teased (71). Biting is also particularly targeted at the **feet**, which seem to the monkey as if burning or being pierced by hot needles, like an itch that needs to be bitten to be released. This was clearly observed in **baby Klay's** case (72). The biting of the leg was his response to frustration caused by the

difficulty of interacting with others and with his environment as he used to, due to his amputated hand. Frustration builds up into stress and anxiety, and since he cannot express this frustration outwardly, he redirects it inward. The biting becomes a desperate way to externalize what he cannot otherwise express. It is as though his leg is filled with a flow of hot, moving needles that he's trying to silence (73).

Abused pet monkeys under inconsiderate even sadistic ownership, are often **very vocal**, they keep shouting and crying, **which expresses their irritation and frustration** as they are teased, resisted or blackmailed, as demonstrated in monkeys Yuri, Minea and Moly (74,75). On the contrary, fulfilled and content monkeys living as members of a human family tend to be less vocal; even during playful interactions, their vocalizations are typically limited to expressing grateful excitement, usually as when enjoying a favorite food.

In worst cases where abuse and unethical treatment is also present, such as provoked competition for resources (deliberately provoked to jealousy by being forced to share a single milk bottle among multiple individuals, or teased by being given clogged bottles that restrict access to milk), exposure to harmful stimuli (Some have suffered deliberate physical discomfort, such as having ants placed on their genitals to induce frantic scratching. Others have been thrown into ponds without an escape route, causing panic and fear, or intentionally starved as a form of sadism, punishment or control), or physical mistreatment (like being drugged and sexually exploited), the severely neglected or abused macaque reaches a stage where he has no more anything positive to expect from life. Only abuse. Therefore, he displays advanced levels of self-soothing behaviors including **toe or genital sucking**, marking a retreat into dissociative coping mechanisms. These are severe signs of unfulfillment **indicating a withdrawal from any**

desire for environmental engagement, even a complete loss of excitement about food, loss of curiosity, **a desire to exit this life. a state akin to learned helplessness, equivalent of a suicidal behavior in humans** (65,76).

Monkeys kept in cages without stimulation to engage their intelligence often exhibit reduced cognitive alertness compared to their wild counterparts. Their gaze tends to appear vague, unfocused and confused; they lack spatial orientation and show limited ability to interact meaningfully with their environment or other beings. In contrast, monkeys raised as family members by attentive owners—regardless of economic status—who provide rich experiences, regular outings, and diverse human or interspecies interactions in various settings, tend to develop significantly higher intelligence, often surpassing that of wild monkeys. Notable examples include the famous macaques above mentioned : Monkey Lyly (58), Monkeys Bibi and Lala (59), Monkey Zim (60), Monkey Lily (61), Monkey Cutis (62), Monkeys Yaya and Shally (63), Monkeys Yoyo and Yiyi (64) and Monkeys KaKa and Mit (56,57). Interestingly, when Mit was first rescued by KaKa’s family, she displayed no spatial awareness and was entirely sedentary, lethargic, dull, and unresponsive (77) (78–80). Through patient care, affection, and a sense of security provided by her human family, who encouraged her to explore her environment by inviting her to retrieve objects and treats, Mit gradually gained confidence, became engaged, and exhibited marked cognitive improvement over time (79,81) (82,83). Same for monkey Lala who was found as a baby, almost dying, pale, completely sick with a swollen finger (84) and rescued by her owners who magnificently and successfully worked on her healing and rehabilitation with love, affection and proper care. She became happy, skilled, mannered,

interactive, engaged, even autonomous exhibiting all signs of fulfillment (85). Indeed, love heals (86,87).

5. Increased Cognitive Awareness and Self-Regulation in Thriving Macaques as Members of a Human Family:

Interestingly, thriving domestic macaques exhibit heightened interoceptive awareness of their bodily functions, beyond the natural repertoire of the species (88). It is often posited that macaques lack voluntary countenance over defecation and urination (88). However, happy thriving cognitively enriched domestic macaques living as members of a human family, like the celebrity monkeys named above, challenge this assumption (89–91). Contrary to wild, farmed or neglected environmentally-deprived domestic macaques who typically defecate without apparent awareness, the happy fulfilled monkeys have shown an ability to recognize the urge to defecate and even delay the act briefly, demonstrating a heightened ability to contain (89–91), even monkey Lala at a very young age (92). They exhibit anticipatory behaviors, they would go to the restroom, remove their nappies, and use the toilets (93,94). Some, particularly the most intelligent and mannered, can even put their pants back on afterward (93,95). This behavioral sophistication suggests that such somatic awareness in macaques isn't innate, but rather acquired through provocation, environmental stimuli and social learning. Wild, farmed, or unfulfilled domestic macaques, haven't had the opportunity to focus their awareness on their bodies. Their cognitive resources are merely allocated to survival, and environmental scanning, In contrast, macaques living as members of a human family, are exposed to structured enrichment and responsive care. They have the chance to learn, through demonstration and practice, that toilets exist and that using them keeps their nappies clean. They thus develop

metacognitive insights into their bodily processes, including the functional utility of toilets and the hygiene benefits of avoiding soiled garments (96). Such behaviors can be considered as anthropological indicators of an evolution of consciousness in macaques exposed to higher standards of living than the norm (88). Recent neurological research supports that macaques can be trained to control urination and defecation (88), demonstrating voluntary ability to delay reflexive behaviors, thus indicating a level of cognitive control over bodily functions (97). Furthermore, studies have shown that macaques possess cognitive and sensory repertoires resembling those of humans, enabling them to learn complex tasks and exhibit self-awareness (98). This implies that when provided with sufficient cognitive engagement and environmental feedback, macaques can manifest behaviors traditionally regarded as uniquely human, thus contributing to an expanded understanding of nonhuman primate sentience and adaptive learning.

In short, happy, fulfilled, thriving macaques, especially domestic macaques under responsive ownership like the above-mentioned celebrity macaques, members of a human family, can also be identified through bodily and behavioral signs. They appear relaxed, playful, engaged, highly curious, alert, highly intelligent, bonding, grooming, aware even of their body functions and environment, not vocal (no shouting no fussing no crying, only sweet small sounds of content), talented, open to learning new skills and exploring, exhibiting desires. Their skin color is bright and homogenous, reflecting their inner peace and a restful inner space free from abuse, pain, fear and greed and provoked irritations. Such happy pet monkeys may even exceed their wild counterparts in intelligence and awareness when the life they are offered contains more grounds for exploration, discoveries, activities, and sane inter-species interactions.

Therefore, domestic monkeys should not automatically be considered as abused, especially those enjoying their life, not as pets, but as members of a convenient human family that respects their nature and is present to their emotional and physical needs.

There exists a large scope of behavioral indicators for assessing the welfare of monkeys. On the other hand, identifying and understanding these emotional expressions is crucial, particularly when evaluating the well-being of macaques living in captivity (farms, laboratories, unfulfilling deprivational ownership). Their nuanced emotional expression allows for a real-time monitoring of both immediate suffering and long-term psychological health, and places a moral imperative on caregivers to create environments that foster safety, activities and cognitive engagement. Being a domestic monkey is like a double-edged sword: it can either elevate the life quality of a standard macaque or severely degrade it, depending on the sanity of their relationship with their owners and the privileges they are granted.

6. Macaques' Life as Fulfilled Members of a Human Family:

Companion macaques show a wide range of complex emotions and social behaviors similar to those of humans. Due to their heightened intelligence, acquired through frequent exposure to diverse experiences, social interactions, and regular outings, and owing to their genome, which shares over 95% similarity with that of humans, macaques integrated as family members are capable of exhibiting remarkably human-like behavior that cannot be found in neither the wild nor the macaques in enclosures. Given that macaques integrated as family members were not previously documented, these behaviors may at times appear “too good to be true”, leading to prejudiced assumptions that such conduct must be the result of coercive training. Such

assumptions often further imply that training necessarily involves abuse, wherein the animal complies only under threat of punishment, paralleling practices observed in petting zoos with labeled “wild” animals. Such bias would be victimizing when directed toward the fulfilled domestic macaques members of a human family.

However, these assumptions do not stem from empirical studies of fulfilled macaques raised in family environments. Rather, they are extrapolated from research on captive macaques kept in enclosures, individuals who lack the environmental enrichment necessary to develop their cognitive and emotional capacities to the same extent as family-integrated macaques. Many who hold these views are not even aware that such a distinction between captive macaques and macaques raised as family members exists.

They learn rapidly through demonstration and positive encouragement, not through coercive training or abuse, embodying the famous proverb “monkey see monkey do”. As Mr. Ngoc Le Nhu, owner of monkeys Kaka reports “Kaka is very intelligent, you just show her how to do something once, then she can replicate it by herself”.

These macaques also display complex social behaviors: **They are playful and complicit.** Kaka played along with her dad’s jokes, helped him retrieve money, she was seen sneakily creeping across the floor to stealthily grab money from the bed where her human mother was sitting, then cheekily handing it off to her dad in such a complicity (99).

They are so **loyal, helpful, cooperative and benevolent in taking responsibilities and helping with daily tasks. They are protective and caring.** For instance, Bibi assists his father in collecting fish, snails (100) and clams (101); and in setting a pool (102); Similarly, Lyly, voluntarily helps by

pulling the water pipe to fill the pool (103), wiping the table after meals (104,105) and cleaning the floor (106), sign of a positive engagement, understanding, integration and ability to connect with family life. Kaka once faithfully guarded a plate of fruit she was asked to protect by her human father (107). She also guarded her home from someone she thought was an intruder and stood in the way of a stranger to prevent him from approaching Mit (31). Similarly, Cutis chased a perceived thief to protect his house (108). Another monkey protected his sibling from a perceived dog attack (109); Monkey Bibi protected his rescue dog from a perceived threat from other dogs (110), signaling their love and care for their home and family.

Monkey Lily considers and tries various methods to prevent the ceiling leak from wetting her bed, until she discovered an effective solution (111); Monkey Lyly climbed into the house through the window to bring the keys that her human mother had forgotten inside (112), a testament to their advanced cognitive abilities and capacity to integrate complex information.

Observing her mother cleaning the floor, Lyly benevolently attempted to assist by gently swiping the floor herself (113); Monkey Kaka felt pity for monkey Mit upon noticing that Mit was not clothed, so she went to her closet, retrieved one of her dresses and offered it to Mit to wear (114), exhibiting a behavior suggestive of **empathetic response and prosocial action**.

In times of need, these macaques demonstrate an **acute awareness and understanding when a family member is ill or laboring, responding with notable compassion**, bringing items like cold pads or thermometers (115,116). They remain close to the affected family member and **actively seek ways to provide comfort and care**, aiming to alleviate their family member's suffering and promote recovery. For instance, Lily feeling sorry for her father's arm injury (117) bringing the medicine bag and water for him (116,118), preparing his breakfast (117), applying the cold

patch on his forehead, tenderly covering him, and staying by his side when he is sick (119–122), same for monkey Lyly sticking by her mother's side as she is suffering (123,124). Lyly shielding her mother from excessive heat (125), and Kaka expressing visible compassion in response to her mother's broken leg (126) and to Mit's (127). Kaka felt concerned when she perceived Mit fell sick, and sat by her side, and helped her (128,129); Yiyi took the initiative to go buy a treat for a disabled monkey whom her human father had rescued and offered him a banana (130); Kaka attempted to change Mit's diaper when she perceived that Mit had pooped (131); Bibi even stopped during a walk as he spotted a trapped dog to ensure his owner rescued him (132). Bibi takes care of his rescue dog, feeding him, grooming him, nursing him and guiding him to safety (133,134), indicating sophisticated, human-like capacities for attendance and protection. Zim panicked when she saw her brother not moving and tried to awaken him (135,136), she tries to prevent her mother from disturbing her brother while he sleeps (137); while Lyly brought a blanket to warm her cold mother and snuggled close to comfort her (138). Noticing it was raining, Bibi brought a hat to shade his father while he was gardening (139). They grieve, too. Bibi refuses to eat when he is worried about his father's health (140). Lily refused to enjoy eating without her father, who was unusually late returning; she waited impatiently, then rushed to open the gate and warmly welcomed him upon his arrival (141); Bibi refused to enjoy eating without offering food to his sick dad (140). Yiyi isolated herself after witnessing the burial of her pet piglet companion and stopped eating (142,143). **Their actions reflect a reciprocal expression of the love and support they themselves have been receiving during moments of vulnerability, as well as a deep, sincere attachment to their inter-species relationship, one grounded in a family context, an ecosystem in which they thrive and flourish. This bond is so**

meaningful to them that the fear of losing any part of it has led to visible emotional distress, such as a loss of appetite. Therefore, any attempt to separate emotionally bonded domestic animals from the family ecosystem in which they have been thriving long enough to accumulate meaningful memories and experience love, would constitute a significant form of cruelty.

They **enjoy being loved, cherished, and valued by their human family**, and they **reciprocate this affection. They feel gratitude and emotional loyalty**. Cutis, raised by two different owners, was torn between them (144). Like Lyly and Zim, they enjoy eating with their family (145), they are always grateful as they are savoring the delicious food they are given, they express with sounds of content (146), sometimes with lip chattering and gentle flirting to the human mother's face as they are eating, showing affection (147) (148) (149), all indicators of a well-balanced ecosystem conducive for genuine contentment, active engagement, and emotional warmth. They demonstrate **strong emotional bonds with their human siblings**: Kaka would greet her sister coming home from school with a hug; Sokyaa embraces his young human siblings with complicity (150); Shally sits comfortably beside her human sister (151); and the adult monkey Bella continues to find pleasure in grooming the hair of her father figure (152); Yaya affectionately cuddles her family members (153,154) and makes small joyful jumps (154). **At times expressing happiness through acquired behaviors**, like monkey Yaya clapping along as she shares in the joyful atmosphere created by her human mother's singing, indicating a **vivid engagement in the group's emotional state** (155); They enjoy staying close to their caregivers, even during routine activities (156). For instance, Kaka prefers to remain beside her human father while he cooks (157). Similarly, Bibi, a curious and food-loving macaque, attentively and

enthusiastically observes the preparation of his meals as his caregiver cooks (158) (159) (160) (161) (162) (163). On other occasions, Bibi attempts to replicate the steps to prepare the dish himself in the absence of his human parent (164) (165) (166). These scenes highlight their genuine curiosity, their **focused interest in paying attention, willingness to participate and help, demonstrating their excitement and engagement in everyday family life. Such behaviors reflect joy, excitement, and a clear motivation to live.**

They seek attention in clever ways, sometimes pretending to be sick or injured to get extra care. Kaka, Lyly, and Bibi have faked having a sore leg or arm, deliberately lifting their leg to draw attention and induce their human parent to care for them (167–169); Kaka pretended to have hurt her hand to seek her mother’s attention (170); Lyly sulks and calls her mother in an endearing way when she needs interaction or care (171); Similarly, at the very moment his human caregiver approached, Monkey Bibi endearingly feigned illness to receive attention and care (172); Likewise, monkey Shally acts cutely to elicit nurturing responses from her caregiver (173). Such behavior demonstrates their **high intelligence and their ability to manipulate others into fulfilling their desires.**

On the other hand, like human children, they are capable of expressing objection or frustration in response to annoying behavior from a familiar individual, and they respond either physically or through appropriate vocalizations (137,174). **They apologize quickly afterward, to reconcile** (175–177).

They are capable of feeling embarrassment when they make mistakes. For example, when Lyly wakes up her human mother to request a diaper change after defecating, despite being able to use the toilet. Similarly, Lily exhibits signs of shyness after committing an error: upon spilling

powder on the floor, she attempts to sweep it away, and when unable to fix the mess, she hides from her owner (178).

Such macaques integrated as members of a human family **express preferences and desires much like humans**, shaped by their individual experiences and social encounters, desires that their wild counterparts are unlikely to develop due to a lack of exposure to such stimuli or possibilities. For instance, Monkey Bibi exhibits a preference for having breakfast at restaurants; Kaka and Mit enjoy walks in the park; and Monkey Lily getting the idea of going to the supermarket to buy treats (179). Monkey Lyly got the idea to fill the lake with water upon noticing that it had dried up (180).

They **often desire what they know is difficult to obtain, or what they are aware would typically be denied to them, and would still attempt ways to get it, even secretly: unlike wild macaques, who often exhibit impulsive robbery behaviors, macaques raised as family members can display more nuanced and "civilian" forms of mischief**. For example, Lyly waits patiently for her human mother to fall asleep before attempting to sneak a treat, such as a sweet or a can of cola she had previously noticed and desired. Unable to open it, she quietly returns it to the fridge without asking for help, knowing her mother would refuse (181). In another instance, Lyly hides in the closet to secretly eat snacks (181) (182); Or sneaking to the garden to enjoy them in peace. This behavior reflects not only their intelligence but also their social awareness and their mischievous temperament, combined with a high level of cognitive flexibility, often driving them to pursue their desires through creative or devious strategies, demonstrating an impressive willingness to bypass restrictions they perceive obstructive, which is rarely observed in wild individuals.

These domestic macaques **use creative ways to communicate their needs and desires, and they do it clearly.** For instance, monkeys Bibi and Lily bring their backpack to show they want to go out (183); monkey Lyly hands over her shoes to indicate desiring to go for a walk (184,185), or brings her helmet and shoes as a way of requesting to accompany her mother on the motorbike (186), or her hat to her mother asking to be taken out into nature because the weather is pleasant (185), bringing the phone to her mother after seeing on it a video of herself in the forest, as a way to express her desire to reiterate (184,185); even deliberately brings the epilator insisting on having a haircut and grooming (187). Monkey Bibi brings car keys and/or his kitchen utensils to ask to eat at a restaurant or brings a tent to ask to go on a picnic (188). He even, like other monkeys who have been exposed to the shopping experience, takes money and goes to the market to ask for his favorite food (189). Monkey Lyly hands the remote control to her owner, requesting him to turn on the TV for her (190). **They display joy during family outings,** demonstrating interest and active engagement. For example, when Bibi saw his family preparing their luggage for a beach trip, he packed his clothes, without forgetting to gather his own belongings such as a toothbrush, pillow, or hat, clearly indicating his desire to join himself with his family, in the packing activity and in the trip (191); Monkeys Bibi, Lyly, Shally, and Yaya, who enjoy going for rides in cars or on motorbikes (184). As seen in Bibi (192), Shally and Yaya enjoy hugging their owner while he drives; and playing filially with their human siblings (193).

Being emotionally bonded, **they experience emotional distress, even blame when they perceive rejection from those they are bonded with.** After her confiscation, Kaka appeared sad and withdrawn in the forest, seemingly believing her human father no longer wanted her. When he avoided her, due to being restricted from physical contact, she looked at him with sorrowful,

almost tearful eyes, as she approached for her usual hugs (*figure 1*). She did not understand the reason for the distance. **In such moments of blame and discontent about a family member's behavior, macaques sulk and turn their backs when upset**, like monkey Kaka did when she thought her human father doesn't want to take her back home with him, and like monkey Lyly did when her human mother did not take her back to their old home (194), **indicating their emotional awareness and attachment** to the persons and the spaces they love.



Figure 1: Kaka gazes sorrowfully at her caregiver with a silent sense of blame, a vexation behavior after being denied physical contact, a deviation from their usual routine, due to externally imposed restrictions.

They demonstrate a clear sense of ownership with distinct preferences and attachment to their personal spaces and items like their cushions, tent, pool, toys, clothes, toothbrush, pillow, blanket, and bed, comforts that deprived or caged monkeys often do not experience (195). In one instance, Kaka appeared upset when monkey Mit sat in her chair (196); or when Mit

damaged Kaka's clothes (195); she brought the torn dress to her human caregiver as if to report Mit and seek help in having it restored (195). Similarly, Kaka became visibly upset upon seeing Mit sitting in her drawer (195); she confronted Mit and then appealed to her human mother to intervene and remove her (195). Lyly packed her stuff in her bag pack desiring to go back to her old house (197). Lyly was also upset when her favorite blanket was taken to hang and went to retrieve it. She tries to carry her old bed to her new room (198). She also cherishes her toys. Noticing that the painting palette was dirty, Lyly decided to clean it; She brought over the large basin she usually bathes in, placed the palette inside, and turned on the water over it (199). Monkey Lyly likes her clothes, feels possessive about them and likes to try them (200), thus challenging the prejudice that clothing constitutes a form of abuse. Monkey Lyly also became confused and upset when her favorite swimming pool was being removed by her human mother she tried to put it back in place (201). They enjoy using their family members' phones scrolling and watching YouTube videos (like Lyly, Sokyaa and Shally) (202,203) (204,205), indicating their successful adjustment within a human ecosystem, thereby challenging the prejudice that human households are unsuitable environments for monkeys.

These macaques also view their family members, even their rescues as their own; and may show signs of jealousy if their caregiver gives attention to another pet of the family. For instance, monkey Kaka felt vexed when her human sister Diem was brushing monkey Mit's fur and not hers. She tried to get her sister's attention, laying before her, as to invite her to also brush her fur (206). Kaka also exhibited signs of jealousy when she saw Mit being hugged by their human father; she intervened, took Mit's place, and engaged in play with their owner herself (207); Lyly feigned injury when she felt jealous seeing her human mother laying with

Tommy the cat in the hammock, then she sulked feigning distress when her mother didn't immediately shift her attention to her (208,209). Heartwarmingly, Bibi gently leads his sister Lala to safety and rest, an expression of care and protection within their family dynamic (210). In another instance, Bibi attempted to hide his rescued dog in the toilet, as he perceived the approach of the dog's owner, aware that she intends to take the dog (211), Bibi even tried to prevent her, even attempting to stop her as she walked off with the dog in her arms (212); Bibi once hid his rescued sister Lala to protect her from being taken back by her owner (213), This kind of strategic behavior and individual personality is rarely seen in wild macaques, highlighting the cognitive and emotional depth of well-socialized domestic monkeys, that exceeds their wild counterparts.

They alert their owner to perceived dangers, they recognize when their owner's assistance is needed, actively seek help, and guide their owner to the location requiring intervention, demonstrating both situational awareness and communicative ability. For example, Monkey Lyly and Monkey Kaka demonstrated situational awareness by dragging their mother's hand to signal that the potatoes were burning (214,215). Monkey Kaka brought her adoptive mother to assist monkey Mit who got stuck in the rooftop (216). She also alerted her human mother when either herself, baby Diem or monkey Mit, needed a cleanup and diaper change (217) (218) (219) (131,220). Similarly, Lyly, upon seeing the restroom door closed, would bring a fresh diaper to her human mother indicating her need for a diaper change, (221,222) (223,224) demonstrate an understanding of toileting routines, as observed in many celebrity companion monkeys. In one incident, despite repeated calls from his owner, monkey Bibi, aiming to draw his owner's attention to an incident he has just spotted, remained by the side of a lost dog who had fallen

into a pit, refusing to leave until his owner caregiver arrived for rescue. Bibi continued to care for the dog afterward as well (225) (226). Contrary to false prejudices that these domestic macaques demonstrating advanced abilities are forced to perform or “work” for financial gain, such behaviors are not taught; they emerge as natural responses shaped by the individual character of the monkey, which is, in turn, influenced by the quality of interactions with human family members.

They have even understood trade. They can go to supermarkets, pay, and collect their items, like monkey Bibi (227) (228) (229) and monkey Lily (230) (231) even skateboarding (232). Cutis secretly stole money from his human father to buy snacks (233). Kaka handles money to earn treats (234). The most conscious of them also show strong values and self-respect. For example, Bibi once left a restaurant without eating because he discovered he had forgotten money. He returned home, got money from his owner, and came back to pay before eating his meal (235). These real-world examples beautifully illustrate how macaques, when raised as family members, can **exhibit high moral standards, understand and reproduce everyday tasks such as shopping, demonstrating cognitive capabilities far beyond typical expectations.**

Macaques integrated as members of a human family also understand routines quickly. They are very smart and have good manners. Lyly, Lily and Bibi can eat using a fork or a spoon (125,146,236–239), brush their teeth (183,240), remove their dirty clothes and put them in the laundry (241). When they need to relieve themselves, they go to the toilet and remove their clothes, showing bodily awareness. They throw their diaper in the bin (242), collect their clothes from the rain (243), and prepare their own breakfast including baking their sandwiches (244), steaming cakes or potatoes (245,246), bringing a bottle milk, opening it (244), even piercing it

with a blowtorch, or handing it to their owner asking him to open it (190); eat and clean after them (247), putting things in place (190). They are able to fill the basin with water to bathe themselves, then take a towel to dry off independently (248), even washing their own dress like Monkey Shally as well (249), which gives them a certain level of independence even at young age (246). They can be well mannered at restaurants (250). **They exhibit highly civilized behavior, requiring no cages, and sleep peacefully either in their own beds or alongside their human family (251–254), contrary to the automatic prejudiced association of domestic macaques with caging.** Lily, out of respect, refrained from eating all of the fruits, anticipating that it was meant to be served at the table; she patiently waited until her father figure returned and presented it to her (255); In the same way, Lyly first collects the dumplings and sets them on the table, adhering to an observed social protocol (256); thus demonstrating an advanced level of social understanding, discipline and mannerism, non-typical of the wild (255).

Contrary to common prejudices that macaques emit strong odors and fall ill easily, healthy and fulfilled macaques enjoying a life as members of a human family, do not (257,258), as also evidenced by Mr. Ngoc Le Nhu’s testimony regarding Kaka and Mit; likely due to their well-balanced microbiome supported by a diverse and nutritious diet, which supports immune function and inhibits odorous bacterial overgrowth (257,258).

7. Three Distinct Spectrums of Fulfillment Differentiating Captive, Wild, and Domesticated Macaques Integrated into Human Families:

Currently, any macaque under human care, is automatically assumed by many organizations and segments of the public, to be “captive”, confined or subjected to a restrictive environment,

either relatively large enclosures or small cages. Even when presented with clear evidence of macaques living freely within the home, sleeping so casually in a bed with his family members, having daily routines, and exhibiting socially appropriate behaviors, interactive engagement with life, humans and other species, family-integrated lifestyle, even possessing and protecting personal belongings such as cushions and interactive devices, skeptics often continue to claim that such animals are merely allowed temporary freedom for the sake of filming for financial gain, and are otherwise kept in cages. This position disregards the signs of fulfillment where macaques who are psychologically fulfilled and socially bonded to their human families do not exhibit the behaviors or pathologies associated with caged or deprived environments.

Empirical research supports this differentiation. A study conducted on unfulfilled macaques with caged lifestyle (259), has identified 10 distinct profiles that significantly differed from that of wild macaques on several behaviors, body postures, body orientations and distances between individuals and locations in the cage, suggesting atypical ethologically-defined stereotypic behavioral physiological and psychological profiles with repetitive invariant ambitionless behaviors such as pacing, rocking, or self-directed aggression (260). These behaviors are reminiscent of certain depressive-like symptoms of chronic stress and cognitive deprivation, due to the constraints of their environment (261) (260) (262) (263). Although a caged lifestyle can never ensure the fulfillment of a macaque, tailored enrichment strategies have been shown to reduce such behaviors, highlighting the importance of individualized care in captive settings (261). However, these pathological behaviors are not observed in the well-integrated, free-living domestic macaques like the famous Monkeys KaKa and Mit before their confiscation (56,57), monkey Lyly (58), monkeys Bibi and Lala (59), Monkey Zim (60), Monkey

Lily (61), Monkey Cutis (62), Monkeys Yaya and Shally (63), bonded with emotional attachment, and social reciprocity with their human companions and enjoying an interactive engaged life as a real member of their human family. This suggests that domestic macaques living as family members should not be categorized alongside captive individuals, highlighting the need to establish clear distinctions in order to prevent bias in legal protocols and welfare assessments.

Unlike captive macaques, whether housed in barren or enriched enclosures, companion macaques integrated as human family members, experience each day as novel and stimulating. They anticipate new activities, environments, and interactions, even within routine daily life. Their cognitive and emotional engagement is supported by a broader variety of stimuli: excursions to diverse locations, access to dynamic play or interactive environments, and frequent interaction with both humans and varied situations, living together, running purposeful family activities together, even taking responsibilities, which feels emotionally fulfilling and rewarding to the macaque. This results in significantly higher mental stimulation and psychological fulfillment compared to captive macaques in enriched cages, who are confined to the same repetitive environment and limited or absent purposeful social contact with humans or other species, where togetherness with their owners consists of only spending some time sitting together, instead of running their life together as one unit.

Captive animals often exhibit signs of boredom, both in small and larger cages (261) (264). In small enclosures, this escalates into depressive-like states due to their inability to even dissipate boredom through physical movement (264) (262). Even in larger, enriched enclosures, macaques feel bored in a same repetitive environment (264) (262), thus display heightened

agitation (264), because behavioral relief is possible through mobility, such, exceeding the baseline reactivity observed in wild individuals.

Wild macaques, though physically free, still operate from fear and insecurity, knowing that any threat of hostility or predation can emerge anytime and they would have to face it on their own (265). Therefore, any new figure that appears is impulsively perceived as a danger, and would immediately behave with sudden aggression to protect themselves and each other, because they are not used to having much of friendly interactions with strangers in the wild. Their behavior is largely shaped by vigilance and survival instincts (266) (267), as they lack the perceived protection of a higher social authority. In contrast, domesticated macaques raised within human families experience emotional security, protection, and affection. They were gently and carefully treated by family members who securely led them to interact with neighbors and surroundings, with assurance of being present in case of need or threat, whereby the macaque could indeed experience much more kindness than danger, therefore the macaque is less expectant of any hostility to occur anytime. This safety fosters a mental state not dominated by fear and survival concerns, allowing the mind to freely engage with their activity or interactive experience that triggers higher emotions than fear, thus allowing for the development of more complex cognitive and emotional behaviors (268).

For instance, companion macaques engage their mind and emotions in actively getting creative in finding ways to communicate a need, a desire or even an emotion like gratefulness, care, appreciation, even guilt, jealousy or disagreement to their human family members. Their mind and emotions are able to quickly understand the message a family member is trying to convey or the feeling he's going through, and respond to nuanced social cues, and participate in

emotionally and intellectually rich exchanges. Immersed in a human environment, characterized by complex emotional expression and social dynamics, they are exposed to opportunities for different and broader desires than wild macaques, based on the emotional resonance with the different experiences and empathetic understanding (268). As a result, companion macaques exhibit calmer temperaments than their wild counterparts, reflecting greater internalization, cognitive processing, and emotional development.

Since the majority of scientific observations on macaques have involved caged individuals living under constrained, unfulfilling conditions, the prevalent bias has developed: the mere mention of a domesticated macaque tends to evoke assumptions of abuse and captivity. However, macaques living in enriched domestic environments, where they are treated as cherished family members, exhibit markedly different physical and behavioral profiles. These macaques often appear leaner and more agile than their wild counterparts, likely reflecting both improved well-being and nutrition.

Despite this, many organizations and segments of the public, for political benefits, continue to uphold the belief that the wild environment is the only setting in which macaques can attain genuine fulfillment. This leads for instance, to the assumption that macaques should consume only and strictly the wild fruits, insects, and leaves naturally available in their native habitats. However, emerging anecdotal and observational evidence suggests that macaques do actually thrive on a more diverse and nutritionally rich diet when in human care. For instance, they passionately enjoy fruits that are either not available in the wild habitat or that wild macaques cannot physically open on their own even if available, and are often provided with nutritious treats like steamed potato (269), steamed corn (145), a cocktail of fruits with yogurt (270) and

other mixtures that contribute positively to their health. These diets have not been associated with adverse effects; on the contrary, domesticated macaques on such diets tend to live longer, healthier, and more contented lives (271).

A poignant example is Cindy, a 31-year-old baboon who has surpassed the typical wild lifespan for her species. Raised in a domestic setting and lovingly provided with a wide variety of fresh foods and fruits, Cindy shows no interest in consuming insects, even when they appear in her meal, gently putting aside a bug that landed in her food (272). Her case exemplifies how fulfillment and longevity may be more closely tied to emotional security and dietary quality than to strict adherence to a wild lifestyle. Similarly, observations of well-known domesticated macaques integrated into human families, such as Monkey Bibi, Monkey Kaka, and Monkey Lyly, have equally shown that these individuals exhibit no interest in consuming wild leaves or insects. Notably, it was only when Kaka was forcibly removed from her domestic environment and deprived of her usual diverse and nutrient-rich diet that she began eating grasshoppers, which had become one of her few available food sources. This behavior suggests that insects are not a preferred or enriching dietary element for emotionally fulfilled macaques; rather, they are a survival adaptation among wild populations.

Recent studies also highlight significant differences in the diet and gut microbiota between domestic and wild macaques. A comparative analysis of oral and gut microbiota between wild and captive unfulfilled caged long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) in Thailand, given repetitive non-diverse food, revealed that the lack of food diversity induces substantial alterations in microbial composition, reducing the diversity of the microbial species, affecting

metabolic function and health outcomes, and contributing to shortened lifespans (273) (274) (271).

Given the well-established correlation between emotional well-being, behavioral health, and microbiome integrity (274), macaques living in integrative domestic settings, treated as members of a human household, sharing together diverse healthy foods and fruits, are very likely to benefit from a healthier microbiome than not only caged, unfulfilled pet macaques but also their wild counterparts. These findings challenge the persistent assumption that a wild lifestyle is inherently optimal for all macaques in terms of fulfillment and health.

Crucially, caged environments -- whether in farms, laboratories, or private ownership -- fail to provide the spatial and social complexity necessary for healthy psychological development. Such environments restrict both the freedom to travel and the opportunity to engage in dynamic social interactions, intellectual activities, problem solving and mental stimulation, leading to stress and stereotypic behavior. In contrast, while wild macaques benefit from natural social structures within troops and activities such as foraging, domestic macaques integrated into human families also form rich interspecies bonds. These relationships, combined with exposure to diverse settings such as beaches, parks, forests, restaurants, and playgrounds, unavailable for wild macaques, offer cognitive stimulation, emotional enrichment, and broader opportunities for social learning and problem-solving. This lifestyle fosters not only a greater fulfillment but would also contribute to the refinement of character and the evolution of primate consciousness within anthropogenic contexts.

“The more an animal is close to his human, the more his emotions (friendliness) become sharpened and overtakes his instincts. In wild animals, it is the instincts (aggression) that are in the front row because it is survival mode that predominates in the wild” says the animal communicator Mrs. Laila Del Monte. Her claim is equally supported by different studies where the authors explain that domestication and human bonding shift animals toward sociability and emotional sensitivity, reducing the dominance of aggression and basic instinctual responses (275–278). In *Survival of the Friendliest* by Hare & Woods, 2020, the authors **argue that friendliness (social bonding, cooperation and empathy), not aggression or dominance, has been a key driver of evolutionary success,** thus favoring domestic macaques living as members of human families over their wild counterparts (278). **“Survival of the friendliest”** is presented as a counterpoint to the outdated notion of "survival of the fittest" understood as brute strength or aggression. Therefore, **the behavioral differences in character between a well-adjusted, domestically integrated macaque living as a human family member, and a wild macaque should no longer be blindly and automatically considered as signs of abuse by those who, due to prejudice, assume that the wild state is the sole reference for animal fulfillment. Unless such assumptions are deliberately invoked to justify punitive confiscation under the pretense of “rehabilitating” domesticated macaques by forcing them to rediscover their “natural instincts” thus forcing them to downgrade, they merely reveal a limited and reductionist understanding of the optimal contexts in which primates can thrive.**

Moreover, several scientific sources support the statement that once an animal (or person) has evolved to develop emotionally-driven behaviors through bonding, they can no longer downgrade to purely instinct-driven, “wild” behavior: a recent study found that both human

and non-human primates form organized attachment patterns early on (e.g., secure instead of insecure, spoiled instead of neglected having to fend for himself, empathetic instead of aggressive, more affectionate, trustful instead of expectant of danger, resistant instead of dominated), which remain stable across development (279,280). This suggests that once an individual transitions from a wild state to a bonded one, their emotional bonds persist rather than being overwritten (279,280). Therefore, depriving the individual of these bonds induces significant emotional harm. Furthermore, neurobiological studies show that emotions in mammals, including primates, are mediated by deep brain structures (amygdala, limbic system) that serve as higher-order motivators of behavior, rather than just basic survival-based instinctual programming (281,282). This supports the argument that behavior rooted in emotional bonding is neurologically distinct from instinct-only behavior and cannot simply “flip back” when the emotional context changes (281,282). Comparative studies also show that domesticated or human-bonded individuals exhibit attachment behaviors not found in their wild counterparts, even when both are raised in similar environments (283–285). This suggests that emotionally bonded animals develop new behavioral traits that wild-mode instincts alone cannot replicate.

Rather, this difference in character is likened to that between a civilized, educated, and well-mannered person who has invested in self-development and lives in cleanliness and comfort, and a street dweller living in the suburbs. It is not feasible nor proper to assume that those 2 kinds of people would even desire to fellowship nor is possible that the learned man would succeed in un-learning and regressing to become as conscious as the unlearned. Monkeys Kaka and Mit, Bibi, Lily, Cutis, Zim and Lyly are a perfect example of what love and respect can add

into a macaque's well-being beyond what conservation alone can provide. Therefore, confiscating a happy, thriving monkey who shares a genuine bond with his human family and enjoys a rich life filled with joyful, enriching experiences, a varied and healthy diet including delicacies, would condemn him to a reduced lifestyle where he is expected to adapt and be content with a basic, purposeless existence with a less diverse diet, diminished comfort, and integration into a group of non-mannered individuals whose primary ambition is survival, often exhibiting more violent behaviors. This transition would therefore harm his well-being and condemn him to a life of misery. It is akin to forcing a civilian accustomed to cooked food and delicacies to live in the wild among cavemen, hunting buffalo and eating raw fruits and leaves. Not only would he resist such a life, but he could also suffer illness and die.

Their microbiome was not one that was formed to protect them against the ailments of the wild, but proper to serve them in domestic conditions where they were raised. A king who was used to the comfort of his palace and the higher mental stimulation, can no longer be fulfilled in a poor life of a random man or caveman whose only ambition is survival.

Moreover, "withdrawal in animals appear at abandonment, neglect or abuse" confirms Mrs. Leila del Monte. In abandonment, the notion of security is compromised. The animal suddenly finds itself in a hostile environment, alone, without the warmth of a family, without shelter from the elements, without a comfortable place to sleep, without easily accessible food, and, most importantly, without its family members. Its emotional state becomes consumed by remorse and attempts to regain its previous privileges, leaving little interest in socializing with other monkeys, as demonstrated by monkeys Kaka, Mit and Puka despite the trials to bond them with conspecifics in one cage.

That is why, even with dedicated rehabilitation efforts, the success rate of “releasing” pet macaques into the wild is rarely successful and the released animals needed to be re-captivated (286). Reports and expert opinions suggest that the success rate is often below 5% (287) (288) .

In conclusion, all three categories—fulfilled, human-family-integrated domestic macaques; unfulfilled, caged pet macaques; and wild macaques—exhibit behavioral patterns that differ significantly and distinctly from one another. These differences arise from variations in environment, social structure, and early life experiences. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish three distinct behavioral spectra corresponding to each category, rather than presuming that all macaques must conform to the spectrum of wild fulfillment in order to be considered fulfilled.

8. A Critical Discussion of the Common Prejudices Against Macaque Companionship in Domestic Settings:

The debate surrounding macaque ownership in private households is marked not only by legal and ethical complexities, but also by a range of widespread **prejudices**, often propagated by online organizations and advocacy groups. These generalizations tend to obscure the nuanced realities of individual cases, undermining the potential for informed, welfare-oriented discourse.

The assertion that "macaques are not pets" and "belong to the wild" has become a categorical position, often ignoring individual welfare realities. While their stance is understandable since the big majority of Asian macaque owners are either abusers or unfit to raise a monkey, their prejudice assumes a one-size-fits-all solution, denying that macaques, especially those adopted after rescue or abandonment and raised under fulfilling ownership, find greater safety,

longevity, and emotional well-being within comprehensive human care (289,290). Cases such as the famous celebrities Monkey Kaka, Monkey Lyly, Monkey Bibi, Monkey Lily and that of Ruben from Namibia, whose family has raised the baboon Cindy for over 31 years (291), illustrate the potential for strong, stable human-primate bonds that surpass survival conditions in the wild. Furthermore, ethological studies on Bonnet macaques (*Macaca radiata*), a close relative of the pig-tailed and stump-tailed macaques, have shown that these primates readily coexist with humans and can develop protective behaviors beneficial to their caregivers (292).

Animal welfare organizations like the Animal Welfare Institute (293) and CITES (5), have long advocated against the keeping of macaques and other primates in domestic environments, citing concerns related to:

- Social deprivation: “macaques are highly social and require complex interaction” (293)
- Health and safety risks: aggression at maturity, zoonotic diseases vectors (293)
- Long-term commitment: “With lifespans often exceeding 30 years, macaques can outlive caretakers, leading to neglect or abandonment” (293).

While these concerns are scientifically grounded, **they largely derive from observations of primates kept in confined, caged, and often substandard captive conditions (294,295), As such, they are based on the behavioral and emotional profiles of macaques who experience chronic stress, insecurity, and a lack of fulfillment. Crucially, these evaluations overlook macaques raised in enriched, socially integrated domestic settings where they are treated as genuine members of the human family, likely due to the relatively recent emergence of such cases. These newer examples demonstrate a higher, even optimal, level of psychological well-being and fulfillment within human-primate relationships. Although the concerns are valid**

within the context of conventional captivity, they fail to distinguish between deprived, institutionally confined individuals and those raised in emotionally supportive environments where their needs for exploration, stimulation, and bonding are sufficiently met. Macaques raised with affection, granted freedom of movement, and provided with cognitive stimulation should not be assessed using the same criteria applied to laboratory-housed, zoo-confined, or caged individuals, lest they be unfairly victimized by inappropriate standards.

Scientific literature increasingly indicates that the likelihood of pathogen transmission is closely linked to stress-related immune suppression (296–299). Animals subjected to stress, common in laboratories and overcrowded captive environments, are significantly more likely to shed pathogens. In contrast, macaques living under conditions of emotional security and close, compassionate care present a markedly different risk profile; they exhibit signs of psychological fulfillment and reduced pathogenic vulnerability. While systematic studies on such cases remain lacking, anecdotal evidence from famous long-term caretakers, like the above mentioned, who are constantly in close proximity to their macaques, suggests that zoonotic transmission in genuinely bonded, well-maintained home settings is negligible (297).

In the same way, the belief that macaques inevitably become aggressive or unmanageable in adulthood stems largely from countries where monkeys are raised in exploitative or unfit conditions, often as entertainment objects (Baker et al., 2007). Many such individuals are abandoned before maturity or suffer premature death. However, these examples should not be generalized to situations where macaques have genuine bonds with their human family and raised with security, ethical commitment, respect and emotional understanding. As they grow together, both parties become attuned to each other's character, needs and preferences.

Animal-human relationships grounded in mutual respect—such as those documented by Kevin Richardson (“the lion whisperer”)(300) and Dean Schneider (301) in their videos, long-term caretakers of rescued lions—demonstrate that even traditionally "wild" animals can form safe, lasting relationships when given the emotional support and understanding they require, so much so that the animal consistently remains cautious to avoid causing harm to its human companion, even during playful interactions, and exhibits protective behaviors in the presence of perceived threats. In such cases, behavioral stability and safety prevail even during natural hormonal shifts or mood swings, as their emotions have outgrown their instincts due to a lifetime of experiences that have nurtured emotional connection rather than triggering defensive or survival behaviors.

A prevailing assumption is that **all privately kept macaques are exploited for monetary gain**, particularly by families who share their lives with these animals through online platforms. While it is true that some (even most) individuals may adopt macaques for inappropriate reasons—ranging from exotic display to online attention—such a blanket assumption do not leave room for any possible different intention. It ignores cases where caretakers with selfless motivation demonstrate genuine commitment to the animals' well-being. In many instances, the intent is not economic exploitation but rather **emotional reciprocity**, protection, and rehabilitation, anchored in the joy of witnessing their growth in happiness and health. Regarding the use of online platforms, many caregivers share the unique joy they experience with their animals simply because the bond feels too meaningful to keep private, as expressed by the caregiver of Rafus the kangaroo. Any financial gain that follows is a byproduct, not the primary motivation. The distinction between profit-driven exploitation and **mutually enriching companionship** is

crucial. Moreover, monkey-themed channels are often criticized for allegedly generating easy profit, as though the animal alone is responsible for their online popularity. In reality, it is not merely the monkey being featured, but rather the unique and emotionally resonant **relationship** between the monkey and their human family. It is this relationship that shapes the monkey's personality and behavioral expression. Had the same monkey been subjected to neglect or abuse, the monkey might have displayed withdrawn or stereotypic behaviors such as thumb-sucking or passivity, similar to other primates who lack stimulation and emotional connection. In such cases, the content, like that of most channels where the animal is confined off-camera, likely not have drawn the same public interest or engagement. Notably, organizations that accuse such families of exploitation often themselves simultaneously benefit financially or politically, from the removal of these animals at the cost of the animals' visible decline in welfare following confiscation, which makes their benefit **exploitative** and contradicts the very notion of 'rescue'.

A second form of prejudice asserts that **supporters of domestically kept macaques are naïve, unintelligent, or emotionally deceived by the cuteness of primate that they can't see the abuse behind**. This perspective disregards the cognitive and emotional insight many observers bring to their evaluations of animal welfare. Affective attunement—the ability to recognize emotional states in others, or even to distinguish signs of fulfillment and unfulfillment—is an essential skill in evaluating animal well-being. The real unintelligent are those who aren't able nor willing to discern between abused and fulfilled or to empathize. To dismiss public concern as mere emotionalism is to **devalue empathetic observation**, which is a cornerstone of welfare

science. Indeed, supporters protesting certain confiscations often do so not from sentimentality, but from careful observation of behavioral cues indicating distress, joy, or bonding.

There is a prevalent prejudice that viewers of monkey channels are motivated solely by a **desire for entertainment**, as if no other intentions could exist. While it is true that many followers are initially drawn by the remarkable intelligence and behaviors of these monkeys, long-time viewers often develop emotional bonds with the animals featured. They come to regard the monkey as one of their own, expressing a deep sense of protectiveness toward the animal's safety and well-being. These viewers derive genuine joy from witnessing the monkey's happiness, affectionate interactions, and positive life experiences. They do not respond the same way when encountering other channels where monkeys are being abused or exhibiting signs of distress or lack of fulfillment, even though monkeys, regardless of whether the situation is abusive or not, still appear outwardly "cute" in their reactions.

Similarly, the **use of clothing and diapers** is frequently cited as inherently abusive. This assertion, however, lacks contextual nuance. While the use of diapers can be considered annoying for captive macaques who receive minimal attention and are left to sit in soiled diapers—sometimes for days before being changed, feeling uncomfortable in their skin, which makes them rebellious about anything added unto them other than food or affection—this should not be extrapolated to all cases. In contrast, well-adjusted and fulfilled macaques living as members of a human family, have a different perception of their diapers and clothes. They love their clothes as their property, feel possessive about them and do not feel burdened with their diapers. In fact, they demonstrate awareness and either experiential or interactive skill: they either actively seek out their caregiver for a diaper change, or might remove their own

diapers by themselves, bathe or change themselves on their own, sometimes taking the opportunity to enjoy a swim in the water as they like, or even might opt to using the toilet independently before soiling the diaper. **Most importantly, no happy and fulfilled animal would willingly trade a secure, enriched fulfilling home life for the trauma of separation from their bonded human family. Concerns over clothing or diapering are negligible compared to the risks posed by forced separation or release into the wild or into sanctuaries.**

In fact, in some human-primate cohabitation contexts, such practices may facilitate hygiene while respecting the animal's preferences and needs. Assertions of abuse must therefore be evaluated **case-by-case**, based on behavioral indicators of distress or comfort, rather than through categorical assumptions.

Critics also often fail to recognize **cognitive and emotional complexity in captive macaques**, particularly in cases where the animals exhibit advanced social learning, trust, and communication with their caretakers. These behaviors are frequently misattributed to coercive training rather than to the motivational power of **affection, security, and encouragement**. The failure to acknowledge the richness of these human-primate relationships reflects not only a lack of scientific nuance, but at times, a **strategic suppression of counterexamples** that threaten prevailing ideological narratives.

Therefore, many of the public and organizational prejudices against private macaque ownership operate from **generalization and ideology**, rather than empirical, individualized assessments.

While the caution of animal welfare organizations is justifiable in many contexts, a rigid, one-dimensional rejection of all domestic primate care ignores emerging evidence and lived

examples that challenge such categorical conclusions. A more ethical and scientifically grounded approach would involve case-specific evaluations that prioritize the **observable well-being** and expressed preferences of the primates themselves, rather than enforcing rigid interpretations of legality or orthodoxy in the name of welfare. Future research must expand to study these exceptions where individual macaques thrive, not to promote widespread pet ownership, but to refine welfare approaches that are sensitive to emotional bonds, behavioral fulfillment, and individual needs.

9. **International Laws and Ethical Principles on Animal Welfare:**

International Laws and Ethical Principles on Animal Welfare reveal significant variability across jurisdictions, especially regarding the private keeping of macaques, with growing attention worldwide to balancing legal compliance and animal welfare. In the European Union, for instance, the *EU Zoo Directive (1999/22/EC)* (302) and national regulations, aligned with *CITES* (303), generally restrict private ownership of macaques, except for licensed institutions focused on conservation or education. However, welfare-based decisions have increasingly influenced enforcement, as highlighted by the European Court of Justice rulings emphasizing that administrative actions must not result in unnecessary suffering or diminished welfare of animals involved (e.g. *Case C-219/07*). In the United States, the *Animal Welfare Act (AWA, 1966)* sets minimal federal standards for primates, while several state-level statutes include welfare-centered provisions that can, in some cases, allow non-commercial private ownership under strict licensing and welfare compliance (ASPCA, 2023). In contrast, many Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, face challenges balancing enforcement with welfare protection, often due to limited resources and conflicting

priorities. **Vietnam, a regional stronghold for several macaque species, presents a highly complex scenario: while it is a signatory to CITES and maintains national laws such as the *Law on Forestry (2017)*, *Decree 06/2019/ND-CP*, and *Decree 84/2021/ND-CP* that strictly control wildlife ownership, there is growing discourse around the ethical treatment of confiscated animals.** Authorities like the Forest Protection Department (FPD) may issue permits for conservation, education, or research, yet compassionate exceptions for bonded companion animals remain inexistant. While some Vietnamese legal texts allow for *humane considerations in the context of disease management recognizing the ethical obligation to minimize animal suffering during state interventions* (e.g., Article 21 of the *Law on Animal Health 2015*), humane treatment is not yet embedded in non-disease contexts such as confiscations or forced removals. Comprehensive welfare statutes remain disregarded.

Globally, there is increasing recognition that welfare-centered frameworks, such as the *Five Domains Model* (304), should guide interventions, ensuring that the application of law does not unintentionally compromise animal well-being under the pretext of legal compliance.

10. Possible misuse of the law: Hidden Agendas and Bureaucratic Harm:

In Vietnam, macaques are commonly found in proximity to human dwellings, **and widely adopted into households**, be it through genuine rescues of orphaned or injured animals or through illegal trade with third parties, whose activities remain largely unchecked and unregulated. As a result, private ownership of macaques has become rampant, occurring in a legal grey zone where formal regulation is minimal and often reactive. Globally, enforcement is sporadic and reactive rather than proactive, relying primarily on isolated confiscations triggered

by individual reports of alleged abuse or neglect, funneled through a non-governmental organization (NGO).

However, in June 2024, the targeted confiscation of two well-adjusted, thriving macaques from a human family (305) sparked public outrage and raised concerns over potential misuse of animal protection laws for political or financial gains. This intervention appeared punitive toward the owner, deviating from the original protective intent of the legislation, and suggesting possible corruption and a lack of accountability in enforcement. Typically, such sporadic enforcement, framed as strict legality, results in confiscations without individualized welfare assessments, actions that can cause psychological trauma to socially complex species like macaques (25,289,290), especially those with established fulfillment and emotional bonds to humans.

Vietnam is a signatory to several international conventions, such as OIE animal welfare standards, which discourage trauma-inducing enforcement like confiscation where human-animal bonds are evident, condemning such actions as cruel due to the harm inflicted on sentient animals. When anti-trafficking or anti-possession laws increase suffering for bonded animals, the ethical basis of enforcement requires critical reevaluation (306–308).

However, the involvement of certain NGOs has, at times, raised concerns about selective enforcement driven by political motives or personal agendas: In some cases, high-profile and widely popular monkey owners — whose animals display clear signs of strong human-animal bonds, psychological well-being, and thriving health — may become targets of such enforcement. This creates a situation where legal interventions are applied inconsistently, with enforcement actions being disproportionately focused on prominent cases for public

visibility or organizational gain, rather than being guided by objective assessments of legal consistency and animal welfare that require attending to the most urgent cases of abuse and not the disruption of the lives of the fulfilled animals. Therefore, when enforcement authority is entrusted to organizations lacking compassion and driven by hidden political agendas, punitive objectives, or blind activism rather than genuine welfare concerns, the law can easily be misused, resulting in serious harm to the very animals it claims to protect.

These organizations often present themselves as strict legal adherents, protecting their reputations from being seen as unethical or cruel, through unscientific biases and generalized prejudices, justifying their actions while disregarding the profound psychological distress and fatality their actions cause.

Despite growing evidence of satisfactory welfare outcomes in home environments, many animal welfare organizations and public sectors continue to oppose macaque ownership, often motivated by punitive intentions toward owners. Their resistance relies on long-standing narratives that deem macaques unsuitable as pets, based primarily on behavioral studies of animals in restrictive enclosures rather than those integrated into human families. Since such integrative cases have historically been rare or undocumented, their welfare potential remains underrepresented in the scientific discourse. Nevertheless, institutional reluctance to revise established positions, even in light of emerging evidence, may reflect bureaucratic inertia and cognitive biases where maintaining an image of infallibility and authority that reinforces their perceived status as a reference point for wildlife expertise, takes precedence over objective reassessment. This preserves control over public opinion, contracts, and funding, often at the

expense of animal welfare. Such resistance frequently leads to decisions that harm confiscated macaques, causing distress and mortality contrary to animal protection goals.

Moreover, the public has witnessed since June 2024, an insensitive application of the law resulting in trauma rather than rescue or welfare. Animals' silent distress and pleas have been ignored, and supporters dismissed as overly emotional. Pleas and petitions have been ignored (309–311) As earlier prejudiced arguments weaken, critics have now relied on one last speculative claim that monkey-related media channels fuel demand and illegal trade, justifying continued enforcement motivated by punishment and political dominance. Without substantiated evidence linking media content to demand, this reasoning obscures the true impact of interventions and distracts from the need for nuanced, welfare-centered approaches.

This case raises broader concerns about the potential for laws intended to protect animals to be selectively enforced or interpreted in ways that reflect political or personal motivations, rather than objective welfare priorities. In certain contexts, legal frameworks may be co-opted to justify punitive actions against individuals, particularly those with public visibility or influence. Such patterns risk undermining public trust in conservation institutions and highlight the importance of transparency, consistency, and accountability in enforcement practices.

Ultimately, the conflict may reflect less a debate over animal welfare, and more a struggle over narrative control and public perception.

11. Case Study: The Tragedy of the Confiscation of Kaka, Mit and Puka:

The case of Kaka and Mit provides a valuable observational example to explore the welfare implications, emotional consequences, and institutional handling of confiscated primates

following forced separation from bonded human caregivers, highlighting significant behavioral, psychological, and welfare dynamics as well as potential violations of animal welfare standards, human rights, and transparency principles in the management of confiscated animals. It offers an instructive example of how legal instruments intended for animal protection may instead be misused as instruments of harm producing adverse welfare outcomes when applied dogmatically or under hidden agendas without consideration of individual behavioral and emotional contexts.

11.1. Background and Confiscation

Kaka, along with two other macaques, Mit and Puka, had been raised as members of a human family in a highly enriched human household, sharing constant individualized care, affection, and complex environmental stimulation. The macaques experienced daily positive human-primate interactions, personal attention, access to healthy and diverse diets, emotionally secure bonds, and a stimulating physical environment. They appeared healthy, engaged, happy, thriving, unmistakably adoring their life and their family, exhibiting all signs of fulfillment (312–314) (*figure 2*).



Figure 2: Kaka and Mit's integrated family life, demonstrating signs of fulfillment, social bonding, regular outings, healthy rich diet and overall well-being; Happy, healthy, and well-adjusted macaques, feeling secure and comfortable at home.

Despite their evident well-being, they were reported to the Forest Protection Department (FPD) in Vietnam for confiscation. On June 26th, 2024, authorities confiscated the animals and

transferred them to Ben En National Park (315). The confiscation was conducted under the general clause of "illegality" which prohibits private possession of endangered wildlife species, pursuant to Article 72 of the Law on Forestry (2017), Decree 06/2019/ND-CP. This legal category, while intended to combat trafficking, disregards the monkeys' established emotional bonds with their human family, failing to distinguish between different domestic contexts, such as macaques kept in cages (whether enriched or not) versus companion macaques integrated into human families, and individual welfare assessment. Kaka, Mit and Puka are not wild or trafficked animals but rescued from misery and death, highly socialized individuals who had formed strong emotional bonds with their human caregivers, that made them highly intelligent and more evolved than their wild counterparts.

The 3 macaques were placed in standard institutional enclosure, which lacked individualized care, environmental enrichment, and social familiarity (*figure 3*). Their new living conditions represented a significant downgrade in both quality of life and psychological security. They were abruptly and forcibly removed from their established environment, characterized by continuous individualized human care, uninterrupted 24/7 attention, consistent emotional security, a wide range of cognitive and social stimuli, enriching interspecies interactions, family outings, discoveries, explorations, possession of familiar objects and territories, access to abundant and nutritionally diverse food sources, and hygienic living conditions (316–318). This sudden deprivation resulted in the complete disruption of their established behavioral, emotional, and environmental stability (316–318). Critically, they lost access to the humans they perceived as attachment figures and primary social partners, they lost the relationship with the only individuals they recognized and loved as family. In short, they were stripped of their home, their

family, all sources of comfort and joy and the very foundation of their well-being, forcing them instead into an impoverished, purposeless existence, a substantially diminished quality of life incompatible with their prior well-being, devoid of emotional fulfillment and mental stimulation, a state they clearly and unmistakably did not prefer (316–318).

11.2. **Observed Post-Confiscation Psychological Responses**

Following the confiscation, all three macaques exhibited marked signs of psychological distress, consistent with attachment disruption syndrome, a condition extensively documented in both human and non-human primates (319) (294) (*figures 3-4*). Behaviors included persistent withdrawal, depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, and loss of interest in their environment and social interactions.

- **Puka** who was approximately a year old, rapidly deteriorated; within one month, he developed a severe illness. His weakened immune state, likely exacerbated by chronic psychological distress due to separation (*figure 5*), rendered him vulnerable to infection. He died shortly thereafter from an ulcerative disease, contracted within the facility's unhygienic conditions.
- **Mit**, now 1 year old, previously noted to have regained energy, confidence, and emotional security during her time with her human caregiver who rescued her, experienced renewed psychological decline following her separation. She remained in a state of persistent depression and emotional withdrawal (*figure 4*).
- **Kaka, now 4 years old**, as well displayed continuous signs of longing and grief (*figures 3-4*).

During the owner's rarely permitted brief visitations, all three macaques demonstrated attachment behaviors including vocalizations of excitement upon their meeting, clinging tightly and persistently to their family members (*figures 6-7*), refusing to be handed to a technician, groaning of solace in the arms of their family members, desperate attempts to follow and remain physically close to the human family members (*figures 6-7*), vocalization of agony upon their farewell, that were loud and audible cries, vocal protests and expressed visible distress whenever the owner departed. These behaviors align with established models of separation anxiety and attachment loss (320–322), consistent with a biphasic protest-despair response to separation documented in non-human primates, particularly macaques (323,324). Moreover, studies show that such separation-related distress cannot be mitigated through stepwise reduction of contact; even limited visual or tactile separation can exacerbate stress (325). Confinement into a poor unstimulating enclosure constitutes a risk as in parallel, broader evidence from sanctuary-based primates demonstrates long-term negative emotional and behavioral consequences following social isolation, such as increased stereotypies and withdrawal behaviors (326). Forced separation from familiar social environments consistently negatively impacts well-being (325). Notably, they consistently refused to socialize with other macaques in the enclosure and showed a marked reduction in exploratory and play behaviors (316–318).



Figure 3: Comparison of Kaka's expression at home prior to confiscation (left) versus in a cage at Ben En one month after confiscation, during a rare visitation allowed to her owner (right).



Figure 4: Kaka and Mit's mental state in the deplorable cage, withdrawn and distressed in the enclosure at Ben En's facility, looking pitiful, unmotivated, purposeless, having lost their joy to live. Pieces of bread thrown on the dirty ground was their food.



Figure 5: Monkey Puka, once perfectly healthy and free at home, has become seriously sick and depressed, with sunken eyes reflecting his misery.



Figures 6: Monkeys Kaka and Mit display clear anticipation upon perceiving the arrival of their owner for visitation, expressing impatience to find his embrace (left), then immediately jump on him and into his arms and cling to him tightly as soon as the cage door is opened (right),

demonstrating strong emotional attachment, a deep sense of longing, and a desire to reunite and live with him.



*Figure
7:
When
taken*

outside the cage, Kaka and Mit consistently sought to keep close proximity to their owner, expressing a sense of security in his embrace and fear of risking his departure without them (left and middle). After a ban prohibiting taking them out of the cage, Kaka, who was known to dislike being held by strangers, is seen desperately trying to retain her human sister, not wanting her to depart and be again deprived of her family's company (right).

11.3. Post-Release Developments

Although the owner had previously been promised permission to be present at the release, Ben En Center did not fulfill this promise, releasing Kaka without informing him and banning him from further visitations. Approximately three months post-confiscation, Kaka was released onto a forested island within Ben En National Park. However, the release introduced further challenges:

- Two weeks post-release, the owner was permitted to search for Kaka, with the expectation that she would not be found, as she had ceased returning to the release cage once the food left there had been consumed. Therefore, Ben En's decision would not have been an act of kindness toward the caregiver, but rather an exploitation of his dedication to his daughter for their own benefit, using his reluctant search and the resulting footage of the forested island to increase their visibility and promote ecotourism (327). However, at the third visit, Kaka successfully located him by voice recognition, an indicator of strong retention of social bonds and cognitive attachment (328). She jumped into his arms unexpectedly and vocalized groanings of solace upon finding the embrace of her human father (52,329). Kaka had lost weight by the time she was found (328).
- The island lacked adequate food sources for macaques, and no individual macaques or troops were observed, raising questions about the survival of the released monkeys as the Center had previously claimed to have been releasing monkeys for years (327). In addition to experiencing significant hunger, Kaka was also exposed to unprotected environmental conditions with scarcity of food (330) and tumultuous weather. Whereas she had previously enjoyed the comfort of running to her family member's embrace whenever she heard a storm and hiding in the bed playing with them, receiving reassurance and safety, she was now deprived of such protection and joy.
- The owner was able to visit her only 1 to 2 times a week due to the constraints of 3 hours distance from home to the forest, the necessity of waking up very early and the high costs of gas, food, tourist fees, companionship fees, and boat fees required to reach

her. Kaka spent her time waiting at the entrance for his visits, knowing that he would return. He secretly was leaving enough food to sustain her until his next visit. Upon each encounter, she consistently displayed affiliative behaviors (329): groaning for comfort, seeking physical proximity (*figure 8*), grooming (*figure 9*) (329,331) and showing visible distress upon each separation (*figure 10*). She repeatedly attempted to follow her human father upon his departure, trying to board the boat with him to return home (*figure 11*), and cried at the sight of the departing boat, realizing that her father has left without her (332,333).

- Meanwhile, Kaka was serving at Ben En as a tourist attraction, with the park exploiting her habit of waiting at the entrance for her owner and her acquired well-behaved, gentle, and non-aggressive character which credit goes to her relationship and life with her owners. This served Ben En to create the illusion that they were capable of producing such well-adjusted monkeys, even hanging a flyer on a tree at the entrance that reads "Monkey Release Zone" suggesting that their ecosystem was successful and intriguing visitors with the possibility of encountering a monkey. Tourists and staff, excited by the presence of a gentle macaque, would pet her, unknowingly taking advantage of her deprivation from her usual delicacies and the hunger that led her to approach them and would ask her to groom their hair like she used to do benevolently out of love and care to her owner, in exchange for food. Had she not found her owner, she likely would have died or disappeared like the other monkeys they have been releasing. While she was emotionally fulfilled during her lifetime with her human family, uninterested in following unfamiliar humans, it was only at Ben En that she developed

emotional deprivation and began following humans for food, who in turn exploited her hunger to encourage her to interact with them.



Figure 8: Kaka's emotional encounter with her family during a visit to the forest where she was "released" three months after confinement in the facility's cage. She mouth-chatters to express affection and love toward her father figure (left), always seeking reassurance that she remains part of the family, and yearning to be embraced as she was in the past (right).



Figure 9: Kaka lovingly grooming her family during a rarely possible visitation, expressing how much she missed them and conveying her unwavering, enduring love.



Figure 10: Kaka clings to her parent figure, refusing to be put down and seeking the security of his arms, clearly expressing her attachment to the security she felt upon meeting him, a clear indicator of her feeling that she has encountered her savior and her refusal to lose sight of him, a clear desire to remain with him rather than be left in the forest (left). Aware that he was about

to leave, she held on tightly, showing both her longing to return home with him and her deep distress at the prospect of being abandoned again. Her behavior unmistakably indicates a preference for living in her human home with her family over remaining in the forest.



Figure 11: Kaka attempting to board the boat with her parent figure, do return home with him,

as she refused to be left alone exiled in that forest island, despite knowing she was not permitted. Having been forcibly separated, she looks plaintively at him as he boards, seemingly questioning the reason for their separation and pleading to be taken along, unwilling to accept the imposed distance.

Escalating Restrictions and Institutional Interventions Leading to More Emotional and Psychological Trauma from Forced Separation:

As Kaka's attachment behaviors became publicly visible, and her unrevoked preference of living at home with her family over staying in the forest which, by common presumption meant "freedom", Kaka's earnest supplications and cries of agony were met, not with compassion, but with imposition of additional restrictions on the human father:

- He was prohibited from bringing food, hugging, or physically interacting with Kaka, even from approaching her, he literally had to keep a distance from her which caused Kaka clear distress due to the absence of contact (334) (335,336). Kaka responded to these new restrictions with further behavioral signs of emotional pain including sulking, sorrowful facial expressions (*figures 1-12-14*), and unsuccessful attempts to elicit caregiving behaviors from the human father (*figure 12*) (337): she exhibited vexation behavior (*figure 12-13*), looking at her owner with sorrowful and questioning eyes (*figures 1-12*), shocked by his sudden disinterest in sharing her affection. As he moved away whenever she approached, she hesitantly attempted to get closer, as if testing her father's willingness to receive her (337). However, each time she advanced, he was forced to retreat in an effort to comply with the new restrictions. Consequently, she

displayed sulking behavior (*figure 13*), seemingly believing that he no longer loved her the way she does, also believing that he no longer wished to take her back with him, and expressed grief by lying pitifully hopeless and confused on the ground (*figure 15*) (334,337), as if trying to provoke his pity towards her and his rekindle his previous habitual expression of affection toward her (*figure 1-12*). Despite the restrictions, Kaka's love and bond with her owner was not severed (*figure 18*), and she kept waiting for him all her time.

- Notably, Kaka developed a scaly fungal infection on her tail (*figure 16*) (330) and scarred legs (*figure 17*) (338) during captivity in the forest, a health condition not previously observed while in the home environment, further indicating a decline in welfare. Conservationists remained irresponsive to her infection as they believe they should not intervene with nature. The forced separation overlooked crucial welfare parameters recognized in animal behavior science, including species-specific social needs, emotional bonds, and cognitive well-being (339–341).
- Eventually, the emotional hurt extended to the owner as well. Him, having fatherhood attachments, was forced to behave passively as a mere observer, feeling suffocated in his ability to attend to his daughters' needs. He was expected to remain indifferent while witnessing his daughter hungry and in emotional need, permitted only to watch Kaka from a distance. He felt powerless, yet constantly searching for ways to bring Kaka back, after all his attempts to return her home were repeatedly rejected.

- During this period, the owner secretly continued supporting Kaka's welfare by supplying food and treating her fungal infection that developed on her tail during her stay in the forest, preventing further health deterioration (330).



Figure 12: Kaka looking at her owner sorrowfully after sensing that he was no longer embracing her. Unaware of the imposed restrictions on him forbidding him from hugging her and feeding her, she appeared confused and remorseful, questioning the change in their bond. Her attempts to express sadness and elicit pity, conveying that she never meant him harm, serve as a poignant testament to the sophisticated and emotionally nuanced behavior of domestic macaques raised within human families.



Figure 13: Kaka vexed, withdrawn, deeply hurt by her owner's affective rejection, unaware of the restrictions.



Figure 14: Pitiful Kaka appears wearied, expressing her discontent and fatigue about her

situation where none of her desire are being met anymore, even perceiving that her father figure no longer wishes to hold or comfort her.



Figure 15: Miserable Kaka feeling hopeless and desperate, realizing that she is no longer understood or comforted, not even by her father figure who always used to attend to her, surrenders to her fate, laying on the ground, conveying her exhaustion from fighting tirelessly and in vain for her happiness.



Figure 16: The appearance of scaly fungal growth on Kaka's tail during her time in the forest indicates unsuitable living conditions and a compromised immune response likely triggered by stress.



Figure 17: Kaka's feet covered with scars during her stay in the forest, a clear indicator of a decline in her comfort



Figure 18: Despite feeling sulky and vexed, Kaka continued to express her desire to follow her father figure home whenever she sensed he was about to leave, saddened by the prospect of being left behind.

11.4. Secret removal:

In response to the increasing public visibility of Kaka's persistent attachment to her owner despite the restrictions meant to sever her bond, and in response to Kaka's observable expressions of distress due to her forceful stay in the forest, along with her continuous yearning and desperate trials to return home with her owner, Ben En Center covertly removed her from the original island without notifying the owner, despite being aware of his upcoming usual visit. The owner subsequently arrived at the site with his entire family, paying full transportation and entry fees, only to discover that Kaka, who used to spend her time at the entrance area waiting for him, was no longer present. Her family searched for her all day and officials denied

any knowledge of her whereabouts.

Despite widespread public appeals since the confiscation, daily urging Vietnamese authorities to reconsider, no official response was issued, with all messages and pleas effectively disregarded.

However, independent evidence later confirmed that a so-called wildlife conservation NGO, Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV), in collaboration with a vocal group of critics with entrenched prejudices, resistant to alternative interpretations of welfare outcomes, who initially targeted and relayed Kaka's address to the FPD to get her confiscated (342) and who solicited Ben En in severing her bonds with her family (343,344), had submitted a request to the government to relocate Kaka secretly (344)(thus more cruelly) to an undisclosed location, thereby preventing the owner from locating or receiving information about her. These groups, appearing to harbor personal animosity towards happy monkey owners, monitored the owner's efforts in order to compile evidence about times where he failed to completely comply with the abusive restrictions placed on him, notably the “no approaching and touching” to further restrict his access to his monkey daughter. Allegations were raised against him through the NGO claiming that he is a violator of the rules and misinterpreting his intentions as continuing to use his monkey for financial gain from YouTube content, disregarding the realities of his genuine caregiving motivations, his sacrifices and Kaka’s need for his presence, thus disregarding the scientifically recognized emotional nature of the human-primate bond and the genuine concern of these monkeys' supporters about their health and mental state.

11.5. Institutional Dishonesty, Suppression of Transparency and misleading public statements:

These groups automatically accuse monkey owners of exploiting their monkeys for financial gain via YouTube. These so-called wildlife activists, operating under the guidelines of online bureaucratic NGO coalitions, deliberately avoid watching happy monkey channels, as they are committed to not contributing views or income to the channels. Yet, without observation, they continue to blindly cast false accusations and unfounded assumptions that do not match the novel reality of integrated macaques as members of a human family, reiterating the same biased prejudices that claim monkeys kept at home are abused, caged off camera, forced to perform, coerced to walk upright, and fed what they call "human food", food which, they argue, is not natural for monkeys because it is not naturally available in the wild for them. Their persistent refusal to acknowledge clear indicators of fulfillment in these home-raised monkeys, combined with their purposeful dismissal of the negative outcomes of the confiscation on the well-being of emotionally-bonded macaques, even when shown, along with their desperate efforts to find faults against the owner — even resorting to fabricating lies when no evidence of abuse is found — and their constant complaints about the potential income such channels generate, likely reflect an ill intent, suggesting that their motives stem from personal animosity toward the owner -- whose channel seemed to have gained both popularity, and financial success -- jealousy and a desire to discredit him, rather than any genuine concern for animal welfare. This serves as a typical example of how the law can be misused to cause harm to an owner and his channel under the guise of conservation and law enforcement.

They label as "criminal" a responsible owner who rescued the monkeys from a destiny of misery, and who not only compensated on them but under whose care the monkeys have thrived and flourished living a joyful interesting life that exceeds that of all other monkeys,

accusing him of keeping his monkeys illegally, while in fact, they themselves committed the true crime by causing Puka's death, separating family members, trying to break bonds, destroying lives, inflicting suffering, and severely disrupting the well-being of Kaka and Mit, abducting these happy animals against their will, forcing them into a lower lifestyle they don't want where they feel deprived, betrayed, get sick and even die, depriving them from all their privileges which a forest cannot compensate, depriving them from the only troop they want (their human family), yet calling these crimes and atrocities as "rescue", "wildlife protection" and "conservation". Their positions appear to disregard the sentience of animals, their capacity to form preferences about where and with whom they wish to live, treating them instead as objects to be appropriated or confiscated without regard for their individual agency or well-being.

They accuse the owner of "exploitation" assuming he earned income from YouTube, while they themselves have exploited Kaka's popularity for political interest, to gain visibility among groups, thereby increasing their own popularity thus more donations, all while asserting dominance over the supporters of happy monkey channels, by suppressing a reality that happened to challenge the prejudices they promote. Exploitation means taking advantage of someone without giving anything in return; Kaka, Mit, and Puka were amply repaid with a wonderful life integrated into a human family with optimal care, while the benefits these institutions gained came at the cost of the animals' suffering, psychological trauma, even death, thus the exploitation.

They accuse the owner of violating the law, while they themselves have violated not only a single law but numerous legal and ethical standards concerning animal welfare, human rights,

family integrity, and transparency.

They accuse the owner of being an abuser for keeping monkeys at home where they automatically assume a captive lifestyle in enclosure, but were in fact feeling free, never caged, thriving, and joyful, while they are the ones who forced the monkeys to live against their will in the forest, where they feel captive and unhappy, in an attempt to forcibly regress them into a wild state that they never desired. This reality testifies that Freedom is not a forest; it is a feeling.

They falsely accuse the owner who rescued his monkeys from a miserable state and fate, to thriving and evolved, of being a criminal using the prejudice that monkey adoptions encourage wildlife trade and the separation of monkeys from their biological mothers, while in reality, they are the ones who tore these monkeys from the only family they know, remember, and love, subjecting them to uncertainty, insecurity, deprivation, struggle, and premature death, all while portraying themselves as "rescuers," This situation reflects a tragic inversion of truth where the true rescuer is labeled a criminal, while the true criminals are celebrated as conservationists and rescuers.

Such online bureaucratic "law enforcement organizations" which specialize solely in forwarding reported addresses of abused monkeys to the Forest Protection Department (FPD) of Vietnam, do not conduct any follow-up on the animals they cause to be confiscated, despite being legally obligated to maintain transparency. This raises questions about the ultimate fate of these confiscated animals: do they even survive? Many of them are confined to facilities such as Ben En, where management is unwilling to invest resources in proper care, and are subsequently

released into the forest, unprepared, leading to their deaths outside the view of public scrutiny, all while propagating to conserve ecosystems.

To reinforce their narrative, these groups often resort to scientifically unsubstantiated fabricated claims, such as asserting that walking upright damages macaques' spines, or that consumption of fruits that are not naturally available for macaques in the wild and other cooked foods typically prepared for human consumption induces diabetes and various illnesses. Such assertions lack empirical support and are contradicted by the observable health and longevity of numerous adult celebrities fulfilled macaques and 31-year old baboon Cindy who have been raised within human households, eating passionately various fruits and simple cooked food and have not developed such conditions.

Moreover, they frequently misinterpret the sophisticated, intelligent, and playful behavior of human family-integrated macaques as evidence of coercive training and thus abuse. In reality, monkeys are quick learners, especially those who are emotionally fulfilled and bonded to their human caregivers, showing a great deal of enthusiasm and engagement in their daily activities. As the saying goes, "monkey see, monkey do." With minimal encouragement, they are able to discover and expand their skills. For example, walking upright, a behavior wild monkeys may naturally exhibit for brief periods, can, with encouragement, be extended in family-integrated macaques, allowing them to walk upright for longer durations without any observed side effects or spinal damage in adult individuals. These groups also disregard the possibility that many people follow such online channels not for entertainment at the animal's expense, but rather for the joy to witness the macaques' enjoyment of enriched lives, healthy development, and attentive care. Paradoxically, these same legalistic groups are usually found targeting and

complaining about online platforms showcasing thriving, fulfilled well-cared-for macaques, while disregarding or ignoring content that depicts neglected or genuinely abused primates.

To justify their ill intent and opposition to keeping macaques or returning the confiscated emotionally-bonded monkeys to their human family, as well as their insensitivity towards the monkeys' withdrawal following confiscation, they claim to care about upholding the law of illegality as a form of etiquette for animal conservation, while overlooking the negative outcomes on the welfare of Kaka, Mit, and Puka. They have found representation through NGOs that clearly share their intentions. Their position is further driven by resistance to the growing public support for companion macaques like Kaka, Mit, and Puka, who have been successfully integrated into a human household environment, and by efforts to suppress narratives that challenge the prevailing assumptions held by these wildlife advocacy groups. Such groups often promote the generalized belief that primates kept as companion animals are inherently subjected to abuse, a position frequently reinforced by dismissive characterizations of the public as incapable of recognizing signs of animal suffering.

Moreover, following Puka's death, the Director of Ben En Center provided false statements to conceal the situation. It was publicly claimed that Puka had been released alongside Kaka, when in reality, Puka had died in captivity shortly after confiscation due to rapid health deterioration associated with his psychological decline. Additionally, visitations to Mit were arbitrarily forbidden. The director of Ben En falsely claimed that Mit was no longer in the cage but had been transferred to an agent who would care for her until she reached an appropriate age for release into the wild. In reality, recent evidence showed that Mit was still confined to her original cage, receiving only occasional brief visits from a ranger who would offer her a fruit.

These misrepresentations appeared aimed at both limiting external scrutiny and suppressing public awareness of the macaques' ongoing psychological suffering and deteriorating welfare. The concealment of true conditions reflects deliberate efforts to sever public visibility into the consequences of the confiscation process of emotionally-bonded macaques and to obscure the persistent emotional attachment between the macaques and their original caregiver, attempting to hide the truth that macaques not only could not, but did not want to become wild, nor did they enjoy living without clothes, observations that once again, directly challenge the misconceptions promoted by so-called conservationist NGOs, which claim that macaques are not pets, blindly considering against all evidence of fulfillment, that keeping them at home and dressing them is abuse.

While the stated justification for Kaka and Mit's targeted confiscation referenced concerns based on inherent prejudices, this rationale demonstrates significant enforcement inconsistency. Many similar cases in Vietnam remain unaddressed unless specifically reported by one third-party NGO, indicating that legal enforcement is selectively applied. Such patterns of selective or discretionary enforcement have been described as a form of legal misuse, where laws are employed as instruments of control or sanction rather than as neutral frameworks for welfare protection (345–350). International welfare frameworks (e.g., OIE, EU ETNs) emphasize that forced separation from bonded caregivers can constitute cruelty. **From a legal-ethical perspective, such selective targeting exposes tensions between rigid statutory enforcement and international animal welfare principles of which Vietnam is signatory.**

While the stated goal of confiscating pet macaques is often the protection of the animal, many cases like this one reveal an undercurrent of retaliatory tendencies, institutional assertion of

power, and performative activism. **These actions, carried out under the guise of legal enforcement, can in fact constitute ethical violations, what may be termed *crimes committed in the name of the law*. Confiscations made without behavioral expertise or individualized assessment, without psychological evaluation, without prior attempts at negotiation, and without any regard for the animal's emotional bond or current state of care, reveal a broader systemic risk: that poorly calibrated legal frameworks advertently or inadvertently result in profound harm to the primate. Rather than safeguarding the well-being of sentient animals, the confiscation of Kaka and Mit severed established social bonds, disregarded family-typical social attachments, and subjected both animals to prolonged psychological distress. The deaths of Puka and the unknown fate of Mit raise serious concerns over accountability and transparency. Moreover, when the confiscating authorities refuse to disclose health records, post-confiscation outcomes, or allow independent assessment, it suggests a troubling prioritization of authority over truth, and legalism over compassion. These practices, left unexamined, risk undermining the very cause of animal conservation they purport to uphold. Importantly, it also criminalized caregiving individuals who had demonstrably contributed to the animals' welfare, raising ethical concerns regarding the fairness and proportionality of such legal applications (306,308,351,352).**

11.6. Ignorance, Strategic Misrepresentation, and Misguided Narratives in Contemporary Animal Advocacy:

Several prejudices surrounding the Kaka and Mit case highlight a concerning disconnect between certain animal advocacy narratives and contemporary scientific understanding of

primate behavior and cognition. One prominent claim—stated even by Mrs. Lauren Arnaud James, the head of the online coalition SMACC, of which ENV is a member—that “monkeys are and will always be monkeys” (353) reflects a reductive and anti-evolutionary stance. Such assertions ignore advances in ethology and evolutionary psychology that recognize the role of individual experience in shaping cognitive and emotional capacities. To equate Kaka and Mit, who have formed deep social bonds and exhibit complex behaviors resulting from human-integrated environments, with undifferentiated wild macaques is scientifically flawed. As Frans de Waal observes in *“Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?”*, characteristics such as empathy, morality, and culture are shared with nonhuman primates, erasing the stark lines previously drawn between human and nonhuman cognition (354).

Moreover, her dismissive statements such as “no one can claim to know whether they miss their owner or not” (353) disregard well-documented evidence of attachment behaviors in primates. This view not only reflects a lack of behavioral expertise but also risks invalidating legitimate welfare concerns. Advocates who profess animal protection and expertise must recognize that cognitive-emotional insight, particularly in species capable of complex social attachments, is central to welfare assessment. The inability or refusal to acknowledge such bonds undermines the very ethical foundation upon which animal advocacy is built.

Equally concerning are documented instances of unprofessional conduct and language by some organizations responding to soliciting fans. For example, Vietnam Animal Aid’s public references to Kaka’s caregiver as a “moron” and supporters as “nummies” based on inherent assumptions (VAA, personal communication, 2024), reflect a troubling breakdown in respect and

professionalism. Such rhetoric diminishes the credibility of the organization and detracts from any hope for constructive discourse on animal welfare.

Another common misconception is that advocates for the return of Kaka and Mit are merely motivated by a desire to continue watching videos of the animals for their own entertainment. On the contrary, many supporters advocate for the monkeys' return out of genuine concern for their safety and well-being. It is crucial for organizations and coalitions to recognize the emergence of cases where a monkey's advanced behavior is the result of love, care, and encouragement, not cruelty.

Another common claim, propagated by certain foreign-led NGOs, is that all macaque owners will inevitably abandon their animals at puberty. While abandonment is indeed a risk in cases of irresponsible ownership, it is a gross generalization to assume this applies universally. Families that have formed genuine stable, long-term emotional bonds with their companion macaques living together in harmonious cohabitation, had not shown relinquishing care. In such contexts, the home environment becomes a permanent and secure setting for the macaque, who displays behaviors shaped more by social learning and emotional attachment than by wild instincts. The presumption that all macaques will inevitably become aggressive in domestic settings reflects a biased generalization, based on the prominent cases involving either abused, neglected, unfulfilled captive-caged individuals or wild individuals. This stereotype overlooks the behavioral plasticity of macaques and fails to account for the influence of new profiles in macaques living as family members in enriched, nurturing environments on their temperament and psychological well-being. Numerous cases—like Kaka and Mit, other above-mentioned celebrity macaques and 31-year-old Baboon Cindy (291,355)—demonstrate enduring, stable

bonds between macaques and their caregivers, even through adulthood. When well cared for, emotionally secure animals do not display the aggression typically associated with fear, frustration, or neglect. These NGOs may be aware of this reality but continue to circulate misleading narratives for strategic reasons, including increased donations, media attention, or influence. This practice risks transforming legal tools for animal protection into mechanisms of personal vendetta, domination, or financial interest, a situation that meets the definition of corruption.

Further, SMACC suggested that returning the monkeys would be seen as a governmental loss of face (353), and encourage undermining legal authority (353), another legalistic argument that does not prioritize the welfare of Kaka and Mit. However, such fears misread public perception. Acknowledging and correcting errors would, in fact, enhance the government's integrity, while stubbornness in maintaining the ongoing harm is the thing that damages the government's reputation and speaks of tyranny where enforcement is without accountability and reasoned dialogue or welfare-based assessments have no place in the process. Many professions, including medicine and law, routinely retract mistakes without losing credibility. In the Vietnamese context, this aligns with the self-critical principles advocated by Hồ Chí Minh: "We are not afraid of possible mistakes, but of failure to correct them resolutely... We must listen to criticism by the masses and practice sincere self-criticism. Otherwise, we shall lag behind and regress, which will lead to our being cast aside by the masses" (356)(*On Revolutionary Morality*, 1958).

Since the preceding misconceptions can be readily refuted through rational observation and empirical evidence, some NGOs, often operating with undisclosed agendas, rely on their final

claim: that the existence of monkey channels increases the demand for monkey ownership thus fuels illegal wildlife trade. However, this view oversimplifies a much more complex reality:

- Around the world, not only in Vietnam, numerous families and content creators share genuine and joyful relationships with macaques and other primates. The portrayal of such bonds is not a fabrication but a reflection of an emerging truth: the human-primate relationship, when built on empathy, care, and knowledge, can lead to outcomes **that exceed the quality of life experienced by many individuals in the wild**. This truth can no longer be concealed: the existence of fulfilling, harmonious relationships between humans and macaques is now established and widely shared across numerous popular online channels worldwide, not only Vietnamese. This truth is overwhelmingly expanding much quicker and broader than the selective efforts of suppressing it. The proliferation of such content is so extensive that, even if authorities of any country like Vietnam where enforcement is not global and macaques are widespread in domestic households, were to dedicate their efforts entirely to confiscating popular and thriving monkeys from convenient homes, the global visibility of these human-primate bonds would persist through other channels, including abusive channels. There are more adoptions than an NGO can know of and more channels than they can suppress. Desiring to relate with monkeys is inevitable. The demand on monkeys exists, not because of the existence of a good channels, but because of the availability of monkeys in shared spaces with humans. the public would still encounter the truth of the harmonious macaque-human relationship. The desire to relate to monkeys—whether through compassion or rebellion against abuse or, regrettably, through fascination with monkeys' expressions and reactions to abuse—not only continues to grow, but is exacerbated irrespective of enforcement strategies.

Therefore, such efforts to target the happiest monkeys are directed to the wrong targets. This confiscation method applied for decades, has failed to reduce monkey adoptions.

- The current approach void of ethics, marked by what many perceive as tyrannical for being applied without accountability or transparency, or as selectively punitive enforcement, has not only proven ineffective but has also triggered public attention and public backlash: Rather than diminishing public interest, the high-profile confiscation of monkeys, such as Kaka and Mit, has amplified public attention and ignited widespread criticism of wildlife management practices by certain NGOs and government actors. Over a year since their confiscation, their case continues to polarize public opinion, highlighting a growing schism between ethically motivated advocates and those who use blanket prejudices that all private monkey owners are exploitative, whether as a means of expressing envy toward what they perceive as easy income, or as a result of internalized prejudice. Increasing numbers of people are awakening to the truth of the possible harmonious relationship between a macaque and his human family, through numerous channels around the world, which is the opposite consequence of the intended proclaimed aim of the confiscation. The tyrannical and selective enforcement of confiscation laws often intensify -- rather than suppresses -- public engagement, especially public objection. In practice, it has led to rising subscriptions to monkey channels, not their decline. When Kaka and Mit were confiscated, their YouTube channel had under 800,000 subscribers; it now exceeds 841,000. Other similar channels, once mid-sized, have crossed the million-subscriber mark following similar interventions. Rather than reducing public interest or demand, these confiscations have intensified engagement, driven curiosity, and contributed to a proliferation of new channels featuring monkey adoptions, and to the existing ones adding new baby macaques to their

family. The principle of psychological reactance "the forbidden is desired", appears to be at play. Authoritarian suppression has backfired, inadvertently popularizing what it sought to erase. In the digital era, this reactive attention dynamic must be accounted for when designing policies that affect online visibility and public behavior. This suggests that suppression-oriented strategies, particularly when implemented without transparency, accountability, scientific nuance, or regard for welfare outcomes, may undermine the very conservation and protection goals they claim to serve. In the 21st century, authoritarian measures are not the solution, particularly when they result in criminal outcomes that harm the very animals they claim to protect, while offering no measurable benefit to the ecosystems they purport to conserve. Animals who have always known comfort and luxury within a human ecosystem, seem to always refuse to live a wild existence.

- The traditional label "wild" has been attributed to species that humans still haven't fully understood. It fails to account for the behavioral plasticity and adaptability seen in macaques raised in compassionate human environments. However, over the last decade, some individuals have evolved in their understanding of primates and have succeeded in building harmonious meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships that respect the emotional and cognitive complexity of primates and greatly enhance the animals' quality of life, surpassing by far that of their counterparts in the wild. Kaka and Mit are a perfect example of what love combined with respect, structure and informed care can achieve: a better conservation than conventional conservation. Such relationships should not be punished, but cherished and supported. A conceptual redefinition is needed in how we classify animals as "domestic" or "wild." These

labels should not be rigidly attributed to an entire species but should instead reflect whether or not the animal is bonded with a human. Domestic animals, like humans, do not need to operate through instincts, as they are able to live in security and acting out of an affectionate desire to please and mutual respect. Crucially, domesticated animals do not share the same psychological profile, desires, or needs as their wild counterparts. An animal who has grown accustomed to a higher comfort and companionship at home does not naturally wish to return to a wild environment—especially when that environment represents a significant decline in well-being.

- Moreover, demand for primates is not solely or even primarily, driven by social media. In many regions, including Vietnam, monkeys inhabit shared spaces with humans. People encounter them directly, sometimes rescue them from injury or abandonment, and occasionally acquire them through informal or illegal markets that have long existed. These realities are not new, nor are they easily mitigated by criminalization alone. Confiscation as a deterrence mechanism has proven ineffective over decades in reducing macaque ownership, as macaque ownership is still widespread in shared regions. Moreover, even monkeys that have been abused or neglected, whether in captivity under abusive or uninformed owners, or in sanctuaries, may still evoke a desire in viewers to adopt a monkey. Therefore, targeting one of the few happiest monkeys on the internet does not appear to address the broader issue even slightly. Thus, a shift in strategy is warranted: rather than solely targeting individual cases under blanket suppression stances, regulators could explore licensing frameworks for qualified caregivers and offer education on the behavioral, psychological, and welfare needs of macaques, discouraging macaque captivities when the owners lack the financial, timely and material provisions to raise macaques in fulfillment conditions.

While it is true that many primate channels display abusive practices or reveal caregiver ignorance evidenced by signs of distress, neglect and insecurity in monkeys such as self-sucking or repetitive behaviors, not all content falls into this category. Channels like *Monkey Kaka* demonstrate perfect optimal relationship, healthy emotional bonding, and behavioral understanding that result in visibly fulfilled, healthy animals. These rare but valuable examples serve not to encourage mass adoption, but to model best practices and raise awareness of what primate well-being actually requires from 24/7 constant attention over more than 30 years, a responsibility that not many can assume, thus **reducing the demand on monkeys**. Such channels serve as informal **educational tools** for conservation purposes by elevating public knowledge and understanding about the requirements to make a macaque thrive best, thus contribute to **reduce the ongoing abuse** by others who lack the necessary knowledge and understanding, and who already would have adopted monkeys. It is easier for someone to desire to adopt a monkey when they see a baby monkey abused and fearful than when they see one smart, outgoing, demanding and with individuality, because such a positive profile surely would require timely dedication. Mikayla Raines, a well-known fox rescuer who successfully formed bonds with foxes in a domestic setting, reported that many viewers of her channel, who also kept foxes as pets, contacted her to surrender their animals after realizing that their own foxes appeared unhappy compared to hers. These individuals recognized that they couldn't take care of their fox, as they realized they lacked the skills or resources necessary to ensure the well-being of a fox. Their realization was only possible because they have seen through Mikayla's channel an optimal level of thriving foxes, which they didn't know possible (357). Their intention was not abuse, but rather a lack of knowledge, talent, and capacity to provide

appropriate care. As such, her channel served an educational purpose and was effective in discouraging sporadic and uninformed fox adoptions. Similarly, individuals with demonstrated talent and care, such as Mr. Ngoc, should be encouraged and celebrated, not penalized and called “criminals”. Recognizing the difference between exploitative and educational representations is essential for an ethically consistent and scientifically informed approach to animal welfare policy in the digital age.

If the goal is truly to conserve species and preserve ecosystems, there exist alternative strategies that can achieve conservation on a broader scale, without punishing individual animals who are thriving in human care or disrupting their well-being. These alternatives are numerous, feasible, clearly identifiable, and, most importantly, effective. They include improving the welfare of farmed monkeys, releasing captive-bred farmed individuals into suitable wild habitats, which improves their welfare, enhancing the quality of life for wild populations; and reducing the export of monkeys for unnecessary and inhumane experimentation.

Nonetheless, even if we assume the judgment is based on this argument of channels contributing to illegal adoptions, then, other decisions could have been made that would not keep Kaka and Mit punished and forced into a lifestyle that is much less convenient, at a time when they could be benefiting from 24/7 love and proper care with their human family.

Such an alternative decision would be

to return these monkeys home to their owner, even without further filming, if indeed, in NGOs’ perspective, the videos were the problem. At their human family's house, these monkeys were

treated as sentient beings, with proper attention given to their individual character and personality, unlike at facilities, where they are seen as numbers and packs with no name.

In conclusion, the Kaka and Mit case offers an urgent opportunity to reconsider entrenched biases and ensure that scientific knowledge, ethical clarity, and genuine compassion form the foundation of animal welfare policy and practice. Selective enforcement, emotionally detached decision-making, and rhetoric grounded in prejudice undermine not only the welfare of animals but also public trust in the institutions meant to protect them.

11.1. Behavioral Plasticity Across Species in Labeled-Wild Animals Raised as Family Within Human Environments:

The behavioral plasticity of labeled-wild animals raised in human environments is not limited to primates such as Kaka and Mit, but extends across species. One illustrative example is Rafus, an eastern grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) rescued at just eight months of age and raised in a domestic environment by caregivers who operate a sanctuary (358). Over time, Rafus exhibited a marked behavioral divergence from conspecifics reared in more naturalized settings. Rather than developing into a typical rehabilitated sanctuary animal, he became a member of the family, psychologically and socially integrated into the human household (358).

Rafus displayed none of the typical wild behaviors often observed in sanctuary-kept kangaroos, such as scratching, rushing, bolting, or maintaining distance. Instead, his behavior increasingly aligned with traits seen in domesticated animals: emotional regulation, proximity-seeking, social bonding, and relaxed posturing. He routinely returned to the house, showed a strong

preference for close contact with his human caregivers, and participated in daily household routines, including symbolic social events such as birthday celebrations (358). His attachment to his caregivers and to the domestic environment, particularly his favored couch, surpassed any observable affinity for open landscapes or interaction with conspecifics. As his caregiver observed: *“Rafus does not yearn for vast open plains or the freedom of the wild. Instead, he longs for quiet evenings, gentle affection, and the safety of a warm home.”* Over time, Rafus became calmer, more patient, and more socially attuned than other kangaroos—demonstrating emotional maturity and a level of behavioral civility rarely seen in wild-reared individuals (358). These behavioral transformations suggest that early and sustained exposure to human care can profoundly reshape an animal’s emotional and psychological needs. This challenges the assumption that “returning to the wild” is always the most ethical or appropriate course of action. In fact, the very concept may become legally and ethically problematic when an animal no longer identifies with its species-specific ecological niche. In South Australia, for example, wildlife law prohibits the release of rehabilitated kangaroos unless their exact place of origin is known, a policy designed to preserve genetic diversity and prevent disease transmission (358). However, even if legal, Rafus’s deep behavioral imprinting and social dependency would likely preclude his survival in the wild. As his caregiver states: *“He isn’t wild anymore. His herd is no longer kangaroos in the bush—it’s us. His sanctuary is this home, this life. And his couch? That’s his throne... Rafus found that love. He found his family. And every night, when he gently taps on the back door, we’re reminded that true trust—from an animal who once had nothing—is the most powerful gift of all.”* (358). These observations closely mirror those made in the cases of Kaka and Mit. They illustrate that the sense of fulfillment family animals derived from their

relationship with human family members differed and exceeded significantly from what the wild could offer.

As for Kaka, Mit and Puka, Rafus' transformation, from a frightened, disoriented joey into a deeply content, emotionally secure being, serves as a compelling testament to the capacity for cross-species relationships and the reconfiguration of behavioral needs in wild animals raised under human care (358). Much like primates such as Kaka, Mit, and Puka, Rafus challenges the prejudice that a human household cannot offer meaningful companionship or psychological enrichment to labeled-wild species.

Moreover, contrary to the criticisms that portray such cases as promoting the illegal wildlife trade, stories like Rafus's—and those of similarly raised animals like Kaka and Mit, serve an important educational function. They allow the public to engage with the emotional complexity and behavioral flexibility of wild animals in human environments. Individuals with an affinity for rescuing or adopting exotic animals are thereby better informed about the profound responsibilities involved. Exposure to such narratives also highlights the inadequacy of traditional captive settings, where standard enclosures may fail to meet emotional and cognitive needs and fulfillment. Viewers come to realize, by witnessing Rafus' behavior and well-being, the importance of providing not just affection, but informed, species-adapted care: *“Because giving them love isn't enough; Giving them the right love makes all the difference”* (358).

Thus, rather than encouraging irresponsible ownership or trafficking, these stories offer a platform for ethical reflection, behavioral insight, and public awareness. Rafus's example

illustrates that the welfare of human-raised wild animals must be assessed not through rigid species-based frameworks, but by individual histories and behavioral outcomes.

11.8. Legal and Ethical Violations:

11.8.1. Legal articles on Transparency broken:

1. Law on Prevention and Combat of Corruption (Law No. 36/2018/QH14)

- **Article 10:** Agencies, organizations, and units shall ensure publicity and transparency in their organization and operation.
- **Article 18:** State enterprises must disclose information on operations, financial statements, and performance.
- **Article 67:** Non-state organizations receiving state funds or operating in public interest sectors (including animal protection) are also subject to transparency requirements.

2. Law on Access to Information (Law No. 104/2016/QH13)

- **Article 4:** Citizens have the right to access information held by state agencies.
- **Article 7:** Information disclosure includes operational and administrative reports, budget use, and activity results.
- **Article 12:** State bodies must publish information proactively and also respond to specific citizen requests.

3. Decree No. 59/2019/NĐ-CP (Guiding Law 36/2018/QH14):

- Reinforces the requirement for all agencies and relevant organizations to disclose operations and results to the public.

4. Directive No. 28/CT-TTg (2016):

- Stresses the importance of transparent management and monitoring of wildlife and urges timely and public coordination of efforts.

5. Law on Animal Health (Law No. 79/2015/QH13):

- Although focused on animal disease control, it includes mandates that relevant agencies report their operations and results.

11.8.2. Violation of animal welfare principles:

The Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) and the Declaration of Animal Rights emphasize the importance of the emotional well-being of animals and discourage arbitrary confiscations.

Legal articles relative to animal welfare:

The forced confiscation of these animals is deemed **cruel** under international laws to which Vietnam, as a member of the United Nations, is a signatory:

- According to Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW) and the 1978 Universal Declaration of Animal Rights, proclaimed by different universal organizations like the World Animal Protection and the UDAR advocacy network: **Domesticated animals, in particular, are**

recognized as being reliant on humans, which would imply that any decisions regarding their **confiscation should consider their emotional needs**. This is relevant in situations like Kaka, Mit and Puka's, where **confiscating an animal would lead to its emotional distress, as in the case of separating it from a long-time owner**.

- **Article 6 of the UDAW condemns the abandonment of animals as a cruel act, which could be extended to view the removal of animals from long-term caretakers as a form of emotional distress for the animals, especially when they were happy. The Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare acknowledges the importance of considering both the physical and psychological well-being of animals. This means that any decision, including to confiscate or not, should prioritize avoiding emotional distress and respecting the bond between humans and their animals.**

- **These laws also prohibit releasing the animals into the wild before the third generation of descendance.** These guidelines exist in cases like Kaka, Mit and Puka, to prevent high mortality or depression rates among the released animals. Examples include the U.S. Endangered Species Act and international guidelines like those followed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

- **Article 12 of Decree 06/2019/ND-CP:** This decree outlines the management of endangered, precious, and rare species of forest fauna and flora. Mismanagement by any organization, including NGOs like ENV, could be deemed illegal under this provision.

- **Article 173 of the 2015 Penal Code:** This article pertains to the offense of "Abusing positions or powers to illegally detain people." While primarily focused on human rights, its principles

could be analogously applied if an organization abuses its position to unlawfully confiscate property, including animals.

Authorities at Bến En National Park are found negligent in their duties, resulting in the death of animals, the following legal provisions apply:

- Article 360 of the 2015 Penal Code: This article condemns the crime of "Lack of responsibility causing serious consequences." **The negligence of individuals responsible for animal care led to significant harm, suffering and death of wildlife are condemnable and to be accounted for.**

- Article 242 of the 2015 Penal Code: This article deals with "Violations of regulations on the protection of endangered, precious, and rare animals." **Negligent actions leading to the death of such animals could result in penalties under this statute.**

- **Contrary to ENV's prejudices, Researchers on Indian Bonnet Macaques who are very close relatives of pig-tail Kaka and stump-tail Mit say "Bonnet macaques are never afraid of humans; thus, they easily coexist with humans. In addition, they can make good pets** since they have the ability to detect danger and warn humans about it through their warning cries".

- Although the personnel at ENV are theoretically supposed to revise the reports they receive from supposedly members of the public to forward only the most urgent and severely abused cases to the FPD, they instead **chose** Kaka and Mit, two of the best thriving and most well-cared-for monkeys, living in harmony with their family, as a well-integrated member. **This constitutes selective enforcement based on public profile, not law enforcement** especially macaques are widespread, readily accessible, and commonly adopted, with little to no law enforcement, except in cases where an NGO refers the matter to the Forest Protection Department (FPD) for

confiscation; **And selective enforcement is itself a violation of the law that warrants legal accountability** (359): Article 1.2 of The Law on Handling Administrative Violations (2012) mandates that administrative authorities must apply the law uniformly and impartially. It emphasizes: In checking and handling administrative violations, the principles of legality, impartiality, objectivity, openness, transparency, and fairness must be ensured...". Thus, ENV and the government have acted unlawfully and must be held responsible.

11.8.3. Human Rights Violations:

The separation violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 17), which protects the integrity and privacy of families.

- **Article 17: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks"** from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) emphasizes the protection of privacy, family, and home — **rights that are also cited in cases involving animals regarded as family members and addressing disruptions that affect their lives.**

Hence, the law that protects against confiscating happy animals who have an emotional bond with their owner, exists, it's just under different clauses. These clauses to which Vietnam is signatory, condemn the confiscation of emotionally-bonded animals as "cruelty" because it only harms their well-being. These clauses were ignored and the abusive clause of "illegality" that treats the abused and the happy with the same treatment, was chosen. That is why it is not about the law, but about the abusive application of the law. The crucial aspects of animal

welfare were overlooked, which are the most important to consider: animal rights, family integrity, human rights, and transparency. Multiple clauses under these areas were dangerously violated without any accountability. Instead, robotic, abusive, and tyrannic exertion of dominance, vengefully confiscating thriving monkeys. This reveals a distorted intention, a desire to cause harm by punishing the owners rather than acting in the animals' best interests. Hence the law being misused as a tool for personal vendetta, as a mechanism to inflict harm on the owners. Institutional entities seem have lost sight of their purpose. Had the animals truly been their priority, their attention would have shifted to other clauses of the law, and their judgment would have been entirely different, one that does not victimize the animal.

This case study illustrates critical behavioral and welfare consequences that arise when individual primates with strong human social bonds are forcibly separated from their caregivers and subjected to rigid institutional protocols. The Kaka case also raises broader questions concerning the adequacy of current welfare frameworks for bonded primates, the ethical limits of institutional authority, and the need for transparent governance in wildlife confiscation with follow-up efforts. **While the stated goal of confiscating pet macaques is often to protect the animals, this case exemplifies how the law can be misused as a tool of harm to serve an authority's political interests and performative activism, at the expense of both the owners' and the animals' suffering, even at the expense of their lives. Such actions exploit the pain of the victims to seek visibility, solicit more donations, assert institutional dominance, and pursue punitive actions to silence platforms that have succeeded in presenting optimal harmonious human-macaque bonds. Instead of updating their knowledge to include a novelty truth, certain NGOs like ENV, abuse of their power to protect the biased prejudices**

which they aggressively continue to promote against all evidence, thinking they're protecting their image from appearing fallible and cruel, while pursuing personal benefits. Therefore, this article highlights the need to embed ethics as a legal obligation to protect animals and their human families from being targeted and victimized by abuses of power carried out under the guise of law enforcement. Greater interdisciplinary integration between behavioral science, welfare law, and enforcement practice is essential to prevent such welfare-compromising outcomes. Incorporating attachment science, welfare indicators, and case-by-case assessments into legal decision-making could help align the letter of the law with its original welfare-oriented intent, ensuring laws fulfill protective, rather than punitive, roles.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This article was written independently and was not supported by any funding agency, organization, or institution that could be perceived to influence its content, and have no financial or personal relationships that could inappropriately affect (bias) the work presented.

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