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## MACAQUE-HUMAN INTERACTIONS IN SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka's toque macaque is an endemic and endangered species. Current information about the nature and diversity of their interactions with humans across the country is limited; focusing to date largely on a few locations. As part of a larger on-going multi-disciplinary study, we conducted 307 interviews across the country using a standardized questionnaire to help clarify this. Overall, 51% believed that primate numbers were increasing, but trends varied regionally, with some provinces reporting noticeable decreases in monkey sightings while others reported increased visits by monkeys to garden plots. This may be due to variation in the intensity of human development and forest fragmentation either forcing primates closer to human habitation in search of food or driving them closer to local extinction in more developed urban and industry based provinces. The toque macaque in particular is considered the biggest pest. For the most part all of Sri Lanka's 5 primates are tolerated, but in certain provinces primates were responsible for significant economic damage to crops, and are treated more severely. Both Buddhists and Hindus treat primates with reverence, and they are particularly visible in the vicinity of temples and historical areas because of a continuous supply of religious food offerings, from which feeding on is tolerated. The killing of any wild animal, including primates is against the law and prohibited by religious beliefs. Nonetheless, hunting for food and a rich belief array of medicinal and ritual uses was reported to occur at very low frequency in rural areas.

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