

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT A MACAQUE AS A PET?

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Twenty years ago it was generally considered unthinkable (as well as unfindable and unpublishable) to carry out research on non-human primates that have contact with human populations. Contexts for interspecies contact such as urban primates, temple, pet or performing monkeys were seen as abnormal/aberrant situations that distorted 'natural' primate behaviour and ecology. In the last decade this bias has gradually yielded to an appreciation that the human/primate interface is not only a legitimate area of research, it is an area of critical importance to both primate conservation and human health. Primate pet ownership, widespread in the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia, cuts across demographic, economic, social and cultural lines. While many taxa of primates are kept as pets, macaques, because of their wide distribution, adaptability and hardiness are the most commonly encountered pet primate in Asia. This presentation will discuss demographic, molecular and serologic data on pet macaques and their owners, viewing the the role pet macaques may play in bidirectional cross-species disease transmission, and their potential impact on public health and primate conservation from an ethnoprimateological perspective.

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