



**PRESS RELEASE** *for immediate release*

27 July 2016

### Unilad ignores pleas over monkey suffering

“When you're searching for f\*cks to give,” ran the banners pasted across a video of Angel, the famous pet monkey, drinking from a green plastic cup and turning the pages of a big book. The video was posted on Facebook by Unilad on July 13, just days after they had been contacted by a coalition of organizations requesting that they review their policy about posting images of primates being kept in pet-like situations, due to the negative effects that such videos are known to have on primates all over the world.

Angel's owner claims that the long-tailed macaque is “a rescue,” yet Angel is depicted in dozens of YouTube videos in her owner's house, cuddling with children and cats, having makeup applied and generally living a life in entirely inappropriate circumstances that are unlike any that a reputable animal sanctuary would provide for her. She is never far from people and never with other monkeys. No primate sanctuary with any understanding of what monkeys need rescuing *from* would allow such situations to occur with their rescued animals, and they certainly would not publicly post such images of their resident primates. This is because sanctuaries know that such images promote the trade in primates as pets; a trade that inevitably causes suffering for the animals involved, and often for the people, too.

Thanks in part to exposure to images of apes and monkeys living the apparent high life with human companions, the general public often fails to grasp the reality of primate ownership - that primates are undomesticated animals with certain innate needs that are not possible to meet in domestic situations. Being born in captivity does not equal domestication, but many people do not understand this, and are easily and thoroughly convinced that with a whole lot of “love”, a monkey can become a happy member of a human family.

Unilad's video of Angel travelled quickly through the Internet. Within hours, the video had been viewed thousands of times and now has well over two million hits. As expected, the inevitable “I want one” comments appeared almost immediately. Sadly, Unilad never responded to the coalition of concerned organizations who had so recently asked the organization to reconsider such postings. The title and caption of Unilad's post, and their continual posting of harmful material, appears to be indicative of how little they care for primate welfare and conservation. Read the letter that Unilad ignored below.





11 July 2016

Dear Unilad,

*We are a coalition of animal welfare and conservation organizations with specific expertise in non-human primates. Several of us have contacted you individually about this matter, but none have as yet received a reply. We hope you will take our concerns to heart and let us know what you think of this matter.*

*Will you consider implementing a policy that limits or eliminates the promotion of images or videos that depict non-human primates in pet-like settings, in human environments, with human companions?*

*With well over 14 million fans on your Facebook page alone, what you choose to post achieves great visibility and widespread impact. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, you posted a video of a so-called “rescued” monkey in a human home, wearing lipstick, and being combed by her human companion (here: <https://www.facebook.com/uniladmag/videos/2278236895532690/>). This video, like previous similar posts, was almost certainly posted in a spirit of fun. People really do like to see cute videos of humans and animals interacting. What you may not know, though, is that the keeping of primates as pets is a very problematic practice. You are probably unaware that viral images of this sort contribute dangerously to the general public’s misunderstanding about primates and their needs. Exposure to such images can have a seriously negative impact on animal welfare and conservation, particularly when the images are presented as light-hearted, fun diversions.*

*Uninformed viewers of videos like these tend to form the impression that primates can and do thrive in human company and in human environments. Any credible primatologist, biologist or animal welfare specialist, however, will tell you that they cannot. Multiple studies<sup>1-5</sup> have shown that images of this nature influence human perceptions of and attitudes towards primates. These, in turn, shape people’s behaviour towards primates. For example, exposure to videos like the one posted on May 22<sup>nd</sup> increase viewers’ likelihood to want a monkey as a pet. In other, similar cases, the spread of such videos has directly hindered conservation efforts for highly endangered species<sup>6</sup>.*

*Consider the condemnation faced by celebrities who obtain pet primates or pose for photos with endangered animals. Justin Bieber, Dez Bryant Lady Gaga, for example, have all been called foolish and irresponsible for such actions. Unilad would do well to avoid such associations.*

*We appeal to Unilad, as a powerful source of exposure for viral videos and images of all kinds, to acknowledge that videos such as that posted on May 22<sup>nd</sup> can have unintended negative impacts. If Unilad and other major sources of these videos and images would stop posting them, then such damage would be largely prevented, and our non-human primate cousins would stand a far better chance at survival in a world that is already stacked against them.*

*We hope to hear your thoughts on this matter soon.*

*Sincerely,*

*Nicola O’Brien, Captive Animals Protection Society ([www.captiveanimals.org](http://www.captiveanimals.org)); Brooke Aldrich, Neotropical Primate Conservation ([www.neoprimate.org](http://www.neoprimate.org)); Erika Fleury, North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance ([www.primatesanctuaries.org](http://www.primatesanctuaries.org)); Sarah Hanson and Paul Reynolds, Wild Futures ([www.wildfutures.org](http://www.wildfutures.org)); Kate Chabriere, Moroccan Primate Conservation ([www.mpcfoundation.nl](http://www.mpcfoundation.nl)); Professor Anna Nekaris, Little Fireface Project ([www.nocturama.org](http://www.nocturama.org)); Dr Sian Waters, Barbary Macaque Awareness and Conservation ([www.barbarymacaque.org](http://www.barbarymacaque.org))*



## Sources:

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2. Ross, S. R., Vreeman, V. M. & Lonsdorf, E. V. Specific Image Characteristics Influence Attitudes about Chimpanzee Conservation and Use as Pets. *PLoS ONE* **6**, e22050 (2011).
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4. Schroepfer, K. K., Rosati, A. G., Chartrand, T. & Hare, B. Use of 'Entertainment' Chimpanzees in Commercials Distorts Public Perception Regarding Their Conservation Status. *PLoS ONE* **6**, e26048 (2011).  
<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0026048>
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6. Nekaris, B. K. A.-I., Campbell, N., Coggins, T. G., Rode, E. J. & Nijman, V. Tickled to Death: Analysing Public Perceptions of 'Cute' Videos of Threatened Species (Slow Lorises – *Nycticebus* spp.) on Web 2.0 Sites. *PLoS ONE* **8**, e69215 (2013). <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0069215>

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Video posted by Unilad on 13 July:

<https://www.facebook.com/uniladmag/videos/2318415494848163/>

Video posted by Unilad on 19 May:

<https://www.facebook.com/uniladmag/videos/2278236895532690/>

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