

# The Role of U.S. Experimenters in the Illegal Trade in Wild-Caught Monkeys



**U.S. laboratories' unceasing demand for monkeys to experiment on has driven two species to the brink of extinction, caused immeasurable suffering, failed to lead to meaningful improvements in human health, and likely encouraged the illegal trade in these animals.**

## U.S. Department of Justice Indictments for Alleged Monkey Laundering

- On November 16, 2022, following a five-year investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the DOJ [indicted](#) Cambodian government officials and the Cambodian owner and staff of Vanny Bio Research (Cambodia) Corporation Ltd. (VBRC), a breeding farm that exports monkeys, for its alleged involvement in a monkey-laundering and -smuggling ring.
- The DOJ indictment references two unindicted co-conspirators, identified as U.S. companies located in Miami and Alice, Texas, which had conspired in the illegal importation of wild long-tailed macaques in order to sell them to customers in the U.S. Based on evidence in the DOJ's complaint and filings with the [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission](#) concerning a monkey-smuggling ring, PETA believes that Inotiv, which owns two monkey facilities in Alice, Texas, and the Miami-based Worldwide Primates are the unindicted co-conspirators.
- The DOJ alleges that defendants and unindicted co-conspirators obtained Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) export permits that falsely labeled wild-caught long-tailed macaques as captive-bred—felony violations of both the Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- The DOJ indictment lists numerous “overt acts” of corruption, bribery, and monkey laundering—including social media app communications discussing the delivery by black market suppliers of wild-caught long-tailed macaques to VBRC.

## Importation of Nonhuman Primates Into the U.S. for Use in Laboratories

- Since 2017, U.S. entities have purchased and imported nearly 175,000 nonhuman primates.
- Long-tailed macaques—the species most heavily traded for use in primate experimentation—account for 94.5% of the total number. These monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*, also known as “cynomolgus monkeys” and “crab-eating macaques”) have been captured and imported from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mauritius, the Philippines, and Vietnam.
- Since 2020, Cambodia has been the largest exporter and the [U.S. the largest importer of primates](#) in the world.
- Hunters in countries like Cambodia trap mother monkeys, pry their babies away, stuff the babies into bags, and cram the mothers—and any other troop members who have survived capture—into crates. Some monkeys are sold directly to U.S. importers, whereas others will be taken to commercial monkey factory farms like VBRC, where the mothers will be forced to breed in filthy, barren conditions. Injury and illness are extremely common at these facilities, and many of the monkeys die.
- Once imported, these monkeys can be bred or sold to third parties, including the National Institutes of Health, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, contract research organizations, U.S. military research facilities, and many public and private universities for invasive experiments.

| Fiscal Year  | Number of primates imported into the U.S. <sup>1</sup> | Number of long-tailed macaques imported into the U.S. | Number of long-tailed macaques imported from Cambodia | Number of shipments carrying imported primates <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------|--|---|---|---|
| 2017         | 21,861   | 20,110  | 6,029 <sup>3</sup>                                    | 125   |
| 2018         | 27,956   | 25,700  | 5,851   | 152   |
| 2019         | 33,818   | 32,439  | 8,571   | 162   |
| 2020         | 26,728   | 24,879  | 15,664  | 115   |
| 2021         | 31,844   | 30,649  | 18,870  | 130   |
| 2022         | 32,709   | 31,522  | 19,618  | Not disclosed   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>174,916</b>   | <b>165,299</b>  | <b>74,603</b>   | <b>684</b> (excluding 2022)                                 |

<sup>1</sup>This figure includes multiple species.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ports of entry for shipments are restricted to Chicago, Dulles, Houston, Miami, Newark, and New York.

<sup>3</sup>CDC documents do not include the number of long-tailed macaques imported from Cambodia in 2017. The data for 2017 were accessed from [https://trade.cites.org/en/cites\\_trade/#](https://trade.cites.org/en/cites_trade/#). All other data were obtained by PETA from the CDC via public records requests.

## The Secretive Monkey Trade and Its Appalling Lack of Transparency

- In order to bring monkeys into the U.S. for experimentation, importers must be registered with the CDC, which currently lists 16 commercial importers, three national primate research centers, and one university.
- The identities of some CDC-registered importers aren't publicly available.
- Importers arrange transportation for newly imported primates throughout the U.S. to CDC-approved quarantine facilities at undisclosed locations.
- Commercial importers are solely responsible for husbandry, health screening, illness detection, and reporting during the mandated 31-day quarantine period. At the end of the quarantine period, the primates can be sold to third parties.

## Protections for Endangered Species

- In July 2022, the International Union for Conservation of Nature changed the classification of long-tailed macaques from "vulnerable" to "endangered" and identified the exploitation by the U.S. experimentation industry as a major factor in the plummeting numbers of this species. Additionally, long-tailed macaques are listed under Appendix II of the CITES permit system. CITES permits are supposed to establish whether the [trade is legal, sustainable, and traceable in accordance with](#)

[articles III, IV, and V of the convention](#). The provisions of CITES are implemented in the U.S. through the ESA. Long-tailed macaque shipments entering the U.S. must be accompanied by a CITES export permit, which details, among other information, whether the monkeys were bred in captivity or taken from nature. Falsely declaring the source of even one animal on a CITES export permit is an act of illicit trafficking in wildlife, and the entire shipment is then subject to seizure.

- The Lacey Act prohibits trade in wild animals who have been illegally possessed, transported, or sold, and it allows forfeiture of wild animals "imported, exported, transported, sold, received, acquired, or purchased contrary to" this provision.

## Consequences for Science

The primate experimentation industry asserts that its use of purpose-bred, specific pathogen-free, well-characterized primates allows investigators to control potentially confounding variables. However, the false labeling of wild-caught primates as being captive-bred and the resulting failure of investigators to address this critical variable in their study designs subverts the integrity and reproducibility of experiments.