

Nancy Priston

Production and distribution of educational material on the ecology, behaviour and conservation of the Buton macaque, *Macaca ochreata brunnescens*, in villages surrounding a proposed national park.

Nancy Priston

nancy@cantab.net

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A study on the population status and behaviour of the Buton macaque *Macaca ochreata brunnescens* (IUCN Red List status – vulnerable) with particular reference to human-primate conflict in the forests and villages of Buton, southeast Sulawesi has been conducted since 2000 using interviews and direct observation of crop-raiding. Management and conservation issues arising from this work, and a desire to communicate results to local communities, led to the development of this education project, conducted June – September 2004.

The aims of the project were to: (i) provide information and increase awareness about the Buton macaque and its conservation amongst school children in villages bordering a proposed national park; (ii) recommend strategies for minimising human-primate conflict; (iii) communicate findings to communities who helped to produce the data; (iv) create an understanding of these animals and, critically, a desire to protect them.

Leaflets detailing the biology, ecology and conservation of the Buton macaque and human-wildlife conflict were produced for elementary school children in the region surrounding Lambusango Forest Reserve, Buton. Posters were also produced for display in schools and given to local authorities. A story-booklet was given to each child (200 children, age 7 – 11). Schools were visited at the start of the study period and given a fun talk about monkeys, including their behaviour, ecology and crop-raiding. The talks were structured in the form of questions to inform the children whilst also assessing their knowledge. Children were asked to shout out answers and demonstrate certain things, such as monkeys' movements etc. This was designed to assess awareness prior to receiving the literature. The schools were re-visited at the end of the study and given a monkey-related quiz and drawing competition.

Evidence suggests there were short-term effects from this education project. The habits and behaviour of the macaques were better understood, including their social structure and diet. Although monkeys' crop-raiding activities were still forefront in most of the children's answers they included comments about the forest and the benefits monkeys bring. In the pre-literature answers, benefits to the forest were mostly aesthetic; in the quiz they included seed dispersal and the Buton macaque's uniqueness. This suggests they understood and retained the information presented in the leaflets. Recognition that killing monkeys is illegal and that chasing them from farms is a better solution was also promising. Although many children still reported wanting a pet monkey (a difficult desire to overcome in young children) many stated that they would not want to trap one or remove it from its group.

This education project was short and its evaluation limited. Perceptions are deep rooted and hard to overcome, but the results are encouraging and suggest further educational workshops would help in disseminating the results of the macaque study

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and foster pride in this island's unique primate. Further work is required to see if these opinions hold over the longer term. If this proves successful it can be expanded to cover all schools surrounding the forest reserve and also could be modified to target farmers' groups.



Elementary school children in the region surrounding Lambusango Forest Reserve reading leaflets detailing the biology, ecology and conservation of the Buton macaque.