

QUOTATION

M. F. SMALL ON MONKEY BUSINESS IN BALI

My last research project on monkey behavior had taken place five years earlier, and I felt a surge of excitement when I reached my primary research site, the Sangeh Monkey Forest in the center of Bali, the tropical vacation spot.

. . . I failed to see an adult female approaching to my left. Suddenly she streaked past me, a blur of green-grey fur so close I could smell the familiar monkey odor. In mid-leap, her tiny fingers gripped my brand-new sunglasses. She unceremoniously yanked them off my face and sped into the forest.

I was stunned. The swiftness of her calculated thievery was breathtaking. . . . Accompanied by a temple guard, I tracked my assailant deep into the woods. She finally stopped running, only to sit and chew contemplatively on my glasses, her brown eyes shifting back and forth between her pursuers. The guard tossed her a few bags of peanuts. Needing both hands to collect this booty, she dropped the glasses in favor of something more digestible and sped away.

"You must not wear glasses near the monkeys," instructed the guard. . . . As I returned to the main area, I noticed tourists holding on to their possessions for dear life, and monkeys clearly poised for thievery. Animals stood on hind legs and yanked on clothes. They jumped on people, pulled hair, and rifled pockets. These normally gentle and friendly animals had turned into beggars and thieves. Something had gone terribly wrong at Sangeh.

As my study progressed, I realized that I had been a victim of a monkey mugging only because the monkeys were victims themselves. Bad management of a tourist site, coupled with uneducated visitors with no appreciation of macaques as fellow primates, had resulted in a twisted relationship between the visitors and the very animals they had come to see.

After a few days of observation, I understood why the monkeys were so badly behaved—they have been taught to be obnoxious. At the entrance to the temple . . . about thirty men who call themselves "guides" sit and wait for the tourists. . . . Each man owns a Polaroid camera, and his job is to manipulate the tourist into buying a photograph. The method is simple: As a tourist enters, a guide tags along offering tidbits of information (mostly incorrect) about monkey behavior. At the first sight of a monkey, the guide pulls bits of food out of his pack and puts it on the tourist's shoulder. The monkey, of course, leaps up, the animal quietly munches away, and the Polaroid camera flashes. The monkey is then shooed off, often hit, and the guide demands 6,000 rupia (about \$4).

The guides . . . foster mass thievery among the monkeys. When a monkey steals a nonfood item, such as a pair of glasses, it gets rewarded with a bunch of bananas or a bag of peanuts from the guide. The purpose is to distract the thief and grab the goods back. From the monkey's point of view, stealing translates into an edible reward. This destructive cycle instigated by the Polaroid gang guides, who are just trying to make a living in a poor country, has been going on for over a decade.

The scene at Sangeh brings out the worst in both human and monkey behavior—stealing, screaming, injury, and intimidation. The day I was attacked by a large subadult male who gnawed on my neck to get my glasses, I decided it was time to leave. I was beginning to hate my subjects—the tourists *and* the monkeys.

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