

PRESS RELEASE

Wild animals are not attractions. A new photo highlights how by photographing and cuddling exotic animals, tourists are unwittingly supporting their poaching and illegal trade

7 March 2023 - Travels to exotic destinations can bring, among many other experiences, encounters with wild animals, which are offered as a paid attraction for the entertainment of travellers. Thus, by taking a photo with them, tourists often become unwitting supporters of the illegal trade in often endangered species of animals that come into the possession of street traders by poaching from the wild. A new unique photo of The Kukang Rescue Program now draws attention to this harmful practice. This organization, as part of its “I Am Not Your Toy!” campaign aims against such use of slow lorises and other wild animals and their consequent popularization on social networks and the internet.

Czechs, like many residents of other temperate countries, increasingly go to exotic destinations during the winter months of the year, such as the countries of Southeast Asia or Latin America. In the more touristy of them, such as Thailand, travellers often come across offers to take pictures or pet wild animals for money. Few tourists have any idea that such a seemingly harmless photo supports poaching and the black wildlife market. At the same time, illegal trade is one of the main causes of the decline of wild animal species on our planet. *“The vast majority of wild animals in tropical countries that come into human possession come directly from the wild. Animal husbandry ensuring new generations of animals without the need to take them from the wild - as we know it in our country - is still not widespread in these areas. People there get their pets most often by buying the animal on the market after it has been caught in the wild and kept mostly in appalling conditions,”* explains the dark background of the pet market in exotic destinations František Příbrský, director of The Kukang Rescue Program and coordinator of international conservation projects of the Ostrava Zoo. In the same way, the trader most likely acquired an animal that he offers to tourists as an attraction on the beach, markets, restaurants, and other busy places or popular stops for travellers.

The Kukang Rescue Program, which is mainly dedicated to protecting slow lorises from illegal trade on the island of Sumatra, therefore launched the international campaign titled “[I Am Not Your Toy!](#)” several years ago. It aims against the use of slow lorises in particular, but also of other wild animals as pets or attractions, and against their popularization on the internet and social networks. The campaign also draws attention to the negative effects that uninformed tourists' interest in interacting with wild animals for entertainment is having on the populations of these animals in the wild. Mainly due to poaching and illegal trade, the population of slow lorises has decreased by up to a third in the last 20 years. Sharing content promoting (not only) slow lorises as pets on social networks has been proven to directly increase the level of poaching and the scale of the black market in these wild animal species.

As part of this campaign, The Kukang Rescue Program has therefore created a new unique photo highlighting the impacts of tourism supporting the practices of trading wild animals as attractions. *“When we realize that, for example, a slow loris can be offered for photographing to hundreds of tourists on the beach every day during the season, it is not such an exaggeration to say that it is*

cuddled to death. That's why I created this arranged photo of the skeleton of a female slow loris. Despite the fact that this skeleton also represents the decline of slow lorises in the wild," explains its author Lucie Čižmářová, an environmental photographer, field zoologist of the Olomouc Zoo, and coordinator of veterinary care and welfare of The Kukang Rescue Program the motivation for creating the photo. The photo is a reminder that tourists should avoid this harmful business when travelling to exotic areas and contact local police or conservation authorities if they come across similar practices.

The attached photographs may be freely used for print, internet and television news purposes. Author: Lucie Čižmářová

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