

Abused monkeys used for coconut picking

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Written by Arjen Schroevers.

I hope you will take a moment to read the following story. A lot of wrong information is distributed, whether or not deliberately.

My name is Arjen Schroevers, I was born in Amsterdam in 1965. I have lived in Thailand for almost twenty years now, and am married to Somjai Saekhow. Somjai Saekhow is one of the two daughters of Somporn Saekhow, one of the most famous monkey trainers in Thailand. One of his monkeys is so well known (Kai Nui) that when Thai speak of monkeys in general they often use the name "Kai Nui". So just like many people call an "adjustable wrench" an "Bahco".

When my father-in-law started training, he knew little about monkeys. He did find that many other trainers trained the monkeys with too much force. He has developed a training method (in 1955 !!) that works completely without penalties. If the monkey does something wrong, the wrong behaviour is ignored. That is sometimes difficult because a mistake is often funny, but laughing is also a reward. If the monkey does something right, the good will be rewarded until the trainer becomes almost nauseous from himself. Almost never the reward is food, but mostly friendly words, hugs, "fleaing". My father-in-law's daughter, my wife, continued the school after Somporn died. I occasionally talk about "we", but I don't run the school, I don't own it, and I don't work there. I only live there.

We do a lot of information. The relationship between Thai and animals is often quite difficult. We are open to visitors. People can see with us how a monkey is trained and what steps a monkey must go through to become an accomplished coconut picker. We give a demonstration, not a show !! With us you don't see monkeys cycling, playing guitar or dancing. And they don't even wear funny clothes. Most of our visitors are Thai. Our school is known as the best and most animal-friendly training institute in Thailand. We are therefore not a "monkey school" but we are the "Monkey Training College". We request access fees from visitors, however Thai schools can visit us free of charge. My father-in-law already did, and we will continue to do so, because it is important information.

Now briefly about PETA. PETA is a militant vegan organization. Especially in their early days they used violence quite regularly to achieve their goal. Their goal is to stop all interaction between humans and animals. You read it correctly **ALL**. PETA sees human possession of animals as animal cruelty. So yes, your cat, your dog, your fish tank with fish, your rabbit in his cage, and even the bird that you raised as a fallen youngster has to go back to nature. That bird does not want to be with you.... And of course they are strongly against keeping animals commercially.

However, PETA has developed extremely well. They have a beautiful website, very good PR. They can hardly be caught in violence anymore. They no longer challenge things that the general public might find "nonsense". But they search continuously. And they are overjoyed when they find things that can get the general public moving. PETA doesn't mind at all when they find abused animals. As long as they can share that with the general public it makes them very happy.

Almost the entire original PETA article is nonsense.

(<https://secure.petaasia.com/page/63752/action/1>)

- **Different types of coconuts and their trees:**

There are about 80 types of coconuts. In Thailand there are two very well-known ones. The tall tree, maximum 30 meters. This tree produces the brown, ripe coconuts. These coconuts are used to make coconut flour, sugar, grated coconut, coconut milk and coconut oil. There is also a low variety, maximum 5 meters. This tree produces the young coconuts from which the water is extracted for drinking. These trees are low, so they are picked by people. Since these nuts are not yet ripe, they are very difficult to pick. They are picked by removing the complete flower. They are therefore traded per cluster of between 8 and 12 pieces. A monkey can never do that.

- **The monkeys come out of the wild illegally:**

If the monkeys come out of the wild, they are indeed illegal. It has been forbidden, and monitored, to take monkeys out of the wild for years. Monkeys must be bred, they must have a chip, and the parents must be known and have a chip. It will still happen, but riding without a helmet is also prohibited in Thailand, and that still happens a lot. What is a much worse nonsense story is that the mother monkey is shot to take the pathetic cub away from her. This is such a nonsense story. A baby monkey hangs almost continuously on the mother's belly. Hunters almost always shoot with hail. So you have to have a hunter who is a sniper and not use a shotgun. This hunter then faces the difficult task of killing the mother and keeping the young intact. Okay, imagine that it works. The dead mother, and her cub, is guarded by the rest of the group. If you want to take the cub away, you risk colliding with at least sixty other monkeys. Then you should shoot them all. Does anyone really believe it goes like this?

- **Canines (tusks) are pulled out:**

Only male monkeys have tusks. A monkey also naturally picks coconuts. If they have had no training, they only use their teeth. That is not good for the teeth. So the trainer teaches the monkey other ways to pick the coconut. But with difficult coconuts, the monkey still uses its teeth. They also use them to untangle a rope. When an owner really removes those teeth, it is not a smart owner.

- **Monkeys are transported in tight cages:**

Of course. That is the safest and easiest way to transport a monkey. A horse is transported in a (tight) horse trailer, and a dog in a tight bench. Much easier and especially **SAFE**.

- **Monkeys are chained and forced to climb up and down to pick as many as 1,000 coconuts a day.**

Yes, the monkeys are on a leash. Only the first 20-30 cm is a thin chain, this to simplify changing to different line lengths. The rest is a thin, flexible rope. That rope is mainly to guide them. The leash is used just like a rider using the reins to control his horse. The monkey does not have to be forced to climb up, it does it all by itself. And of course the monkey also climbs down by itself. A female monkey can pick about 600 coconuts per day. A male monkey as much as 1,600. To achieve these numbers, the following conditions must apply: the monkey must be well trained, in good condition, there must not be picked for a long time, so that the trees bear a lot of fruit and the trees must be close together so that the monkey can jump from tree to tree.

- **The sentence: "According to an insider most coconuts from thailand are collected by monkeys"**

is a misquoted statement by me.

I have said something in the trend of: "in the south of Thailand (the trees are the highest there), more coconuts are picked by monkeys than by humans.

- **Collecting by humans is superior to collecting by monkeys**

We get many requests from coconut producing countries if we want to export trained monkeys to them, as everyone knows a monkey is much more efficient and faster and safer as a human is.

- **Monkeys cannot distinguish difference between ripe and unripe fruits.**

Absolute not truth. Monkeys are much better in this than their human counterparts. Humans only select on color, but green coconuts can be ripe too. A monkey will collect all ripe coconuts, independent from the color. And the monkey leaves the unripe coconuts in the tree. And the most funny thing, it is the most simple thing to teach them..

- **The ripe coconuts gets bruised when the monkeys drop them on the ground.**

I never heard more nonsense. Also when people collect coconuts they drop from the same height. Even when an overripe coconut drops on a concrete slab you will not find any damage on the coconut. They are designed to survive these falls!!

About three years ago we suddenly received a lot of hate emails, most of them came from America, and a large number of them I could trace back to people who are also active within PETA.

The monkeys we have are clearly happy when they are chosen to be trained. They like the attention, and they enjoy working. There is absolutely no violence or coercion involved. The many monkey owners we know all work very quietly with their monkeys. No shouting, no hitting. However, if a stranger comes close, especially if this large film or photo equipment is with them, the monkeys show very anxious behaviour. It takes them a day to get used to the new person. So it is very easy to take pictures of frightened monkeys.

Animal cruelty is also prohibited in Thailand. PETA is of course happy that they found this. They just have a lucky catch. But if they had been really good they would have gone to the police or to the "Office for Agricultural Affairs" PETA even writes on their website that they ask people to report animal abuse to the local police. But PETA themselves prefer to contact the media, instead from helping the poor monkeys they say they have found.

What are alternatives to monkey picking coconuts? Worldwide, coconuts kill 600 people a year. Most of the deaths are people who work in the plantations. In many areas Thailand is the world leader, road deaths, drug deaths, suicides, firearms deaths, electrocutions and lightning strikes are the best known. However, killing by coconuts is very low in Thailand. This is due to the use of monkeys. PETA also offers alternatives. Low stem trees are not an alternative if you do not want to use enormous amounts of pesticides. The mechanical alternatives are very laughable. It takes half an hour before a device (be it an aerial work platform, a crane or a climbing device) is up in the tree. Often they can then reach a quarter of the tree. If they are lucky a third. That means up and down at least three times. Then manoeuvre on the ground again.

In Thailand, two alternatives are used for monkey picking. The first method is someone who climbs a tree, up to 20 meters seems to be doable. The last ten meters become very difficult. It doesn't take much fantasy to figure out what happens when someone (even halfway through) falls from the tree.

The second method is with a long stick with a knife attached. Here too, it is still possible with trees up to 20 meters, but with trees up to 30 meters this is almost impossible. No one is strong enough to operate the stick at an angle. The picker is therefore next to the tree, with the stick parallel to the trunk. He is right under the coconuts that are going to fall. He is holding the stick with two hands. A coconut on your head from a height of 20 meters is always deadly. (oh, and the cause of death is a broken neck, so a crash helmet doesn't help). Your

