Monkey business: Sri Lanka to count crop-raiding nuisance wildlife

AFP – Sri Lanka will launch a nationwide census of nuisance wildlife, including monkeys and peacocks, as part of an effort to tackle the increasing threat to agriculture, the government said Wednesday.
Thousands of officials and volunteers have been mobilised to count wild boar, lorises, peacocks, and monkeys near farms and homes on March 15, the agriculture ministry said in a statement.

“The high price of fruit and vegetables is due to these pests,” the ministry said, adding that they hope to develop ways to deal with the animals raiding farms and home gardens.

Official estimates suggest that about a third of all crops in Sri Lanka are eaten or destroyed by wild animals, including elephants, which are protected by law as they are considered sacred.

The ministry said the census would be conducted in a way to avoid double counting.

“The census will help provide a sustainable solution to the problem of wild animals raiding and destroying crops,” the ministry said, adding that it was seeking public support for the count.

In 2023, the then agricultural minister proposed exporting some 100,000 toque macaques to Chinese zoos, but the monkey business was abandoned following protests from environmentalists.

Sri Lanka removed several species from its protected list in 2023, including all three of its monkey species as well as peacocks and wild boars, allowing farmers to kill them.

Elephants are also major raiders of rice farms and fruit plantations, leading to violent clashes with villagers.

Official figures show that 1,200 people and more than 3,500 elephants were killed in a decade due to the worsening human-elephant conflict.

The government has pledged to increase electric fences to keep elephants from raiding villages but efforts so far have failed to reduce conflicts.

AFP