



# HM Government of Gibraltar

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Ministry of the Environment,  
Sustainability, Climate Change,  
Heritage, Education and Culture

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Environment steps up enforcement in the reserve to protect Barbary macaques**

The Government introduced a new law earlier this year prohibiting the deliberate touching or interfering with Barbary macaques. This came into force in August 2020 and followed evidence that the SARS-COV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, was being transmitted from humans to animals such as dogs, cats, lions and tigers.

The recent development in Denmark where SARS-CoV-2 variants associated with farmed minks, including cases with a unique variant, have resulted in the mass culling of these animals is particularly worrying given the implications this could cause for Gibraltar's Barbary Macaques in the event that COVID-19 were detected in the macaques, especially if this were a mutation. The consequences would clearly be hugely significant, and could include the need to cull our macaques. The wider implications of the identified changes in the new and unique SARS-COV-2 variant are not yet well understood according to the World Health Organisation but there are reports of concerns that it could potentially affect the development of a vaccine if not controlled.

As a pre-emptive measure, the Department of the Environment's Environmental Protection and Research Unit (EPRU) will be undertaking more regular patrols at known hotspots in the Gibraltar Nature Reserve as well as liaising closely with key stakeholders to help encourage and enforce the law. The public is reminded that anyone found committing an offence will be liable on summary conviction to a fine at level 4 on the standard scale.

*Interference with Barbary macaques has, in any case, always been discouraged officially since it can prejudice their health and social structure as well as result in aggressive behaviour specifically in the case of illegal feeding.*

**ENDS**