

WHEN ANIMALS ATTACK...CELEBRITIES!

A wave of primal aggression against stars like Salma Hayek has us worried: Since when do animals bite harder than journalists? And will Barbra Streisand be next?

I♥ ANIMALS, READS AN OLD bumper sticker you'll still see from time to time affixed to the back of hunters' pickup trucks. THEY'RE DELICIOUS! Recently, however, in a dark Dr. Doolittle turn, the animals have turned the tables, embarking on a feeding frenzy that has oddly afflicted one group in particular. It seems that wild animals have put their furry little heads together and decided that they ♥ Hollywood stars. The trend is not new—in the '70s Jimmy Carter and actress Nanette Fabray were assaulted by, respectively, a rabbit and an elephant—but it's escalated alarmingly.

Why do animals love celebrities so much? Perhaps because celebrities are delicious.

Just ask Komo. A seven-foot-long, 55-pound Komodo dragon, Komo recently made headlines when he tried to feast on the bare foot of Sharon Stone's husband, *San Francisco Chronicle* editor Phil Bronstein, while Bronstein was taking a private tour of Komo's cage at the Los Angeles Zoo. Before the reptile mistook Bronstein's foot for a white rat, nearly biting off his big toe and sending him to the hospital for four days, Komodo dragons were, tellingly, Bronstein's favorite animal.

A few months earlier an enraged polar bear chased—but narrowly failed to eat—Ewan McGregor while the Scottish actor was in Canada with a BBC film crew filming a polar bear documentary.

We're not even counting the orangutan that urinated on Julia Roberts.

Tyson, an adorable little capuchin monkey-turned-actor, went even further. While on the Mexican set of *Frida*, a film in which Salma Hayek portrays the monobrowed and famously monkey-friendly artist Frida Kahlo, Tyson—no relation to the ear-chewing boxer—lunged at the actress, sinking his teeth into her hands and arms, but was pulled off before he

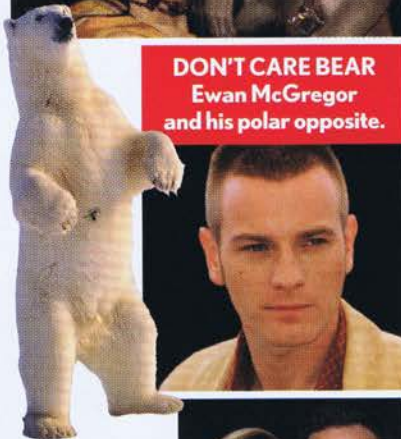
could finish grinding Hayek's savory extremities into monkey chow. The strange thing was, they had seemed to be getting along so well. Before shooting started, Tyson actually cohabited with Hayek in California so that she might, as she told the press, "feel as much at home with monkeys as Frida did."

Hayek must emit some peculiar pheromone that makes her a particularly tasty star: Just weeks after the harrowing monkey attack a still shaken Hayek, perhaps to cheer herself up, was taking a tour of Harrods department store in London, accompanied by the store's owner, Mohamed Al Fayed, when a shrieking parrot alighted from its perch in the pet department and viciously attacked the frightened star. Two species can't be wrong: If

ANIMAL MAGNETISM
Salma Hayek, survivor.



DON'T CARE BEAR
Ewan McGregor
and his polar opposite.



KOMO-PHOBIC
The L.A. Zoo's
star lizard feasted on
Sharon Stone's
husband.



you're a wild animal, Salma Hayek is like a salsa-flavored Little Debbie.

Animals aren't the only ones dining out on all this. The media has covered each attack with an ill-concealed glee that reached its crescendo right after Komo clamped his jaws down on Bronstein's big toe. The day after the incident the *San Francisco Examiner* ran stories about the attack on pages A1, A2, and A3. The day after Andrea Yates drowned her five children in Houston, the newspaper apparently felt that just one article on the tragedy would suffice. *Time* mentioned the Bronstein brouhaha four weeks running. Even two weeks after Komo's conniption—and 10 days after Bronstein departed the hospital—newspapers were still ferreting out new revelations with Warren Commission-like meticulousness. REPORT CONTRADICTS SHARON STONE'S ACCOUNT OF LIZARD ATTACK, read an AP story on June 23 that claimed that zookeepers' accounts of the incident cast doubt on Stone's portrayal of herself as a brave, tourniquet-tying Florence Nightingale.

Confronted with the revelations, a zoo spokeswoman demurred. "I do not want us to become the enemies of Phil Bronstein and Sharon Stone," she said. No, she surely does not.

Like animal park publicists, journalists are also increasingly unwilling to risk the wrath of celebrities, who, backed up by legions of publicists of their own, can make life very difficult for reporters who delve too deeply into their lives. Recent consolidations in the PR business have made publicists more powerful than ever, to the point where journalists who dare to deviate from officially sanctioned scripts quite reasonably fear they may never eat lunch—or even get a phone call returned—in Hollywood again.

So there is something refreshing—inspiring, even—about Komo the Komodo and Tyson the capuchin, who still feel free to rip into celebrities, one digit at a time, with a gusto most reporters are no longer able to muster. Wild animals, after all, will not pull their fur out if publicists threaten them; they may even discover that publicists are just as delicious as celebrities—though perhaps a bit too gamy for some.

Perhaps next year at Oscar time Tyson and Komo will get press credentials and a spot next to Joan Rivers on the red carpet. Salma Hayek will probably show up, and we already know how exciting that would be. ■