

UNDERSTANDING BABOONS

Baboon troops vary in size from 12 to 150 individuals – sometimes splitting into sub-troops as they forage for food. They form an integral part of the ecology of the Cape Floristic Kingdom, foraging from the coastline to the tops of our highest mountain ranges, dispersing seeds and bulbs as they go.

The core of the troop is made up of females: mothers along with their babies and juveniles, grandmothers and sisters. Dominant females 'inherit' their social status in the baboon hierarchy from their mothers.

In natural conditions, there is one adult male to every three or four adult females in the wild – males move between troops and suffer higher mortality from predators when on their own, or from injuries sustained from males when attempting to join a new troop.



The Urban Baboon

Humans have encroached on natural areas as towns expand. With urban sprawl comes animal conflict as the latter are displaced and make for uneasy neighbours.

Baboon troops that live close to urban areas have fewer adult males than undisturbed troops. The lack of natural predators suggests that the males are being killed as a result of direct conflict with humans. Lone dispersing males are often seen as 'rogues' and are treated as a threat to humans. It is important to realize that lone males reflect the natural movement of the males between troops which is nature's way of preventing inbreeding, as males do not mate with their mothers, sisters or aunts.

Killing males within troops has much wider implications for it opens the door for new males to immigrate into the troop. When this happens the new male typically kills the previous males' offspring. One study of an urban troop reported that 53% of all infants born, died within their first year. It was suspected that most of these deaths were due to infanticide. The males engage in this shocking behaviour because without the cost of nursing an infant, females quickly come into oestrus and he is thus able to mate with her sooner than had she raised her infant.



BABOONS IN YOUR HOME

If baboons gain access to your home it is important to remain calm and to not block their exit route. If you panic, the baboons could panic and in doing so, may run frantically around the house causing even more damage.

- First and foremost, you must make it obvious that you are confident and serious about getting them out.
- Never try to get food back from a baboon, it will fight to keep it.
- Back off slowly and identify the baboon's shortest escape route.
- To coax a stubborn baboon out your house, try using a water spray bottle (never use anything stronger than water, as they may react negatively).

It is essential baboons are not trapped or cornered whilst in your home; make sure there's an easily accessible escape route – open doors and windows.



BABOONS ON YOUR PROPERTY

Baboons are attracted by food and enter the villages with the sole purpose of finding food. A troop can cause extensive damage to your home, it is therefore essential to effectively manage your property, to make it less attractive to baboons.

- Keep rubbish secure in a baboon-proof dustbin and practice good waste management. Compost should be contained in composting bins.
- The easiest way to get baboons off your property is by turning the hosepipe on them. They hate getting wet!
- By planting fruit trees and vegetable gardens, you'll be attracting baboons.
- Do not leave dog food outside and do not feed wild birds or porcupines as these grains will attract baboons onto your property.
- Burglar proof your home – bars should be no wider than 8cm apart otherwise the juveniles will gain access. The same applies to cat-flaps.
- Do not display food in your house (eg a fruit bowl on a window sill).
- Pain deterrents are ineffective if animals can still secure the rich rewards



FEEDING A BABOON
COULD MEAN ITS DEATH SENTENCE!

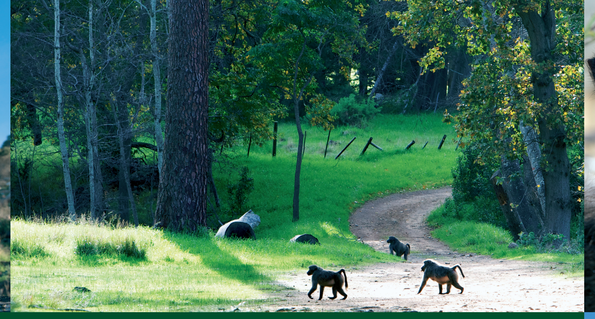
Baboons learn that humans are a good source of food and can show aggressive behaviour in their efforts to gain food.

Once baboons show aggression, authorities are forced to shoot them.



BABOONS DO NOT NEED TO BE FED

If baboons know that they are going to get easy rewards, they will return to the source over and over again – be it a village, a camp site, or the roadside where tourists frequent. If baboons do not forage naturally, the balance of relationships between baboons and nature is disturbed and it disrupts their social relationships in the troop as they learn to rely on human food.



BABOONS AT PICNIC & CAMP SITES

Baboons are intelligent animals and have very nimble fingers. They can unzip, unclip and rip almost anything open – a tent or a backpack keeps nothing safe.

- Where possible, eat at designated areas.
- Do not stop and eat in front of baboons.
- If baboons arrive, pack up immediately and leave the area.
- Store food in lockable trunks and a lockable camping fridge.
- If necessary, store food in the boot of your car, and stow away all bags.
- Only use baboon-proof dustbins, if there are none available, do not leave rubbish behind – please take it with you.
- If you go hiking, carry vacuum-packed food.



BABOONS ON THE ROADSIDE

Please remember to SLOW DOWN when you see baboons on the road – they have little road sense.

Despite the number of injuries and deaths on the road, baboons are attracted to warmth on the roads, road litter and food from cars.

People often stop their cars to watch baboons on the roadside. Many find the baboons engaging and unfortunately some end up feeding them. If you feed them, you are keeping them on the roads and that is how they get killed or maimed for life.

- Keep your car windows and doors locked (some baboons have learnt to open car doors). Even if you do not have food, they may take any bag thinking it contains food.
- It is not advisable to get out of your car to watch or photograph baboons.

THE LAW

Baboons are a protected species in the Western Cape (CapeNature Conservation Laws Amendment Act, 2000, Ordinance 19 of 1974). It is illegal to feed baboons; to poison, trap, hurt or kill a baboon by driving with the intent to kill; hunt by shooting at baboons using a pellet gun, catapult, bow-and-arrow, stoning, setting your dog on them, or use a weapon of any kind in order to injure a baboon; or to keep a baboon in captivity without a permit.

All these offences are punishable by law and carry stiff penalties.





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