

## SAVING THE CAPE BABOON

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The chacma baboon (*Papio Ursinus*), also known as the Cape Baboon, lived in Cape Town's surrounding mountains long before its human neighbours took up residence in the area. Conflict escalated as urban development invaded baboons' habitat and man and baboon came into closer contact with each other.

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Although baboons are widespread and do not rank among threatened animal species, the remaining baboons on the southern Cape Peninsula face a bleak future as continued urbanisation reduces the areas they have roamed for centuries. Movement and migration of these animals cannot take place anymore. The result: ongoing conflict between man and baboon.

The chacma baboon is a large primate with a dog-like face and large, prominent canines. Males can have canine teeth of nearly 60 mm long (nearly as long or in some cases longer than a lion's canine teeth). A mature chacma baboon male measures 1.5 m from head to tail and weighs up to 33 kg, while the more slender female measures 1.1 m and has a mass of about 15 kg. This primate of southern South Africa is a large, heavy, dark brown baboon with black feet. They usually live in social groups of 40 or 50 consisting of adult males, adult females, and their offspring.

For many people in the Cape Peninsula the baboons are a nuisance as some of the baboons have become a suburban menace, overturning trash cans and entering houses in their search for food. These animals can be aggressive and sometimes even dangerous. Negative encounters have frustrated the human residents and some of them started to take the law into their own hands to get rid of the "pests" in their midst. The baboons of the Cape Peninsula are an isolated population and if they are not looked after properly, they will face extinction some time or another.

With this in mind SERVAMUS visited Gail Clever and Natasha Wilson at CapeNature's office in Bellville to learn more about these primates and what is being done to protect them. There are different conservation perspectives about the isolated baboon population, but these two women told us more about their work, the research done by the Baboon Research Unit of UCT, the Baboon Monitor Programme, the Baboon Management Team and other roleplayers who attempt to save these baboons.

The Cape Peninsula consists of a number of densely populated urban areas with the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) situated at its core. The presence of this protected natural area on the Peninsula brings with it a number of benefits as well as problems. Baboons live adjacent to urban areas and the relatively large number of residents, visitors and tourists to the Peninsula in general present ample opportunity for conflict between baboons and people. Not only are the baboons an integral component of the bio-diversity and ecosystems of the Cape Peninsula, they are also a huge tourist attraction in the Peninsula.

### A Baboon Management Team

In 1994 a Baboon Management Team was established in the Cape Peninsula consisting of representatives from Sanparks, CapeNature, the City of Cape Town, the SPCA, the UCT Baboon Research Unit and residential groups. Members of the Kommetjie Environmental Action Group (KEAG), Friends of Tokai Forest, Specialist Scientists, the Scarborough Rate Payers Association and other civic bodies also have full membership of the Baboon Management Team. The aim of this team is to make recommendations to the relevant authorities regarding the holistic management of the chacma baboon populations in the Cape Peninsula to ensure their sustainability whilst minimising conflict between baboons and people. The Baboon Management Team brings all the role-players together to coordinate issues regarding baboon conservation in the Cape Peninsula and to find a solution. In the Overstrand Municipal area a similar group was established.

Gail described the baboon issue as a "bit of a hot potato". Inside the Table Mountain National Park the baboons are the responsibility of Sanparks, but the moment they move outside the park they become the City of Cape Town's responsibility.

There is no quick fix for baboon management. Natasha Wilson said: "It is about managing people and baboons. One can interact with people on a management level, not with baboons."

### The Baboon Monitor Programme

There are currently 11 separate baboon troops within the Cape Peninsula with a total of approximately 376 primates. According to UCT figures released in 2007, there were 256 baboons in the southern population of which 55% were breeding adults, and the Tokai population consists of 120 baboons. Four troops have home ranges within the Cape of Good Hope (COGH) section of the Table Mountain National Park with another three troops moving in and out of the Cape of Good Hope. The remaining four troops are found near Redhill, Da Gama Park, Slangkop and Tokai respectively. These troops, including the three troops from the Cape of Good Hope, move between private land, residential areas, the national park as well as provincial and South African National Defence Force land.

The monitoring team monitors the troops that regularly invade the residential areas of the Cape Peninsula. The monitoring is often complicated by the fact that the existing troops frequently split into smaller groups.

There are currently 18 monitors, but the numbers fluctuate due to resignations and new appointments. These monitors work in four teams, each with a team leader. The responsibility of each team is to find the respective troops in their sleeping sites (nests) at sunrise and join up with them. They stay with the baboons for the whole day and herd them away from the urban fringe and prevent them from entering any residential area or areas where they can come into conflict with humans. The team must herd the baboons towards the vegetation zones where they can pursue their daily activities of eating, socialising and resting. When the monitors see that the baboons move towards houses or streets, they drive the baboons away by making noise and waving their arms and/or sticks. The monitors adopt postures that demonstrate their dominance, and the baboons respect this and retreat.

Although this sounds like a simple operation, it is not always easy to successfully prevent

invasions as baboons are active from sunrise to sunset, intelligent and have complex social relationships and behavioural patterns that are often unpredictable. With monitors working a fixed number of hours per day, it is impossible to cover sunrise to sunset. The better the baboons are protected the more they breed. Troops have started to split up and it has become more difficult to monitor them.

Keeping these monitors in the field is a very expensive exercise. Currently the funds are obtained from a poverty relief project from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and partnership agreements between Sanparks, City of Cape Town and the private sector, but unfortunately these contributions are still not enough to run an effective monitor programme. As further funding is needed, the Kommetjie Environmental Awareness Group (KEAG) initiated the Adopt-a-Baboon concept. Individuals or corporates can "adopt" a baboon for a minimum of R1000 per year. There are also monitors in the Cederberg Nature Reserve and in the Hermanus area.

A study that was done recently by UCT showed that the monitors have reduced the raiding of houses by 70%.

#### Tourists and the chacma baboon

Traditionally, a chacma baboon will not approach humans or show much interest in them, but this has changed as many tourists feed baboons, and so baboons have started to associate tasty treats with humans. Car windows and doors must be shut when viewing baboons and food should not be visible. When a person is outside a vehicle, for example while having a picnic, and a baboon sees the person carrying food, it may try to grab the food. Rather let the baboon take it than risk confrontation and possible injury. Although baboons do not deliberately attack people, they remain wild animals and their instinct for obtaining and holding onto food once in their possession is very strong.

Around the scenic Cape Peninsula there are many signs that warn tourists not to feed baboons. Although tourists enjoy watching the baboons as they eat the food that tourists have thrown to them, the residents and baboons pay the price, long after tourists have gone home. Often the baboons pay with life and limb as they cannot refuse this fast food option and start raiding houses and dustbins on a regular basis.

#### Humans and baboons in conflict

Many residents in the Cape Peninsula appreciate the fact that wildlife is literally on their doorstep, and enjoy the playful baboons as they slide down roofs or interact with one another. Other residents are frustrated with the "pests" who raid their dustbins, make a mess in their homes and frustrate their dogs.

Although baboons are protected by law, some residents take inappropriate action. The baboons are regularly shot, stoned, poisoned and harassed by people and by dogs. Smaller baboons and nursing mothers with babies clinging to their bodies, are especially vulnerable. Several have amputated limbs as a result of injuries.

In 2005 a female was found shot dead days after giving birth. The baboon's 5-day-old baby starved to death although his traumatised brother desperately tried to take care of it. The female who had been killed had led the Da Gama troop for some time in the absence of a mature male baboon. The baboon monitors loved her and knew her for her bravery as she defended the troop from dogs.

In spite of the abovementioned, CapeNature also experiences a high incidence of injured baboons due to electrocution, as baboons climb up pylons. Some-times baboons are hit by cars.

#### Educating the community

For the baboons in the area the reward is high as there is a lot of food available to them in dustbins, in dog food bowls etc. The Cape Peninsula community is educated by the Baboon Management Team to ensure that man and animal can live together in harmony.

The "window shopping" activities of the baboons have forced residents to take responsibility and baboon-proof their homes. Baboons easily enter houses with little or insufficient security on windows and doors and can cause extensive mess and damage. Baboon "thieves" are only after one thing - food. Rather than blaming the animals, it is up to humans to take responsibility for securing doors and windows. Electric fencing is not sufficient to keep the baboons out of properties, because when the reward is big enough they will tolerate the pain.

People are taught to keep their houses' windows closed, to keep fruit and dog food out of the baboons'; sight, not to feed the birds and not to plant fruit trees. Baboons can smell fruit as far as 3 km away!

Waste must also be managed properly as baboons tip over rubbish bins and rummage through them for "junk food". To help keep the baboons away from the rubbish bins, the City of Cape Town has provided the affected areas with baboon-proof bins.

As part of the Baboon Management Team they have different communication strategies in place, such as the distribution of pamphlets at the schools, informing children about what to do when baboons get into classrooms or homes.

The Baboon Management Teams also interact with tour groups to educate them about not feeding baboons and that their actions can contribute to conflict between the animals and humans.

The public's role in managing the baboons of the Cape Peninsula is of utmost importance. People must realise that it is not in the baboons'; best interest to be fed by humans as they can become problematic and aggressive later on to get food. This in turn may result in them having to be put down, and this is something that most of us don't want to happen.

## Relocating baboons

Sometimes baboons that cause trouble need to be moved. When such a relocation must take place, a whole team with members from CapeNature, the Baboon Research Unit of UCT, the SPCA, City of Cape Town, baboon monitors and vets are usually involved, to make sure that the animal is moved according to the correct standards and procedures. One such a case where a baboon had to be moved was the case of David, a male baboon.

David wandered away from the Tokai group in February 2007. He was captured in Bergvliet and returned to Tokai, but by the middle of April 2007 he had made another attempt to wander off. He was captured in Harfield Village and taken to the rehabilitation centre in Barrydale due to an injury. He was ear-tagged (green and yellow) and released on 1 May 2007 near the Smitswinkel Bay Forestry Station. It was hoped that he would join the Plateau Road troop, which was in need of a male, or the Smitswinkel troop. Unfortunately, he moved back along the mountains, and then crossed onto the Cape

Flats on 14 May 2007, moving towards Philippi. David was clearly intent on moving northwards, across the Flats, which is believed to be a historical dispersing route. But on 15 May 2007 David was re-captured in Lotus River and taken to the SPCA in Grassy Park where a decision had to be made regarding his future. According to the Baboon Management Team's dispersing male protocol, a male baboon may be euthanised after three attempts of relocation to a new troop. This only after the Baboon Management Team had approved it. After intensive meetings and discussions, it was decided to release him up north. David was released in a CapeNature reserve in the Boland Mountains on 18 May 2007.

## Baboon rehabilitation

The Baboon Management Team works in close cooperation with the Cape Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) in Barrydale. The Baboon Rehabilitation Centre started on the morning of 14 June 2000 with Matthew, a 6-week-old pink baby baboon with almost no hair, who had been orphaned. Today this Centre aims to rescue orphaned animals or badly injured animals; to rehabilitate the animals (which can take up to 10 years in some cases); and to release the baboons back into the wild, or protected areas.

## Guided walks

Visitors to the Cape Peninsula have a unique opportunity to see baboons in their natural habitat as Baboon Matters, an NGO in Kommetjie, organises guided walks so that people can spend time with the last remaining chacma baboons in the Cape Peninsula. During these walking tours visitors have the once in a lifetime opportunity to interact with the baboons, without disturbing their daily activities. They can sit and watch these fascinating animals as they eat, play and socialise around them.

## Baboon legislation

According to Provincial legislation, the Conservation Ordinance 19 of 1974, baboons are not a threatened species or an "endangered" wild animal. But in terms of this legislation they are "protected wild animals". According to Section 29(f) of Ordinance 19 of 1974, the hunting of any wild animal "by means of any weapon in a public place within the area of jurisdiction of a local authority", is prohibited. The provisions of the Hunting Proclamation for 2000 do not allow baboons to be hunted "within the Cape Peninsula Protected Natural Environment and all surrounding rural areas situated in the Southern Peninsula". Chacma baboons are the most abundant wild primates within the south-western Cape and cause specific problems on the edges of human settlements, and the hunting proclamation makes provision for certain circumstances. In cases of illegal hunting where the suspect is found guilty, s/he can be fined R1000 or sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment.

Tour bus drivers and tour leaders often feed baboons so that tourists can take pictures. If caught, they are fined R500, but taking into consideration the amount of money they make from the tourism industry, the fine is petty cash in their eyes.

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We must all make our small contribution to protect the last remaining chacma baboons of the Cape Peninsula. Not only are they an integral part of the history and heritage of the Cape, they are also important to the ecosystem and a big attraction to tourists. By behaving intelligently when around the Cape chacma baboons we will be able to see them in the Cape Peninsula for many years to come.

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