

Living with baboons

If you are lucky enough to live on the urban edge with baboon neighbours, it just takes a little **preparation and understanding** to live side-by-side peacefully. Baboons can cause extensive damage to property (TV aerials make great swings!), so you need to make sure that your property is **not a source of easy food**.

Your garden –

- Secure your waste in **baboon-proof** dustbins;
- Use **lockable bins** for composting;
- Keep **dog food bowls** inside the house, not in the garden;
- Enclose veggie gardens and fruit trees in **baboon-proof fencing**;
- If baboons do visit your property, the best way to chase them off is to **spray them with a hosepipe** – they hate getting wet!

Baboons on the roadside

Spotting baboons on a car trip is a real treat. Please **slow down** when you see them, or, even better, pull over and enjoy their antics for a while. When baboons try to dart between cars they are often killed or injured.

- To baboons, roads provide **underfloor heating** in winter and year-round attraction of **easy food** found in waste thrown from vehicles. Keep all waste inside your vehicle until you can dispose of it properly;
- If you stop to watch them, make sure your **windows are up and doors are locked** – they can be cheeky in their search for easy food, and will take bags as well if they think they might contain food.

DO NOT FEED THEM It is illegal to feed baboons and it encourages them to hang around on roads where they may be hurt or killed.

Powerful jaws & sharp teeth

- When a **male baboon yawns** and shows off his long canines it is often a warning – simply to show how strong he is;
- When **younger baboons show their teeth** in a ‘fear grimace’ it is a sign they are scared or worried;
- So seeing a baboon's teeth **does not mean** the baboon is about to attack;
- Sometimes baboons yawn just because they are **tired** – like we do;
- Baboons **are not predators**, they do not hunt – those big teeth are useful to protect the troop.

About Baboons



A BABOON MATTERS TRUST INITIATIVE

Your home

- Put burglar bars on your windows, **not more than 8cm** apart to keep smaller baboons out;
- **Do not leave food visible** that can be seen through your windows, such as fruit bowls – this is a tempting invitation for an uninvited lunch guest!
- If a baboon gets into your house, **stay calm**, and make sure he has an exit route – open all doors and windows. Do not corner him;
- Baboons **will not attack humans**, but snatching an apple out of your hand may seem like an attack;
- If you are holding food and a baboon tries to grab it, **let it go** as the baboon may try to wrestle the food from you;
- **Be confident**, make a loud noise and bang pots and pans to chase him away. Baboons will ignore you if you are not sure of yourself;
- As a final resort, **spray him** with a water pistol or water bottle – baboons dislike water.

At a camping or picnic site

- Baboons **love picnics and camping** as much as humans, because it often means easy food;
- They can easily unzip or rip tents and backpacks, so **keep food locked** in the car or in lockable trunks or camping fridges;
- If baboons join your picnic, it is best to just **pack up and leave** – they can be very persistent and aggressive if there is food around;
- Stick to **designated picnic spots**;
- Only dispose of your waste in **baboon-proof bins**. If there aren't any, or if they are already full, please take your waste home and dispose of it there.

Killing them does not solve the problem

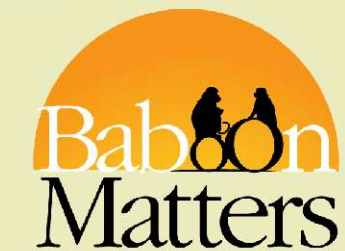
- Many people believe that killing the alpha male will stop the troop raiding – this has **never been shown to be effective in the long run**;
- The only way to modify their raiding behaviour is to **stop giving them a reason to raid** – it may take years to change this behaviour, and the best time to start is now!
- **Will you** be part of the change?

Baboons and the law

Baboons are a **protected species** in the Western Cape. It is **illegal to feed, kill or injure baboons**, or to keep a baboon in captivity without a permit (CapeNature Conservation Laws Amendment Act, 2000, Ordinance 19 of 1974). These offences are **punishable by law**.

DO NOT FEED BABOONS!

- It is **illegal** and you will be **fined** if caught;
- It encourages them to **raid repeatedly**, which could result in them being killed by the authorities;
- When dominant baboons grab food this is seen as **aggressive behaviour** – this often results in them being killed by the authorities;
- **They do not need our food!**



The Baboon Matters Trust aims to create a society that cares about baboons, conserves their place in our natural heritage, and seeks sustainable solutions for our peaceful co-existence.

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Useful contact numbers

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In memory of Joan Wrench



Understanding baboons

The most important thing to understand about baboons is that they are **a lot like us!**

Baboons have the same **opposable thumbs** as we do, they have individual finger prints and finger nails (not claws). Baboons also show the **same range of emotions** as humans do – they mourn when their family members die, fight and squabble over food, look after each and have strict discipline in the troop.

Important to remember : Never feed baboons – if you feed baboons along the side of the road, they will remain there and will be at risk of being killed by passing traffic. In urban areas **feeding baboons** will encourage them to keep returning for easy food rewards – it is better and safer for baboons and humans if baboons stay out of residential areas.

Troop structure

Baboons understand the benefits of **collective information** and so they live in family groups referred to as troops. **Troop size** ranges according to environmental factors – in some areas a troop could be as large as 100 baboons, but it is becoming increasingly common to find small troops of less than 20 baboons.

- Baboons have a **hierarchical troop structure** with dominant males and high ranking females;
- **Males** may leave a troop;
- **Females** commonly stay with their natal troop their entire life;
- **Discipline** within a troop is very strict – low ranking baboons are subservient to higher ranking baboons;
- **Alpha males** spend a lot of time 'safe-guarding' their offspring and baboon males are very caring fathers.



Not a rogue baboon but a dispersing male

When a **male baboon reaches sexual maturity** he may often leave his natal troop to find a new troop where he can mate and bring up his own progeny.

- Male baboons reach sexual maturity at around **7 – 8 years**;
- Dispersing males are **vulnerable** without the support of their troop so tend to move quickly through an area, but can stay on their own for extended periods of time;
- When a young male attempts to **join a new troop** the existing males may fight off his advances;
- Some male baboons do kill baby baboons when they come into a new troop – this is called **infanticide**. The reason for this is so that the females come into their oestrus cycle more quickly and then he can mate and have his own offspring.



Juveniles and sub-adult baboons

The **amusing antics** of the juveniles are a joy to watch. As the younger troop members tend to group together to play their boisterous games, it often seems like there are more baboons than the actual number. Sub-adults are the **teenagers of the troop** and like human teenagers they are all long limbs and attitude. The **sub-adult males** are normally the ones who engage in rough wrestling matches with each other and bully their younger siblings.

- Juveniles are often **killed by dogs or by cars**;
- Juvenile baboons are very protective of their siblings and take on **'baby-sitting'** duties when mother baboons are sleeping or foraging;
- Juveniles play in **close proximity to their father** – moving further afield as they get older and brave;
- Sub-adult males have **long limbs** and their **long canines** are starting to grow down.



A brief history of baboons

Baboons are found over most of Africa, but baboons found here in South Africa are **Chacma baboons** (*Papio ursinus*). Like humans, baboons are **very intelligent and highly adaptive** but rampant urbanisation and ever intensive agriculture have resulted in these two clever primate species coming into increasing conflict.

One big difference between humans and baboons is that humans like to record history and tell stories. There are **folk tales and stories about baboons** throughout Africa, and in Khoi San rock art, Egyptian temples and early Dutch settler's diaries baboons are often featured. (I wonder if baboons tell stories about humans?)

In human story telling there is often a **villain**, the monster that everyone loves to hate. In many modern urban legends, the **male baboon** has been made out as this monster, the 'rogue' that strikes fear in people's hearts.

In truth, baboons are just animals going about their business as animals do, and if we understand them better it is possible we can learn to get along better.

Male baboons

- Can weigh up to **42kg**;
- Have canines longer than those of a **lion**;
- **Defend and protect** their troop;
- Can live in the wild for approximately **20 years** (Eric the famous baboon of the Cape Peninsula was known to be over 20 years old when he died).

People love to report that they have seen the 'alpha male' as he is considered the biggest, scariest baboon. In the past it was thought that the 'alpha male' was the leader of the troop but, in fact, the 'alpha male' is simply the **dominant male** – the one who dominates food and mating rights with female baboons.

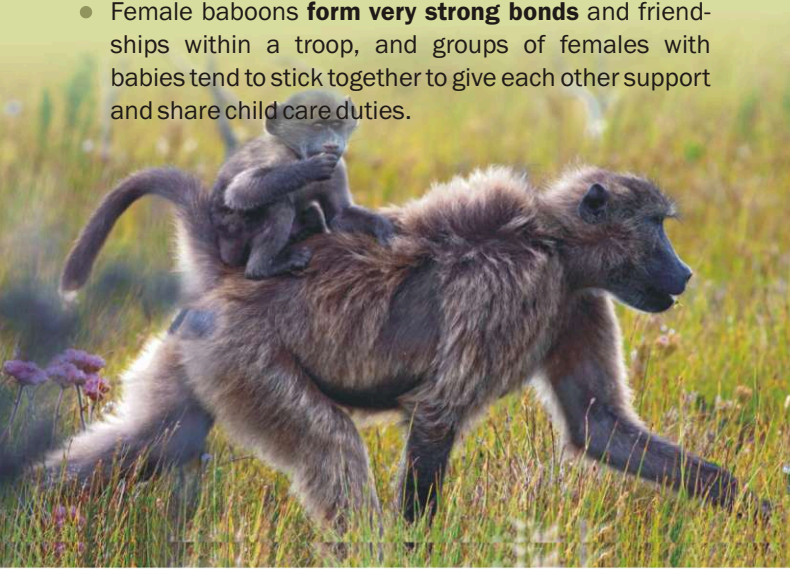
Male baboons can become dominant in much the same way as humans – some use their strength and power, some use their intelligence and strategy.



Female baboons

Female baboons commonly **stay with their natal troop** their entire life. They are born into their position within the troop and if they are high-ranking, they will hand their position on to daughter baboons.

- Mature female baboons can weigh between **12 – 17kg**;
- Their **gestation period is 6 months** and they suckle their infant for 6 months to one year;
- Depending on food availability, female baboons typically give birth **every second year**, but high infanticide rates may result in females giving birth more frequently;
- Female baboons **form very strong bonds** and friendships within a troop, and groups of females with babies tend to stick together to give each other support and share child care duties.



Infant baboons

In the baboon world, the **birth of a new baby** is reason for great excitement and interest. All the females gather around the mother and baby and want to examine the new baby. The mother will allow only high ranking female friends to see her new baby first and she keeps close to the father for protection.

- Infant baboons are born with **bright pink faces** and ears and dark black hair;
- They are born **with teeth**;
- Baby baboons start putting food into their mouth at an early age, but need their **mother's milk** to survive until they are at least 4 months old;
- For the first weeks of its life **the baby is carried under the mother baboon** as it is quicker for mom to move around and safer for both mother and baby;
- From about 6 weeks when the pink starts to fade, the baby will start **occasionally riding on mom's back** and by the time he is 3 months he is confident enough to ride there most of the time.

