

## **GEORGE CAMPUS**

### **Nelson Mandela University George Campus - Baboon Management Plan**

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#### **1. Introduction**

Over the past 80 years interaction between humans and baboons at Nelson Mandela University's George Campus has resulted in diminishing troops and ongoing adaptation as human development continues to encroach on the habitat of baboons. Nelson Mandela University George Campus is nestled in a sensitive natural environment where we strive to nurture and maintain a positive balance between the environment and the needs of the university, its staff and students.

This management plan aims to provide an understanding of baboon behaviour and to provide guidelines on maintaining a positive relationship between humans and the wild animals, especially baboons, who share this habitat.

Because the baboons rely largely on learned behaviour (as opposed to instinct), they are highly adaptable to their changing environment. One way in which they have adapted is that they have learned that an easy and swift method of acquiring filling, nutritional and tasty food is to steal it from humans within their range. For the opportunistic baboon, this may seem easier than the long hours needed to forage for indigenous vegetation in order to meet nutritional needs. The reaction and retaliation of humans to this, have impacted on social dynamics, both amongst diminishing troops and individual baboons and have caused a ripple effect through troop structures.

As a result of this "conflict", more adult males are lost, ensuring less protection available to juveniles, family groups and female allies. The important process of genetic mixing is thwarted when transient males (who can spend months alone while between troops) are mistakenly labelled as "rogues" and destroyed.

A troop losing a male will acquire a new leader which leads to disruption of social relationships, infanticide and related trauma. The more often the dominant (alpha) male is replaced - due to the loss of his predecessor – the more often this disruptive ripple effect occurs, effectively breaking down the strength of relationships and groups within the troop.

#### **The role of baboons in maintaining an ecological balance**

Baboons are beneficial to the environment for a number of reasons, such as:

- They disperse seeds through faeces, ensuring biodiversity;
- They have a symbiotic relationship with other species in their range, for example, the warning bark does not merely serve to warn the troop, but other species like antelope as well;

- They also eat certain birds' eggs and in so doing, control these bird populations;
- The baboon also has a symbiotic social relationship with some other species within its range;
- The baboon has become a fascinating species to observe for tourists visiting this country and are synonymous with the wilderness of the Cape;
- Because of its primate relationship to us, it offers valuable insight into many aspects of humanity.

A number of myths and misunderstandings have arisen throughout the history of the human/baboon conflict, resulting in negative perceptions that have served to mistakenly justify a number of crimes towards this primate; widening the gap of understanding and causing escalating fear, leading to more aggressive conflict situations.

As the baboon is simultaneously an important part of the eco-system here on campus and in the surrounding areas, it is important that we learn to achieve a co-existence through tolerance and education. The long term gain of this would be healthier baboon populations, enhanced biodiversity, better understanding of baboons and the continuation of an indigenous primate species for future generations and tourism.

It has been identified that human/baboon conflicts on campus need to be addressed. The following is a proposal suggesting a means of resolving both short- and long-term conflict and its impact on the environment.

## **2. A few confirmed facts about baboons to take note of**

In this regard I refer to findings of researcher, Dr Dave Gaynor, who has spent 12 years researching baboons and 7 years specifically studying baboon / human interactions as well as Jenni Rethowan, Head of Baboon Matters and Manager of the Peninsula Baboon Monitor Project.

### **Will baboons attack people?**

*"We need to define what an attack is. What baboons do is push past people and knock them over, grab food or jump onto people who have rucksacks (at Cape Point). A baboon is not like a dog that will attack a child or a person. If you do a dispassionate risk assessment, you will find that a dog in your neighbourhood is more likely to hurt someone and if your reason is fear of attack, all dogs should be removed long before you remove the baboons."*

(Dr Dave Gaynor)

### **Use of pepper spray**

Dr Dave Gaynor cautioned against this as something particularly dangerous. In an incident in Scarborough where a law enforcement officer had used it on a baboon in his house "to teach the baboon a lesson", the baboon had thought it was being attacked and charged the man, knocking him down.

### **Chasing baboons**

Baboons can be chased by confidently walking after them clapping your hands loudly. They might well make a threat display (showing their teeth) but in Dave Gaynor's experience they do not attack. Even a very bold male that made a threat display just 6 inches from his face did not follow through.

*"If a baboon is still taking food from the table, do not get too close as it has an incentive to stand its ground. Wait until it has filled its cheek pouches and tucked what it can under its arms, and then exert pressure by encouraging it towards an exit and it will go willingly".*

### **Baboons are not predators**

They eat meat opportunistically if they come across it but they lack the instinct to chase and attack. Leopards, cats and dogs (descendants of wolves) kick into a predatory function if something runs away, but baboons simply do not have that instinct to chase.

*“Only the males have incisors, which tells us that [as a species] they do not hunt. They use their incisors to intimidate other males.”*

(Dr Dave Gaynor)

### **Baboons and children**

Children are under no threat, but should be taught to drop any food and move away. Should male baboons be challenging each other, a child might accidentally be knocked over or seriously hurt. Take a lesson from the baboons themselves. When males are challenging, all the young are hurried away from the scene.

### **Because they are being rewarded!**

Dr Gaynor discounted an earlier claim that baboons (and children!) learn best through punishment. He contends that baboons would not break-in / enter houses if they were not being rewarded! “Every time a baboon gets half a loaf of bread from a rubbish bin or window ledge, they are being rewarded!” Reward is a far more powerful learning incentive than punishment.

### **Why do they enter closed up holiday homes?**

Baboons tend to see houses as fun cliffs to play on. They come into a village and get chased out of gardens ... so they look for a quiet place where they won't be disturbed ... which makes holiday homes most susceptible. And while they are there, the juveniles will play around, hang on the guttering and chew on a window. Gnawing is a natural habit, through which they have learnt that windows can be loosened. Now baboons will routinely gnaw at wooden frames to loosen windows and gain access to food.

### **Breaking in**

Baboons are often falsely accused of 'breaking in'. *“Baboons on a thatched roof are clearly not pulling out the thatch in order to break into the house ... they just do it - it's a nice feeling; a relaxation.”*

*“In all the on-site investigations I have done I have never seen conclusive evidence that baboons have broken windows deliberately to gain access. Every case I have investigated, the glass has been lying on the outside of the window. If they are trapped inside and scared enough, they will go straight through the window”. (Dr Dave Gaynor)*

Baboons can be swinging on a slightly open window [or trying to lift it open]. When it breaks or gives way, they then take advantage of the now open window. When the owners return they see the broken window and call it a deliberate break-in. Baboons can also try and pull open or even try and squeeze through a window that has been left slightly ajar. The strain can bend the frame and in so doing break the glass. When this happens a few times, the baboon will learn that certain behaviour has food rewards attached to it and so will learn to repeat the tactic. In response to accounts that baboons were now using stones to attack people and break into houses, Dave Gaynor said that tool-use is restricted to chimpanzees. In all the site inspections he has made over the years, he has seen no evidence that glass was deliberately broken with a 'tool' (like a rock) nor that the glass was deliberately broken to gain access.

“People often ask ‘What happens if baboons learn to break windows because then we will really be at their mercy. The reality is that in Kommetjie, Scarborough, Da Gama Park and Welcome Glen, it has never progressed to that ... in over 40 years. Baboons in Cape Point sometimes hang on car windows looking for food items and the windows break. If there was a full cognitive connection, you

would expect them to have learnt to break car windows regularly and get in ... but they haven't. We haven't seen that progression ... but I'm not ruling it out. It's something to look out for."  
(Dr Dave Gaynor)

### **Pain / fear aversion / chasing baboons**

"From what we know about baboons, pain aversion does not work" (Dr Dave Gaynor). Baboons that have been severely wounded by people have been seen back in the area within hours. They associate the pain (or the scare tactic of shooting over the troop's heads) with the person who inflicts it, not with the area. So if the man with the club or gun is not visible, then the baboons will feel safe to enter the property again.

"This is clearly demonstrated by Baboon Monitors. When we started we had a small hope that with the Baboon Monitors chasing the baboons away every day, after 3 months or 6 months or even a year the baboons would learn that it's not worth going into that area. The Baboon monitors have been up and running for 5 years now ... and if the Baboon Monitors are not on top of their job for half an hour, the baboons will go in! So with all the facts, I'm afraid I have to dispel the idea that you are going to teach the baboons that this is an unfriendly area. The best you can do is form a barrier ... but the Baboon Monitors have to be there all the time!" (Dr Dave Gaynor)

### **Threat aversion, e.g. leopard calls or leopard scats**

According to Gaynor, these also don't work, tending to attract the baboons to investigate rather than scaring them away!

### **Painting baboons**

This is an old farmer's tale that also does not work. A baboon captured and painted white in Scarborough was not shunned by the troop and was back the next day. Later the troop was seen grooming the baboon extensively for many days.

### **Eliminating or relocating troops**

"... you can kill out this whole troop. We did it in Kommetjie – an entire troop of 18 baboons. All that happened was that the next troop moved down! So eliminating your baboons is not going to help. Relocating them to another area is also not going to help - because you've got this whole [open] mountain range and you're going to get baboons coming back."  
(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)

### **Reduction of rewards**

"Baboons work on a reward system. What you as a community need to look at is reducing the rewards to the baboons."  
(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)

### **Waste management**

"... you have got to baboon-proof your bins. Waste management, I believe, is one of the biggest, single issues that needs addressing, overall, with the baboons ... waste management is a huge, huge issue. That is where the baboons are getting a lot of their rewards ... There is the rubbish removal and collection, your own bins, the bins around your own home, the public bins, and then your refuse sites. In Kommetjie, very few people have baboon-proofed their bins. Those who do, are noticing that the baboons don't bother with their house anymore because the contents of the bin is not available to them".  
(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)

### **Removal of other food incentives (vines, fruit trees, etc.)**

“...you have to decide as a community “Do we want fruit trees at all? Do we want vegetable gardens at all?” These are hard issues. In Scarborough, when the issue was raised, a lot of the Scarborough people got really, really angry because they said: “Why should we cut down our fruit trees?” Well, you cut down your fruit trees because you have chosen to live in a wilderness area, where you have wild animals coming down to your village. But nobody can tell you what to do. I can’t tell you what to do. This is something the community must collectively decide upon.”

(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)

### **Baboon monitoring**

“What I can really suggest to you that work is the Monitor project. It’s not going to be 100% successful ... and make sure that every property owner has that money deducted off their rates base every single month. You will always go through these difficulties – that I can tell you! But what I can also tell you is that the Monitor Project will keep the baboons away from the villages. It will reduce the conflict so that you will see a lower incidence of baboons coming in and causing the damage that they do.”

(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)

### **3. Primary objective**

Whereas the Nelson Mandela University, George Campus acknowledges the fact that wild animals share the campus with us and whereas the university is desirous to manage this cohabitation as best possible to maintain respect for the natural environment; and

Whereas we agree that there is no simple solution to solving the human-baboon conflict, a management programme that indicates arrangements that all visitors, staff and students agree on and practise, should go a long way to assist in the cohabitation of animals and humans at the George Campus.

### **4. What we have achieved so far:**

- All refuse bins used at the George Campus are baboon-proof, i.e. lockable but user- friendly;
- Windows of residences have been fitted with expanded metal or wire mesh to prohibit entry to rooms when windows are open;
- Windows of offices are lockable; please report any window that cannot lock to Technical Services at extension x5006;
- During the annual orientation week (introduction of campus to new students) all students are informed of the fact that they share the campus with wild animals and the baboon management procedures are communicated to them;
- Bins are emptied weekly on a Friday, except when a Friday is a public holiday in which case refuse removal will be done the day before;
- Waste removal is done weekly by unlocking bins, removing the content to a waiting vehicle and locking bins again (no refuse bags are / should be left unattended);
- The George Campus approached Cape Nature to determine their approach towards dealing with the human-baboon conflict and they assisted by proposing options such as deterrent devices and ideas that are being tested to determine their success.

## 5. What measures visitors to the campus and students should comply with

If baboons are in your office it can be assumed that something is attracting them and the attraction needs to be eliminated. Once there is no reason for a visit they will eventually tire of coming past your house or office. Make sure no food or any item that might attract baboons is visible from outside.

Windows and doors need to be closed and locked when you go out. Please note that baboons in our area are able to open windows and doors which are not locked. When at home or in your office, please manage your windows and close the windows even if you leave your office for only a few minutes. Burglar bars or wire mesh have been fitted in most buildings - so please leave only the protected window open. Baboons react to invitations of foods visible from outside a home or office. Close your curtains or do whatever is necessary to ensure no sources of food can be seen through windows.

- Please note that no waste should be placed in any container or area that will be accessible to wild animals;
- Close and lock the windows of your office or residence when leaving;
- Please separate waste into recyclable and organic waste - adequate lockable trolley bins are available for this purpose;
- Please use the containers with a baboon-proof swivel mechanism that are available in all communal outside areas;
- Students, staff and visitors are required to accept responsibility to manage their own waste by ensuring that it will be out of reach of animals;
- Students and clients should refrain from: hurting, hitting or setting a trap to catch any animal. Do not confront or take away anything from an animal;
- Do not leave any items that might attract animals anywhere that will be visible from outside.
- Rubbish needs to be secured in a baboon-proof bin or stored in the garage until collection day.
- Please note that you do not have a claim whatsoever against the university for any damage caused by any wild animal whilst on campus.
- Students or visitors who continually disregard the above-mentioned measures may be asked to leave the premises as they do not adhere to the values of the university, i.e. to respect the natural environment.

## 6. What to do if

### **Baboons are outside your house or office:**

Leave the animals. Most baboons in this area will respond and run away when shouted at or when you clap your hands. If this does not work, close your windows. Make sure no food is visible from outside.

### **Baboons inside your home of office:**

The best way to deal with a baboon is to exhibit passive body language and move out of its way. If the baboon believes you are ignoring him, he has no reason for fear and will not react. Avoid eye contact. It is important that the baboon has an escape route. If there isn't one, gently back up and open a window, then make sure you are not obstructing the escape path. Never corner a baboon or trap it inside. It is important to never try and retrieve anything that has been taken.

## **7. The way forward**

It is difficult to manage baboon-human conflict in built up areas. With the management of conflict addressing the human side of the matter (i.e. the origin of the problem) is necessary. This includes effective waste management, preventing the animal from gaining access to infrastructure, tolerating wildlife as well as informing staff, visitors and students on pro-active measures that will prevent conflict situations and providing guidelines on what they should do if they are confronted by a baboon.

Also identifying the possible culprit baboon/s and determining what its status in the baboon troop is, is important. This will aid with implementing a management strategy that can be followed with these animals. Such measures could include catching and releasing, tagging, collaring, marking or monitoring individual baboons.

Some people think that it will be a solution to merely shoot baboons.

This “problem” should rather be considered an opportunity for the George Campus to implement an ethical strategy that could be used for baboon management elsewhere.

Baboon monitoring is NOT chasing baboons. Monitoring is discouraging the baboons from coming into the area. You will never, ever stop one or two dispersing males from coming around. What you can do is to stop a troop coming into a residential area and causing mayhem. Electric fences work - if properly installed. The Operations Unit is researching some potential solutions by electrifying some sensitive areas.

**During preparation of this document the following websites were consulted and I would like to acknowledge these sites:**

### **WEBSITES**

<http://www.garethpatterson.com> (The Baboon sanctuary project)

<http://www.art.co.za/kaz/menu.htm> (paintings)

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