

# CAPE TOWN'S BABOON TROOPS

## KEEPING OUR CHACMA BABOONS WILD AND SAFE

The chacma baboon (*Papio ursinus*) forms a part of Cape Town's rich biodiversity and is a considerable tourism asset, with troops to be seen from Cape Point in the south to the Constantia Valley in the north, and in the Gordon's Bay area.

While around five troops live within the Cape of Good Hope section of Table Mountain National Park, baboons from the remaining 11 Cape Peninsula troops and troops in the Gordon's Bay area come into conflict with people, including residents, property owners, businesses such as wine farms and restaurants, fishermen and tourists. Baboons raid urban areas in search of high-energy human food, and conflict with humans and dogs results in injury and even death to baboons.

These 11 Cape Peninsula troops are managed by the Baboon Technical Team (BTT) comprising relevant management authorities, the City of Cape Town, SANParks and CapeNature. This group is advised by the Baboon Research Unit (University of Cape Town) and the SPCA. The BTT works with ratepayers through the Baboon Liaison Group (BLG). The emphasis is keeping the baboons in the natural areas and out of residential suburbs, where they are at risk from various conflicting situations. Since 2010, the baboons on the Peninsula have been managed by a City tender. Currently the tender is managed by Human Wildlife Solutions (HWS). The primary focus of their work involves employing baboon rangers to ensure that these wild animals are kept out of urban and residential areas for at least 90% of the time.

### 'Keep our baboons wild and safe'

The baboon management project has been very successful as the number of human-induced deaths has been reduced and the welfare of the troops, and size of the population, has improved under this management. Between 2006 and 2008, contact between humans



*Baboons in their natural habitat.*

and baboons was at its height and walking tours with baboons in their natural habitat and filming of baboons was encouraged. As the baboons in the southern Peninsula became less afraid of humans, raiding increased and angry residents retaliated. Between 2006 and 2008, an average of 15 baboons per year were killed by shooting, poisoning or road deaths. Since the implementation of more science-based management of the troops, where they are in town for less of the time, baboon deaths caused by humans have been reduced to about nine per year.

Once public awareness campaigns were introduced to reduce the availability of food and 'keep our baboons wild and safe', the mortality rate began to drop. With active management of the troops, the death rate has dropped even further. In 2015 and 2016, there were only seven euthanasia deaths per year, and 11 between January and September 2017.

Scientific management has increased the baboon population. In 2006, there were 379 baboons on the Peninsula in 10 troops. There are now approximately 600 baboons in 16 troops on the Peninsula. In the 11 managed troops, in December 2017, there were 446 baboons. With a steadily growing population, the Peninsula chacma baboon is no longer considered to be under threat.

### FEEDING BABOONS IS ILLEGAL

You may be liable for a fine of up to R10 000 or two years' imprisonment.



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The City of Cape Town's Transport  
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## Measuring the success of the programme

The success of the programme is evident from the fact that in the last financial year, troops, on average, spent 99.5% (up from 98,7% in 2015/2016) of the time out of town (not in the urban areas). A monthly average of 99.9% was achieved on three occasions during this period. Individual baboons only raided for 5.1% of the time.

The hotline calls for the last year are one of the indicators showing the urban areas with high conflicts. This is not a complete correlation as there might be many calls on one baboon, but it does indicate where the recurring problems are. For example, there are a high number of hotline calls in Da Gama. Welcome Glen and Glencairn are where the Da Gama troop is located and individual males spend a relatively large amount of the time in town. Similarly, the Waterfall troop correlates to Simon's Town.



## Challenges for management

The proper management of waste remains a challenge throughout all the sections. This is particularly relevant to properties under both public and private ownership. Picnic areas as well as local restaurants and households generate waste which continues to be a problem as they provide feeding stations for baboons. Without adequate waste management in these baboon-affected areas, waste will continue to attract baboons and hamper management efforts.

Trends show that during spring and early summer the baboons spend the greatest amount of time out of town as there is an abundance of natural food available. Towards the end of summer when the hot and dry conditions are at their most intense, there is less food and water and baboons move down in search of human food. Similarly, with the onset of winter with colder conditions and lack of plant growth, the baboons move down the mountain for shelter and human food.



Home ranges of baboon troops.

This is a historical seasonal movement and the baboons are known to use the lower slopes for more nutrient-rich foods. Sadly, intense urban development has transformed many of these lower slopes which exacerbates the problem. In response to this, the baboon home ranges are one of the environmental informants to future development on the Cape Peninsula.

Other environmental factors, such as the severe drought currently being experienced in the Western Cape, have impacted the baboon troops and contributed to raiding. Luckily the natural water sources on the mountain have, however, been adequate. The fires of 2015 and 2016 also impacted many baboon home ranges changing available foraging vegetation. Luckily immediately after a fire, recovering fynbos is nutrient rich. The Tokai/Constantia baboons for a first time in many years used the area around Silvermine Dam. Although this did result in conflict with picnickers, it also provided a wonderful habitat for baboons.

There are several dispersing males in the northern population of baboons. Some of these males could potentially be moved to the southern troops. However, there needs to be a vacancy within the receiving troop in order for this to be viable.

## PIONEERING THE 'VIRTUAL FENCE'

The City's Biodiversity Management department also manages baboon troops in the Steenbras Nature Reserve. In 2016, the virtual-fence system was implemented to limit human and baboon conflict in Gordon's Bay. This management method takes the natural behaviour traits of baboons into consideration and simulates the formation of a boundary, which the baboon troop no longer find desirable to cross. This management technique has proved to be extremely successful in keeping the animals out of town, enabling the reserve staff to focus on other important conservation management activities.

The programme is being evaluated with the view to rolling it out in other areas with similar challenges both within the Cape Peninsula and outside the City of Cape Town.





Waste management plays a key role.

## HELP SAVE THE CAPE TOWN BABOONS

People have a big role to play in the survival and safety of the chacma baboons. Local residents should also help visitors to the area understand how they should behave around these animals.

Here are some basic tips:

- Do not interfere with family groups as they roam and forage for food in wild areas.
- Never feed a wild baboon, as you are teaching them that humans are a source of food and eventually they may have to be euthanased. Feeding baboons is illegal - you may be liable for a fine of up to R10 000 or two years' imprisonment.
- Pack bags and food items in the boot of the vehicle or under the seats. Food should never be visible through the windows.
- Secure backpacks and picnic baskets if you are out of a vehicle. If a baboon snatches your bag or backpack do not chase it – it will discard the bag once it's searched it for food.
- Never dispose of food in an unsecured bin in a baboon area. If there isn't one, or it's full, take your litter home.
- Don't tease or harass baboons – they can be dangerous.
- Slow down when you see baboons near a road. Keep car windows and sun roofs closed and car doors locked.
- Never throw items out of the car windows.
- Keep dogs away from baboons – both can get seriously hurt. Keep your dog on a leash in baboon areas. Remember that baboons are protected and it's illegal to set a dog on them.
- Don't interfere with the work of baboon rangers – it's their job to keep the baboons out of town and away from danger.

### FAST BABOON FACTS

- The chacma baboon is the largest of the baboon species and is a very intelligent animal. It has a dog-like head, large canine teeth and short, coarse fur that varies in colour from a grey/brown to black.
- A fully grown male baboon may weigh between 30kg and 40kg, while the more slender females weigh between 15kg and 20kg.
- They live in family groups, called troops, with an alpha male in charge of the family. Each troop has a home range.
- They are omnivores and feed on plants, such wild fruit and nuts, and small animals, birds and reptiles. Baboons will also eat mussels and limpets they find on rocks near the shore. They have cheek pouches in which they can store food.
- Baboons breed throughout the year and have a single baby after a six-month pregnancy. They are very protective of their babies.

Source: *Living With Baboons*, [www.baboons.org.za](http://www.baboons.org.za)

## MEET THE RANGERS

Trained baboon rangers are employed to ensure that baboons in the 11 managed troops are kept out of suburbs that lie on the fringes of each troop's range. The rangers carry paint ball markers and two rangers and a supervisor manage each troop. Rangers are on duty from sunrise to sunset.

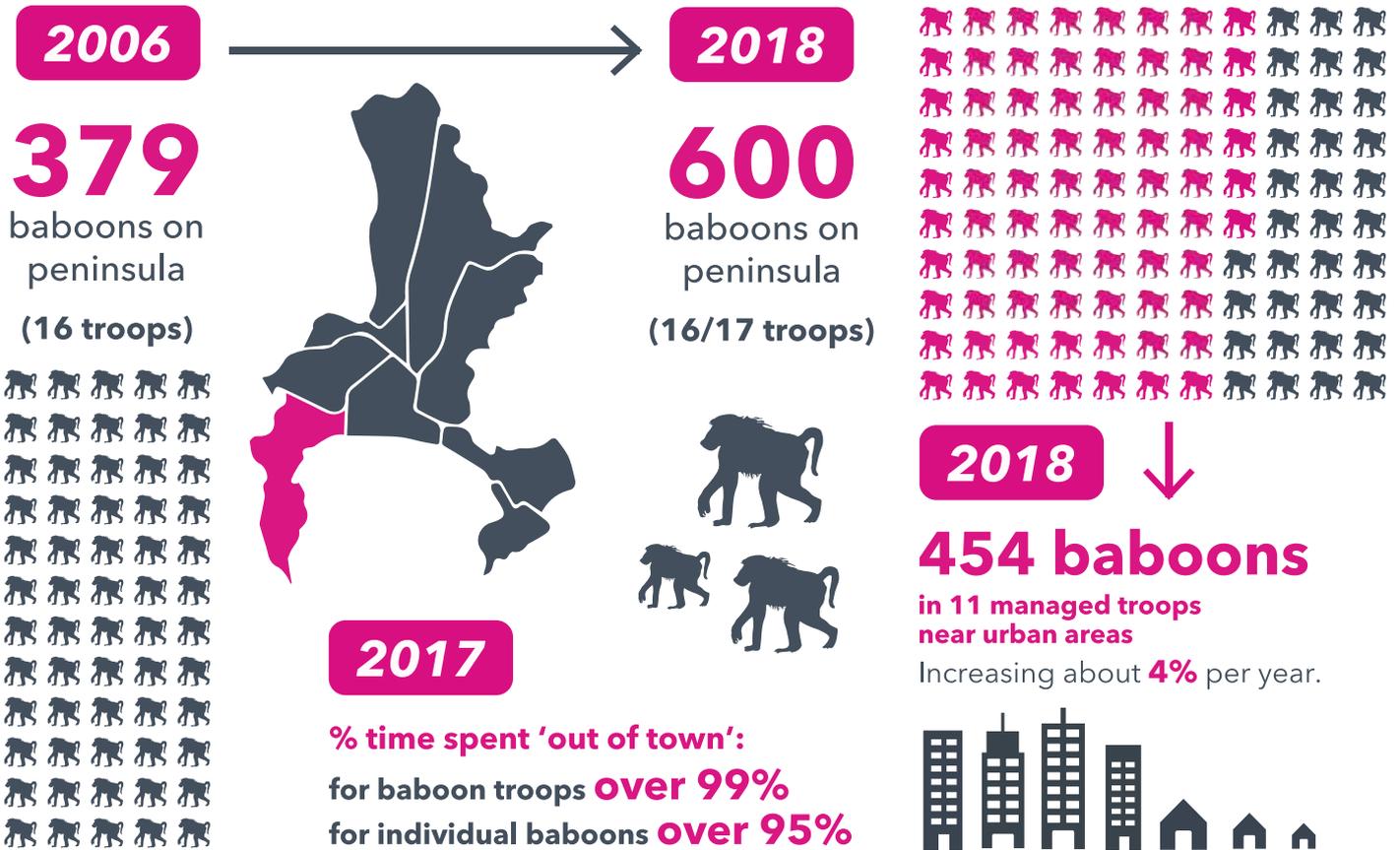
Early each morning rangers will locate the troop. If they are out of town, the rangers will hold a line between the troop and town. If a troop has spent the night in town, the rangers will herd it out. If the troop doesn't respond to the paintball markers the rangers may use a 'bearbanger', a small flare that makes a loud noise in the sky for a few seconds after firing.

Baboons may also be ear-tagged and some are fitted with very high frequency (VHF) radio-collars. These VHF radio tracking pulse collars emit a beep every second and using radio telemetry, rangers know the exact location of the baboons at any time. The collar allows rangers to anticipate the movement of the baboons and if necessary, cut them off before they reach town.



Rangers track the movements of baboons.

# BABOON MANAGEMENT IN NUMBERS



## NO EASY PICKINGS – NO BABOONS

Every resident living in a known baboon area has a responsibility to practise good waste management. Leaving waste bins unsecured not only puts the baboons in danger, but also poses a risk to the community.

Human food is unhealthy for baboons. Research shows that baboons that have access to human food show signs of tooth decay, become overweight and have increased cholesterol. Baboons can also pick up human diseases and parasites through contact with waste. They are also possible carriers of diseases and parasites which can be transmitted to humans.

The City of Cape Town needs the support of residents to ensure a baboon-free residential area. If you live in a baboon raiding area, the City requires you to have a double lockable bin secured with two padlocks. The City's waste removal trucks which serve baboon areas have been converted to open and empty the bins, even with the locks in place. The keys are not needed by City staff.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
Visit [www.baboons.org.za](http://www.baboons.org.za)  
or [www.capetown.gov.za](http://www.capetown.gov.za)

**TO REPORT INCIDENTS WITH BABOONS**  
Call the Baboon Management Hotline  
CAPE PENINSULA: **071 588 6540**  
GORDON'S BAY: **021 957 4725 (ext 2413061)**

By keeping your bin locked you not only help to prevent baboon raids, but also help to assist waste staff who are obliged to clean up the mess left by the baboons after a raid. This poses a real health hazard and makes for a very unpleasant job.

- Place a strong padlock on each latch on the bin. Lock the padlocks and keep the keys in a safe place.
- Secure the bin either upright against a wall or pole or place it side down (locks towards the ground) at the road side or on the pavement.
- Store your bin in the garage or in a locked cage.
- Advise and educate new residents in the area on the use of baboon-proof bins.
- If there are any residents in your neighbourhood who do not use baboon-proof bins, please inform Human Wildlife Solutions (HWS) on the Baboon Hotline – Call 071 588 6540

**TO APPLY FOR A BABOON-PROOF BIN, EMAIL**  
[wastewise@capetown.gov.za](mailto:wastewise@capetown.gov.za)