

MISUNDERSTOOD MALES



Two brothers huddling together on a cold and windy winter day in Rooiels, South Africa (Photo: Kaelin DeLong)

Male chacma baboons are intelligent, social, and emotional beings whose behavior is frequently misinterpreted by humans. Fortunately, baboons are one of the most well-studied primates and scientists have a good understanding of their behavior. This infographic addresses five common misconceptions.

“There was a ~~lone male~~ baboon without its troop (visibly) nearby.”

Male baboons often travel on their own for part of the day, but they still belong to a troop and have strong social bonds.^{1 2 3}



“The big male ~~bared its teeth~~ displayed a fear grimace”

When primates show their teeth, it is generally a signal of submission or fear rather than aggression. The “fear grimace” is often accompanied by short, repetitive vocalizations that are commonly misinterpreted as a “bark” or “growl”.⁴



“Male baboons ~~don't respect women~~ are highly observant of human behavior.”

If there is a baboon in your home, they respond best to calm, confident and assertive (but not aggressive!) behavior, regardless of your gender.⁵



“Male baboons ~~frequently~~ rarely kill infants.”

Infanticide most often occurs within the first two weeks of a new male's arrival, particularly if he tries to become the alpha (but even then, not a guarantee!). Resident males almost never kill infants. Fathers actively protect and care for their own offspring, and sometimes even unrelated offspring of their female “friends”.^{3 6 7}



“The baboon ~~attacked a dog~~ was defending itself or its offspring.”

Baboons are mainly prey animals, and dogs are predators. Baboons do not attack dogs unprovoked, but they will fight back if they feel they or their offspring's lives are at risk. Baboons are far more likely to die from dog-induced injuries than the other way around. Dog attacks are one of the leading causes of death in urban baboon troops.



Misunderstandings like these have contributed to the death or removal of at least 100 male baboons in the Cape Peninsula and Overstrand regions of South Africa in the last 10 years. An accurate understanding of baboon behavior is critical for anyone living near baboons, and for effective baboon management programs.

References

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- ⁴ de Waal, F. B. (2006). Darwin's legacy and the study of primate visual communication. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1000(1), 7-31.
- ⁵ Personal observation (as a short, petite woman who has gotten dozens of baboons out of houses)
- ⁶ Mascovice, L.R., Heesen M., Di Flore, A., Seyfarth R. M., & Cheney, D. L. (2009). Paternity alone does not predict long-term investment in juveniles by male baboons. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, 63(10), 1471-1482.
- ⁷ Palombit, R. A., Cheney, D. L., Fischer, J., Johnson, S., Rendell, D., Seyfarth, R. M., & Silk, J. B. (2009). Male infanticide and defense of infants in chacma baboons. In C. P. van Schaik and C. H. Jansen (Eds.), *Male Infanticide and its Implications* (pp. 123-152).