



Coexisting with baboons in Rooiels through shared responsibilities

Final Report on the 2021 Rooiels Baboon Indaba & Proposed Follow-up Implementation Activities



The 2021 Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Indaba

In mid-2021, the Executive Committee of the Rooiels Conservancy (REC) and Rooiels Rate Payers' Association (RERA) initiated an open process with Rooiels residents and stakeholders to identify issues, challenges and action to support the long-standing coexistence of humans and baboons in Rooiels. Key steps and activities implemented are summarized below. Links are provided to access the more detailed documents.

- Establishment of a [Task Team](#) which was open to all Rooiels Residents (June 2021).
- Implementation of a [Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Survey](#) (September 2021) designed to gauge the opinions of Rooiels stakeholders and to help to identify key issues for discussion at the Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Indaba.
- Preparation of a [Discussion Document](#) (November 2021). See Annex 1 for the key messages of the document.
- Organization of a [Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Indaba](#) on 20 November 2021.
- An [Outcome Document](#) of the Indaba was widely shared in December 2021 in advance of the annual RERA meeting.
- Reports prepared by the four [Indaba Working Groups](#) (unedited) are available for those who would like more detail than what was captured in the final Discussion Document.
- As a follow-up, six priority implementing activities have been identified for consideration of REC, RERA and Rooiel residents and stakeholders. They are presented in this Final Report, and in chapter 5 of the updated [Discussion Document](#) (2022).

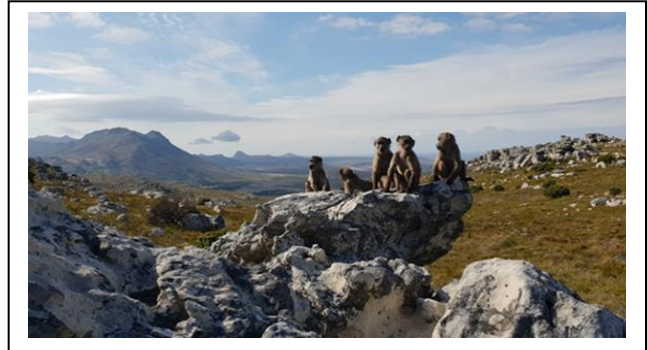
163 separate households who reside or own in Rooiels completed the survey in 2021. About 45 Rooiels residents and stakeholder participated in a Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Indaba on 20 November 2021. During the half day Indaba, participants shared a range of perspectives through open, respectful and constructive discussions. These activities confirmed the broad support of Rooiels residents to preserve our mostly pristine natural environment and to coexist with Baboons. At the same time, challenges and opportunities were identified which merit follow-up implementation action.



About the Rooiels baboon troop

Baboons are philopatric, having a range they operate in, and are not territorial. They are prey animals and not predators. Baboons are an interlinked part of the ecosystem, distributing fynbos seeds as they forage. The females remain where they were raised, with most adult male baboons dispersing to other troops. They have been here for around 200 000 years!

The first survey ever done of the Rooiels river estuary in 1948 noted the presence of baboons living where the village is located today. In September 2021, the Rooiels troop comprised of a total of 27 baboons: 3 Adult males (alpha male Benji); 12 Adult females (alpha female Regina); 1 Sub adult male; 4 Juvenile males; and 7 Juvenile females.



The troop size has varied between 22 and 29 over the last 5 years of research. The baboons are individually named for research identification purposes. The troop is still being observed to keep track of their life history, particularly births and deaths.

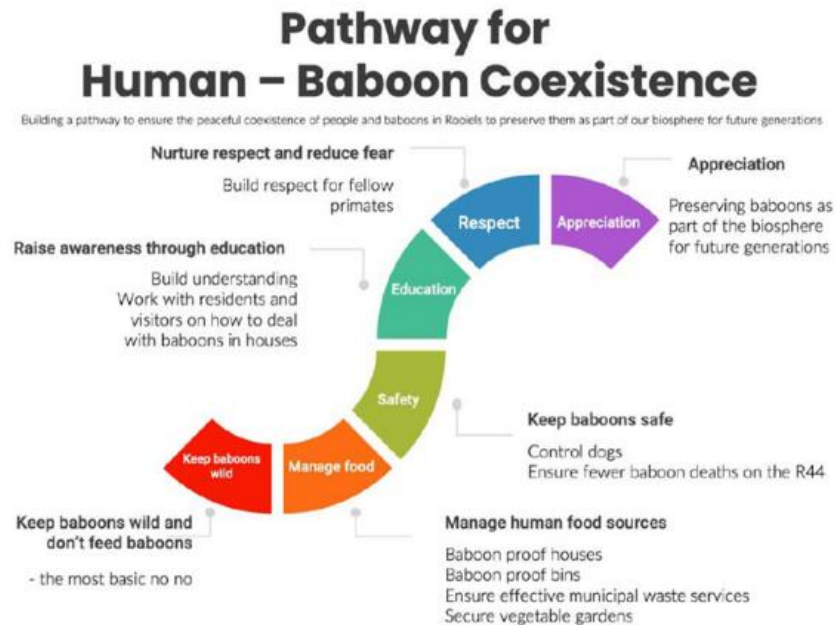
There is no “loner baboon” in Rooiels. The status of adult male baboons does fluctuate, and (as of September 2021) the alpha male, Benji, currently accepts a small sub-group led by Indy within the troop. Challenges between the males can occasionally be heard, especially as the younger males grow into their prime.

Pathway for Human-Baboon Consistence

The Baboon Indaba Coexistence Task Team developed “The Pathway for Human-Baboon Consistence” (Figure 1) which provided a framework for discussions at the Indaba and helps to organise key proposals for action and implementing activities.



Figure 1: The Pathway for Human-Baboon Coexistence



1 Keep Baboons Wild and Don't Feed Baboons

Baboons are listed as “threatened” species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is illegal to harm, hunt, poison, paintball gun or feed baboons. There are fines for doing so. Details are specified in the Western Cape Nature Conservation Laws Amendment Act 2000, the Nature Conservation Ordinance 19 of 1974, and the Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962).

2 Manage Human Food Sources

1. Baboon proof houses
2. Baboon proof bins
3. Ensure effective municipal waste services
4. Secure vegetable gardens





Baboons come into Rooiels because [1]:

- Baboons prefer low lying land - this is an innate behaviour
- Vegetation in the village is very productive
- There is a specific type of fynbos that occurs only in the Rooiels area that the troop favours
- Lawns serve as dense areas of grass, a fall-back food during winter when the fynbos is less productive.

Because of resident vigilance and baboon-proofing, human food (i.e., from homes, cars, bins) accounted for less than 5 percent of their diet over a 12-month period in 2017-2018 [1], but baboons remain alert to human food opportunities that arise on any given day.

There is unanimous agreement that responsible household and municipal waste management is key to reducing unwanted human-baboon interactions [2]. A bylaw in the Overstrand Municipality that requires residents to dispose of rubbish in baboon-proof bins is also in place, and almost certainly contributes to the responsible behaviour. However, it is arguably the culture and social norms of the Rooiels Conservancy that make this community so receptive to the education and awareness campaigns.

3 Keep Baboons Safe

1. Control dogs
2. Ensure fewer baboon deaths on the R 44
3. Limit negative baboon-human interactions

Rooiels baboons have been killed in road traffic accidents and as a result of attacks by dogs and/or humans. The R44 bisects the village and “authorities still need to ensure that measures are put in place to ensure animal welfare and human wellbeing [3]”.

A proposed **priority implementation activities** is to:

- Take further action to **limit the time baboons spend in the Central Business District** particularly during peak season. This can build on and institutionalise good practices developed by RERA and REC over the past years.

4 Raise awareness through Education

It is important to build understanding and work with residents and visitors on how to deal with baboons.



A proposed ***priority implementation activity*** is to:

- **Disseminate information on coexisting with Baboons** and reach out to real estate agencies, builders and construction workers active in Rooiels. This is particularly important given the many ongoing and planned constructions in Rooiels.

Nurture Respect and Reduce Fear; build respect for fellow primates

Joselyn Mormile found in her study that informing a new resident about baboon behaviour, reduced or removed the fear of baboons and that “most become tolerant of, or embrace, living with baboons [3].” The overall lesson learned is that this must be an ongoing process of factual information sharing about baboons and their behaviour with residents, the urgent follow-up of any incidents that do take place to gather the facts, and the prevention of spreading of false information.

A proposed ***priority implementation activity*** is to:

- **Develop and disseminate guidelines when encountering Baboons** in nature, on a property, and at home as articulated in the Discussion Document. Full buy-in and ownership of the Rooiels community is desirable in implementing the guidelines, recognising that there will always be differences of opinions.

5 Appreciation of Baboons as part of our unique environment

This involves preserving baboons as part of the biosphere for future generations.

Additional priority implementation activities

Further to the three priority implementation activities presented the preceding section (Action in the Central Business District; Disseminate information on baboon coexistence; and Develop and disseminate guidelines when encountering baboons) the following three ***additional priority implementation activities*** are proposed. All six priority implementation activities proposed in this final report take into account views of residents and stakeholders expressed through the Survey and at the Indaba.

- **Work with the Overstrand Municipality** to establish a system to ensure that prospective and new property owners are aware of the challenges and the benefits of living with nature in Rooiels.



- **Develop a strategy to market Rooiels as a Conservancy** in a Biosphere Reserve (“attracting conservation-minded people”). This activity would inform potential buyers and residents as early as possible that Rooiels is a Conservancy in the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. At the Indaba it was proposed that Rooiels has several marketing experts who may be willing to assist with this.
- **Establish a small volunteer support group** to provide assistance to residents when incidents occur using the many respondents that volunteered to support coexistence with baboons

Implementing activities and considering further issues

At the Indaba it was recommended that small teams could be established to support implementation, recruited from the survey respondents who indicated their willingness to volunteer support (more than 50). The teams could take into account work already initiated by RERA and REC, the Discussion Document, and ideas generated at the Indaba which are captured in the [working group notes](#). These activities would support dissemination of information, promoting the safety of baboons, securing of human food sources and marketing Rooiels as a conservancy.

While the 2021 Indaba process featured detailed discussions on many topics and issues, some topics came up during the process, where the current state of science or knowledge does not provide a clear or simple answer. This includes, for example, the question whether or not, or to what extent the behaviour of baboons has changed over time. Some of these topics may merit further consideration in the future, including what the concept of “rewilding” means for Rooiels.



Annex. Key messages of the Baboon Coexistence Discussion Document

- Rooiels is one of four Conservancies located in the transition zone of the UNESCO designated Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, an area of pristine environment with unique and globally recognized plant diversity.
- For many decades, Rooiels citizens and baboons have coexisted in Rooiels. In September 2021, the Rooiels troop comprised a total of 27 baboons. The troop is still being observed to keep track of their life history, particularly births and deaths.
- Baboons are listed as “threatened” species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and protected in the Western Cape by law. It is illegal to harm, hunt, poison, paintball gun or feed baboons.
- Baboons interact with humans primarily for one reason: food. Incidents occur in Rooiels where baboons raid unprotected waste bins or enter homes of residents in their quest to search for food.
- Diverse lessons have been learned on how coexistence with baboons in Rooiels is possible. Key factors include but are not limited to: Responsible human behaviour; Baboon proofing of homes; Effective waste management; and targeted awareness and education.
- While baboons have never done physical harm to anyone living in Rooiels, incidents involving baboons seeking human food have created tension, or even trauma. Open communication and recognizing the feelings of individuals affected, can help develop a better understanding of the situation.
- The influx of new residents and visitors to Rooiels, as well as the construction and renovation of buildings, create particular challenges for human-baboon coexistence because not all newcomers and stakeholders are fully aware of the Rooiels coexistence model, and the shared responsibility it brings along.
- RERA and REC are committed to foster a solution- and action- oriented process to maintain the coexistence model with minimized incidents. This needs engagement of all residents and stakeholders, including residents, visitors, new owners and businesses, as well as of architects, constructors and builders, and estate agents.
- A Rooiels Baboon Coexistence Indaba took place on 20 November 2021 and was open to all community members and stakeholders. The overall purpose of the Indaba was to enhance coexistence with Baboons in Rooiels, by creating awareness, dialogue, and scaling-up action through shared responsibility by all concerned residents and stakeholders.



References

1. Mormile, J., *The viability of urban human-baboon coexistence through an interdisciplinary lens*, in *Southern African Wildlife Management Association Conference*. 2021.
2. Falcon, S., *LETTER TO THE EDITOR: A humane solution is needed to solve the Kataza 'problem'*. 2020, Dailymaverick.
3. Mormile, J. *Human-baboon coexistence*. 2021 [cited 2021 Sept]; Available from: <http://www.icwild.uct.ac.za/human-baboon-coexistence>.