

# BABOON MATTERS.

*In April 2004 a joint meeting of the Rooi Els and Pringle Bay villages was held, to address escalating problems of human-baboon interactions. A panel, including international experts on baboon behaviour, was constituted to deal with specific issues raised by the meeting, and to summarize the way forward. Because of the informed, objective, yet sympathetic way in which all issues raised were handled, this document has remained a definitive guideline. In the subsequent 6 years nothing has changed.*

*Specific queries and conclusions are tabled below.*

**Jenny Stark**

**27/10/2010**

<b>PERSONAL SAFETY</b>	<p><b>1. Will baboons attack people?</b> <i>"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."</i> (Dr Dave Gaynor)</p> <p><b>2. Use of pepper gas.</b> 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.</p> <p><b>3. Chasing baboons</b> 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, then exert pressure by encouraging it towards an exit and it will go willingly.</p>
------------------------	--

	<p><b>4. Baboons are not predators.</b>  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.</p> <p><i>“Only the males have incisors, which tells us that [as a species] they do not hunt. They use their incisors to intimidate other males.”</i>  (Dr Dave Gaynor)</p> <p><b>5. Baboons and children</b>  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. Baboons should not be allowed to become familiar with a children’s playground as they may learn to see it as their territory.</p>
<p><b>WHY  BABOONS  ENTER HOMES  &amp; VILLAGES</b></p>	<p><b>1. Because they are being rewarded!</b>  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! <i>“Every time a baboon gets half a loaf of bread from a rubbish bin or window ledge, they are being rewarded!”</i>  <b>Reward is a far more powerful learning incentive than punishment.</b></p> <p><b>2. Why do they enter closed up holiday homes?</b>  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.</p> <p><b>3. Breaking in</b>  Baboons are often falsely accused of ‘breaking in’. ...  <i>“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.”</i>  <i>“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”.</i> (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 a certain behaviour has food rewards attached to it and so will learn to repeat the tactic.</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p><i>"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."</i></p> <p>(Dr Dave Gaynor)</p>
<p><b>TECHNIQUES that do not work!</b></p>	<p><b>1. Pain/ fear aversion/ chasing baboons</b></p> <p><i>"From what we know about baboons, pain aversion does not work"</i> (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 <b>person</b> 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.</p> <p><i>"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! <b>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!</b>"</i> (Dr Dave Gaynor)</p> <p><b>2. Threat aversion, e.g. leopard calls or leopard scats.</b></p> <p>According to Gaynor, these also don't work, tending to attract the baboons to investigate rather than scaring them away!</p> <p><b>3. Painting baboons</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>4. Eliminating or relocating troops</b></p> <p><i>"...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."</i></p> <p><b>(Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)</b></p>

<p><b>MINOR SOLUTIONS</b></p>	<p><b>1. Inflicting a physiological cost to the baboon.</b>  <i>"The easiest way to do this is to take a hose pipe and spray them. Adult baboons, like cats, hate getting wet."</i> (Dave Gaynor)          (This was loudly disputed by many people who have seen baboons playing in water) in PB and RE areas. Dave responded that these were probably youngsters.</p> <p><b>2. Electric fences</b>          If they are properly constructed, electric fences work!</p> <p><b>3. Wood frames</b>          Bitrex (the bitter, purple component added to Methylated Spirits to stop human consumption), or Capsican, (extract of chillies) can be painted onto wooden frames to deter gnawing.</p>
<p><b>MAJOR SOLUTIONS</b></p>	<p><b>1. REDUCTION OF REWARDS</b>  <i>"Baboons work on a reward system. <b>What you as a community need to look at is reducing the rewards to the baboons.</b>"</i>          (Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)</p> <p><b>2. WASTE MANAGEMENT</b>  <i>"... <b>you have got to baboon-proof your bins.</b> 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"</i>          (Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)</p> <p><b>3. REMOVAL OF OTHER FOOD INCENTIVES e.g. vines, fruit trees, etc.</b>  <i>"...<b>you have to decide as a community "Do we want fruit trees at all? Do we want vegetable gardens at all?"</b> 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."</i>          (Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)</p> <p><b>4. BABOON MONITORING</b>  <i>"What I can really suggest to you that works is the Monitor project. It's not going to be 100% successful ... and make sure that every property owner has that money <b>deducted off their rates base every single month.</b> 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."</i>          (Jenni Trethowan, Baboon Matters)</p>

*“The solution is Monitors... You form a partnership between the community - and it might be more than one community...representatives from the [Municipality] and from the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board. And together you then develop a management plan. The management plan will have 3 fundamental elements to it.*

- 1. Residents’ education - that means each of us, as a resident, needs to do what we can to make it more difficult for baboons to get food from our properties. There must not be a very good economic opportunity for them to come and get food to eat.*
- 2. That the Municipality manages the waste better than they are doing at the moment. That is a Municipal responsibility and you’ve got to put a lot of pressure on them.*
- 3. Baboon monitoring - 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.”*  
(John Green, WESSA, Chairperson; Friends of Tokai)

The meeting was chaired by ambassador **Casper Venter**, and the panel included:

**Dr Dave Gaynor** [who has spent 12 years researching baboons and 7 years specifically studying baboon/human interactions], **Ruth Kansky** [who published the book “Baboons in the Cape Peninsula”], **John Green** [Head of WESSA, Western Cape, and chairman of Friends of Tokai], **Jenni Trethowan** [Head of Baboon Matters and manager of the Peninsula Baboon Monitor Project], **Tom Peschak** [a zoology graduate, researching local baboon troops], **Craig Spencer** (then head of the Overstrand Department of Ecological and Conservation Services), **Dr Jenny Stark** [Biosphere Reserve Action Group representative] and **Johan Grobler** [Pringle Bay Baboon Action Group representative].