

Pathway for Human – Baboon Coexistence

Building a pathway to ensure the peaceful coexistence of people and baboons in Rooiels to preserve them as part of our biosphere for future generations



The additional information below is provided for context, drawn from the PhD fieldwork conducted by Joselyn Mormile during her 3 years living in Rooiels observing baboon behaviour and baboon-human interaction. She successfully conducted a 2018 survey of village attitudes to baboons and mapped their range.

Baboon Information derived from Joselyn Mormile's PhD research

It is widely believed that baboons belong in the mountains. While they do utilise the steep slopes of mountains for protection from predators while sleeping, baboons have always spent the majority of their time in low-lying land. Low-lying land is home to both more abundant and more productive vegetation. It also provides access to marine food along the coast.

When we arrived, we unsurprisingly also preferred to make our homes in these low-lying areas. In the face of urbanization, wildlife are required to adapt to the changing landscape or are forced into the remaining untransformed portions of their range. Baboons are one of the species that readily adapt to landscape changes due to a high level of behavioral flexibility and a generalist diet. Their presence in our villages is a result of two main factors. Firstly, our villages were established within their existing ranging areas and secondly, we brought food along with us in the form of rubbish, vegetable gardens and other human-derived foods. These foods are very attractive to baboons due to their high calorie content

which when consumed allow baboons to spend less of the day searching for food and more time resting.

By comparison, the sandstone fynbos in the Kogelberg is a notoriously low-quality food source, which requires baboons to spend most of their days in search of food which may not always meet their needs. Baboons play a pivotal role in the survival of many fynbos species through seed dispersal and are of considerable importance to the local environment. By allowing baboons access to human-derived foods, we not only detract from their role in nature, but we set the scene for negative and unwanted interactions with baboons. For this reason, feeding baboons is prohibited by law and utilising a baboon-proof bin is required by law. Through responsible behaviour, we can prevent baboons' access to human-derived foods as they pass through the village, which encourages baboons to forage naturally despite development and reduces the potential for conflicts.

This has been the approach of the Rooiels community for many years. Rooiels' adoption of a coexistence model, where baboons and residents share semi-urban space, is one of a kind. This has been made possible through high levels of community awareness in addition to village-specific nuances. This model however requires buy-in from the vast majority of the community as its success is contingent almost solely on the behaviour of residents. The hope is that through continued science-based education and community awareness, it can continue. Rooiels is the one semi-urban example we have of just how well community efforts and minor lifestyle adjustments can work at preventing conflicts with baboons.

The functionality of the coexistence model approach requires occasional reassessment to determine where it may require improvement and how it can be improved using the currently available and tested Rooiels tools (e.g. awareness, baboon-proofing) and the potential addition of others. The survey of residents was carried out to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the residents and their constructive insight on this matter.