**Baboon Education and Awareness Programme (BEAP)**

Article extracted from the Rooiels Breeze 2001

“*People are the problem, not the baboons…”*

*“I’m not prepared to live behind bars…”*

*“The baboons were here first…”*

*“It’s only a matter of time before a child is hurt or killed…”*

*“If people don’t like the baboons, let them live somewhere else…”*

These are only some of the comments which spice up social gatherings in Rooiels. Amusing at first, I felt compelled to take things more seriously after rumours of baboons shot on three different occasions in the Rooiels area during 2000. Since there seemed to be numerous legends but few facts, I decided that the place to start would be to scientifically document facts relating to the Rooiels baboons and their interactions with humans in our community.

The object of the study is to collect and document as much information as possible with a view to launching an education and awareness programme to teach residents, visitors (and perhaps baboons!) how all citizens of the Kogelberg Biosphere may live in harmony.

In December 2000 Koos Smit, Evette Weyers and Drika Wilkens helped me hand out questionnaires to all occupied houses in the village. Margaret Hensen kept copies available in the Village Shop for anyone we missed and also for visitors.

To date we have received 113 completed questionnaires, 90 from property owners and 23 from visitors. … Analysis of the data so far received from property owners has revealed some interesting facts.

* We seem to be fairly evenly divided on whether the baboons are a problem (YES = 47% NO = 52%)
* Most of us (63%) think the baboons are an asset. 28% don’t agree and the remainder don’t know.
* Most of us (61%) LIKE the baboons, 20% are neutral and 20% don’t like them at all.
* Despite liking them, most of us (61%) think they are a nuisance, although 36% of respondents do not.
* The overwhelming majority (73%) do not consider them to be dangerous at the moment, but opinion is neatly divided on whether they will become a problem in the future: (YES 33% No 30% DON’T KNOW 37%)
* We are not afraid of them (76%) and most of us do not want them removed from Rooiels (70%).
* 80% of respondents would prefer it if we could find ways to live in harmony with the baboons and there is clear support (84%) for an education and awareness programme.
* Of the more than 230 “hits” between July to December 200, only 14 respondents reported damage to property. In some cases this was extensive (R1000-R4000). One has to ask why baboons cause serious damage to property in a small number of cases (6%), and this has led us to implement the second part of the study.

We are asking everyone in Rooiels to accurately document “hits” when these occur and report these to Koos, Jenny or Darelle Snyman who will then do an on-site visit. “Hit” questionnaires are available at the Village Shop and contain our contact numbers.

Baboons enter our homes for fruit (56% of hits) with bread running second (38%) in the favourite human food stakes.

* No-one admitted to deliberately feeding the baboons, and some commented on how important it is to stop visitors feeding them. It’s important for all of us to realize that baboons can’t tell the difference between deliberate and accidental feeding. If they get food inside our homes, from our waste, or food we set out for the birds, WE ARE FEEDING THEM!

We are making every effort to increase our response rate in order to maximize the scientific validity of the study. Hopefully you will shortly receive a questionnaire with your municipal account. Please take a few minutes to fill it in (if you have not already done so) and return it to me. ….(Jenny Stark)