

BABOON RESEARCH in the CAPE PENINSULA, SOUTH AFRICA

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

A quarter of the world's 230 primate species are currently threatened by the direct and indirect activities of humans. The Cape Peninsula in South Africa is a classic example of this trend, with urban sprawl greatly reducing the availability of suitable habitat to the local chacma baboon (*Papio h. ursinus*) population. Ironically these baboon troops are the only protected population of this species in Southern Africa. Despite their unique status their numbers are declining and the population is now classified as critically endangered.



In the Cape Peninsula, South Africa, an absence of empirical information regarding the spatial requirements of the resident 11 baboon troops, has resulted in regional management efforts focusing almost exclusively on reducing physical contact between the baboon troops and human settlements. High baboon mortality rates and increased levels of human-baboon conflict throughout the Peninsula suggest that this strategy is inadequate and alternatives need to be considered as a matter of urgency. Officials charged with management of this species have repeatedly requested empirical data on the spatial and habitat requirements of these troops as a critical first step towards effective management.

The Baboon Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, South Africa has subsequently developed a research project focusing on the spatial ecology of the Peninsula baboon troops. The aim of the study is to collect spatial data and to perform a detailed Geographic Information System (GIS) based spatial analysis on all of the Peninsula baboon troops. To achieve this two kinds of data are collected: year-round Global Positioning Systems (GPS) data recorded by GPS tracking collars, and seasonal observational data collected by field biologists.

Volunteers with training and/or experience in field biology are invited to take part in the collection of observational data during winter 2007 (June/July 2007) and Summer 2007/08 (December/January). Volunteers will work in the pristine setting of the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, situated approximately 50km from Cape Town city centre. Data collection involves observations of each troop during the cold, wet winter and hot, dry summer months. Volunteers will follow each troop on foot collecting detailed behavioural data (e.g. foraging frequencies and diet, social behaviours, movement patterns) throughout the day.

Volunteers must be able to participate for a minimum of one month, and must be able to fund their transport to South Africa, and their board and lodging whilst in the country. Please contact **Tali Hoffman** (Principal Investigator) for more information.

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WHO MIGHT ENJOY THIS KIND OF WORK?

People who are interested in zoology, behavioural ecology, conservation biology, and the reduction of human-wildlife conflict...or anything along those lines!

WHAT HAS ATTRACTED VOLUNTEERS TO THIS PROJECT IN THE PAST?

‘Since I was a little kid, I’ve always wanted to follow animals around all day, just watching them and coming to understand how life works for them. Baboons - intelligent, social, and charismatic as they are - seemed like the ideal subject species to introduce me to field work in behaviour ecology. The project was a great way to really get my feet wet in the field I was hoping to engage in, as well as play a vital role in a very important project.’

Nitin Sekar, University of North Carolina

‘The chance to work with primates and be involved in a project dealing with animal behaviour. It also helped teach me a lot about field work and all the factors that need to be considered when approaching a project of this nature.’

Stacey Jordaan, University of Cape Town

‘I saw it as an opportunity to gain field experience and learn more about baboons and baboon-monitoring.’

Matthew Lewis, University of Cape Town

‘The opportunity to work with an amazing group of animals and be involved in a cool project.’

Glenn Moncrieff, University of Cape Town



Volunteer training



**Jacqui Stephenson,
University of Cape Town**



**Shahrina Chowdhury,
City University of New York**



**Kathryn Tarr,
University of Edinburgh**



WHAT SKILLS WILL YOU ACQUIRE THROUGH YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROJECT?

'I feel as though I have acquired an ability to observe certain wild animals in certain situations in a smart, practical way. With just a few guidelines and some experience, one learns how to live amongst baboons. I started learning how to read certain communications, foresee trouble and reactions, to see greater significance in personal interactions amongst certain individual baboons. Every day also had some special event that made it memorable. My comfort and confidence in studying animal behaviour have benefited greatly from the project. In addition, spending so much time outside, I found myself generally more able to navigate around the area and mountain, to use the sun to tell the time or the direction, to learn to love working outside. I also become more comfortable with using GPS technology. Without a doubt, the greatest benefit was simply the experience of working with a wild troop of intelligent Chacma baboons.'

Nitin Sekar, University of North Carolina

'I acquired the ability to reason with people about baboon tolerance and knowledge of baboon Behaviour.'

Glenn Moncrieff, University of Cape Town

'My field work skills definitely improved. Also I feel I have learnt how to approach and observe wild animals without influencing them, how to get close enough but not too close. It also gave me perspective on the kinds of things that need to be taken into account when approaching a project of this nature.'

Stacey Jordaan, University of Cape Town

'I have learnt much about baboon behaviour, especially regarding interactions with humans and how the influence of such interactions on baboon behaviour can be minimised. I have also learnt the correct techniques for tracking animals using GPS systems, and have an idea of how these techniques can be altered for maximum efficiency for different species.'

Matthew Lewis, University of Cape Town



**Matthew Lewis,
University of Cape Town**



**Nitin Sekar,
University of North Carolina**



**Anne Ketley,
University of Cape
Town**



**Megan Laird
University of Cape Town**

SOME SENTIMENTS FROM PREVIOUS VOLUNTEERS...

'I would definitely recommend it to those who are considering field biology as a career, as it provides important insight into this field and is an enjoyable experience.'

Matthew Lewis, University of Cape Town

'I loved working on the project. Living amongst baboons for 8-10 hours a day greatly affected both my scientific and philosophical outlook on life. I spent most of my days outdoors, getting exercise in what seemed the most natural way. I had moments of adventure and peril, and moments of both intellectual and emotional revelation. In a quiet way, I was always getting information, always re-analyzing situations—and all against the backdrop of the beautiful Cape Peninsula mountains, surrounded by a perplexing and intriguing troop of primates.'

Nitin Sekar, University of North Carolina

'This project offers a great way to get out of the house and become exposed to larger mammals, and become involved in such a hot topic.'

Jacqui Stephenson, University of Cape Town

'I enjoyed every shift I worked. It was very interesting to observe the baboon's natural behaviour so close up and to hear people's opinions of them.'

Glenn Moncrieff, University of Cape Town



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