

# HOGSBACK VILLAGE BABOONS

## SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

JANUARY 2021

### 1. PURPOSE OF THIS PAMPHLET

This pamphlet is a short, simple summary of our understanding of the human-baboon conflict situation in Hogsback as at the end of 2020. It has been written by a small group of Hogsback residents (AKA 'Hogsback Village Baboon Core Group') who have spent a few months gathering information online and interviewing both residents and research scientists. We have tried to present our findings as objectively as possible. We hope that everyone will find this useful as a starting point in finding a workable way forward.

Please share and discuss this widely. We welcome all ideas and comments. See our contact details at the end.

### 2. WHO ARE WE?

- Carol Collins, Michelle Griffith, Wayne Kent, Vincent Shaw, Fiona Wallace, Felicity Wood (AKA 'The Baboon Core Group'), recently joined by Carl Hansmann.
- Much of the desktop research was completed on our behalf by Clare Padfield.
- An open WhatsApp group ('Hogsback Baboon Dilemma') is run by Chris Breedt. All Hogsback residents may join this open forum.

### 3. RESEARCH COMPLETED

We have focussed our efforts so far on four areas:

- Researching proven ways to reduce human-baboon conflict.
- Documenting actual human-baboon interactions in Hogsback to understand the extent of the problem.
- Ongoing interviews of Hogsback community members to hear opinions, experiences, perceptions and suggestions, encouraging positive engagement across differing views.
- Providing regular communications through various channels to community members to create awareness about preventive actions.

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1 The status of the village baboons

The Hogsback baboons are Chacma Baboons (*Papio ursinus*). Chacmas live in a wide variety of habitats including mountains, grassland, savanna and fynbos. They are not forest animals but do use the forest edge for food and kranztes/cliff edges for sleeping. They are 'generalist opportunistic omnivores'. This means that they eat a wide variety of food and will learn to eat different food if it is available. They find food by foraging – moving from place to place searching for things to eat. They live in social groups of different sizes, called troops, each with its own area or home range.

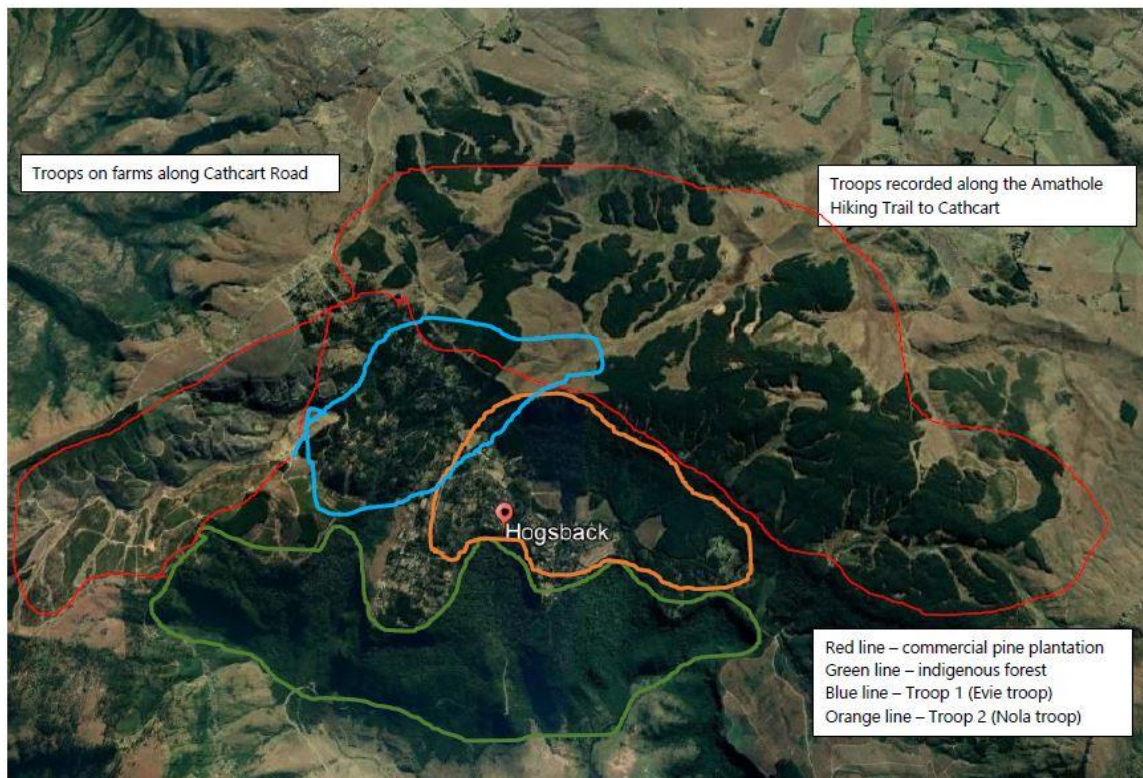
There are currently three troops using the village as a major part of their home ranges. They forage and sleep in and around the village. Until mid-October 2020 there were two troops, but Evie, the dominant female of one troop, appears to have formed a smaller splinter troop. The reason for this is not yet clear and this may not be permanent.

It appears that the first known incidents of conflict between Hogsback residents and baboons occurred around 2007. Researchers have studied the troops since 2010 and named the troops the 'Nola' and 'Evie' troops.

Baboons are not territorial, but they do have home ranges, and the ranges of the Hogsback troops overlap considerably.

- **The Nola troop's** home range includes the area from Tor Doone Lane, Tor Doone and up to just beyond Hunterston. The troop size has averaged 38 baboons since 2012 (official count in 2018).
- **The Evie troop** previously ranged from Little Timbers/Dunaverty (overlapping with Nola troop around Tor Doone Lane), Plaatjieskraal areas, Summertown Drive and Perry Bar Lane up to The Edge. The troop had a larger home range and roughly 47 baboons (official count June 2016).
  - The **'Old Evie troop'** now occupies the area between Little Timbers/Dunaverty and Plaatjieskraal Road. This troop appears to 'raid' gardens/farms more often than the Nola troop and is often chased by people and dogs using more violent means (firecrackers, shooting and trapping).
  - The range of the **'New Evie troop'** (about 13 baboons) includes Summertown Drive/Orchard Lane.

According to local researchers, the total number across all the troops has averaged around 70–100 since 2010. It may rise and fall in different years, but it has not increased overall. They report that at least 7 males have been shot and killed in recent times.



Current situation. Hogsback village is situated where the 2 troops currently are located.

#### 4.2 What we know about baboon behaviour

This is a summary of discussions held with researchers in early December 2020.

- Baboons generally do not seek to fight dogs, or humans, but are inquisitive and will watch us and our dogs closely, often even approaching to investigate us.
- Female baboons are very protective of their young and, if they feel that their offspring are being threatened by dogs and/or people, they may retaliate.
- If alarmed, mothers and babies will retreat to safety, while the males, especially the leaders, will come back to check the situation – this is not usually an 'attack', but rather a 'scouting' of the situation to ensure the safety of the troop.

- Baboons sleep in various sites and, upon waking, spend an hour or two playing and communicating with one another, also basking in the sun, before they start foraging.
- Their diet is hugely varied, and a drought does not really affect them, as they are extraordinarily efficient feeders. However, fruit trees and vegetable gardens present 'easy-pickings'.

#### 4.3 Previous Hogsback actions

- Production of a pamphlet, by Kirsten Wimberger in 2011/12, providing general information about baboons.
- Meeting with DEAT (2012).
- Various correspondence with DEAT 2020.

#### 4.4 Changes in Hogsback

- The human population is denser now with an estimated 1 000 residents in 2020 (from 310 in 2010), with this number potentially doubling during peak tourist seasons.
- The baboons need cliffs for sleeping, but they are unable to access them freely.
- The erection of electric fences may have cut the baboons off from their preferred home ranges.
- Commercial pine plantations have replaced much of the grassland, the baboons' natural habitat in the Amathole Mountains, around Hogsback.
- It is worth noting that not all new residents were made aware of the baboon situation prior to purchasing property while some were told baboons had entered the village five years ago because of the drought.

#### 4.5 Recent encounters with baboons

Reports from Hogsback residents related to:

- 'Raiding' of vegetable gardens and fruit trees.
- Damage to buildings and structures.
- Posing a danger to people and dogs<sup>1</sup>.

#### 4.6 Variety of options

A wide variety of responses to manage the encounters between baboons and people was collected from residents, researchers, scientific literature and other South African communities. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list. Not all of these are applicable to Hogsback nor necessarily desirable or even effective. We present them all here in order to document them. Some of them have been used by Hogsback residents in the past and/or are currently in use. The common denominator running through all of them is that the baboons "must be made to feel unwelcome".

- Send them away to their 'natural environment' around Hogsback.
- Send them to the indigenous forests.
  
- Cull them to an environmentally acceptable number.
- Trap and kill them.
- Shoot to kill.
- Hunt with dog packs.
  
- Fire paintball guns.
- Use catapults.
- Use dogs to scare them away.
  
- Set off firecrackers.
- Crack whips.
- Shout and wave arms.

---

<sup>1</sup> One report was of a recent confrontation between two dogs and a single baboon causing injuries to all three animals. The events leading up to this incident are unknown.

- Shoot firearms to scare not kill them.
- Play sounds of predators.
- Install an ultrasonic sound deterrent.
  
- Use leopard/lion scat.
- Use water guns/hoses.
- Install electric fences.
- Build cages over vegetable gardens and fruit trees.
  
- Create 'ecological corridors' to allow the safe passage of baboons through specific areas.
- Create a safe 'urban edge' around the village for the baboons.
- Employ trained 'baboon minders' to actively guide baboons off properties and into the corridors or edge.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Lack of co-ordinated, community response

One community member summarised the issues as follows:

1. *We have two problems not just one: baboons and our human responses to them.*
2. *We do not have consensus in the community.*
3. *We lack a workable strategy to implement.*

It is a reality that the 'easy-pickings' from fruit trees and vegetable gardens will continue to attract baboons. Human-baboon conflict will continue to flare up, especially when fruit/vegetables are in season.

None of the deterrents used by individuals have been co-ordinated at a community level. One of the greatest challenges and areas of community conflict is that stressed baboons are chased off one property onto a neighbouring one.

For the human/baboon conflict to be reduced and to be successfully and sustainably managed, the ideal is for our community to reach agreement on a set of solutions to be adopted. Consensus and compromise will be necessary.

Baboons are intelligent and adaptive and continuously balance the risk of obtaining food with its benefits. Little energy is needed to find food in a human food garden with a small risk of danger to the troop. Baboons will 'sit and wait' for the opportunity to get the food. This adaptive behaviour is specific to baboons that feed in human spaces as high energy human food provides more return than hours of foraging.

Currently, Hogsback residents use varying 'chasing' methods to move baboons off their properties. However, if not co-ordinated, all this achieves is a shift in raiding location, from one neighbour to the next. More aggressive methods, such as gunshots and firecrackers cause fear, panic and aggression in the troop. As the troop is chased off a property, its aggression is transferred to the dogs and people in neighbouring properties. In addition, loud explosions cause panic in domestic animals and much of the remaining wildlife. Frightened, panicked baboons may be also more destructive as they escape.

It seems clear that **a range of deterrents within a co-ordinated, planned approach** is required for Hogsback.

### 5.2 Misperceptions regarding the Hogsback baboons

The Core Group also documented a wide variety of community perceptions of our baboons, several of which are not supported by our research:

- Populations have exploded: *Over 100 in a troop; Over 300.*
- *Baboons are vermin and need to be culled.*
- *They are invaders from the Savanna.*
- *They need to be permanently removed from the village.*

- *The population each year is increasing. Their natural environment cannot now support them, so they have moved into village.*

## 6. WAY FORWARD

As a self-formed group of interested community members, we carry neither the authority nor the mandate of the community to implement any strategic plan to manage the human-baboon relationships in Hogsback. However, we are committed to working with our community to find solutions.

We are certain that the only sustainable way forward lies in the ability of the Hogsback community to reach agreement through **consensus, compromise and commitment**. A strategic balance between short-, medium- and long-term approaches must be found.

### 6.1 A recommended strategic approach

We highlight here some practical approaches (drawn from our research and discussions) that appear to be useful for the Hogsback context, acknowledging that this list is probably not exhaustive and that a combination of approaches is likely to produce the best results:

- 6.1.1. Through a co-ordinated approach, it is our belief that baboons can be purposefully, passively and directionally herded into **safe areas** where they can range peacefully.
- 6.1.2. People will need to set boundaries and baboons will need to learn and respect the boundaries.
- 6.1.3. Hogsback could create **ecological 'corridors'**/spaces within the village through which baboons could move safely.
- 6.1.4. Areas that could be reverted to natural baboon habitat need to be identified on the boundaries of Hogsback to create an **'urban edge'**.
- 6.1.5. More recent **technology** developments (e.g. virtual fences) may help to keep baboons within 'safe' areas.
- 6.1.6. The community should investigate **cost-effective** methods for caging and protecting vegetable gardens and fruit trees.
- 6.1.7. Hogsback could follow the example of other communities by employing **trained baboon monitors** or appointing **trained community volunteers** to direct/displace the baboons to the corridors/spaces/urban edge.
- 6.1.8. Very specific, **appropriate guidelines**/protocols for moving baboons are required.
- 6.1.9. A dedicated **online baboon-monitoring group** could record movement, behaviour, numbers and activity of troops so that they can be easily located and re-directed.

### 6.2 Approaches not recommended

Alternative approaches that we do not recommend are detailed below in order to provide clarity and transparency around alternative approaches that have been raised by community members.

- 6.2.1. **Trapping and killing baboons** is a costly and time-consuming exercise as baboons are intelligent and adaptive. If one is trapped, the rest learn to avoid the traps.
- 6.2.2. Baboons entering the traps may not be the most ideal individuals to remove, particularly if it is one of the adult males. The removal of an adult male results in a vacuum filled by migrant adult males, sometimes heightening aggression. The new adult male usually kills all the young babies so that new offspring carry his genes.
- 6.2.3. **Culling** is not advised as a long-term sustainable solution, since research has shown that troop numbers recover quickly if the energy-rich abundant food source is still available.
- 6.2.4. The space is quickly filled by baboons from the surrounding areas if the whole troop is culled.
- 6.2.5. The troop scatters and hides if one is shot, so it is expensive to cull more than a few at a time.
- 6.2.6. Culling disturbs the social structure of the troop, particularly if adults are killed.

Our work continues as we investigate and engage further with the community. We are currently reviewing our next steps for 2021 and will share these with everyone. However, we are clear that **a co-ordinated community approach is an urgent priority**. Concrete action is needed sooner rather than later.

## 7. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Read this document thoroughly and respond with your practical suggestions on how to improve it or fill any obvious gaps.
- Share this with other members of the community.
- Communicate your ideas with any member of our team.
- Join the WhatsApp group and share your practical ideas there.
- Join our team.
- Commit to the creation of a community-based plan of action.
- Become part of the solution.

## 8. CONTACT DETAILS

Michelle Griffith	073 209 1625	mgaigr@gmail.com
Carol Collins	079 633 9546	collinsacarol@yahoo.com
Carl Hansmann	061 226 2199	boomshushu@gmail.com
Wayne Kent	083 333 1902	elementpropertyservices@gmail.com
Vincent Shaw	082 576 8246	vpshaw@gmail.com
Fiona Wallace	073 110 0878	wallacefionajeane@gmail.com
Felicity Wood	082 200 4639	fels.wood@gmail.com

## 9. DOCUMENTS

All research papers and other relevant documents used to compile this summary can be found in our Google Drive:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vNkBoDFK65wLWLFx0Yn0gIxYXJojefa4?usp=sharing>