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Mother with infant, of the Seaforth Troop. Photo by resident of Simonstown

Workable Solutions for the Peninsula Baboons

A Paradigm Shift

By W. Jamieson – for AnimalTalk Africa Trust.

About AnimalTalk Africa Trust

We are committed to a vision of a world of peaceful and harmonious co-existence within Nature. Our focus is on human-wildlife co-existence, based on the principles of Intuitive Interspecies Communication or IIC.

What is IIC?

IIC occurs across many cultures around the world and is growing in use in contemporary wildlife rehabilitation and conservation, with domestic animals, and in veterinary care. It is also often used for resolving human-animal conflicts. Illustrations of IIC are reported across many fields and cultures, but it is currently under-researched.

The working definition of Intuitive Interspecies Communication (IIC) is as follows:

"IIC presents as a detailed, non-verbal and non-physical form of communication between humans and other animals. Drawing on a diversity of intuitive capacities, IIC includes the mutual exchange of visceral feelings, emotions, mental impressions and thoughts, embodied sensations of touch, smell, taste, sound, as well as visuals in the mind's eye. While these exchanges can occur while in direct physical proximity to the animal, they can also occur over great distances and without the need for visual, auditory, olfactory, voice or other cues that humans normally associate with direct interactive communication" (Barrett et al. 2021, p. 151).

A New Way

A non-violent approach to managing coexistence between baboons and people needs to be explored. The current options—permanent captivity for wild, free-roaming baboons or their death—demonstrate that more than 15 years of fear-based management have been unsuccessful.

AnimalTalk Africa Trust would like to work with the relevant role-players to explore a new approach. The aim would be to safeguard the biodiversity and integrity of the baboons, the people and the ecosystems of Table Mountain and the Cape Peninsula.

Cape Town's baboons are currently managed through an aggressive and outdated approach to wildlife—one based on fear and pain aversion. The current situation on the Cape Peninsula and Simonstown in particular demonstrates the failure of this strategy.

Both personal experience and international research indicate that a heart-based approach to wildlife coexistence can be more effective than one rooted in fear. This approach has been applied in several conservation projects, particularly in residential, agricultural and urban areas affected by baboons, with verified success.

A Paradigm Shift from Negative to Positive Reinforcement.

The emerging science of Intuitive Interspecies Communication (IIC) could be one of the tools in a baboon monitor's toolbox. Where the monitors are trained, not only in baboon behaviour, but in working with their own intuition and inherent knowledge.

With appropriate training, IIC could support monitors in communicating with baboons in a non-violent way and in developing a shared language based on mutual understanding and respect.

The traditional indigenous guiding practices of clapping and whistling, together with demonstrating strength and developing an understanding of individual baboons and family dynamics, would work alongside Intuitive Interspecies Communication.

This shared approach would help keep the monitors, baboons and surrounding people safe while supporting peaceful coexistence between humans and our primate cousins.

How Would This Look?

The monitors and management team would undergo training in Intuitive Communication and in applying this approach as part of their work with the baboons. Intuitive Communication is described as a natural way of connecting that is available to all species, including humans. The training would focus on re-awakening this innate skill, which is often dormant and does not require extensive intervention to become active again.

As the monitors begin to experience the results of communicating *with* the baboons, they would develop a clearer understanding of how to apply the approach in practice. This would help them identify where the baboons intend to move at the beginning of the day, guide them safely to appropriate areas and assess the needs of the troop.

The monitors' observations and communication with the baboons would therefore support a more responsive form of management. Rather than relying only on established routines, they would learn to adjust their guidance according to the troop's intended movements and immediate needs.

This approach would require time for the baboons, the monitors and the human residents to become familiar with the new way of working. A series of talks and engagements with residents would help explain the shift in management, encourage understanding and support acceptance of the approach. Although adjustment would take time, current shifts in world views show that many people support this new way of being with wildlife.

Other Factors to Consider

Why Baboons Spend More Time in Residential and Urban Areas:

Many of the reasons why baboons have increasingly been spending more time in residential and urban areas are already known. These areas offer obvious attractants, particularly easy access to food through waste and opportunities created when residents do not take sufficient care to make their homes baboon-proof.

Solutions to these challenges have been proposed over the past 25 years. They are also addressed in the many formal objections to the Kogelfontein Urban Wildlife Sanctuary submitted by various organisations.

Degradation of the Mountainside:

Another factor to consider is the degradation of the mountainside. Protea seedlings require approximately 8–12 years to mature and produce their own seeds, and there has been very little mature fynbos since the fires in 2023 and before. As a result, natural food sources are scarcer, particularly in the context of ongoing fires and continuing fire threats.

Temporary Provisioning and Fynbos Regeneration:

The natural mountainside could be made more attractive to the baboons through temporary, short-term provisioning. Although there has traditionally been strong resistance to any form of food provisioning, the reasons for this resistance must be reconsidered in the context of the current choice between permanent captivity and death, which leaves no reasonable alternatives.

A short-term, strategic provisioning plan using natural, healthy, rewarding foods could help encourage the baboons to move away from residential and urban areas and remain on the mountainside for longer. At the same time, the regeneration of natural fynbos would be important to support long-term sustainability.

Water Availability on the Mountainside

There is also insufficient water on the mountainside for the baboon troops. In the past, during the period when first KEAG and then Baboon Matters were responsible for management in various baboon-affected areas, water points were installed and maintained. These water points have not been restored, partly because of fire damage and other factors. Restoring and maintaining them would be a vital component of efforts to keep the baboons away from urban and residential areas.

Maintaining Access to Natural Foraging Areas

Baboons also forage in low-lying areas and along the seashore. To ensure that this ancient way of obtaining food and supporting their health is not stopped completely, a "green" access corridor could be identified. Monitors could then guide the baboons safely to and from these areas once or twice a week.

If no entirely green corridor currently exists, it may be possible to obtain the support of residents living along an easily accessible route to the shore and begin creating one. This would help preserve the baboons' access to these foraging areas while providing a managed way for them to move safely between the mountainside and the seashore.

AnimalTalk Africa Trust believes that if these shifts start to happen within the context of baboon-human management, never again would we be faced with terrible options that have now been presented.

Please see the following 2 pages for references to baboon case studies and research on IIC.

Personal Experiences and Baboon Case Studies in Practice:

2005 to Current
As an advisor and consultant for the Global White Lion Protection Trust, I have trained staff on how to work with baboon challenges with vegetable gardens, baboons entering houses and the guest camp. I am currently assisting with a large-scale permaculture indigenous food and medicinal garden.

July 2026
In my role as an IIC practitioner, I assisted a resident in Victoria Bay, Garden Route who had challenges with baboons in her commercial flower farm. Their behaviour changed completely after working with IIC and negotiating with the baboons.

October 24 to current
In Wilderness in the Garden Route, my colleagues and I helped manage a tricky situation when the Kaaimans troop moved away from their home range because of the N2 roadworks and tried to move into the village. Using IIC and guiding them away from the village we moved them off, and they did not try and enter again. We addressed concerns with residents and continue to give talks and workshops on understanding baboons and using heart-based interventions. I have also helped a number of individual residents with challenges around baboons.
As a resident expert in IIC with baboons, I am involved with current ongoing assistance with the baboons in Wilderness Heights area.

October 2024 and March 2025
Assisted KVET in Pringle bay with individual cases of baboons with injuries, to assess treatment needs, and keep them away from danger.

September and October 2024
Assisted Green Group Simonstown working with the baboons. Helping their monitors work with IIC to keep the baboons safe. Actively worked with IIC to keep the baboons away from dangerous situations with tourists on the beach.

2014
Assisted residents of a baboon effected area in the Garden Route through workshops and individual consultation when baboons had started behaving seemingly aggressively with residents. These challenges eased almost immediately for a few years after. (This has been written up and published as a case-study for the University of Saskatchewan, Multi-Species Symposium.

2005 to 2009
As a trustee of Baboon Matters Trust, I became actively involved with the baboon monitoring project. Part of my involvement was in assisting with training the baboon monitors, including working with IIC to work with the baboons each day.

Current Research in
Intuitive Interspecies Communication (IIC)

Hinz, V. & **Barrett, M.J**. (2026).
Potentials for Animal Participation: Remote Intuitive Interspecies Communication. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography.*

Barrett, M.J., Hinz, V., Wijngaarden, V. & Lovrod, M. (2021). **'Speaking' with Other Animals through Intuitive Interspecies Communication: Towards Cognitive and Interspecies Justice**. In Eds. Alice Hovorka, Sandra McCubbin and Lauren Van Patter. *A Research Agenda for Animal Geographies,* Chapter 10. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd. doi.org/10.4337/9781788979993

(A short video about IIC and the above published paper):
https://youtu.be/iiHl4e5A3e8?si=1y1XHkwJbT95Iuk_

MJ Barret, Adjunct Professor School of Environment and Sustainability.
https://researchers.usask.ca/mj-barrett/index.php
https://researchers.usask.ca/mj-barrett/research.php

Wijngaarden, V (2024):
Intuitive Interspecies Communication and Language Beyond the Human: Bridging Posthumanist and Indigenous Understandings in practice. In: Hadzantonis, M. *The Proceedings of the 2023 GLOCAL African Assembly on Linguistic Anthropology*. The Global Council for Anthropological Linguistics. Pp355-371. ISSN 2707-8647. Full text

Kuppenbender, S (2025):
Bringing Animal Voices to the Table: Exploring Intuitive Interspecies Communication as a Method for Conservation and Human-Animal Coexistence
https://hdl.handle.net/10388/16626

Working Paper under review:
Barrett, M.J., Mathur, A., Zmud, L., Hoessler, C., Kuppenbender, S., Ghoreishi, Z., Hinz, V., (revisions submitted).
No Longer Under the Radar: Animal Communicators and a Shifting Paradigm for Interspecies Engagements. *Society and Animals*. *https://researchers.usask.ca/mj-barrett/working-papers.php*