



William of Scarborough

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www.baboonmatters.org.za

On Friday 2 July 2010, William – alpha male of the Groot Olifantsbos troop – was killed by lethal injection. His crime? It could be argued that this was a crime of passion as a great deal of emotion influenced the decision. For many residents of Scarborough, William was just typical male baboon, but to others he was seen as a destructive, bothersome beast – and it seems that fear based issues abound whereby William was found guilty of traumatising specific residents.

To be totally pragmatic and truthful it is clear that William did enter homes, without a doubt he did cause damage to property. But this is where the argument against this male starts to get a little shaky – baboons will do what baboons do; we will only effectively influence their behaviour by our own actions. In other words, if the villages lay out a rich feast of rewards for baboons, the ever opportunistic baboons will take advantage of the easy pickings. Will removing one, so-called “problem animal” resolve the problems – that is doubtful.

So what is the solution? The relevant authorities have said that millions have been spent on the baboon monitor project – they may feel that they have “done their bit” for baboon management. But if you examine the facts a little more closely it is clear that there are gaping holes in the argument –the baboon monitoring project has a long history of “stop-start” management, insufficient funding, lack of man-power and lack of training. Ironically, it was only this year when funding was perhaps optimal for the first time that authorities resorted to time old tactics of killing problem animals.



The recent press release from the City of Cape Town makes mention of a detailed baboon management protocol “put in place to ensure that humans who live close to baboon areas are compelled to behave responsibly and not attract baboons onto their property.... etc.” The protocol may well exist, but have residents seen it? What educational material or proactive law enforcement plans have actually be implemented to instruct and then enforce behaviour of people? The answer is that the last effort by the authorities was the excellent manual put together by Ruth Kansky in 2002. The distribution was effective at the time but the on-going follow-up, law enforcement is negligible and the only recent disbursement of information to new residents has been limited to efforts from the N.P.O Baboon Matters Trust.

The tripartite agreement between City of Cape Town, CapeNature and Table Mountain National Parks appears to have some excellent plans – but ironically the only plan that has been implemented with astonishing efficacy was the plan to start removing individual raiding baboons. The authorities argue that the decision was made after full public participation – yet residents of Scarborough feel they were kept completely in the dark – the chairman of the local residents association maintains he knew nothing about the plan. Was there public participation – or was this act carried out in secrecy because the relevant parties felt they “know best”? From the many calls to Baboon Matters, from residents all over Cape Town it seems that they disagree and would never have agreed to the killing of William.

Will the new raiding baboons protocol be the answer? Sol and William have been killed, and if we consider why they were taken out it is logical to assume individuals such as Eric, George, Quandt, Noskethi, Fred, George, Tammy, Sparky, John Travolta, Jimmy, Bongo and others are soon to follow. So let's take a deep breath in and get over the shock – *if* we accept this as the outcome of the new protocol, and *if* we accept that it is a well thought out strategy – can we expect the raiding baboons situation to be under control, will our problems all be over?



Sorry to burst the bubble – but it is highly unlikely that by removing individual baboons we will stop raiding into villages. The highly opportunistic nature of baboons means that they will always be on the lookout for easy pickings. The juveniles do not need to be “taught” to raid – they can pick up the basics very easily just by keeping a check on the rewards and opportunities presented.

So, the choice remains ours. We can embark on what is tantamount to a cleansing of undesirable types – a pogrom of sorts. We can justify our actions and remove any emotion, give the individuals codes not names; work to carefully thought out tables. We can get over the grief of killing more animals, sacrifice Fred and Jimmy for the greater good. But will it work?

The answer is clear – killing animals will not solve the problems we encounter. We have to take responsibility for our actions – our choices. We have to adopt ways of living in villages that mean attractions for opportunistic baboons are so minimal that the safety of mountains and natural areas present better rewards. Is it possible to live like this? Or is this more idealistic dreaming from the “baboon hugging greenies”?

The facts are simple and irrefutable. The monitor programme will work if the men are properly trained and managed. The programme will work more effectively if aspects such as waste management, what we plant in our gardens, reducing feeding opportunities are implemented seriously.

The focus should be to educate residents effectively, to enforce the law effectively and to work collectively towards the goal of all baboons staying out of the villages – without resorting to the violence of killing.

Currently, the four juvenile offspring of William, together with the females of his troop are running through the village of Scarborough calling and calling for their father and troop leader. They will soon come to accept that William has gone, and in time, the troop will regroup and life will go on – William will be forgotten and a new male will seize the opportunity presented by his demise. Raids will continue, people will feel threatened and shout and moan – the cycle will perpetuate over and over until humans wake up to the changes they have to make.

To William the Conqueror, go well.

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Baboon Matters currently has two petitions running about pro-active management of baboons. Please help by signing the petitions and writing a letter to the city of Cape Town about your views. Please address your emails to:

baboonmatters@cybersmart.co.za and we will forward them on to the relevant people.

Go to: <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/stop-the-culling-of-cape-towns-baboons.html> to sign the petition