

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP: HOW 'PURE RESEARCH' IS GUIDING CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF BABOONS IN THE CAPE PENINSULA, SOUTH AFRICA

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Foraging experiments were conducted with troops of chacma baboons (*Papio ursinus*) in Namibia by the Tsaobis Baboon Project to gain new insights into group decision making. The first part of the talk will present the results of this study. We found that “despotic” group decisions were the norm, and that groups were led by the individual who acquired the greatest benefits from those decisions, namely the dominant male. Theoretical models predict the opposite—“democratic” decisions—because they result in lower costs for the group as a whole. However, we found subordinate group members followed the leader despite considerable costs (in terms of foraging benefit) and this follower behaviour was mediated by social ties. The Cape Peninsula chacma baboon population in South Africa is under increasing pressure from habitat fragmentation due to urban sprawl, and conflict between humans and baboons is escalating. The second part of the talk will report on the findings of a project with the Baboon Research Unit of the University of Cape Town that tackles this problem. Informed by experiments developed in Namibia, we aimed to manipulate leadership behaviour, and consequently resource utilisation and movement patterns for a ‘problem baboon troop’. Simple, passive interventions resulted in the troop significantly reducing their time spent in urban areas, increasing their time in fynbos (natural shrubland vegetation), and decreasing their consumption of human foods. Moreover, these positive changes were observable with no differences in the daily activity budget of the troop.

Keywords: leadership, human-baboon conflict, group decisions, coordination