WILDLIFE ANIMAL PROTECTION FORUM
SOUTH AFRICA

PUBLIC STATEMENT

BABOONS NEED TO BE RESPECTED, NOT FEARED, HATED, HUNTED AND PERSECUTED BY CHILDREN AND ADULTS ALIKE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Wednesday 12th February 2025

The Members of WAPFSA are deeply concerned by reports of school children violently stoning and beating a dispersing male Chacma baboon, then according to reports, binding him with metal wire and a tire, and burning him to death, while at a school in Mpumalanga Province. This barbaric and inhumane act was captured on camera and shared on social media.

WAPFSA acknowledges the fact that South Africa is a violent country. According to the United National Office for Drugs and Crime, the South African murder rate for 2023 and 2024 of 45 per 100 000 is the second highest for countries that publish crime data. Crime researchers use murder rate per 100 000 as a crude measure of the general level of violent interpersonal crime globally.

Witnessing such violence predicts and increase's a child's engagement in maladaptive behaviours, including the perpetration of violence towards humans and animals.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child confirms that the damage violence can cause for those children who witness it, has long been flagged by psychologists.

Violence against animals has been documented by extensive scientific research and has been linked to other forms of violence including direct and indirect domestic and gender-based violence, violence in the workplace and against children,

This particular act of violence towards a sentient and intelligent Chacma baboon needs to be thoroughly investigated and the consequences must be addressed without delay. Baboons are victims of inexplicable hatred in South Africa and are widely considered as vermin despite their complex social structure and intelligence.

Baboons a Global Racial Prejudice

Soccer is the sport that almost everyone agrees is the most viewed sport in the world with a global following of over 3.5 billion fans. Unfortunately soccer matches around the world continue to be marred by racism, racists hurl bananas onto the pitch, monkey chants swirl around the stadiums when black players score goals or lose games. One of the players currently subjected to the most vicious, relentless and high-profile racist insults is Vinicus Junior, a twenty-two year of Brazilian who plays for Real Madrid, the most successful soccer team in Europe.

These global racial insults where Black people are compared to baboons, do not go unnoticed in South Africa where streaming services offer live streaming of every Premier league soccer match. Six in ten South Africans watched the 2022 FIFA World Cup. According to a report by the US based Center for Countering Digital Hate Black players were targeted by the 2022 World Cup, no action was taken over 99 of the 100 racist tweets targeting 43 football players. A monkey and banana emoji was used in 25 of these tweets.

Baboons and Racial Prejudice in South Africa

The deep entrenchment of racial prejudice and stereotyping continues to be confirmed in public outbursts in South Africa. As recently as two years ago the Democratic Alliance Cederberg Municipality speaker shared a picture on social media likening Economic Freedom Fighter supporters to baboons.

WAPFSA would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the fact that in South Africa words historically used during colonial and apartheid periods such as “baboon”, “monkey” and “ape” were commonly used to describe people in a demeaning way. So much so that these words have been declared by the courts to be hate speech. Such speech has no place in a constitutional democracy founded on the values of dignity and equality.

Section 16 of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media, however this freedom is limited and does not extend to propaganda or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (Peduda or Equality Act) is also meant to prevent and prohibit hate speech. Section 10 of the Act provides that no person may publish, propagate, advocate or communicate words based on one or more of the prohibited grounds against any person, that could reasonably be construed to demonstrate a clear intention to be hurtful, be harmful or to incite hate and or to promote or propagate hate.

In 2015 a number of examples of hate speech where the word *baboon* was used in a derogatory way, were published. In the case of Herselman versus Geleba, the court held that the use of the word 'baboon' amounted to hate speech as defined in Section 10 of the Equality Act. The court held that the word 'baboon' has racial undertones and a derogatory meaning and would be construed as such by a reasonable African person.

In the case of Strydom versus Chiloane, two justices of the High Court found that the Magistrate was right to find that the words complained of, fall within the definition of hate speech as defined in Section 10 of Peduda, the Equality Act, referring to Mangope versus Asmal and Another 1997 where the court stated that:

"it is in my view clear that when the epithet baboon is attributed to a person when he is severely criticized, as in this case, the purpose is to indicate that he is a base and extremely low intelligence. But I think that it can be inferred from the use of word in such circumstances that the person mentioned is of subhuman intelligence and not worthy of being described as a human being."

Baboons are Officially Portrayed and Treated as of Least Concern and Most Rewarding to Hunt

The Chacma baboon has been assessed by the IUCN as a species of Least Concern. However baboon numbers are decreasing, the species is especially vulnerable to climate change. According to studies the Chacma baboon will be the worst affected species and it has been recommended that more focus is placed on biogeographical tools as a means of exploring vulnerabilities in this seemingly resilient species.

Despite their obvious vulnerabilities baboon there are no seasonal restrictions on hunting of baboons in South Africa. Baboon hunts are described as not being easy,

but blinds are constructed at watering holes where the hunters are almost guaranteed a successful hunt.

"Due to the high intelligence of these animals, they are generally able to tell the difference between a game hand on a reserve and an armed hunter. Hunting baboon in South Africa is therefore an extremely rewarding hunt, being one of the most difficult animals to hunt."

British trophy-hunters legally killed and exported the trophies of 500 baboons over a thirty-year period, according to a report published based on figures obtained from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

There are no plans by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment to establish a national policy for the hunting of bushbabies, Chacma baboons or vervet monkeys. According to DFFE, none of the three species are in danger of extinction and, therefore, do not require regulation at national level.

No permit is required for the hunting of baboons and they can be hunted at any time of the year in North West Province. In Limpopo a landowner may hunt a baboon without a permit throughout the year, hunting of baboons by other persons is subject to a hunting season proclamation issued by the MEC. In the Eastern Cape baboons may be hunted throughout the year in accordance with a hunting proclamation issued by the MEC. In the Western Cape baboons may be hunted throughout the year in accordance with a hunting proclamation issued by the MEC.

Is it Acceptable to Kill Baboons for Traditional Medicine?

Is the rapidly expanding traditional healing market also affecting Chacma baboon populations? Leopard, Chacma baboon, Cape porcupine, monitor lizard, puff adder, African rock python and black baked jackal are the species most often killed and used in the traditional medicinal trade in the Western Cape.

Of these species the Chacma baboon is the third most utilized species by traditional healers. WAPFSA is not currently aware of similar studies that have quantified the number of baboons killed for traditional medicine in the other provinces of South Africa.

The study carried out in the Western Cape noted the importance of future research due to the lack of knowledge on the source populations or localities for Chacma baboon harvesting. Importantly the study raised concerns for the increased probability of the spread of zoonoses amongst traditional healers and the users of the traditional medicine trade.

The important results of this study to quantify wildlife use for cultural traditions has relevance for setting conservation priorities and should assist in effective policy development inclusive of ecological sustainability priorities as well as cultural demands.

There is valid concern about the sustainability of the Chacma baboon species by virtue of the diverse number of traditional healing uses attributed to them. The majority of the categories were found to relate to spiritual or magical ailments as opposed to medical ailments especially for the protection against evil spirits and demons.

Teaching Children that it is an Acceptable Practice to Shoot Baboons

Tens of millions of rands of taxpayers' money has been spent on attempting to manage baboons in the Cape Peninsula and the Overstrand over the past two decades using protocols which, according the available data, and expert and public opinion, ignore baboon sentience and well-being and have not been successful for baboons or for humans.

For example, the Cape Peninsula Baboon-Strategic-Management-Plan sanctions the use of paintball markers against the 16 indigenous baboon troops historically present on the Peninsula as a management technique. Perhaps, encouraged by this violent management strategy, some residents have taken up arms such as pellet guns, and other lethal means, resulting in the death of numerous baboons this year.

Intensive research of these management practices in the Western Cape, has highlighted the fact that the protocols established to manage baboons were instituted by a baboon management company and adopted without a rigorous public participation process by the City of Cape Town Municipality, Cape Nature, SANParks and the Overstrand Municipality. These protocols must be recast. Baboon management, at the very least, requires a flexible, dynamic and compassionate approach.

In Pringle Bay in the Western Cape, the Overstrand Municipality has armed entire teams of individuals, employed via the extended Public Works Programme, with paint ball markers and other weapons to shoot the baboons out of the village. This violent approach ignores the fact that the Chacma baboon depends upon foraging areas within the village in order to survive.

There is evidence that this violent strategy in Pringle Bay has encouraged residents, including young adults to take up arms and to do the same with dire consequences for the welfare and wellbeing of the Chacma baboons.

Stop the Cycle of Anger and Violence

The witnessing violence may lead to the perpetration of further violence, will certainly involve desensitization, and decrease empathy. At the very least witnessing violence will result in maladaptive coping mechanisms and other learned behaviours.

The very public and barbaric killing of the Chacma baboon, fondly named Raygun by everyone who followed his journey through Pretoria, is an important alarm signal to bring in much needed change in our violent society. If we do not act now, and set an example, what hope is there for future generations of South Africans?

WAPFSA urges government institutions to reform outdated baboon management policies. Civil society and the public must recognise that we have reached a breaking point and take a firm stand against the persecution of baboons and the brutality they endure.

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