**This article uses local knowledge**

It is important is to be acutely aware of never-ever leaving access doors unlocked - even for a few minutes.  Their "scout" is often in the vicinity and will seldom be seen by you.  They will grab any opportunity to enter - and they do this very quietly and quickly!  *We have had times when a baboon has sneaked past 4 adults sitting reading, two dogs snoozing (the wind was the other way so they didn't smell them) and calmly take a sponspek from next to me while I was washing the dishes!  With no-one the wiser until the sponspek just wasn't there*!

**Baboons are strategic and analytical – so to outwit them it is important to stay calm!**
This cannot be stressed enough; it is based on sound logic and many years of practical experience.
**Stay calm, assess the situation – think and then act.**
If you get hysterical, or angry and start yelling and screaming chances are you will give the baboons a fright, they will immediately defecate and react fearfully or protectively if their family is in close proximity. If they are in your home the resulting mess is most unpleasant – so it is in your interest to remain calm and not to excite them.  If YOU react badly, the situation quickly gets out of control and you do not solve anything.  The baboons have been living amongst us in Rooiels for decades and no-one has been hurt. Never in over 60 years has anyone ever been hurt. Despite many occasions when they have got into homes!
**Calmly ensure that there is an exit – allow them to take what is in their hands, ensure that you are not between them and the exit – try to move behind them and gently herd them out.**

If you meet them when walking try to hide any food you may have on you and move away.  If they take food off you, let the baboon take it.  It is only food they will take it and they will not harm you. Baboons don’t share their food with each other and if humans don’t have any food with them, baboons will just ignore them and carry on about their day. If you are unsure or scared of the baboons – they will take advantage of your indecision (they will just sit and look at you) and your apparently feeble attempts to “chase them away” normally are unsuccessful. Typically in these situations people report that the baboons were “aggressive” and it is only when we unpack the facts does it come out that the baboons didn’t really do anything except possibly show their teeth in a yawn – but they didn’t move away either.   They show their teeth (yawn in fear and to avoid having to engage)
**If you don’t have any food on you – you can stay still and just watch them**. Or walk on past – they will ignore you if you have no food on you.

You should **lock the doors of your car.** The baboons know how to open the doors from the outside but they don’t seem to manage to open them once inside – and that can result in a mess!  If you are in the car when a baboon gets in (same as in a house) let the baboon take some food and then be sure there is an unblocked exit and insist they get out – and remain calm!

**Be assertive and sure of your intention**
By remaining calm, that does not mean that you sit back and let the baboons stay in your home or car – rather, it gives you time to plan your own action. It has been proven in many experiments that animals respond well to our clear intentions – so you have to remain calm and be sure exactly what your intentions are to have the best success.
Once you have decided what you are going to do, and how you are going to do it – be assertive and very sure of yourself, remembering that the baboons are reading you like a book!

**Some tactics that you can use to your advantage include:**

* Be sure of your plan and carry your actions out clearly and methodically – this will help you to stay calm and send a clear message that you mean business.
* Try making your voice as commanding as possible – without shouting and screaming!
* “Shoulders back, head high” – remember your body language is being read by very clever strategists! By making your body appear as large and dominant as possible you are already sending out a clear message that you are in control.
* Lift up your arm, a broom or something else to show intent.  Normally all the baboons, except the large male, will be scurrying around trying to exit.  So the **MOST important is to be sure that they have an exit available** and there is not a person or dog blocking that exit.
* The dominant male will normally not be keen to leave until he has something – but will usually move off as soon as he has a piece of fruit, bread or your sugar bowl!  Let him take whatever it is but then insist that he moves out.  I have never had a situation (in the many, many times I have forgotten to lock a door!) where he did not exit.

For more information on “Setting your intention with animals” go to www. animaltalkafrica.co.za

**Overcoming your fear**
Fear is a very difficult emotion to overcome, but a suggestion is to deal with the situation as factually as possible – by keeping to logic and avoiding the emotion, you will be better able to deal with the baboons. Remember the main thing is to provide a clear path to an exit for them.
If you are not managing – phone a neighbour.  But be sure to tell them which entrance to use and be sure that it is not where the baboons are trying to exit.

**Some facts about baboons:**
Baboons are not predators – those big teeth are for protection, not hunting.
Typically, baboons will avoid a conflict; they don’t want to waste energy of a fruitless fight. Baboons will only engage in a fight if they are directly threatened, or cornered – or if the juveniles are threatened – in other words they will protect themselves and their families.
People often mistake the fear grimace for a sign of aggression. Remember baboons are often just as scared as you are – **signs of their fear** include:
o    the fear grimace (i.e. when they pull their lips back from their teeth)
o    running with their tail straight up.
o    high pitched screams and frantic movements
o    defecating or urinating
Baboons have both the musculature and teeth to do tremendous damage – if they chose to do so. But the facts are that over the many, many years of interactions between humans and baboons, reports of actual baboon bites are extremely rare anywhere in Africa. There have been fewer recorded incidents of baboon bites than most other species. To elaborate – dogs, rats, humans, scorpions, spiders – even sharks! – all bite far more frequently than baboons. In the past twenty years in the Cape, there have been situations where people have been pushed over by baboons, a few incidents where people have been scratched. The damage inflicted on the toddler in Kogelbaai is because the parents were socialising, unaware of the child, and allowed him to crawl in between two adult male baboons that were fighting for dominance in the troop – they did not target the child to attack he just got between them.

**The fact that baboons do not often bite people does NOT mean you should take them for granted in any way – or try to befriend them. Leave baboons alone – do not try to feed them or touch them.**
Treat all animals with respect – do not go into their space and try to touch them – just as you would not appreciate a stranger coming up to you and attempting to touch you!

**Baboons Weigh up Risks versus Rewards**
The most important thing to remember about baboons is their innate ability to weigh up the risk versus rewards – if the rewards are high, baboons will take well-thought-out, calculated risks. One of the tools that baboons will use to assess the risks is their incredible skill at analysing the entire scenario – from your body language, to the layout of the buildings and their escape routes.
If a farmer or resident thinks that shooting baboons will chase them away, he needs to realise that the baboons will soon learn to recognise the shooter. Not only will they recognise the individual, they will also look to see if he has his gun with him. So if the rewards are very high – a lovely fruiting tree laden with fruits, for example, the baboons will first stop, look for the shooter – if he is not there they will make a quick, nervous foray for the fruits. If he is there, but does not have his gun with him, they may stay back – or may make a very quick dash for some fruit. If the shooter is present, with his gun – then they will probably stay away completely. **The point is that they will not avoid the area, they will simply be careful about how they achieve their goals.**
Baboons are not territorial – if food sources offer high reward and are easily available they will utilise this opportunity. Home ranges of specific troops usually denote the limit or extent to which baboons will travel in order to gain maximum food benefits to energy expended. Home ranges are not fixed and will vary according to food availability – so fires, drought or other phenomena may cause the ranges to change if food sources dry up. On the other hand, if baboons are gaining high rewards from confined areas, their natural home ranges may shrink – so baboons will spend greater time getting easy foods from villages or farms and ignore their natural foraging options.
**Body language**
In weighing up the risk and reward scenario it is important to remember just how well baboons read our body language. If you are unsure or scared of the baboons – they will take advantage of your indecision (normally they will just sit and look at you) and your apparently feeble attempts to “chase them away” normally are unsuccessful. Typically in these situations people report that the baboons were “aggressive” and it is only when we unpack the facts does it come out that the baboons didn’t really do anything – but they didn’t move away either.
It is important that we do not confuse aggression with normal baboon behaviour. The fact that we may feel threatened does not always mean that the baboon has done anything aggressive.
Human garbage offers rich rewards to these opportunistic primates and it is humans who need to control or change our waste management systems in order to reduce baboons raiding into villages and homes.

**Never (ever, ever) feed baboons.**
They are not hungry and do not need your food. Remember that baboons do not share food amongst themselves – they work in a dominance related hierarchy – so if you give your food to a baboon you are showing that individual that you are subordinate.
You are also probably signing a death warrant for the baboon because they will become a nuisance and may eventually have to be reported to the authorities.  They will also become a serious pest for your neighbours. **Please do not feed any baboon.**