

PROTECTING AGAINST PRIMATES

What is this Action Sheet about?

It's about human-primate conflict and what can be done about it. Throughout the world, primates and people come into conflict with each other. Primates often damage farmer's crops, and some have also been known to injure or even kill people. They may also feed upon the same natural foods that people and livestock eat, and so compete with them for these resources.

African primates include chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys and baboons. Of these, it is the monkeys and baboons that cause the greatest problems by raiding crops. The most common crop-raiders are monkeys and baboons. These Primates live in groups and are able to damage large areas of crops in a single sitting. They are highly intelligent animals which work as a team: some will look out for the farmer while the others feed. This enables them to damage greater areas of crops than animals that live alone. Primates are also able to learn from each other, so individuals will quickly learn how to crop-raid from others in the group. This enables them to damage greater areas of crops than animals that live alone.



Who is at risk from primates?

Primates need trees to survive, so they tend to cause problems to rural communities living close to woodland or forest areas. In Uganda farmers living along the boundary of national parks suffer the most crop damage, because baboons and monkeys come out of the forest and raid the crops closest to them.

Why do primates raid crops?

There are a number of reasons for primates raiding crops. Firstly, primates are attracted to maize and other tasty crops because they are more nutritious than the food that a primate would eat in the wild. Secondly, people's destruction of woodland may cause more crop-raiding. Where people clear the forest for agriculture, primates lose their habitat and their sources of food, so they may start raiding more crops because their own supply of food has been affected. Thirdly, some primates have become used to people. For example, in Uganda, gorillas have become used to seeing tourists and so have lost their fear of people. They raid crops in farms at the edge of the forest without fear.

How do people control conflict with primates?

It is very difficult to prevent primates from raiding crops because they are intelligent, and they work as quickly learn to overcome most deterrence teams. People have tried many ways to protect their crops from primates. The main methods of crop protection can be split into two categories: 1) lethal deterrents, which kill the animals; and 2) non-lethal deterrents which chase them away. These are described below.

Lethal methods

Control shooting

In many countries in Africa baboons and other crop-raiding primates have been shot by government wildlife employees. It was believed that shooting one animal from a group would deter the others in that group from raiding crops. However, it is not clear how well this tactic works. Killing an individual monkey or baboon may scare the others in the group only for a short time. Even if a whole group is killed, another group will quickly take its place. Shooting is also expensive and requires expert gunmen.

Trapping

Farmers may set snares or poisoned fruit, or they may spear primates that threaten their crops. However, as described above, killing crop-raiding primates may not be a long-lasting solution to the problem. In addition, some primates, such as chimpanzees and gorillas, are protected by law and killing them carries heavy fines.

Non-lethal methods

Fencing

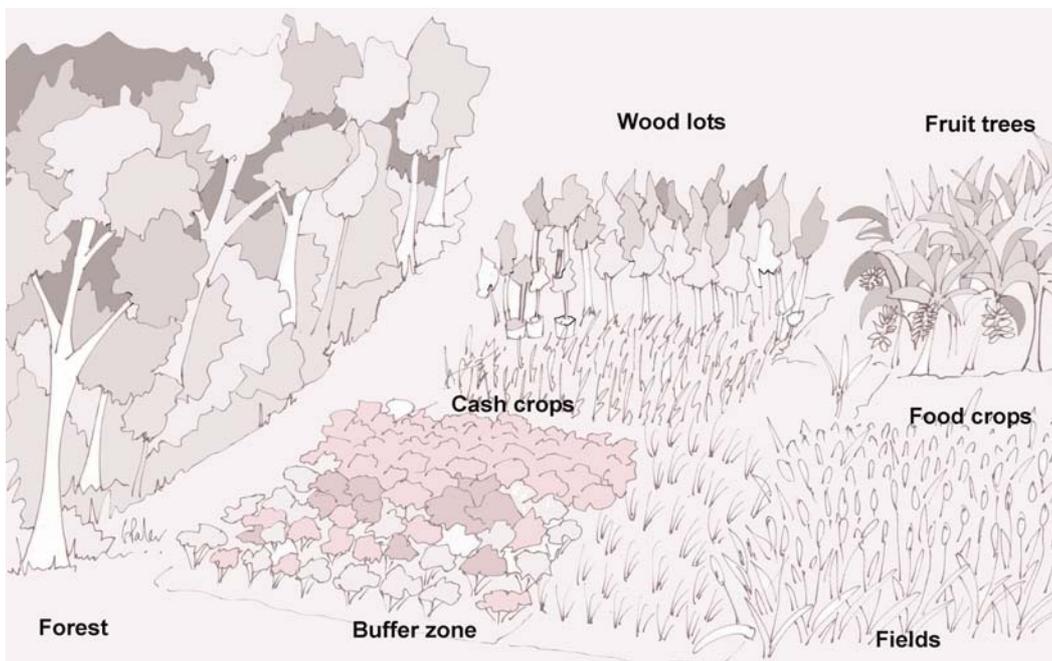
Electric fencing can be used to keep primates out of farm land, but it is extremely expensive to build and maintain, and is just not practical for most rural communities. If there are trees near the fence, primates will use them to swing over the top of the wire. Non-electric fencing is useless because most primates can easily climb over the most substantial fences.

Traditional methods

Rural farmers across Africa chase baboons by beating drums, by shouting, and by chasing them with dogs. This requires a lot of energy and vigilance throughout the day. It is reported that baboons are more scared of men than women or children, especially if they are armed with a catapult or a spear.

Buffer zones

Around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda communities have established a buffer zone between the forest and the farms. The buffer zone is a strip of land that runs around the edge of the forest and separates it from the farming land. In the buffer zone farmers only grow cash crops that are not attractive to primates, such as cotton and tea, and woodlots to provide fire wood.. The food crops, such as maize and fruiting trees, are grown on the other side of the buffer zone, where they are less likely to be raided (see diagram).



Habitat improvement

In Tanzania a different approach has been tried. The people of Tonyo decided to look at the problem of crop-raiding from the primate's point of view. In the past the baboon's natural habitat was burnt by the farmers in an attempt to chase them away from the fields. But the fires destroyed the baboon's natural habitat and so there was less food for them to eat.



Encouraged by the Roots and Shoots conservation project, the , people of Tonyo have clubbed together to plant more trees, providing baboons and other animals with more sources of fruit, nuts and leaves. As the

baboons have more natural food to eat, there is less risk that they will raid people's crops. Farmers in the area now believe that their crops are safer if the baboon's natural habitat is protected rather than destroyed.

Revenues

Whenever there is conflict between people and wildlife, communities bearing the costs of the conflict could be helped if they receive benefits from government, wildlife conservation projects or businesses that depend on wildlife (such as ecotourism). Benefits could include money, jobs or help with community projects. Such benefits may not compensate individuals directly for their crop loss, but they can *offset*, or balance, the problems that wildlife causes, and enable people and wildlife to live together more peacefully.

So how should we protect our crops from primates?

Crop-raiding by primates is an extremely difficult problem to solve, and there is no one solution that will work everywhere. The best direct approach is to use a combination of field guarding and traditional methods to keep the primates out of the fields. However, communities may get longer-term respite by creating buffer zones between their fields and the woodland. Protecting and restoring natural habitat, so that primates can obtain more food from the wild, is another approach which should receive more investigation.

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Resources

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