

# How & Why



## We Should Live With Vervet Monkeys



### BACKGROUND

The monkeys you encounter around your home are almost certainly Vervets. The Vervet lives in close-knit troops of 5 – 40 animals, led by a dominant male. Females have 1 baby at a time; the frequency thereof is an average of 1.5 years. Babies are born throughout the year but mostly between October and December. Although Vervets breed at approximately the same rate as humans, their numbers appear to be declining in urban areas. They no longer have natural predators, but are killed by cars, power lines, dogs, poisons, human hunters, bullies' cowardly cruelty and diseases such as cancer. Stress, poor quality food and lack of space could also be contributing factors.

**CITES** (Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species) lists Vervet monkeys, internationally, as threatened by extinction but not endangered (like the White Rhino and elephant). We generally come into contact with Vervets when their natural habitats are being destroyed, due to urban development. They are trying to survive when their food source and home is taken away in a matter of days or, at best, months – when they are struggling to find food and having to compete with neighbouring troops for space (territory). Vervets are very territorial and compete with each other for whatever resources remain, resulting in terrible suffering (which our 'progress' has brought upon them).

Vervets are omnivorous like us, and eat mostly fruits, flowers, seeds, leaves, shoots, bird's eggs, insects, lizards etc. They have a territory that they continually patrol to defend their boundaries and in search of food. Vervets only feed during the day and sleep in trees at night. Ideally, they like to feed in the morning and late afternoon, but if food is scarce, they might be forced to feed throughout the day or when food is available.

### FACTS

There are many myths surrounding Vervets:

**Do they have rabies?** The chance of Vervets having rabies is less than the chance of humans having rabies.



**They have increased in numbers?** We see more monkeys because they have lost their habitat and are spending more time around us in search of food. Their numbers appear to have reduced in urban areas.

**Will they attack me?** They are unlikely to attack **unless threatened** and far less likely to attack you than a pet dog. Human beings are much bigger than them - they see us as big monkeys. Like us they would rather pick on someone their own size! They are wild animals, however, and must be treated with respect. Small children must be supervised around monkeys as they might inadvertently get too close to a monkey or a baby monkey – this could be interpreted as threatening by the monkey – a potentially dangerous situation.

**Will they attack my pet?** They may attack your dog if your dog is threatening a baby monkey or a monkey that has fallen to the ground - otherwise they generally ignore dogs. Many more monkeys are killed by dogs than the reverse. Puppies could be vulnerable to adult male monkeys – it is best to keep them away from a troop of monkeys. They may chase a cat or ignore it, but will not injure it. There have been reports of monkeys grooming cats as they do buck.

Here are a few simple ways to interact with them safely:

1. Never corner a monkey where it feels threatened. If this accidentally happens, move out of its way, look away, and allow it to escape.
2. Don't shout at Vervets. This frightens them, makes them poop and can make them unpredictable
3. If you come upon a Vervet inside your house, REMAIN CALM & QUIET, open a door or window nearest the animal, and use a towel to shoo the Vervet out or throw a lure outside (e.g. Fruit or bread), step away from the point of exit, look away and allow the Vervet to escape.
4. Instruct your child carer on the escape strategy to be used in your absence. Instruct children that if they come upon a Vervet trapped inside, to REMAIN CALM AND QUIET, leave the room immediately, and call an adult.
5. Don't run away from a group of Vervets – they might run after you.
6. If Vervets move towards you – stand still and look away. They are probably just curious and might even try to touch you.
7. Do not stare at a Vervet, especially with raised eyebrows and widened eyes; it is interpreted by the Vervet as a warning of future attack. If a Vervet, raises it's eyebrows, widens it's eyes, and makes a sound, it is warning you that it is feeling threatened. Simply look away and move away quietly.
8. Do not catch or touch monkeys, especially baby monkeys. The mothers are very protective (as are bitches of their puppies).

9. Do not feed monkeys by hand and stress that children do not eat in front of monkeys. If monkeys are extremely hungry, they might attempt to snatch the food from the child – in this situation the child and monkey's response would be unpredictable, resulting in a potentially threatening situation that should be avoided.
10. Do not keep monkeys as pets. Pet monkeys are often mentally disturbed because being caged is unnatural to them and very cruel – caged monkeys sometimes do bite.

### SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

Vervets visit your property for 2 reasons: it is in their territory that they patrol and they are looking for food as they move along. Hence, it is desirable to allow them to spend time in your garden and move on (especially since WE have taken away THEIR home). However, if Vervets are a nuisance, try the following:

- A. Remove fruit, cereals, bread or cakes from kitchen surfaces, particularly near open windows and doors.
- B. Protect your windows with insect screens or shutters. There are a variety of options, inexpensive or sophisticated.
- C. Vervets are quite habitual, so note what days and times they visit. During this time, ensure windows and doors are closed or guarded. Birds might warn you of their arrival.
- D. When absent from the house, never leave windows and doors open.
- E. Do not leave pet food, bird feeders or any food near the house, open doors or windows. This food attracts monkeys to your house.
- F. Place any leftovers in a compost heap or birdfeeders away from your and your neighbour's house. This will serve to distract the Vervets from your house or vegetable garden.
- G. Spray around pillars with pet repellents or grease down pipes to prevent them from running on your roof.
- H. Electric fencing is effective in protecting property or vegetable garden (use chicken wire to protect vegetables)
- I. Use a wheely bin, dustbin with a clamped lid or bricks on the dustbin lid to avoid Vervets unpacking your garbage.
- J. Chase them by swinging a piece of plastic hose with holes cut in it. The sound emanating from the swinging pipe discourages Vervets or squirt water at them. (Please do not use catties and stones – it can injure monkeys – rather use pieces of potato if you must use a catty.)
- K. Do not use pellet guns or any other guns – it is illegal to shoot with them in built-up areas (R60 000 fine or 3 year imprisonment). Shooting with a gun or paint ball gun constitutes an offence in terms of the Animal Protection Act 71/1962.
- L. Plant indigenous fruit trees and indigenous plants in your garden to provide food for Vervets and birds, thus preventing them from looking for food in your house.
- M. If the Vervets in your area are extremely hungry due to development, try supplementary feeding stations in a natural area away from houses, after obtaining information on how to responsibly do this. This will attract monkeys away from the houses. Hungry monkeys are desperate and will go to extreme lengths to get food thus making them bolder.

### ON BEHALF OF THE VERVET MONKEYS

It is important to know something about these highly intelligent animals we so easily take for granted. When Vervets pick a fruit or vegetable, take one bite and drop it, they are not being deliberately wasteful. In their natural habitat, this discarded food is vital to animals that forage below feeding monkeys and cannot reach the food source in the trees.

Vervets are one of nature's most valuable agents for seed dispersal and the reduction of insects that is very important for the growth of healthy, indigenous vegetation and mammals. Some seeds will only germinate after having being subjected to the Vervet's digestive processes and buck rely on their grooming. We should try to understand the dilemma facing monkeys. We have built our homes where they once had theirs. They had no defense against our destruction of their home and all they can do now, is survive as best as they can in an increasingly foreign world. If you would like to know more, need assistance with a problem, or have an injured or orphaned monkey please phone the

**Primates Africa** Monkey Hotline between 8 a.m & 5 p.m. on **08 44 32 99 74**

