



# WHO CHACMA BABOONS ARE

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**Chacma baboons are captivating indigenous primates of South Africa. They share 94% of their DNA with humans.**

## **EVOLUTIONARY CONSIDERATIONS AND FITNESS OF CHACMA BABOON**

In evolutionary terms, *FITNESS* refers to an organism's ability to reproduce, and successfully pass its genes to the next generation. It reflects how effectively individuals adapt to their changing environment and succeed in ensuring a lasting genetic legacy. Chacma baboons demonstrate remarkable evolutionary *FITNESS*, including in recent decades, as they respond to challenges posed by human-driven environmental changes and expansion on primate two-million-year ancestral habitat. Baboons' admirable *FITNESS* is a natural evolutionary response, underscoring the profound imbalance caused by human development on the edges of wild environments. In those cases, baboons act as living indicators of this imbalance, highlighting the urgent and critical need to restore and safeguard natural habitats.

## **BABOON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND HIERARCHY**

Chacma baboons live in complex societies with a strict hierarchy. To put it simply, some have compared this hierarchy with a human, royal, and polygamous structure, with the alpha male being the king of the troop, and interacting with his high-ranking females – the queens –, with princes (other high-ranking males, including juveniles) and down to middle and low-ranking members of the troop. The alpha male is typically the fittest and largest baboon, he protects the troop and maintains order. Females play a crucial role in the troop's social dynamics, often forming close bonds with each other, particularly those of the same or close rank.

## **BONDS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Chacma baboons show their affection to others by, for example grooming each other, playing, and cuddling. These bonds are essential for their emotional well-being and help maintain troop cohesion. Grooming is an essential social behaviour. It involves picking through each other's fur to remove parasites, dirt, and other debris. Grooming strengthens social bonds between individuals, promoting a sense of trust, and affection. In addition, it has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety in baboons, helping to calm them down and promote relaxation. It also helps promote overall health and hygiene. Grooming stimulates the release of endorphins. Endorphins are natural chemicals produced by the body that act as painkillers and mood elevators. This means that when baboons groom each other, they experience a rush of feel-good hormones.

## **BABOON COGNITION, SENTIENCE AND HABITS**

Chacma baboons are capable of using tools, such as rocks and sticks, to obtain food and inspect their own bodies. They exhibit a range of emotions, including joy, sadness, fear, and empathy. When they lose their offspring, mothers mourn their loss for weeks. Chacma baboons feed on a wide variety of plants, fruits, insects, and even small animals. They forage on the ground and in trees, where they also sleep.

Baboons have great communication skills, see Green Group flyers to discover more!

## **PARENTING SKILLS**

Baboon's parenting devotion is absolutely remarkable. Mothers carry their babies everywhere, often holding them close to their chest, and are very protective of them. Mothers take admirable care of injured babies, and most of the time they nurse them back to health. While females are the primary caregivers, males also play a significant role in parenting. They often help protect the infants, groom them, and even carry them on their backs. Chacma baboon parents provide emotional support to their infants, offering comfort and reassurance when they are distressed or scared.

Chacma baboon infants are completely dependent on their mothers for the first few months. The mothers nurse them, groom them, and keep them warm. As the infants grow, they begin to venture out and explore their surroundings under the watchful eyes of their parents. Chacma baboon parents actively socialise with their infants, introducing them to other members of the troop and teaching them important social skills, including boundaries, and safety.

## **WHAT MAKES BABOONS HAPPY**

Chacma baboons seem to thrive in safe environments with plenty of food, water, and social interaction. They prioritise safety and then food and love to forage, play, and groom each other. They love their family and also enjoy exploring their surroundings and discovering new things that challenge their curiosity and playfulness.

Info: <https://greengroupsimonstown.org/>

