



# MINIMISING DISTRESS AFTER THE DEATH OF AN INFANT

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

**The forced removal of a dead infant baboon can prolong or intensify the mother's (and father's) grieving process and disrupt the troop's dynamics. Like many primates, baboons exhibit complex emotional behaviours, [including grief and mourning](#).**

Scientific documentation of infant corpse-carrying behaviour in primates dates back to the early 20th century, with one of the earliest accounts [published in the Journal of Animal Behaviour](#) in 1915. These observations highlight that primates may carry their deceased infants for weeks and show significant distress if humans remove the corpse prematurely.

Both male and female baboons have been observed [carrying deceased infants](#), grooming them, and cleaning their mouths in apparent responses to the loss. Some primates even [use tools to clean the bodies](#) of their deceased offspring, demonstrating an [awareness of death](#) and engagement in grief-related rituals. Researchers argue that post-mortem care, including grooming, plays an important role in primates' mourning processes, ending only when the corpse is ultimately abandoned.

Fathers of deceased infants may also exhibit [protective behaviours](#), preventing others from approaching the body. These observations underline the emotional complexity of baboon social structures and the distress caused by the premature removal of a dead infant. Stress in such cases manifests through vocalisations, pacing, and heightened agitation.

For this reason, it is critical to avoid hastily removing deceased infants from baboon troops. If a body obstructs an area, it can be relocated nearby but should remain accessible to the troop.

When deceased infants are removed prematurely, troops have been observed repeatedly returning to the site, searching for the body for weeks. This behaviour can increase the risk of baboons congregating in unsafe areas, further compounding stress for the troop, and possibly exacerbating conflict with the humans who reside in the area.

The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA) compels any authority tasked with managing baboon populations, to adopt practices that consider the well-being of these animals. Deceased infants should be left with the troop, so that they can take the body to wild spaces, allowing the natural grieving process to unfold. Eventually, the body will be abandoned and left to decompose naturally. This approach minimises distress and avoids unnecessary interference in the baboons' social and emotional dynamics.