

Crop-raiding Baboons (*Papio anubis*) and Defensive Farmers: A West African Perspective

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Abstract

Baboons are often reported as the worst crop-raiders in Africa, but there has been little observation of the actual behavioural-ecology of their crop-raiding, especially in West Africa. The paper examines the crop-raiding behaviour of a group of habituated baboons (Gamgam group) near the village of Gashaka on the south-western border of Gashaka Gumti National Park, Nigeria. Data were collected during the wet and dry crop seasons *via* scan sampling and *ad libitum* techniques. For scan sampling the activity of each observed individual was noted every 2.5 min. For *ad libitum* data any activity relevant to crop-raiding was noted when it occurred, including the reactions of farmers who were guarding their fields. Descriptive statistics were generated and trends in baboon and human behaviour examined. Sixty-nine percent of Gamgam group's raids were successful. Farmers only prevented or reduced the time baboons spent in fields on 28.9% of all raids. Crops eaten varied from ripe maize to scavenging for scraps of sweet potato in harvested fields. Maize (ripe and dried) was the most frequently eaten crop. All members of Gamgam group, including weaned infants, ate all crops, but only adult males ate bananas. Observations suggested that baboons used cheek pouches to store food before moving to a safer locality to eat, to avoid farmers' attacks and intragroup competition. Deterrent methods included guarding, fences of fish net, poisoned baits, olfactory, visual and auditory scaring devices. Guarding presence in fields was not regular. In the wet season guards reacted to baboon crop-raiding on 54% of raids and in the dry season on 44%. On average it took farmers 23 min to react to baboons in their fields. The two most common reactions of guards were shouting and chasing baboons. Observations do not suggest that any one particular defence method can prevent baboon crop-raiding.