

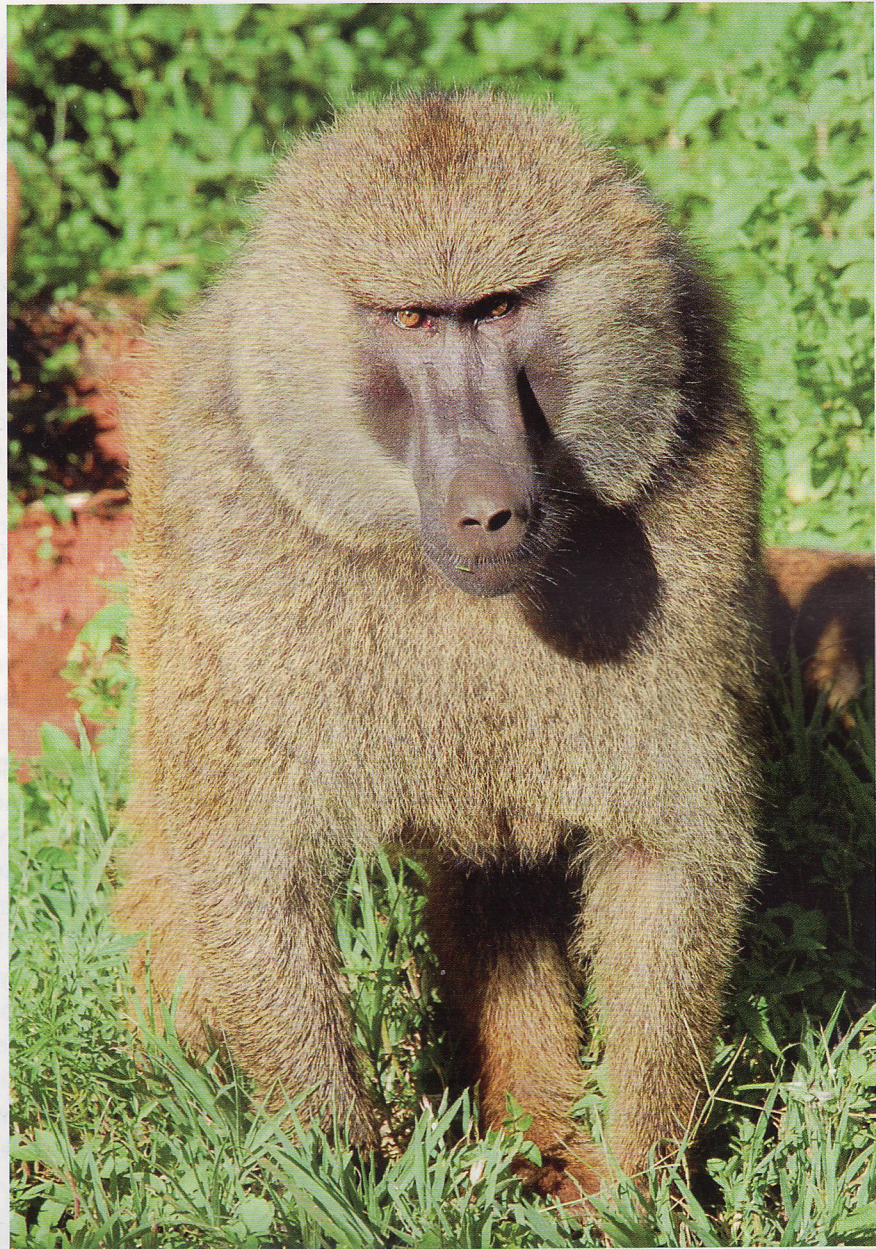
Baboon

BABOON

In Africa, the baboon is seen as a vermin menace – along the lines of the rat in Europe. On hunting safaris, the PH always tells the hunters to shoot at baboons at any distance. This is not as easy as it sounds: 95 per cent of the time, the baboon is running away looking back over its shoulders. The creatures seem to have a sixth sense. When travelling along the dirt roads in the bakkie, baboons are not too difficult to spot; they are usually a good distance away, running around the sides of a cliff face or kopje. They never seem to have a care in the world – that is, until the bakkie slows down. Their sixth sense seems to kick in: somehow they instinctively know the sound of the brakes, the engine revs changing or the door opening. Then they are off at full speed over the nearest kopje and vanish into the distance. Baboon hunting cannot be guaranteed and there are more days without a shot than there are with one.

The best time to shoot baboons is in the early morning, getting into an ambush place before the sun is up and hiding in the rocks at one of their usual haunts. I have seen this done on numerous occasions, with a great deal of success. Obviously the big males are the preferred target, but when trying to ambush baboons in this way the hunter generally has to take the closest or easiest shot first. After the shot, the baboons are generally confused over what has just happened and tend to run to the top of the nearest tree or rocky outcrop to get a better look. There is then a chance for a second shot; this time, you get the opportunity to pick the target. It is very doubtful you will get a third shot at a sitting baboon, as they will now be in full flight.

I was sitting on the side of a kopje, nestled among some rocks with Bruce the PH and Elias the tracker. We were overlooking a dam, waiting for bushbuck in the afternoon of a very hot April day. In the distance, the “whoa” sound of barking baboons could be heard. The sun was beating down on the back of my neck and ears, making me feel like I was melting. Through my scope I watched two Egyptian geese floating around on the water, then scanned the shoreline for movement, then peered through the acacia bushes. Nothing was moving, but the barking of the baboons was getting closer. I looked over to the PH, who was scanning the opposite mountain with his Swarovski binoculars. He muttered something about baboons and then resumed scanning the bush veldt below us. I looked through the scope and could see about 10 to 15 baboons running around on the top of the mountain. There was a large male barking but not visible.



Above: The baboon is instantly recognisable by its thick fur and long muzzle

I resumed looking down the dam walls for the quarry I had originally intended to shoot. We sat for a further hour and a half. My legs were stiffening and my ears felt like they had fallen off. There was a cooling breeze starting to blow as we were now in the late afternoon and the sun would be setting soon. I looked through the scope again at the baboons on the opposite mountain. There were about 25 of them now, and in the middle sitting on a rock was a big male barking. Due to the distance, they were not concerned about us – in fact, they might not even have seen us.

I watched the big male for five minutes and then heard Bruce say, “You want about two baboon heights above him.” I looked over to him and he was also watching this male baboon. Sitting with my elbow on my knee, I

