



Above: Monkey nuts: Baboons are mostly herbivorous and eat a wide range of plant products

Bottom right: Long shot: Adrian with his prize, shot from almost a kilometre away

rested the crosshairs of the Kahles scope at full magnification on his chest. I lifted the .270 Brno above him, settled my breathing and pulled the trigger. The baboon fell off the rock, or jumped, or rolled – I am not really sure which. Then we heard the thwack of the bullet. Bruce and I looked at each other. “You got it,” he said. But I wasn’t sure, then he wasn’t sure, then he was

sure but neither of us could see where it had gone. Baboons were scattering everywhere.

Elias the tracker jumped up and said, “What have you got, boss?” “I think I got the baboon!” I said. “No boss, he was too far,” came the reply. So what did the bullet hit?

Due to the geography of the area it was impossible to go and scour the place where the baboon was until next morning. We spent that entire evening in the bar talking about the shot. Did I get it, or did I miss? We would find out in the morning – provided it was still there, as baboons have a habit of dragging their dead off with them.

The following morning we were out at five after a swift cup of tea. We had two trackers with us, as well as an American who was hunting there at the same time as me. After about an hour of scrambling up dirt tracks, loose rocks and shale, we eventually reached the top of the mountain in the Nissan Patrol bakkie. The sun was just up and the view was magnificent across the valleys and flat top mountains. This was an extremely volcanic area millions of years ago: the telltale signs of lava flows and volcanic rocks were everywhere.

The two trackers went off in search of the area where the baboon was thought to be, while the rest of us worked out where I had taken the shot from. After about 20 minutes I could hear the trackers on the radio. They were speaking in Xhosa to Bruce. He turned to me with a massive smile on his face and said: “You got it, they’ve found it.”

At first I wasn’t sure if he was winding me up, but the smile on his face gave it away. We hurried over to where the trackers had gone and they appeared from behind a rock carrying an enormous baboon. The bullet had gone straight through the heart.

Was this more luck than judgement? If you ask me, it was aimed for, so I am sticking to judgement. After the formalities of the photographs we used a Leica rangefinder to work out the distance. It was 980 metres – the shot of a lifetime. **AS**

Baboon fact file

■ Recognition

One of the largest non-hominid primates, the baboon comes in several varieties but is recognisable by several unifying features. Regularly described as ‘dog-faced’, it has a long muzzle, powerful jaws and close-set eyes. It has thick fur everywhere except the muzzle and its protruding buttocks, which are nerveless as well as hairless and are often brightly coloured. Males are significantly larger than females, and many males also have a large mane.

■ Feeding

Baboons omnivorous, but mostly vegetarian: they eat a range of plant life, including grass, leaves, blossom, berries, seeds, pods, bark and sap. They are opportunistic eaters, and as such will eat insects, fish, hares, birds and the occasional small antelope if the opportunity presents itself.

■ Reproduction

Baboons live in hierarchical societies of around 50 (but sometimes up to 250), and mating patterns depend on the structure of the troop. Each troop contains roughly twice as many females as males; males’ social ranking determines their mating opportunities, and males often fight over mates. Females usually give birth every other year, producing a single infant after a six-month gestation. Young baboons are weaned after around a year, and reach sexual maturity after five to eight years – at which point males leave their natal troop (females remain with it for life).

■ Vocalisation

When it comes to vocalisation, baboons are very versatile. Instead of having a trademark call, they have a range of over 30 vocalisations at their disposal, including grunts, barks and screams.

