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Letter to the Editor | Appeal to residents and visitors adhere to refuse policy

*Writer: Pat Redford, HBAG spokesperson*

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“The Hermanus Baboon Action Group was established voluntarily in March 2019 by residents, deeply concerned about the dilemma of the wild Voëlklip baboon troop, and their negative impact on residents and tourists in high density areas of Hermanus.

The affected areas have been targeted by the large Voëlklip troop due to poor refuse management by the community and the municipality over time. After the baboon monitors were withdrawn almost 6 years ago, the troop have had free reign and troop size has increased significantly.

However, the baboon monitoring programme by Human Wildlife Solutions (HWS) will soon begin, and residents are now looking forward to living once again with fresh air flowing freely through their open windows and doors, safely spending time in their gardens with small children and domestic pets, unthreatened by the troop.

Affected areas such as Voëlklip, Fernkloof, Fernkloof Estate, Kwaaiwater and Hermanus Heights have become popular destinations for weekenders and what were once holiday homes, (seldom used except for peak seasons), are now more regularly occupied by visitors and owners. Many homes in suburbia are also now permanently occupied as Hermanus becomes a preferred permanent home for close to 70% of the properties.

The quantum of refuse is now far greater than it was 5 years ago. Refuse collection procedures have had to evolve accordingly, with more trucks servicing the areas.

Many weekenders are not advised by the property owners or service providers who manage and clean these homes, that the baboon problem is directly associated to refuse management.

HBAG has worked hard to create awareness of this dilemma and to get co-operation from the Overstrand Municipality. HBAG collaborated with the municipality to design and print flyers for distribution to schools, tourist offices, shops, estate agents, businesses and residents.

In spite of this ongoing campaign, residents and visitors still insist on dumping refuse bags and unsecured refuse bins on the pavements in affected areas, attracting the baboons to easy access of human-derived foods and refuse. The consequence is the baboons become addicted to the starch and sugary foods, and their behaviour changes over time. As their behaviour changes, so the youngsters in the troop mimic the elders, and an unfortunate habituation to suburbia has developed over just a few generations.

Scientific evidence indicates changes to the genetics of some troops over time, as a consequence of this dependency on refined, starch or high sugar content in their daily diets. Aggressive, unpredictable behaviour can be a consequence.

Even when the HWS baboon monitors begin implementing the programme to keep baboons out of suburbia, HWS expects a few incursions from time to time, as the troop is so well-habituated and familiar with our high-density suburbs.

HBAG again appeals to residents, home owners and weekenders as well as cleaning staff, property management companies and estate agents to please ensure refuse bins are locked securely with baboon-proof devices, and that no refuse bags are left on pavements or on any property. If your refuse bin has no lock, give Cristo from Bobby Bins a call, he will fit a device to your bin on site; see our website www.hermanusbaboons.co.za for contact details.

Francois Pretorius from Waste Management at the municipality has advised that Law Enforcement officers will be issuing fines to transgressors in the coming weeks. Residents can report refuse issues to f.pretorius@overstrand.gov.za, or call 028 313 8092. Please provide addresses, dates and times.

The bylaws state clearly that all refuse bins in affected areas must have baboon-proof devices attached and that no refuse bags may be left on pavements. Criminal proceedings may also be instituted against the property owner/occupier in terms of the Criminal Procedures Act.

HBAG would like to see residents and visitors being part of the solution, rather than the problem, and looks forward to a safer, healthier life for the baboon troop and the residents of affected areas. Mongoose, crows and mice are also part of the crew raiding refuse bags and open bins.

Please note refuse collection days are Mondays for Voëlklip and Fridays for Kwaaiwater, Hermanus Heights, Fernkloof and Eastcliff.

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