

Field Museum News

Published Monthly by Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

Vol. 9

MAY, 1938

No. 5

BABOONS—MONKEYS WHICH HAVE ABANDONED TREES FOR LIFE ON THE GROUND

By COLIN CAMPBELL SANBORN
Curator of Mammals

Baboons may well be called terrestrial monkeys, for they have given up life in the trees almost entirely and returned to a life on the ground. Africa is the only continent on which they are found, and there they inhabit the open plains, the mountainous and rocky country, and the ground of the forests of the western regions.

Baboons have changed physically in many ways from their arboreal relatives, and are well adapted to their terrestrial habitat. The chest in these animals is compressed laterally, and the arms and legs are

the chest that becomes especially brilliant at certain seasons of the year. In others the colors are confined to the naked areas of the buttocks.

Fine colors, however, do not always make fine animals. Baboons are largely vegetarian in taste, and in cultivated regions do considerable damage to crops. In spite of the numbers that are killed they manage to hold their own and remain plentiful over large parts of Africa.

They have learned to respect a man with a gun, but in South Africa have no fear of the unarmed natives. It has been reported that in some remote regions, for protection

six to a dozen. An adult male mandrill is a really handsome animal.

Baboons have often been kept as pets, and many stories have been written about their behavior. The most extraordinary is that of a signalman on a South African railroad. He had lost both his legs and used a small hand-propelled car for locomotion. His pet baboon not only pushed him on this car, but pumped water, swept the floor, and performed many other helpful tasks for more than nine years.

The Celebes black ape, although not a true baboon, is a very close relative. It is a link between the baboons and the old



Seven Species of Baboon

Group on exhibition in Hall 15, showing the principal varieties of baboons. From left to right: young Guinea baboon, Celebes black ape, drill, mandrill, another kind of drill, gelada baboon, yellow baboon, and (behind the last) dog-faced baboon. Prepared by Assistant Taxidermist W. E. Eigsti.

almost uniform in length, facilitating their mode of travel, which is on all fours like most other mammals living on the ground. The muzzle is greatly elongated, and an overhanging ridge above the eyes protects them from the bright sun.

As mammals living on the ground in open country, these monkeys have been forced to develop an outlook on life different from that of the tree dwellers. They are fiercer, better fighters, and have a much keener sense of smell.

Baboons are characterized by naked areas on the body which are marked by highly developed bright colors. In the mandrill the face is bright blue and red. In the gelada baboon of Ethiopia there is a red patch on

against baboons, the women are accompanied by an armed guard when they venture away from the villages.

The fruit of the prickly-pear cactus, which was introduced into South Africa from Mexico, is a favorite food of the baboons. The seeds of the fruit are not digested or harmed, and consequently baboons have been the cause of spreading this undesirable plant. Baboons also feed on insects, and have been a help in combating plagues of locusts, on which they gorge themselves.

Baboons live together in large groups and often travel long distances in search of food or water. The mandrill of West Africa is usually found in groups of only

world monkeys. The black ape is found only in the island of Celebes where it lives in trees and feeds mainly on fruit. At low tide it often comes to the beach where it varies its diet with a taste of sea food.

A case of baboons has recently been reinstalled in the systematic collection of mammals in Hall 15. The new installation shows the animals on a base simulating natural ground. Three new species have been added to the exhibit—a dog-faced baboon, and a drill, gifts of the Chicago Zoological Society, and a Celebes black ape, collected by the Cornelius Crane Pacific Expedition of Field Museum. The taxidermy and installation are the work of Assistant Taxidermist W. E. Eigsti.

Museum and Chicago Daily News Co-operate for Conservation

During the week of April 17-23, proclaimed as Conservation Week in Illinois by Governor Henry Horner, Field Museum enlisted the co-operation of the *Chicago Daily News* and was enabled to publish in the latter a series of six daily articles on

various phases of conservation. The opening article presented views of Director Clifford C. Gregg and Dr. Wilfred H. Osgood, Chief Curator of Zoology. This was followed by an article on conservation of plant life by Curator Paul C. Standley; one on mammals by Curator Colin Campbell Sanborn; one on birds by Curator Rudyerd Boulton; one on reptiles by Curator Karl

P. Schmidt, and one on preservation of geological features by Curator Sharat K. Roy. The series attracted much favorable comment from other organizations and individuals interested in conservation.

A single crystal of beryl weighing 1,000 pounds is exhibited in Stanley Field Hall.



Sanborn, Colin Campbell. 1938. "Baboons - Monkeys Which Have Abandoned Trees for Life on the Ground." *Field Museum news* 9(5), 1-1.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25714>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/364439>

Holding Institution

Field Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.
For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.