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Pets and pests: vervet monkey intake at a specialist South African rehabilitation centre

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Abstract

Vervet monkeys (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*) encounter a plethora of anthropogenic risks as a result of their ability to exploit human-altered environments. A systematic assessment of these risks has not been carried out to date. Here, we aim to begin addressing this gap in our understanding of human-vervet conflict in South Africa. We present a descriptive analysis of the intake of the Vervet Monkey Foundation (VMF) — a specialist vervet monkey rehabilitation centre and sanctuary in the Limpopo Province. Between October 2003 and March 2012 almost 200 vervet monkeys arrived at the VMF. At least 161 infants arrived with a steady decrease in annual intake over time, most probably due to the increasing number of other centres in the province. Detailed data for all age classes were available from March 2009 to March 2012. Of the 50 monkeys that arrived during this period, more young monkeys (infants and juveniles) than adults arrived and more infants than juveniles. Intake of injured and uninjured monkeys was equal. The majority of injuries were caused by cars and the majority of uninjured arrivals were ex-pets handed over voluntarily. A distinct temporal pattern of arrival, peaking in the austral summer, coincides with the birthing season of vervet monkeys in South Africa. The merits of publishing such records and the welfare implications of the perceptions of and objections to these 'pest' primates are discussed.

Keywords: animal welfare, *Chlorocebus/Cercopithecus*, human-wildlife conflict, pest primates, primate rehabilitation, vervet monkey