BABOONS IN A HUMANIZED LANDSCAPE: BENEFICIARIES, VICTIMS AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

S.C. Strum[1,2], D. Western[3], D.L. Manzolillo Nightingale [1]

[1]Uaso Ngiro Baboon Project, P.O. Box 62844, Nairobi 00200,Kenya; [2]Department of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093-0532; [3]Amboseli Conservation Project, Box 62844, Nairobi 00200, Kenya

Presenter's Email: nightingale@africaonline.co.ke

How do baboons manage in humanized landscapes that are pushing many other primate species to the brink? There were once more baboons than people in Africa. Today, baboons probably remain the most abundant large mammal and one of the most successful species of primates in Africa. We present data on diet, reproduction, and population trends from one population living on the Laikipia Plateau of Kenya. These data illustrate how baboons benefited from successive ecological transformations caused by increased human density and sedentarization. But there were costs in terms of human-wildlife conflict as baboons became victims of their own success. Throughout much of Kenya, baboons are now perceived as the biggest wildlife threat to human subsistence economies. Finally the baboons became agents of ecological change themselves. We suggest that baboons are pre-adapted to the new human dominated ecosystems which select for a different type of primate, one that is an inter-niche specialist and can exploit gardens, agriculture, urban and suburban contexts as well as the changing forests and rangelands.

Keywords: baboon, human-wildlife conflict, environmental change, adaptation