

EDUCATION Giant Volcano and Its Baboons With Altitude!

EVENTS

Yvonne de Jong and Thomas Butynski are exploring eastern Uganda and western Kenya to study primates, supported by a grant from the National Geographic Society. See what they found on the higher altitudes of Mount Elgon. Baboons (genus name: *Papio*; Kiswahili: nyani) are the most widespread of Africa's monkeys. Occupying most of Africa south of the Sahara, baboons...

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



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Baboons (genus name: *Papio*; Kiswahili: *nyani*) are the most widespread of Africa's monkeys. Occupying most of Africa south of the Sahara, baboons inhabit almost all types of vegetation. It is not difficult to find baboons on the beach of East Africa, in the Fynebos of South Africa, in semi-arid northern Kenya (see our earlier post: ["Finding a New Monkey for East Africa"](#)), in bamboo forest in Senegal, or in montane forest in Tanzania and Uganda.



A juvenile yellow baboon (*Papio cynocephalus*) looks out among thorny bushland near Bura, eastern Kenya. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)

During one survey we explored Mount Elgon on the Kenya-Uganda border. An enormous dormant volcano, Mount Elgon rises 14,177 feet above sea level at Wagagai, Uganda, has the broadest base (about 1,540 square miles) of any free-standing volcano in the world, and is protected by two national parks (one in Uganda and one in Kenya).

The olive baboon (*Papio anubis*) is one of six species of non-human primate on Mount Elgon. In East Africa, olive baboons are known to occur at elevations as low as 1,770 feet (Meru National Park, Kenya), and as high as 7,780 feet in Kenya (Nyahururu), and 8,200 feet in Uganda (Echuya Forest Reserve).

The highest altitude reported for the species anywhere is a staggering 12,630 feet on Mount Orobo in Ethiopia.

Baboons are famous for their “attitude.” They generally live in groups containing 30 to 200 individuals, and they often become “familiar” with people, something that can become very clear when you enter a national park in East Africa. The group that we encountered lounging around the headquarters of Mount Elgon National Park on the Kenya side at about 7,000 feet was no different.



An adult male olive baboon (*Papio anubis*) puts his teeth on display for an adult female with clinging infant at elevation 7,050 feet in Mount Elgon National Park, western Kenya. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)



A bit further up the mountain at about 7,640 feet, a juvenile olive baboon (*Papio anubis*) clung to a tree in the sacred montane forest of Mount Elgon National Park, western Kenya. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)

On February 21, 2015, we drove upwards from the headquarters of Mount Elgon National Park (Kenya side) through grasslands and montane forests considered sacred by people in the area, past caves and basalt bluffs, and through bamboo forests at 7,900 feet. We came to a halt where the track ends at 8,983 feet—only 10.5 miles from the Uganda border.

Here there is a mix of gallery montane forest, open woodland, and grassland. Ahead the afro-alpine moorland begins. While enjoying the breathtaking views both below and above us, we were surprised to see a group of olive baboons about a quarter mile away. These olive baboons are 1,207 feet higher than recorded for Kenya—indeed, this is the highest record for all of East Africa.





The volcano is home to wildlife big and small, such as this adult white-eyed slaty flycatcher (*Melaenornis fischeri*). (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)



An adult male bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*) peeks through the dense understory of Mount Elgon's montane forest. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)



Eventually we sighted olive baboons (*Papio anubis*) at 8,983 feet above sea level in Mount Elgon National Park, western Kenya. This is the highest altitude recorded for this species in East Africa. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)



Roads and vehicles allow us to reach remote areas to document olive baboons (*Papio anubis*). (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong)

During this project we encountered 30 groups of olive baboons. With the exception of two groups, all of the groups were within protected areas. Even this most adaptable of Africa's primates is struggling to survive outside of protected areas. Baboons close to humans are generally crop raiders. Farmers have little tolerance for "food-stealing monkeys." Beyond this, Africa's human population is doubling about every 20 years. One result is that people are rapidly destroying and degrading the habitats of baboons.



Olive baboons (*Papio anubis*) move along the edge of montane forest at 7,580 feet in Mount Elgon National Park, western Kenya. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)

An overview of the causes and effects of baboon-human conflict can be accessed at: ["Guess who's coming to dinner."](#)

For more articles and pictures of baboons and the other primates in East Africa, visit our site at [wildsolutions.nl](#).

[Click here for additional photographs taken during our field trips in Uganda and Kenya.](#)



An infant female yellow baboon (*Papio cynocephalus*) plays with her mother's tail at Dian, south coast of Kenya. (Photograph by Yvonne de Jong & Tom Butynski)

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Yvonne de Jong & Thomas Butynski

Yvonne A. de Jong (PhD) is a Kenya-based Dutch primatologist who has worked in Africa for more than 13 years. She is member of the Nocturnal Primate Research Group at Oxford Brookes University, member of various IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups including the Primate and Wild Pig Specialist Groups, and Collaborating Scientist of the Institute of Primate Research in Nairobi. Her main research focus is the biogeography, diversity and conservation of eastern Africa's primates and several other groups of large mammals, including the warthogs. She is the co-leader of the Eastern Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation Program and senior ecologist at the Lolldaiga Hills Research Programme)Sustainability Centre Eastern Africa' based in Laikipia, Kenya. Thomas M. Butynski (PhD) is an American conservationist and ecologist who has worked in Africa for 45 years, mostly in Botswana, Kenya, Uganda, and Equatorial Guinea. He is a member of four IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups (Primates, Antelopes, Afrotheria, Wild Pigs) and has served as Director of the Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation in Uganda, Director of Conservation International's Eastern Africa Biodiversity Hotspots Program in Kenya, Director of the King Khalid Wildlife Research Center in Saudi Arabia, Vice-Chair of the Africa Section of the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group, Senior Editor of the journal African Primates, and a Senior Editor for Mammals of Africa. At present he is Co-leader of the Eastern Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation Program, and Director of Research at the Sustainability Centre Eastern Africa in Kenya.



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