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# Monkey in Red

*Shy, fast, silent, handsome: the Patas Monkey, though not very often observed in East Africa, is by no means forgotten, writes Yvonne de Jong.*



The Patas Monkey, *Erythrocebus patas*, sometimes called nisanas, hussar monkey, military, or red monkey, ranges from West Africa (western Senegal) to East Africa, north of the equatorial forests and south of the Sahara.

Patas are easily recognised by their brick red upper parts and heads. Their long limbs are completely and distinctively white, especially in males. The East African Patas Monkey (of western Ethiopia to northern Uganda and southern Kenya) has a blackish face with a white nose and a white moustache, unlike the Patas Monkeys found in West Africa and northern Tanzania, which have an all black face.

Patas are of slender build. Females are the size of a male Vervet Monkey (7–8 kg), the species' closest relative. Males are twice as big, and have a bright blue scrotum, while both the anus and the penis are red. Cheek pouches allow Patas Monkeys to collect food

very quickly for consumption at a later time. Relative to their size, Patas males have the longest canines of any African monkey.

Patas Monkeys are rarely seen in East Africa. K Hall, in studies conducted at Murchison Falls in Uganda, collected the first systematic field data on the species in the 1960s. He notes that Patas occur in low densities throughout their range. Their home ranges are big (20–80 km<sup>2</sup>), and their group sizes highly variable (7–56 individuals according to Tom Struhsaker, Steve Gartlan, Janice Chism, and Thelma Rowell).

Hall's research was followed by that of Struhsaker and Gartlan in 1970 in Cameroon's Waza Reserve. Although brief, Struhsaker and Gartlan's study was in West Africa. They found that Patas distribution in the dry season is influenced largely by the distribution of water sources.

For 10 years, Lynne Isbell carried out a Patas monkey study in Laikipia, Kenya. She found that patas there are highly dependent on Whistling Thorn (*Acacia drepanolobium*) for both food and sleeping sites. Isbell also found that Patas drink daily, preferring to drink water from holes, ponds, and tanks in open areas, rather than from streams with their dense riparian vegetation.

### Distribution and abundance

Patas Monkeys are shy and silent – traits that, combining with their speed and cryptic pelage, make them difficult to find, let alone observe and study. The map (*facing page*) shows what is known of their historical and current range in Kenya and Tanzania.

Historically, Patas occurred in the centre, south, west, and NW of Kenya. They were present on the Athi Plains south of Nairobi, and – until about 20 years ago – in and around the Amboseli National

Park. More than 70 years ago, Patas were present near Makindu, in southern Kenya. In 1978, Debbie Nightingale encountered Patas once on Kekopey, between Naivasha and Gilgil.

Isbell and Chism found that the Patas subpopulation on the Laikipia Plateau was stable between 1979 and 2000. At 300–500 animals, this is the largest subpopulation in Kenya. Ismael Chirchir found Patas in Baringo District in 1993, mainly around Lake Bogoria. Yet Murray Roberts, resident in the area for many years, has not seen Patas around Lake Baringo (just 40 km north of Lake Bogoria) for the past 25 years at least.

A survey I conducted in Kenya in 2003–2004, confirmed the presence of Patas in Busia District (after I had received reports from Gomez de Silva, Ng'weno and Shanni). Patas are also still present in West Pokot and in Turkana, although their numbers appear to be low in both areas. Richard Bonham last observed Patas in the Chyulu Hills in 1996. In Kenya, Patas are found mainly outside protected areas, on privately owned ranches or community land.

In Tanzania, Patas distribution and abundance remain little known. Historically, Patas ranged only in northern Tanzania, mainly in the Serengeti area and west of Kilimanjaro. Tom Butynski and I saw Patas in the Grumeti Game Reserve in October 2005. Whether they still occur in other areas of northern Tanzania has yet to be determined.

There is no detailed information yet on the distribution and abundance of Patas in either Uganda or Ethiopia.

### Ecology and Behaviour

Patas are terrestrial, preferring savannah-woodland habitats, especially those dominated by *Acacia* shrubs and trees. They are able to reach speeds of 55 km/h, making them the fastest on the ground of all primates. During the day, Patas spend roughly 60 % of their time on the ground, and 40 % in trees. They feed mainly on the ground. When disturbed, Patas usually flee on the ground, even where they are encountered in trees.

Patas eat gum, leaves, and arthropods (principally ants), as well as flowers, fruits, small mammals, reptiles, and birds' eggs. In Laikipia, Isbell found that gum accounts for more than one-third of their diet. This reliance on gum is unique for a primate of this size, and is more characteristic of the smaller primates, such as bushbabies. In some areas, such as Busia District (West Kenya), crops (like maize) make up a significant part of their diet.

While foraging, Patas Monkeys spread out over a very wide area – often several hundred metres across. Groups consist of females with their young, accompanied by one adult male. The adult females in the group form strong bonds, are all somehow related, and are intolerant of strangers. Adult females direct daily activity, defend the group against intruders, and dominate the males. Unlike the hierarchical social system of baboons and vervets, there is no linear hierarchy among the adult females.

The resident adult male acts as the 'watch dog' for the group. He is often located several hundred metres from the group to scan the area from a tree for possible danger. This is why people very often report having seen just one Patas Monkey, instead of a group (the other group members are usually in hiding). When young males reach the age of 4 years they are forced to leave their natal group. Females stay with the group for their lifetimes (according to Chism, Rowell, and Dana Olson).

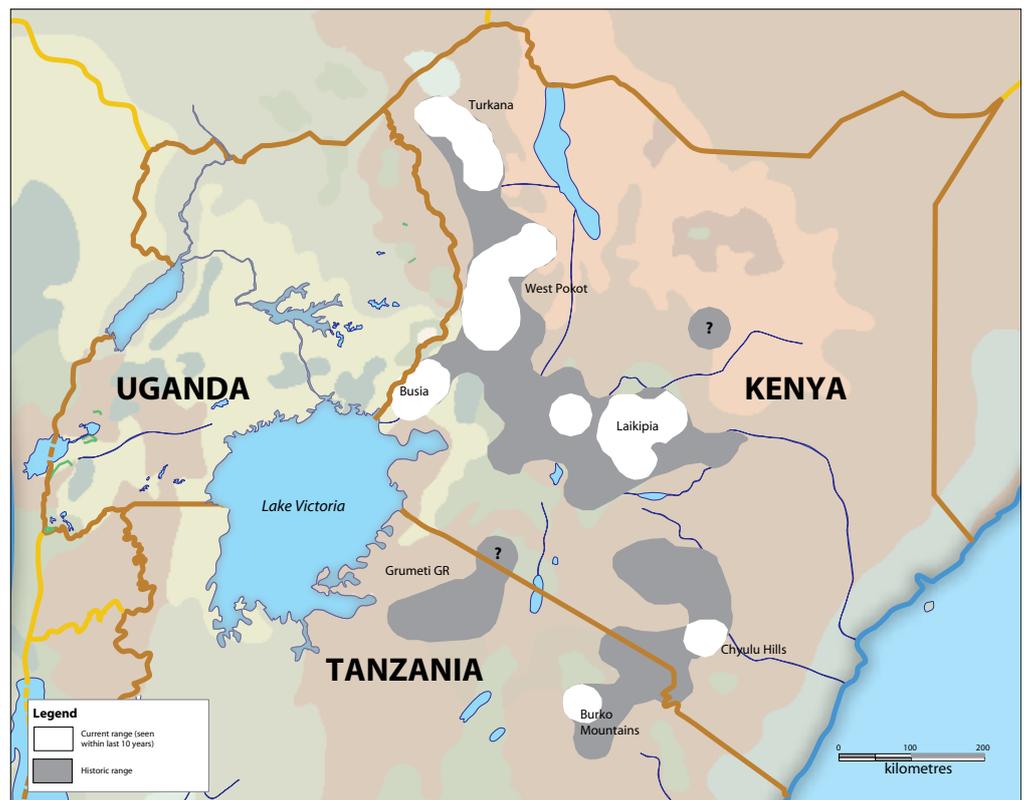
Females can start breeding at the exceptionally early age of 3 years, and can give birth every year. Robert Harding and Olsen, who studied multi-male influx occurrences of non-resident Patas males, described how groups with only one male change into multi-male groups when additional males enter the group during the breeding season (June–August).

Come the end of the breeding season, all males, except for the resident male, leave the group. Captive studies by James Loy indicate that the oestrous cycle averages about 33 days, gestation about 167 days, and the inter-birth interval about 384 days. Births occur in the dry season (December–January), so that weaning takes place in wet months when more food is available.

The Patas Monkey's main predators are Black-backed Jackals, domestic dogs, African Wild Dogs, Leopards, Lions, hyenas, Cheetahs, and Martial Eagles, but humans are probably the most significant predator. As a part of their anti-predator strategy, Patas groups sleep at a different site each night, with a group's individual members widely scattered – sometimes over an area of two hectares.

Under some circumstances, Patas Monkeys benefit from human activities. In areas inhabited by humans, food and water are often readily available in the form of crops and artificial water sources. In western Kenya, for instance, Patas persist in areas with dense human populations, where crops have almost entirely replaced the natural vegetation. Here, Patas raid crops.

In Laikipia, and other areas, Patas frequently use livestock water tanks and troughs. The Prickly Pear cactus (*Opuntia vulgaris*), an exotic from Bolivia and Argentina introduced by humans to



provide fodder for cattle, acts as a water and food source for Patas, as well as for other primates. Patas Monkeys frequently use fence posts to sit on, and as vantage points from which to scan their surroundings. The other advantage of their 'association' with people is that non-human predators are often much reduced in density, or absent.

### Conservation

The main threats to the survival of Africa's primates, including Patas, are habitat loss and hunting, accelerated by a rapidly growing human population and by related poverty. Although Patas are widespread across Africa, they are rare in eastern Africa. This is due both to their naturally low densities and to the fact that their range in eastern Africa has been greatly reduced as the result of habitat loss and fragmentation.

In the past, Patas rarely competed with humans for space, since Patas prefer semi-arid savannahs and open woodlands – ecosystems that were marginal for agriculture. Over the past several decades, the scarcity of land has forced farmers to exploit drier areas, converting large areas of Patas habitat into cropland. Trees are cut for lumber, building poles and charcoal, and farmers either chase away or kill crop-raiding Patas.

Patas are unable to use habitats that are devoid of all natural vegetation, or which have dense vegetation and long stretches of open, treeless grassland or cleared land, or which lack a reliable year-round source of available water. Small, fragmented Patas populations are more vulnerable to a variety of threats, including disease, hunting, and in-breeding.

In Kenya, primates are rarely used as bushmeat. I found, however, that Patas and other monkeys are hunted and eaten in Turkana. More information is required to assess what impact the hunting of Patas in



## Have YOU seen Patas Monkeys in eastern Africa?

In the interests of arriving at a better understanding of the Patas Monkey's abundance and distribution in eastern Africa, I should like to know if you have observed Patas anywhere in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, or Ethiopia.

If you have seen Patas in any of these countries, then I should very much appreciate a record of your sighting. It is important to include the following information: date (or year) of sighting; name of nearest village or town; latitude; longitude, and elevation (if available). You can send the details of your sighting(s) to me at the following address: Yvonne de Jong; P O Box 38; Ol Kalou 20303; Kenya; < yvonne@wildsolutions.nl >.

Turkana is having on that subpopulation. In West Pokot and Busia Districts, crop-raiding Patas are hunted – but not for bushmeat. Some people in Kenya keep Patas as pets, but the impact of the pet trade on this species is unknown.

As mentioned above, Patas benefit from artificial water sources and require large areas of suitable habitat. As such, cattle ranches, with their expansive areas of comparatively undisturbed woodlands, are compatible with Patas conservation. Indeed, it now appears that the well-managed cattle ranches on the Laikipia Plateau (several of which are also wildlife conservancies) are key to the long-term survival of Patas in Kenya. 