



Mpala Newsletter

November 2024 | Issue #24



The Max Planck Institute's Baboon Project team pictured at MRC

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Mpala Community,

As November wraps up, we're filled with gratitude and excitement for all we've accomplished together this month! Mpala continues to shine as a hub of collaboration, innovation, and impact, with strides in research, infrastructure, and community connections bringing us closer than ever.

This month, Mpala marked a major milestone with our **30th Anniversary Dinner Celebration** on November 12, coinciding with the Mpala Board Meeting at Princeton University. The dinner was a joyful occasion to reflect on three decades of impact and to honor Mr. Dennis Keller for his outstanding contributions to Mpala's success. The board meeting also set the stage for inspiring new projects and reaffirmed our shared commitment to science and conservation excellence.

We were delighted to host amazing collaborators from the University of Glasgow and individual researchers who are enriching our mission. A special highlight was an evening spent with our herders at the bomas, discussing an exciting research project designed by Mike Kowalski. We also welcomed the Max Planck Institute Baboon Team, whose collaring program is providing fascinating insights into baboon behavior and conservation.

Sports at Mpala brought us plenty of energy and fun! The football season kicked off with thrilling matches—despite a tough 3-0 loss to Maiyan, our team bounced back with an electrifying 2-2 draw against the Mighty Warriors. On the volleyball court, Mpala claimed a big win, showcasing teamwork and determination.

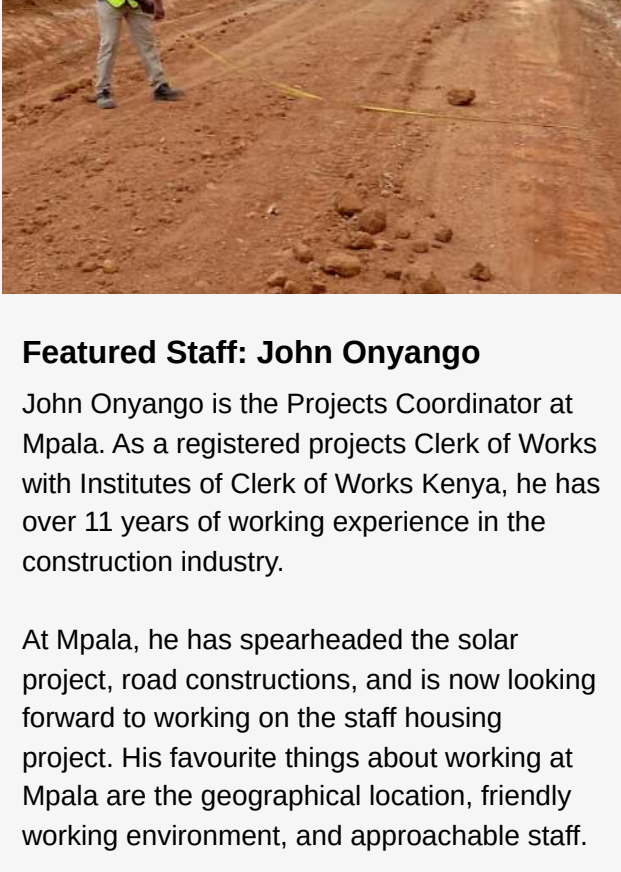
On the infrastructure front, we completed the grading of 42 km of the Naibor-Mpala-Kinamba road—a huge step forward for connectivity in the region. The remaining 18 km is in great hands with the Ivan and Loisaba teams, bringing us closer to linking key areas.

As we head into December, we're excited about what lies ahead. Thank you for being part of the Mpala family—your support and commitment fuel everything we do. Together, we're making a real difference!

Warm regards,

Dr, Winnie Kiiru, Executive Director

Faces of Mpala



Featured Staff: John Onyango

John Onyango is the Projects Coordinator at Mpala. As a registered projects Clerk of Works with Institutes of Clerk of Works Kenya, he has over 11 years of working experience in the construction industry.

At Mpala, he has spearheaded the solar project, road constructions, and is now looking forward to working on the staff housing project. His favourite things about working at Mpala are the geographical location, friendly working environment, and approachable staff.

[Read more about John](#)



Featured Researcher: Mike Kowalski

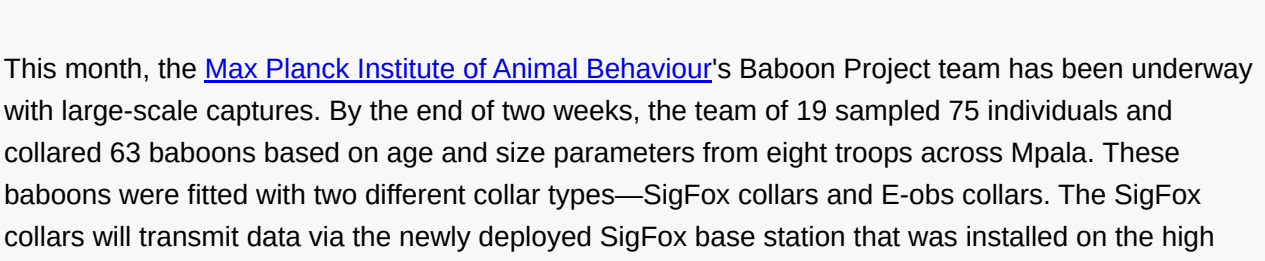
Mike Kowalski is a PhD student at the University of California, Santa Cruz conducting research on the ecology of fear and how human disturbance impacts wildlife behaviour and energetics.

Mike spent five months at Mpala from June - October running a pilot project—the world's largest playback experiment. By setting up 1km² grids of playback speakers, exposing wildlife to human voices and bird vocalisations, he measured the impact of different playback treatments on wildlife occupancy, activity levels, and behaviour.

[Read more about Mike](#)

Updates from the Field

The Max Planck Institute Baboon Project



Collared baboon sitting on a cliff | Photo credits: Grace Davis

This month, the [Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour](#)'s Baboon Project team has been underway with large-scale captures. By the end of two weeks, the team of 19 sampled 75 individuals and collared 63 baboons based on age and size parameters from eight troops across Mpala. These baboons were fitted with two different collar types—SigFox collars and E-obs collars. The SigFox collars will transmit data via the newly deployed SigFox base station that was installed on the high tower near Eagle Scout; E-obs collars take fine scale, downloadable movement data. These solar powered collars are used to monitor baboon movements, gaining insights into how changing environments impact their behaviour and sleep patterns.

About the Project

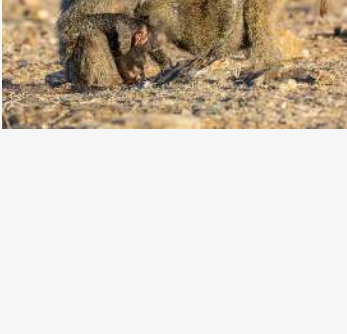
The Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour's Baboon Project aims to bring the study of sleep into the collective context, understand how social processes structure the sleep patterns of individuals, groups and populations, and test how gregarious animals navigate the opportunities and constraints imposed by sleeping as part of a group. The research uses thermal tracking and accelerometry to investigate how baboons integrate environmental (predation risk, temperature) and social factors into their choices about where to sleep. Using these tools we ask, how do individual decisions and emergent group properties affect sleep? How do groups reach consensus about when and where to sleep? Does social isolation alter sleep behavior? What role does sleep play in shaping the social environment?

This research provides a window into the mechanisms and consequences of collective decision-making in social animals. Understanding baboons' sleep choices offers broader insights into how animals navigate complex environments and social structures, enhancing our knowledge of animal behavior and ecology.

[Learn more](#)

Featured Publications

We have updated the list of [publications](#) on our website to include research from 2024!

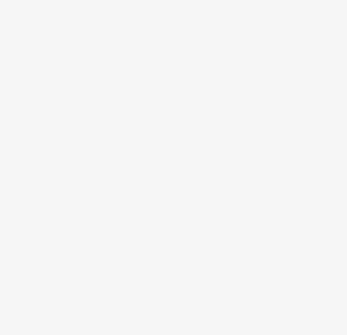


Ecological and social pressures interfere with homeostatic sleep regulation in the wild

J Carter Loftus, Roi Harel, Chase L Núñez, Margaret C Crofoot

Sleep is fundamental to the health and fitness of all animals. The physiological importance of sleep is underscored by the central role of homeostasis in determining sleep investment. Yet, most sleep research has been conducted in highly controlled settings, removed from evolutionarily relevant contexts that may hinder the maintenance of sleep homeostasis. Using triaxial accelerometry and GPS to track the sleep patterns of a group of wild baboons (*Papio anubis*), this study found that ecological and social pressures interfere with homeostatic sleep regulation.

[Continue reading](#)



Adoption by olive baboons (*Papio anubis*) of newly constructed electricity pylons as sleeping sites in Laikipia, Kenya

Lenguya, L., Ewaton, L. and Pilfold, N.W., 2024.

Olive baboons (*Papio anubis*) use fixed, secure, and naturally occurring sleeping sites such as tall trees and rocky cliffs, as protection from predators and often show a selection preference for particular trees or rocky cliff faces. In Laikipia, Kenya, olive baboons (*Papio anubis*) were observed utilizing 45-m-tall high-tension electrical towers (pylons) as sleeping sites. This new behavior enhances our understanding of baboons' natural choice of sleeping sites, which typically include trees and cliffs.

[Continue reading](#)



BaboonLand Dataset: Tracking Primates in the Wild and Automating Behaviour Recognition from Drone Videos

Isla Duporge, Maksim Kholiavchenko, Roi Harel, Scott Wolf, Dan Rubenstein, Meg Crofoot, Tanya Berger-Wolf, Stephen Lee, Julie Barreau, Jenna Kline, Michelle Ramirez, Charles Stewart

Using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to track multiple individuals simultaneously in their natural environment is a powerful approach for better understanding group primate behaviour. This study presents a novel dataset for baboon detection, tracking, and behaviour recognition from drone videos. Undisturbed observations on social interactions can inform models of interaction dynamic, and accurately tracking the proximity of primate groups to human settlement areas can provide a tool to support programs on human-primate coexistence.

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Mpala explores solutions to current and emerging challenges by advancing transformational ecosystems research and teaching, conserving our environment, and partnering with our community

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Mpala Research Centre
P.O. Box 555 - 10400
Nanyuki, Kenya

+254 721202324
info@mpala.org