

TWO WEEKS OLD AND ABANDONED - HOW AN INFANT COLOBUS FOUND HIS WAY HOME

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Based in Diani Beach, Kenya, Colobus Conservation is an organisation designed to promote the conservation, preservation and protection of primates like the nationally threatened Angolan black and white colobus monkey (*Colobus angolensis palliatus*) and its coastal forest habitat in south eastern Kenya.

Colobus Conservation has numerous projects concentrating on limiting the impact of human-wildlife conflict. Some examples of this work include the installation of aerial bridges to enable monkeys to cross the busy Diani Beach road without being hit by cars, insulation of un-insulated power lines to prevent monkeys getting electrocuted as they move through the trees and snare removal from the forest. Colobus Conservation also hosts education workshops to better inform



The two week old abandoned infant was in Colobus Conservation's care for two days. During this time he was kept warm, hydrated and fed.



The adult female, seconds after she had swooped down and picked up the infant, is returning to the safety of the trees. Note the infant is being carried high on her chest, between her arms with the white tail visible down the mid-line of her stomach.

school groups and local communities on the importance of the forest and the primates, as well as offering advice and solutions to pest related primate issues. When these precautionary programmes do not prevent a human-primate conflict from occurring, Colobus Conservation offers a 24 hour rescue and welfare service where sick, injured or abandoned primates are cared for, treated and released.

In the case of abandoned infants, Colobus Conservation attempts to identify the reason for the abandonment and if possible re-connect the infant with its mother and family group. An infant raised within its family troop of course, has a far better chance of survival than one raised in the care of humans, then rehabilitated and released. The case described here is one such successful reuniting of an



The female continuing to climb higher immediately after collecting the infant.



In turn, most members of the group approached the infant.



Once the female had found a safe spot on a nearby roof, the members of her troop followed and stayed in close proximity.



A sub-adult attempts to hold the infant, which is normal colobus behaviour. As the infant shows his distress at the attempt of being taken away from his mother again, the female turns her back on the sub-adult to prevent another attempt.

PHOTOS BY: ANDREA DONALDSON

abandoned infant colobus monkey with his mother.

Late on a Saturday evening in August 2012, a young colobus was reported to have been found in one of the Diani hotels. On the arrival of Colobus Conservation's rescue team, a white infant colobus was discovered abandoned on the ground. The infant was approximately two weeks old. He was cold but appeared to be without injuries and importantly, through palpating his stomach and feeling

distension, we knew that he had recently fed from his mother. This indicated that he had been abandoned only a short time prior and that his mother had been likely caring for him appropriately. Therefore the rescue team was confident that the abandonment was not due to the mother being incapacitated herself but accidental. As it was by then after dark, there was no time to organise a plan to get the infant back to his family group. Instead, he was taken to Colobus Conservation, where he was kept warm,

hydrated and fed goat's milk until the next morning.

Colobus Conservation returned to the site at dawn on Sunday morning hoping to re-connect the infant with his mother and troop. A colobus group was located just waking in a tree directly above where the infant had been found on the previous evening. The rescue team slowly approached the group, placing the infant on the ground. The alpha male came down rapidly, grabbing the infant and dragging him away by

the tail. The infant was taken into the tree canopy at which time he was dropped immediately. Luckily the infant sustained no injuries.

The reaction to the infant, and by then, a determination of the age and sex composition of the group, specifically that there was no adult female who didn't already have an infant, showed that this was not the group to which the infant belonged. Additionally, Colobus Conservation had not received reports of a sick, injured or dead female in this area in the few days prior to the incident. At that time, we began looking for a suitable, neighbouring troop - one with a lactating female but without an infant.

On Monday morning an appropriate troop was finally found, one with a lactating female without an infant. The troop was located in the hotel adjacent to the one where the infant was found. Given the size of colobus home ranges, it was a reasonable assumption that the troop could move between the two areas. The infant was brought from Colobus Conservation to the troop. Just a single cry from the infant was all it took for the identified lactating female to start moving towards the rescue



The 'tongue-clicking' action seen here in the female is used by colobus during positive social interactions with other troop members showing reassurance.

team. In contrast to the initial group introduction, this was the expected response. Swiftly, the infant was placed on a makuti roof under the tree where the female was sitting and before the team was able to unwrap the infant

from the blanket, the female ran down, scooped him up and returned to the safety of the trees.

The circumstances of this rescue case suggest that the abandonment may have been a result of an aggressive

encounter between the two groups. The infant may have fallen accidentally during the interaction for example, being so young, it may have slipped its grip while his mother was leaping or otherwise defending herself. Alternatively, this may have been an incident where a member of the other group targeted the infant and successfully removed the infant from the mother and intentionally dropped the infant to the ground – a type of inter-group infanticidal behaviour.

Six months after this event, Colobus Conservation has revisited the group numerous times to monitor the care of the infant. To date, the infant remains within the troop and is now showing his full adult black and white colouration. ●



Thirty minutes after being re-connected the infant has fallen asleep suckling.