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Research on Baboons by UCT affiliated researchers in the Cape Peninsula

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) has received several queries recently regarding its involvement in baboon research and its contributions to practice and policy of the peninsula baboon program. This matter is under review and was discussed at the Senate Animal Ethics Committee on 11 November 2020.

Professor Justin O'Riain, Director of the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa, Department of Biological Sciences, UCT, said: "We provide technical and logistical support to many international researchers when they are working in South Africa. Furthermore, UCT academics across a range of disciplines collaborate in writing papers and analysing publicly available and shared data sets with co-authors from around the world. Such collaboration is strongly encouraged both at UCT and globally to ensure that global challenges are addressed by a global network of researchers."

Prof O'Riain provided logistical and technical support and advice for students from the University of Swansea in 2018 and contributes to the writing of peer reviewed publications with international colleagues including those at Swansea through application of local expertise and knowledge and as an internationally recognised scholar on a variety of conservation conflicts.

The university also confirms the following:

- It was established in November 2020 that the website for the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa (iCWild) had not been recently updated. iCWild was thus requested to update its website by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) to reflect the current status of students and projects.
- Esme Beamish completed her Masters degree at UCT in 2011. She had planned to register for a PhD in 2020 but did not due to the national lockdown and is thus not registered as a student at UCT. She was introduced as a researcher at iCWild in a radio interview on 31 August 2020, which is incorrect; she is currently an independent researcher with an MSc from UCT on the effects of permanent injury of Peninsula baboon on behaviour and diet. Note that in her capacity either as a former UCT student, an independent researcher with a relevant UCT qualification

or even as a student currently registered at UCT (which she is not), she is encouraged to contribute her knowledge and expertise to veterinarians, conservationists and wildlife managers should they consider her skills to be of use. Such consultation is not research and academics and students from UCT are routinely consulted on diverse issues from politics to law and wildlife and this is entirely consistent with UCT's recommendations for engaged scholarship. Academic engagement with external constituencies should be based on scholarship. Scholarship is "the thoughtful creation, interpretation, communication, or use of knowledge that is based in the ideas of the disciplines, professions, and interdisciplinary fields. What qualifies an activity as 'scholarship' is that it should be deeply informed by (the activity of) accumulating knowledge in some field, that the knowledge is skilfully interpreted and deployed, and that the activity is carried out with intelligent openness to new information, debate, and criticism", added O'Riain.

- Joselyn Mormile is still registered for a PhD at UCT. Ms Mormile was successful in securing full time employment in 2020 by a company contracted to do baboon management by the City of Cape Town. Training students for the workplace is a stated goal of iCWILD and UCT and her success in securing employment within her field of research is thus to be celebrated. However, none of the management work she does on the Peninsula has any relevance to her research thesis. She obtained Science Faculty Animal Ethics Committee (SFAEC) approval for her field work in Rooiels, which she concluded in 2018. Ethics approval is only valid for the time the student is actively working with the animal(s) (in this case 2017-2019) and does not extend to the analysis and write up period (2020 and beyond). Ms Mormile continues to write her thesis in her own time and will maintain her registration until she is ready to submit her thesis. UCT has no mechanism for postgraduate students to study part time and students must retain unbroken registration prior to submission of their theses for examination.

In terms of the role of researchers and academics from UCT in the CoCT baboon management: they are frequently requested to advise on management plans, strategy documents and operational decisions. The importance of researchers to the Peninsula Baboon program was detailed in the first Management Plan for the Peninsula (Brownlie 2000) that predates any UCT involvement. This document detailed key research objectives which UCT students, under the supervision of Professor O'Riain, have largely achieved since they first commenced work on the Peninsula in 2004. However, decisions on practice and policy as it pertains to baboon management and the Peninsula baboon program rest solely with the mandated authorities.

On the issue of utilisation of tracking devices in research, UCT has previously, after a careful harms-benefit analysis which is integral to the ethics review process, approved the use of such devices on a range of wildlife, including raptors, penguins, carnivores, reptiles and non-human primates. There is however not a single baboon on the Peninsula currently carrying a GPS collar for a UCT research project.

The university notes with concern allegations on social media that existing collars on the Peninsula baboons are part of UCT research. It is not clear why such claims are being made when the service providers can and have confirmed that they are responsible for the deployment of such devices with the appropriate veterinarian assistance to monitor Peninsula baboons on the edge of urban areas. We emphatically reject any allegation that UCT is currently doing fieldwork for research on Peninsula baboons using GPS collars, collecting blood or using biopsy darts on baboons. UCT will continue to encourage researchers to share their knowledge and expertise with external constituents, to assist

international researchers when they visit South Africa to conduct research approved by their host institution and, where applicable to work according to UCT's policy and processes, and to make intellectual contributions to peer reviewed research papers as part of collaborative scientific efforts that seek to address global challenges.

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