**Common Name:** Vervet Monkey, Vervets

**Order:** Mammalia  
**Family:** Cercopithecidae  
**Genus & Species:** Chlorocebus pygerythrus

**Status:** IUCN Least Concern; CITES II

**Range:** Vervets are spread across southern and eastern Africa, from Senegal to Ethiopia and south to South Africa.

**Habitat:** The preferred habitat is acacia woodland along streams, rivers, and lakes. Vervet monkeys can also live in mountainous areas up to 13,000 feet.

**Description:** Height 18-26 inches; Weight 7-17 pounds; Tail length 16-28 inches. Vervet monkeys are a medium sized primate with a greenish-olive or silver-gray coat of close-fitting, moderate length hair. They have a black face, ears, hands, feet, and tips of their tails. Their forehead has a white band across it which blends into elongated side whiskers. They have long tails with a reddish patch on the underside of the base. Males are slightly larger than females. Young vervets are born with a dark coat and pink face. Males are distinguished from females by their external turquoise-blue scrotum and red penis.

**Longevity:** Up to 30 years in captivity and around 15 in the wild.

**Activity:** Diurnal. Much of the day is spent foraging for food and grooming.

**Wild Diet:** Omnivorous. Vervet diets include fruit, seeds, buds, leaves, roots, grasses, insects, crustaceans, birds’ eggs and chicks, and other small vertebrates. They are also known to bite into acacia trees to feed on sap.

**Zoo Diet:** Fed once in AM & once in PM to replicate wild feeding habits. Commercial primate chow biscuit, greens, canned primate diet, veggies (potato, corn on cob, lima bean, sweet potato, carrots, okra, onions, leeks, artichokes, parsnip, broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, peppers, squash, celery, turnip, mushrooms, green beans, bok choy), fruits (apple, pear, nectarine, peaches, berries, grapefruit, grapes, cherries, banana, pineapple, papaya, mango, avocado, kiwi, melon), hardboiled egg, browse, vitamin supplements

**Reproduction & Parental Care:** Vervet monkeys are polygynous seasonal breeders with copulation between April and June (depending on geographic location) and birth after the rainy season when food is plentiful. One young is born (rarely twins) after gestation of 5.5 months. Females reach sexual maturity at four years of age and typically give birth for the first time round five years old. Males reach sexual maturity around five years old but won’t mate until they reach full adult weight at closer to six years old. Females are attentive mothers and young are weaned at about 8.5 months old. Once young males reach sexual maturity, they migrate to a new group neighboring their former group, usually with a sibling or peer (presumably for protection from males in the resident group). Males don’t disperse far enough for the effects of inbreeding risk to be washed out. Females will remain in their natal group.

**Behavior, Ecology & Adaptations:** Vervet monkeys are highly social, living in troops of up to 50 individuals. Within a troop, there are separate dominance hierarchies for each sex. Males establish a hierarchy by age, tenure in group, fighting abilities, and allies. Female hierarchies depend on maternal social status.

Within social groups, mother-offspring and sibling groups act as distinct groups. The sibling groups interaction is typically very playful and supportive, although there is some competition for resources providing post-weaning from the mother (i.e. grooming time). Grooming is important to reinforce social bonds within a group and monkeys will spend several hours a day on this task.
Vervet monkeys communicate with facial expressions, posturing, and vocalizations. Their calls are grouped into three main categories: wanting, aggression and alarm. Wanting calls that are medium-intensity with drawn-out gargles serve to attract infants to their mothers. Chattering is used to show aggression or irritation. Alarm calls are high pitched squeals signify distress and communicate the presence of a predator. There are different alarm calls for different predators and the monkeys will respond accordingly to avoid these threats.

Vervet monkeys move on all 4 limbs both on the ground and in trees. They are capable of jumping from tree to tree but will usually descend from trees head first to move to the next. On the ground, they will gallop and forage for food. Trees are used for food, sleeping sites, and shelter from danger. Vervets are also able to swim.

Vervet monkeys are preyed upon by leopards, large constrictor snakes, raptors, and baboons. They also play an important role in the ecosystem as a seed disperser. When consuming fruits, seeds are ingested and pass through the monkeys’ digestive system. For humans, vervet monkeys were used for scientific research beginning in the 1950s. They have been used to study high blood pressure, AIDS, and are still used to produce vaccines for polio and smallpox.

**Conservation**

Humans are a threat to vervet monkeys as they are often seen as a nuisance species. Vervets will steal food and raid crops and are persecuted by poison, traps, and guns by locals. Vervets have also gained popularity as a research animal and are sometimes trapped as a result.

**References**

- CITES; [https://cites.org/eng/node/20651](https://cites.org/eng/node/20651) November 2018.

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