



Vervet or Green Monkey

Taxonomy

Order: Primates

Family: Cercopithecidae

Species: *Chlorocebus sabaesus* (Linnaeus)

Synonyms: *Cercopithecus aethiops sabaesus* (L.),

Chlorocebus aethiops sabaesus (L.)

Summary

Chlorocebus sabaesus monkeys were introduced to the West Indies in the late 17th century on slave trade ships travelling from West Africa. Initially brought over as pets, or as items to be traded and sold, the monkeys have since adapted well to life on these islands where they are sometimes considered a pest species.



Chlorocebus sabaesus female with baby © BY-SA 4.0

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Biology

Vervet monkeys feed and travel on the ground during the day and retreat to trees to sleep at night. They tolerate a wide variety of habitats, their only limitation being water availability and the presence of sleeping trees. In the West Indies, vervet monkeys inhabit both densely populated areas in urban habitats as well as highly cultivated agricultural habitats.

They are omnivorous, eating leaves, gum, seeds, nuts, grasses, fungi, fruit, berries, flowers, buds, shoots, invertebrates, bird eggs, birds, lizards, rodents, and other vertebrate prey.

Distribution in Caribbean

British Virgin Islands (Tortola), Saint Kitts, Nevis, Saint Martin, Barbados and Anguilla.



Pathway of Entry

Natural dispersal: they will not naturally disperse between islands but will disperse freely within an island where food and shelter is available.

Accidental/deliberate dispersal: spread to other islands via boat, escaped pests or being intentionally released.

Impact

In Africa and some West Indian Islands, the monkey is a frequent agricultural pest and raids orchards, cereal and vegetable crops and sugar cane plantations. They will also steal from houses, gardens, campsites and picnic spots. Farmers in Barbados have found the crops most damaged by monkeys include corn, sweet potato, bananas, mangos, papayas, guavas, cherries, cucumbers, peanuts and yams. In St Kitts, monkey populations have increased drastically in recent years, with population estimates of up to 60,000. On St. Kitts where they are reported to feed on bird's eggs and it has been suggested that they have been thought to be partly responsible in for the extinction of the Puerto Rican bullfinch, *Loxigilla portoricensis grandis*.



Chlorocebus aethiops, Ethiopia © BY-SA4.0
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Chlorocebus sabaesus young adult © BY-SA 4.0
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Description

Vervet monkey males are larger than females, with an average weight of 5.5 kg and average head to the base of the tail length of 49 cm. Females are on average 4.1 kg and 42.6 cm by comparison. Both sexes of *Ch. aethiops sabaesus* typically have golden-green fur with pale hands and feet. The tip of the tail is golden yellow as are the backs of the thighs and cheek whiskers. They do not have a distinguishing band of fur on the brow, present in other species, and males have a pale blue scrotum.

Infant vervets are born with black natal coats and pink faces that gradually change to the adult coloration by 12 weeks of age.

They have the characteristic cheek-pouches like other members of the superfamily Cercopithecoidea which allow them to forage and store food to be eaten later. Lifespan of captive green monkeys is generally 11 to 13 years, lifespan of wild monkeys is difficult to calculate, particularly in the West Indies where they don't have any natural predators.

Similar Species

There are now at least six species or sub-species* of vervets recognized, but often in the literature, they are ubiquitously referred to as *Chlorocebus aethiops*. The species/subspecies *aethiops*, *pygerythrus*, *tantalus* and *cynosuros* differ from *sabaesus* in having a yellow to greenish-brown coat with white undersides and white fur on their brows and cheeks. They have bluish skin on their abdomens while their faces, hands and feet are all black-skinned. Males have a brighter blue scrotal area. There is some variation in fur length and coloration among the species. Bale Mountains vervets, *Ch. djamdjamensis*, have much longer, thicker fur than other species and their fur is darker brown. They have dark grey hands and feet and white beards and there is only a faint white brow band. Genetic analyses have revealed that Caribbean vervet monkeys are most closely related to *Ch. sabaesus* from Senegal, Mauritania, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.

There are no other species of wild monkey in Anguilla that they could be confused with.

* based on molecular analysis there are five sub-species, not full species of vervet (Warren et. al., 2015)

Further Information:

<http://pin.primate.wisc.edu/factsheets/entry/vervet>

https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Chlorocebus_sabaesus/