

# SECOND CHANCE

At being **WILD**

One person making a difference for Africa's primates



By Danielle Boobyer

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Hello!

I love to share stories and information that change our lives.

This is the story about an amazing woman named Silke. She and I met via Facebook about two years ago.

Since then I have followed her work as she rescues, restores to health and then releases primates, in particular vervet monkeys, back into the wilds.

Literally she gives them a second chance at living wild as nature intended it.

Thank you Danielle for contributing your writing talents once again by sharing Silke's story so masterfully.

This is a free publication please pass it along.

*Margrit*

## SECOND CHANCE at Being WILD



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## Helping monkeys hold on to life

Bambelela, meaning “to hold on” in Zulu, couldn’t be a more appropriate name for Silke Von Eynern’s wildlife rehabilitation centre in South Africa.

The centre provides a safe haven for injured or orphaned vervet monkeys (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*), who are holding onto life.

Life isn’t easy for vervet monkeys in South Africa, with the primate species facing a daily battle for survival in their conflict with humans. Vervet monkeys are indiscriminately shot with pellet guns or poisoned by many farmers, who see them as pests. Wide open spaces in which vervets once roamed free are disappearing as human urban areas expand, bringing with them hazards like electrical pylons, roads and dogs which can cause death or injury to primates.

Silke and the Bambelela centre nurse orphaned or injured monkeys back to health and enter them into a lengthy rehabilitation programme in which they join a social group (or ‘troop’), with the aim of releasing them back into the wild. Since 2008, the centre has successfully rehabilitated eight monkey troops, which are now living in safe release sites. Silke and her centre’s rescue and rehabilitation work is vital for vervet monkey populations, which are dwindling as the primates continue to come into conflict with humans and urban life.

## Misunderstood monkeys battling for survival

Although vervets have been no longer classified as “vermin” in South Africa’s Limpopo province since April 2005, attitudes to the species have changed and the monkeys still face persecution as pests. Vervets are now protected by both African and international law, but they continue to suffer painful deaths or injury as they are poisoned or shot with pellet guns. As well as rescue and rehabilitation, another key part of Silke and Bамbelela’s work involves educating local people about the misconceptions of vervet monkeys as pests and how the primates are actually important for our ecosystems. Free-roaming vervet monkeys play important ecological roles, creating a balanced environment from which we all benefit.

Among the ecosystem services vervet monkeys provide are seed dispersal and germination. Seeds form a large part of the species’ diet. When the monkeys digest the seeds they excrete them away from the area where they were eaten, which disperses them. Some seeds also have a chemical coating which prevents them from germinating until it has been broken down. During digestion, the seeds pass through the monkeys’ digestive tracts and their stomach acids break down the coating, allowing the seeds to germinate once excreted by the primate. Vervet monkeys also act as pollination agents. When they feed on the nectar of flowers, the pollen grains stick to their fur and the pollen is then deposited at the next flower which the monkey visits to feed.

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As we cause populations of our primate cousins to decline, we reduce our access to these vital ecosystem services. Persecuting vervets as pests isn't the only direct way in which we are causing vervet populations to decline. Wild monkeys are also captured for the illegal pet trade, bushmeat, medical research and use in traditional medicines.

Humans are also decimating vervet populations indirectly. Wide open spaces which were once the monkeys' territories are being lost as urban areas expand. Urban environments leave the monkeys exposed to hazards on a daily basis while navigating the territories in which their ancestors once roamed free. Vervets are killed or maimed by dogs, vehicles, electricity pylons, poison and guns in urban areas. Silke and Bamblela step in to rescue monkeys left seriously injured and, as well as the helpless babies left orphaned when their mothers are killed.

## How Silke and Bambelela help vervet monkeys

The Bambelela centre is famous for its work with vervet monkeys, giving primates injured by human-wildlife conflict a second chance at being wild. However, Silke's centre didn't start out with this aim. Bambelela was founded in December 2003 in the Waterberg district, part of South Africa's Limpopo province. Silke emigrated to South Africa from Germany with her husband in 1990. After his death in 1997, she dedicated her life to conserving South Africa's wildlife and the Bambelela centre was born. When Silke and Rodney Williams opened the sanctuary, their initial plan was to reintroduce game like wildebeest in the Waterberg. But they soon realized rescuing and rehabilitating animals to release them back into the wild was their true calling. The first animals Silke and Rodney cared for were orphaned antelopes. Word of the sanctuary's rehabilitation work started to spread, with local people and vets starting to call on the Bambelela centre to help wildlife in need.

Bambelela's special work with vervets began when Silke and the team's hearts were touched by a young female monkey. She was left abandoned in a cage on a property in the local area and brought to Bambelela by an estate agent. Just a few days later, other infant vervet monkeys started to be brought to the sanctuary. These experiences with vervet monkeys drove Silke to find out more about the species and all stages in their care, including how to handle and feed them, build

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suitable enclosures or camps and prepare them for release back into the wild. She received assistance and mentoring from the late Rita Miljo, a baboon conservationist at the Centre for Animal Rehabilitation and Education (C.A.R.E), who tragically died in a fire in 2012.

Bambelela evolved to meet the need for a centre in the area which took in injured and abandoned vervet monkeys and it is now home to over 150 of the primates. Today Bambelela's work is mainly focused on vervet monkey rehabilitation, which involves caring for orphaned and injured individuals, forming social groups and finding suitable release sites. Silke offers a place of refuge to vervet monkeys, whether it is orphaned babies found clinging to their dead mothers or vervets of all ages who have been shot, poisoned or otherwise injured. Recovery takes a long time, with it taking 3-5 years in a controlled environment to form a well-adjusted troop of compatible monkeys ready for release. During this lengthy recovery process, the monkeys are important education tools for local communities, schools and families who visit the centre to find out about how the monkeys live, their importance for the natural environment and how to help with the species' survival.

“It's a fantastic feeling seeing a troop of monkeys you have saved and rehabbed released into the bush,” Silke says, but “unfortunately not all of our monkeys can be given another chance of freedom.” Bambelela is home to several small groups of vervet monkeys who due to factors like age, disability, injury or abuse are unable to be rehabilitated. Although



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they will never be released to the wild, Bamblela provides these vervets with love, care, food and safety. “We firmly believe that even when a monkey loses an arm and a leg, is blind or has been caught in a snare that it shouldn't be euthanized, we have living proof that these monkeys can not only survive but adapt to their personal situation and live a near normal life, playing, grooming, enjoying life and even mothering,” Silke says.

### NOTE:

Vervet monkeys are not the only primate species the centre works with, Bamblela also helps rescue the lesser bush baby and the chacma baboon, two of the five primate families native to South Africa.

Over the last 10 years, Bamblela has also successfully rescued and rehabilitated a range of other species, including: zebra, rhinoceros, porcupines, warthogs and kites.

## Case study: Thandi, the loved vervet monkey

Thandi was just four-months-old when she and her mother were hit by a car while crossing a road in the Waterberg area in 2007. Her mother had died shortly after the collision, with Thandi (as she was later named) still clinging to her body. The baby, still calling for her mother, had survived the accident but was left with a broken arm and a badly-torn lip. The vet treating Thandi called the Bamblela centre for assistance. Thandi's arm was cast and bandaged, with homeopathic treatments used to treat her lip.

Bamblela named the baby monkey Thandi, a Xhosa word meaning “nurturing love”. Thandi's mother had given her life protecting her and the centre continued to give her love and care she needed for her wounds to heal. Surrounded by other orphaned monkeys at the centre, Thandi thrived and grew into a healthy, confident young monkey. When she was a year old, Thandi entered the rehabilitation programme and was successfully integrated into one of the centre's social groups, the Rafiki troop, all formed from previously orphaned or injured vervets the centre had rehabilitated. Thandi established herself as a middle-ranking monkey in the troop's complex social hierarchy, although it took four years for a well-functioning troop to be formed where all monkeys accepted each other. Among Thandi's friends was baby Alfie, who was rescued from life as a pet in the city of Pretoria.

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A couple of years after her rescue, Thandi fell pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl who the centre called Thandeka, which means “the one whom we love” in the Zulu language. Bamblela gave Thandi and her family their freedom and the chance to be wild animals again when the troop was released on a Bushveld farm in South Africa. With your help Silke and her centre can help more baby vervets like Thandi and Thandeka.

### **You can Help Silke give monkeys a second chance at being wild**

Rescuing and rehabilitating the constant stream of vervet monkeys and other animals who come through Bambelela’s doors isn’t cheap. Silke has not just dedicated her life to caring for South Africa’s wildlife, she has also decided her finances. Silke’s R9.5 million savings have been used over the last decade for building and maintaining the facilities, as well as the general running of the centre and animal care, including food and medical expenses. Silke’s savings have now been used up, with Bambelela relying on donations, income from its on-site tourist accommodation and the ‘Guardian Angel’ virtual vervet monkey adoption programme. The sanctuary is currently running at a monthly loss of R10,000 - R30,000. Donations are vitally important in helping the sanctuary to continue its rescue and rehabilitation work.

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To help Silke continue to give vervet monkeys like Thandi a second chance at being wild, you can make a tax-deductible donation via Nikela. [*100% of your gift goes to Silke's work.*]

With your help, Nikela can provide Silke with the funds to continue her rescue and rehabilitation work, as well as educate local people to treat vervet monkeys with the respect they deserve. You'll be kept updated on Silke's inspirational rescue and rehabilitation work, including the latest troop releases, knowing you played a part in helping these monkeys get a second chance at living free.

To **DONATE** VISIT <http://www.nikela.org/portfolio/silke-rescue-babies-vervet-monkeys-baboons>



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