

# Colobus Monkeys and the Tourist Trade

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The beautiful colobus monkey is not yet an endangered species but the author fears that it may become one if the trade in colobus skins continues at its present level. He describes a short survey he made in Kenya and Tanzania, where colobus rugs are a popular item in tourist shops; in only two months he either saw or was told about stocks of skins representing over 27,000 colobus monkeys killed. He suggests that full protection should be given now—before the animal has to go in the Red Data Book—with a ban on all trade in colobus skins until populations can be assessed.

The East African black and white colobus monkey *Colobus guereza* is among the most striking of all mammals. Its mantle of long white hairs, growing on a mat of short black hairs, joins with the bushy white tail to form a pattern that has attracted man for centuries. Colobus skins have long been prized in Africa and in other parts of the world as well. Colobus furs became very popular in the United States and Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, and these new markets combined with the introduction of firearms led to large-scale slaughter. In 1892, the peak year of exploitation, 175,000 skins reached Europe alone, and since these had to be in almost perfect condition, many more animals must have been killed. After 1892, the annual take declined, supposedly because of the decimation of colobus in many areas. Ten years later the trade petered out, but not before some 2,000,000 skins had been marketed (Sanderson, 1957).

Having never seen colobus furs for sale in the United States or Europe, I imagined that the demand for these animals no longer existed and that the remaining populations were not being persecuted. It therefore came as a surprise when, on a recent visit to East Africa, I found large quantities of colobus monkey rugs on sale in tourist shops. These are made by sewing together triangular

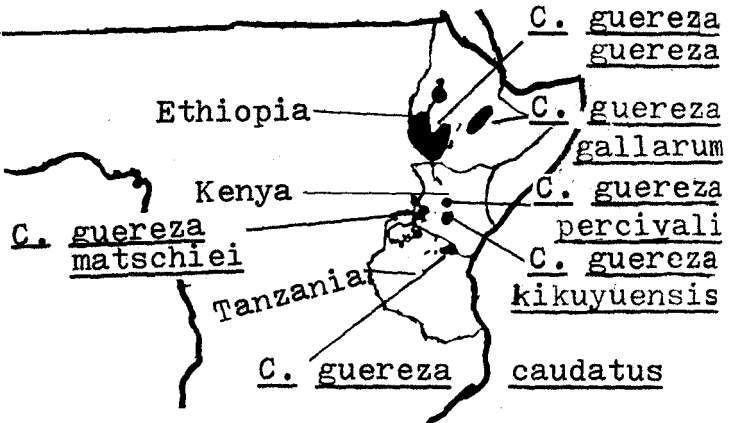


patches of back fur that include the long mantle of white hairs, and they appear to be popular tourist items.

To obtain a rough estimate of how many monkeys were killed to support this trade, I made a brief survey of some 70 tourist shops in Nairobi, Mombasa, Dar-es-Salaam and Arusha (August-September 1972). None of the shops in Tanzania sold colobus skins (indeed, few if any wild animal skins are sold in Tanzania), but 24 of 60 in Nairobi and Mombasa had them in stock. The number of rugs on display in each store was counted and inquiries were made as to prices, origin of skins and number in stock in addition to what was on display. The following information resulted:

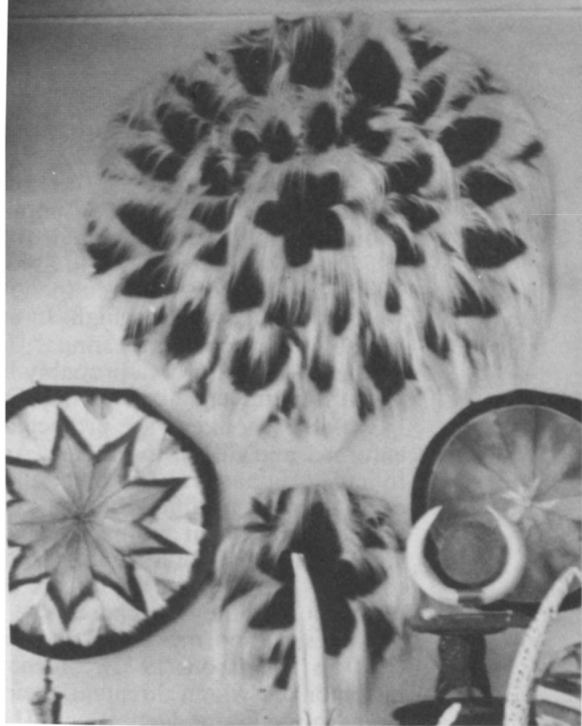
1. The size of the rugs varied from five to 49 skins, five-skin ones being the commonest. Prices ranged from 160 to 375 Kenya shillings for the five-skin rugs; rugs of 15 to 49 skins varied from 650 to 2000 Kenya shillings (17 K.sh.—£1, 7 K.sh.—US \$1.00).
2. A total of 5002 monkeys went into making up the rugs on display in the Kenyan cities, 1530 of them in 11 stores in Mombasa and 3472 in 13 stores in Nairobi. Colobus are relatively small animals and at least five are used to make an attractive rug. Other small mammals like hyraxes are sometimes used, but they occur much less frequently in tourist shops.
3. Some of the stores had many more skins in stock than on display, although most were reluctant to specify how many. However, one Mombasa dealer told me he sold approximately 1000 five-skin rugs per year to firms in the United States (especially in Baltimore, Maryland) and Germany. Another dealer in Nairobi had 15,000 single skins and 500 five-skin rugs in stock in addition to 626 skins in his store. Thus these two dealers alone accounted for 23,000 monkeys. Undisplayed stock in other stores could well have been comparable.
4. The Kenya Game Department allows the sale of these skins, since they are all stamped with the Game Department seal. In addition, anyone purchasing a skin receives a permit, issued by the owner of the tourist shop but prestamped with the Game Department seal, allowing the item to be taken out of Kenya.
5. Most of the skins reportedly come from Ethiopia. However, the dealer with 15,000 skins claimed that his stock came from the Wajiri District in northern Kenya.

Ranges of the six East African and Ethiopian races of *Colobus guereza*. One other race, *dodingae*, is found in the southern Sudan. Two races, *uellensis* and *occidentalis*, are found further to the west, with *uellensis* just reaching into Uganda. Several races of a closely related species, *C. angolensis*, are also found in Tanzania but do not appear to be much affected by the fur trade, at least not in Tanzania. (Map modified from Rahm, 1970)





Thirty-eight colobus skins have gone into this large rug *top right* photographed by the author in a tourist shop in Nairobi. The small one below it used five. The rugs on either side are of antelope skins.



6. Usually only the larger tourist stores have colobus rugs and skins in stock.
7. A small number of blue monkey and Sykes's monkey skins *Cercopithecus mitis* are also sold (137 in Nairobi), but there were no baboon *Papio cynocephalus* or vervet *Cercopithecus aethiops* skins.

This survey indicates that at least 27,500 colobus monkeys had been killed to produce the goods and stocks that I accounted for. The undisputed stock of other dealers could easily have been equal or greater in size. It was unfortunately not possible to determine the annual turnover of skins, but the 1000 five-skin rugs exported per year by just one Mombasa dealer gives some indication.

*Colobus guereza* cannot yet be considered a rare species. However, since it is strictly arboreal, its habitat and range is rather restricted in East Africa. Although two races of *C. guereza* (*occidentalis* and *uellensis*) are fairly widespread in Nigeria, southern Cameroons, Gabon, the Congo and the Sudan, five of the seven other races, found primarily in East Africa and Ethiopia, occur only in montane forest (*guereza*, *gallarum*, *percivali* and *caudatus*; *dodingae* is also restricted to montane forest but it is found in the southern Sudan). Of the remaining two East African forms, *matschiei* also occurs in gallery forest and forest islands and *kikuyuensis* in gallery forest (Rahm, 1970). Such forest habitats are becoming more and more limited as the human population grows.

Estimates of the total colobus monkey population size in Kenya are lacking. However, a short-term survey of the forests in south-

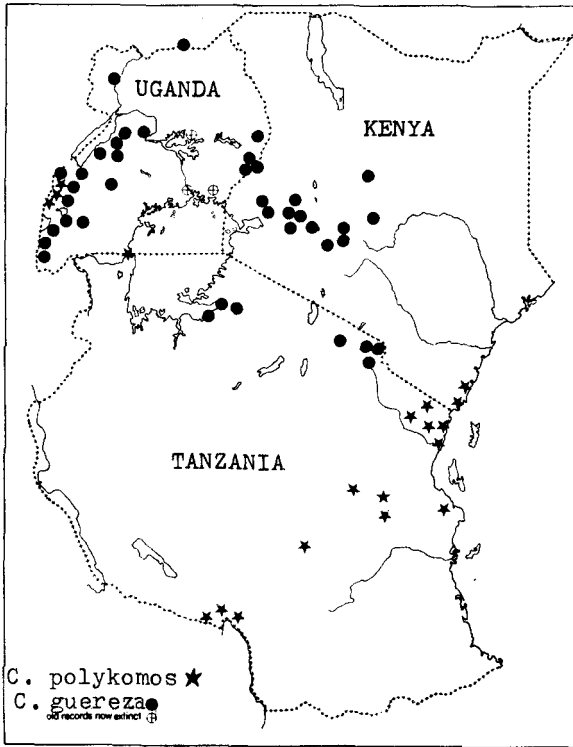
western Ethiopia revealed that the population of *C. guereza* in that area was somewhere between 60,000 and 200,000. Assuming that the maximum density in the south-west is found throughout the forested areas of Ethiopia, a population of 500,000 monkeys for all Ethiopia would be possible (Brown and Urban, 1969, in Harrisson, 1971). Leakey, however, criticised these figures (1970, in Harrisson, 1971); he believed that even the lower figure of 60,000 for the south-west forests may be too high. In any case, the population would not be able to withstand annual losses of tens of thousands of animals—and Ethiopia probably has a much larger population of *C. guereza* than Kenya or the other East African countries (see map).

Colobus monkeys are protected in Kenya, but the law is poorly enforced and full of loopholes. Animals shot in Kenya are claimed to have originated in Ethiopia, and since some skins do enter legally each year, it is difficult to tell legal from illegal. Sometimes the Game Department confiscates skins from illegal hunters, but the stocks are then sold in auction and local dealers get them in the end, together with a valid certificate of ownership that they would not have got had they purchased the skins directly from the poachers. Such a situation makes it easy for smuggling to continue (Leakey, 1970 in Harrisson, 1971). Moreover, farmers are allowed to shoot any monkey which threatens their crops as long as they declare the skins to the Game Department (Leakey, 1970, in Harrisson, 1971). No one checks to see if they came from anywhere near his crops.

Forest officials can also write to the Game Department for permission to shoot colobus that are damaging Forest Department seedlings or employees' crops. Analysis of stomach contents has shown that colobus do not damage crops, but they are incriminated because they are often seen in the company of crop-damaging species like *Cercopithecus mitis*—especially if a profit can be made from the sale of their skins. The Nairobi dealer with 15,000 single skins and 500 five-skin rugs said his stock came from the Wajiri District in northern Kenya; it is doubtful that all 17,500 animals were threatening farmers' crops. Colobus are reportedly also protected in Ethiopia, but as long as a ready market for skins exists in Kenya and as long as smuggling continues to be so easy, the slaughter will certainly continue.

Colobus monkeys are unfortunately rather easy to hunt. Their striking pelage makes them highly visible, even from a moving car. Also they daily defend group space by loud 'croaking' vocalisations, audible for a mile or more, which makes it easy to locate them, and their movement through trees is noisy compared with that of other sympatric primates like *C. mitis*.

Colobus monkeys are still fairly abundant. They can probably resist hunting pressures and habitat destruction for a while, and fortunately some are protected in East African parks. But if the fur trade continues they will probably decrease rapidly, and for this reason I believe that they should be accorded full protection now. The only ways to do this are:



Map showing the distribution of *Colobus guereza* and the closely related *Colobus polykomos* in East Africa (from Kingdon, 1971).

1. make it illegal to sell any colobus skins, however aquired;
2. blacklist the species internationally, at least until sufficient ecological data is available to determine whether or not it can be harvested on a sustained yield basis.

If we wait a decade or so before acting, the black and white colobus may well wind up like the golden lion marmoset *Leontideus rosalia*—reduced to the verge of extinction because of man's greed.

This work was carried out under the tenure of an NSF Graduate Fellowship and was also partially supported by the Hooton Fund of Harvard University and a PHS Grant to the Department of Anthropology at Harvard from the National Institutes of General Medical Sciences, National Institutes of Health. I thank Dr Tyson Roberts and John Fleagle for reading and commenting on an early draft.

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