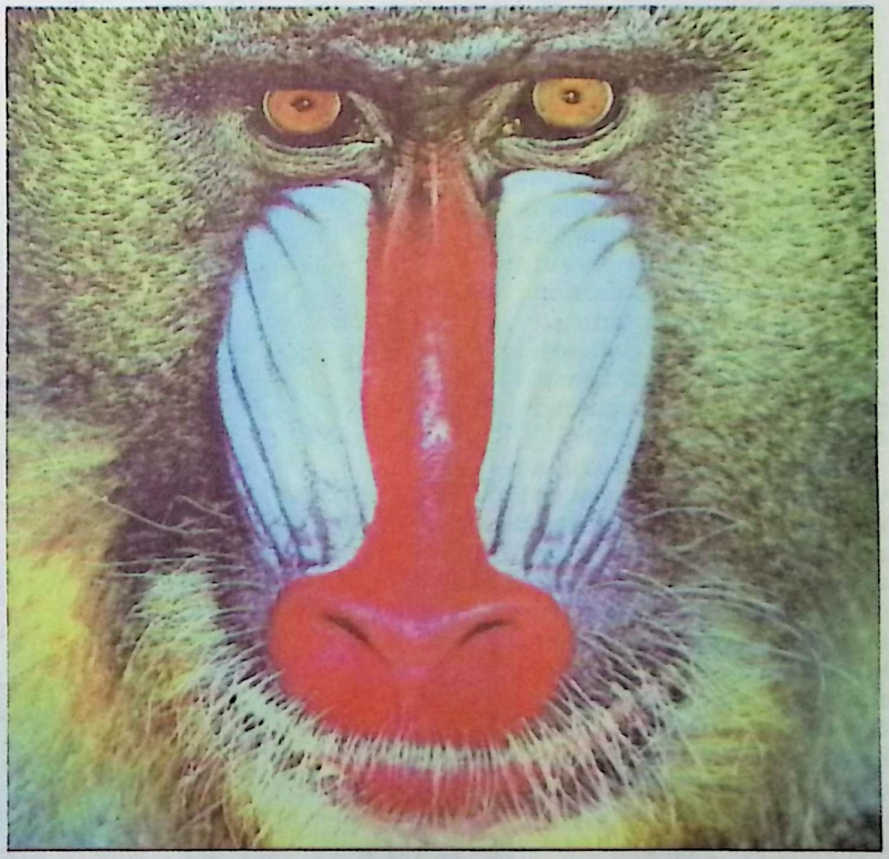
With some trepidation, I asked the camp staff about whether the baboons ever approached visitors. No, they reassured me, not unless you are carrying something that they want i.e. fruit or such like. There was no way I would do that, I thought, trying to reassure myself. But my confidence was shaken a little bit when one of the guides pointed out that it wasn't only a question of whether you were carrying something of interest to monkeys, but also a question of whether they thought you were carrying something! After that, I made sure to be carrying absolutely nothing in my hands.

This mistrust of monkeys has also made me less adventurous when it comes to exploring places like temples in South Asia, which sometimes have resident monkey populations. While the drunken rampage of monkeys at a hill station in India (after tourists were foolish enough to give them alcohol!) may be rare, I have yet to be convinced that temple monkeys are necessarily benign...

Indeed, some time ago, visiting Kathmandu with friends, I was glad to have turned down one particular sightseeing opportunity. A monkey at a nearby temple

Until one fateful day, when it all became too much. One of the monkeys, which was sitting next to my grandmother and taking the food from her hand, suddenly stood up on its hind legs without warning, and walked across to where her aunt was standing. The torrent of abuse suddenly dried up, as the aunt looked at the monkey in sheer terror.



took a dislike to one of my friends, and chased after her, screaming loudly. Luckily, someone managed to distract the monkey, but she was quite shaken by the experience.

Apparently, there is also a temple near Calicut, where the temple priests feed monkeys regular meals. Each day, they sit and eat together, using banana leaves as plates. Most of the monkeys show excessive deference to their leader, and that leader changes quite frequently. There is speculation that the leadership contest of the temple monkeys is decided by some trial of strength (no doubt also involving a degree of cunning). It all sounds suspiciously familiar, and may well explain my mistrust of monkeys - they behave too much like human beings...!

Despite that, one afternoon a lone baboon suddenly appeared on the balcony of my cabin, where I had been happily relaxing with a book. I don't think I have moved that fast in a long time! In a flash, I was safely behind the wire-mesh door of the cabin. The baboon, which looked quite taken aback at my sudden movement, was not reassured by what followed. Determined not to be trapped in the cabin on my own, and terrified by the prospect of a closer encounter if I went back outside, I yelled at the monkey in a desperate attempt to scare it off. The startled baboon, quite rightly divining that this wild-eyed human making primitive sounds was not to be trusted, made itself scarce, bounding off the balcony at a fine clip...