

**The Washington Post**

## **Monkey stumbles into hydroelectric power plant and triggers 4-hour blackout across Kenya**

By [Ben Guarino](#) June 8, 2016, Kenya

When a monkey fell on a transformer at a Kenyan hydroelectric dam, the entire nation lost its electrical power.

Kenya Electricity Generating Company, or KenGen, produces about three-quarters of Kenya's electric energy. Late Tuesday morning, as KenGen wrote on [Facebook](#), a monkey scaled the roof of the company's Gitaru Power Station in central Kenya. The 225-megawatt station is KenGen's largest, generating about 10 percent of the country's electricity thanks to the 100-foot-tall dam holding back the Tana River.

The monkey lost its purchase on the roof of the plant, and it tumbled down to land atop a transformer. What happened next played out like a catastrophic game of transformer dominoes: With a monkey on its back, the first transformer shut off its electrical flow, causing other transformers at the station to trip as well. KenGen said in its statement that "a loss of more than 180 megawatts" at the power station "triggered a national power blackout."

Kenya's blackout lasted for four hours. Business Daily Africa reported that businesses were [the hardest hit](#) by the outage, with many shops relying on local — and comparatively more expensive — electricity from backup generators.

The animal, which appears to be a vervet monkey, survived the incident. “Monkey is alive,” according to KenGen’s [Facebook post](#), “and taken in by [Kenya Wildlife Service].” (The Kenya Wildlife Service’s Nairobi headquarters was unable to confirm the status of the monkey to The Washington Post.)

If it is a vervet monkey, it would not be the first of its species accused of wreaking havoc in the country; in 2007, women in the village of Nachu said they were being harassed by a 300-strong pack of vervet monkeys, the BBC reported. The women had tried to dress like men, as the Kenya Wildlife Service noted that the monkeys seem less afraid of female humans. “But the monkeys can tell the difference and they don’t run away from us and point at our breasts,” Nachu resident Lucy Njeri [told](#) the BBC. “They just ignore us and continue to steal the crops.”

The Kenyan power company described the blackout as an “isolated incident” — but a surprising number of critters have been blamed for power outages.

In April, The Washington Post [reported](#) that a weasel put the Large Hadron Collider, the world’s largest particle accelerator, out of commission. The collider had previously been shut down in 2009 — possibly by a wandering bird, which was also apocryphally blamed for dropping a hunk of baguette somewhere within the machine’s electric guts.

According to the American Public Power Association’s [Squirrel Index](#), each month about 2 to 6 out of every 10,000 customers lose power due

to squirrels, peaking in the summer. Birds, raccoons, snakes, rats and weasel-like creatures known as martens have been [incriminated](#) in power outages worldwide.

Not all animals, however, deserve to be fingered for chewing on wires. In the wake of a California blackout that left 45,000 people without power last year, some customers [speculated](#) that the dead squirrel found at a Pacific Gas and Electric Company station was rather too tidy a culprit. And contrary to a widely circulated [YouTube video](#), sharks do not regularly devour Internet cables, the International Cable Protection Committee reported in a [2015 review](#) of cable failure records. Though sharks might nibble on a cable and then swim away, ship anchors and fish trawlers are much more likely to destroy the underwater communication lines. No shark or fish has caused a cable to fail since 2006, the ICPC said, following adoption of tougher cable sheaths.

At Gitaru, KenGen said it had erected electric fences around the station to keep away what it called “marauding wild animals.” But the barriers were not, apparently, sophisticated enough to foil a determined primate.