

Module # 2 - Component # 3



The Comfort Zone Concept & Man - Eaters

Objectives

To enable Field Guides to fully understand the "Comfort Zone Concept", how it varies between species and its consequences to animal behaviour.

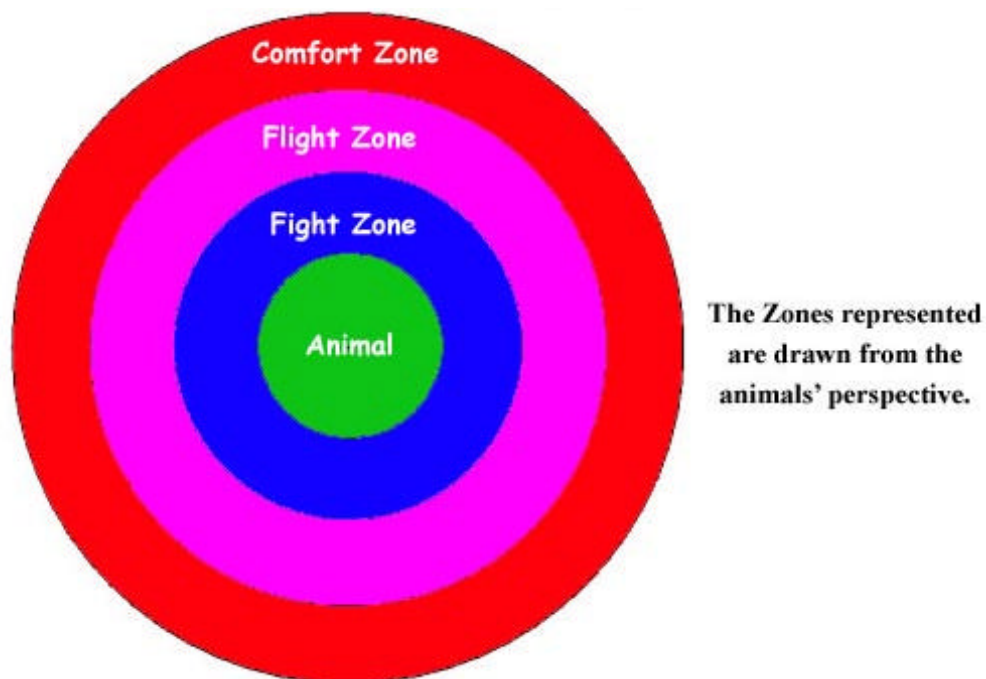
Expected Outcomes

At the conclusion of this Component, learners should be able to:

- Place the three theoretical 'zones of comfort' around any given species in a variety of scenarios.
- Predict an animals behaviour, when approached, but remaining outside of its Comfort Zone
- Predict an animal behaviour when its comfort zone is breached.
- Recognise when they have intruded into an animals' Flight Zone' and predict its behaviour at such an event.
- Identify when they are about to invade an animals' Fight Zone', predict its behaviour at such an event and know how to avoid this scenario.
- Deduce aggressive and warning behaviour patterns.
- Appreciate that each individual will react differently from others of the same species, and will react differently each time to the same stimulus.
- Understand the concept of man - eaters.
- Explain the theoretical phenomenon of the Man-eaters of the Kruger National Park.

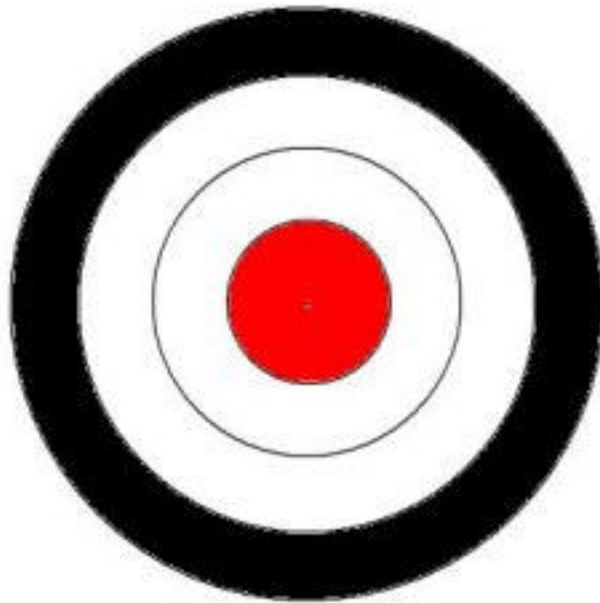
Introduction

Generally speaking animals have three psychological zones around them. The size and shape of these zones is dependant on the species, sex and individual nature of the individual animal, with adjustments made as the mood changes. Animals rely on their senses to warn them of intrusions into these zones, so conditions that inhibit these senses will also affect them. As a rule animals will be aware of a human presence and will move off long before the human is aware of them.



If an approach is made so that both the human and the animal become aware of one another at the same time, the animal will react in one of four different ways:

The Comfort Zone



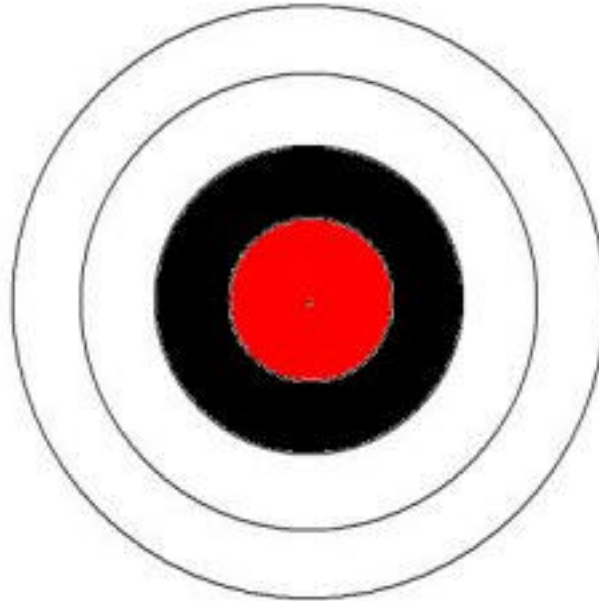
- 1) If the human is outside the comfort zone, the animal will generally continue its activity undisturbed, but will keep an eye open for further movements. This is the area where the professional and ethical guide operates, as the guest experience is safe and the sighting is of an animal behaving naturally.
- 2) If the comfort zone is intruded upon, the animal will move off to try to maintain the distance. The ethical guide will then stop moving to allow the animal to relax and continue its activity without further disturbance.

2. The Flight Zone



- 3) If the flight zone is entered the animal will flee without hesitation or start giving warning signs to indicate that it feels threatened. While this often happens without intention, the ethical guide will try to prevent it. The only option is to back off as safely and as speedily as possible and to maintain a safe distance from the animal while moving around it.

The Fight Zone



- 4) If the fight zone is entered the animal has no other option than to attack to defend itself. This is the most dangerous situation, and one that a professional guide will try to avoid at all costs

Aggressive & Warning Behaviour Patterns

When an animal is unsure of what action to take due to **heightened psychological stress levels** it will often display **displacement behaviour**, this entails a fairly common or normal action that is carried out but is not done properly. E.g. Elephants may appear to be feeding, but no food is transferred to the mouth, or a lion may start grooming itself, but does not actually do it properly. These are often the **first signs** that an animal is **uneasy** with the presence of humans.

Warning behaviour takes on many forms and is intended to show the intruder that their **presence is not wanted** and to **prevent a closer approach**. As most animal communication is visual, many of the warnings involve body posture, facial gestures or the lifting of body parts, displaying of defensive weapons or pilo-erection.

Vocalizations or expelling air to produce a hiss or spit are more intense and designed to **show acute displeasure**. Kicking up dust and destroying vegetation are overt displacement signs and are used for the same reason.

It is imperative for a guide to be **able to recognize** these signs in all animals so that the least amount of pressure is put on them. In particular the understanding of dangerous animal behaviour is essential to stay out of a dangerous confrontation which may be lethal to either a human or the animal. While the basic fundamentals of animal behaviour can be learned theoretically, the best way to get to know the signs is by observation and experience.

(See the Module # 1 for a general overview of specific animal's behaviour)

Conclusion

Obviously each species and in fact **each individual will react differently**. Animals may have become **habituated** and accustomed to the presence of people or may be inherently **aggressive**. There are no hard and fast rules here whatsoever. Many a field guide has gotten themselves into a dangerous situation because they felt that they '*knew*' that animal, and '*what it was going to do*' having encountered it frequently.

Just because a specific individual acted in the **same fashion repeatedly**, does not mean that it will continue to do so. There are a multitude of factors that may be **influencing its behaviour** on any specific day.

The only thing that a field guide can rely on, is an animal's **unpredictability** – expect it and you'll be able to handle the resulting situation.

Man - Eaters

It is possibly due to the fact that Africa is reasonably under populated that **man-eaters are not as common in Africa as in Asia**. African man-eaters are possibly **not as well reported** due to the fact that for most of the rural populations such deaths are a fact of life and communication is limited. A lot of so-called cases of man-eating is also mixed up in ritual sacrifices, cults, and the belief in spirits taking on animal forms.

Lions, and more rarely **leopards** have been recorded as being man-eaters, while **spotted hyaena** usually maim without killing. **Crocodiles** too have been responsible, but as they consider humans as natural prey the shock effect of crocodile attacks seems to be less acute when reported in the media.

Quite why some animals become man-eaters is uncertain, it is certainly **not a natural behaviour pattern**. In some cases the animal may become, due to age or injury, unable to hunt its normal prey effectively. Hunger may drive them to attack and eat humans which are far easier to catch and kill.

On occasion, human activities such as wars may lead to an **outbreak of man-eating as human corpses are left lying around and are scavenged upon**. Most predators will take an **easy meal** when available and the transfer from dead people to living ones is reasonably simple. In areas where natural prey species have been decimated by over-hunting or drought, man-eating has occurred when **starvation forced** the local cat population to turn to humans as the only available prey.

Many man-eating lions are single animals and very often in good health. Some reported cases are:

Lion / Pride	Number of confirmed Human kills	Country
Tsavo (Coalition of two young males known as the Ghost & The Darkness)	28	Kenya
<i>Namvelieza</i> (The cunning one)	43	?
<i>Chambisi</i> male	67	Zambia
<i>Chienge</i> Charlie	90	Zambia
<i>Golis</i> Mountains male	100	Somalia
<i>Mporokse</i> Pride	1000 victims in 10 years	?
<i>Njombe</i> Pride	2000 victims in 25 years	Tanzania

"In 1932, another famous series of attacks commenced in Tanzania near the southern town of Njombe.

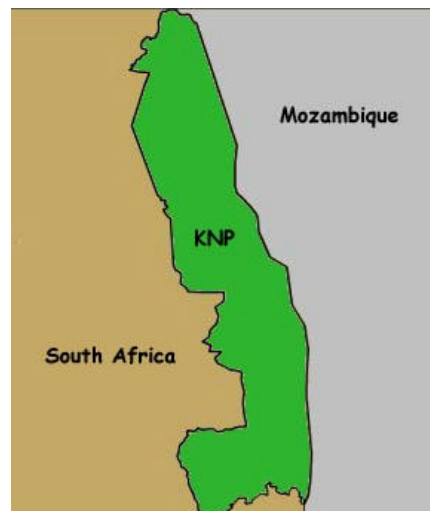
It took until 1947 to kill the final 15 lions from the pride and by this time over 1,000 people had been killed, with some being eaten. The lions of Njombe were a particularly interesting case as there seemed no obvious reason why they should start attacking man; their normal prey was in abundance and the cats were healthy.

Man-eating leopards are rare, but generally are males in their prime. Interestingly their individual 'scores' seem to be higher than those of lions, perhaps because of their relative size and they are more secretive by nature.

Man Eaters in The Kruger National Park

There has been much **speculation** about the status of man-eating lions in the Kruger National Park. The official view from Park authorities is that it has occurred in the past but is no longer a phenomenon. Therefore it must be stressed that what follows are **unconfirmed reports** based largely on **hearsay** and **anecdotal** reports.

The man-eating lion in the KNP are **not hunting tourists**. They are hunting **illegal immigrants** from **Mozambique**, who choose to venture through the Park as a means of entering South Africa, as the 2 countries' common border is the Kruger.



Some reports have indicated that when a pride is found to have killed these people they are **summarily destroyed**. This follows the thought that once a lion eats a human they won't go back to hunting game, the inference is that they get a **'taste' for us**. This is **false**, the only reason why we may become preferred prey, is that we are:

- 1) Easier to catch
- 2) Easier to eat

Whether or not certain lions become fixated on us as prey and refuse to hunt their natural quarry is still a matter of **conjecture**.

One other **unconfirmed report** concerns certain individual lions that exclusively hunt in the **power line corridors of the Park**. It is well known by authorities that the Mozambique illegals use these same corridors as a means of traversing the Park in a relatively straight line so as not to get lost. Now whether the lions are staying in these areas to **catch Mozambiquans** or simply **normal prey** in less dense bush is another matter still to be concluded.