

# IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS

## INTRODUCTION

The areas where we will be running do not have big 5 present however all wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous, especially those that are wounded, pursued, hunted and annoyed. Whilst we do not anticipate you will encounter any of the animals in this pamphlet there is always the chance therefore it is good to be aware.

Because of their size and ability to inflict mortal wounds, some animals should be treated with much more caution than others. In the particular estates there is the possibility of these encounters and particular caution should be taken in an environment where there are hyena, hippo, crocodile and leopard.

Whilst humans have an advantage in their ability to think and rationalize, wild animals act instinctively. They also generally move much faster than humans, and have better hearing, smell and alertness. Most animals also have the added advantage of being able to 'blend' into their surroundings and in addition predators such as lions, hyena and crocodiles have far superior eyesight to other animals and humans.

In most cases, conflict situations between people and wild animals occurs when there is lack of knowledge, lazy alertness, and when humans behave carelessly. Show respect to wildlife by not initiating any contact, and keep alert at all times. Should you come into contact with wild animals, respond in an informed, measured and confident manner. It is essential for you to gain knowledge and understanding of the habitats and behaviour of dangerous animals and it is equally important for you to familiarise yourself with the various 'reactions' that most wild animals will display in a contact situation.

The advice given in this pamphlet will help to give you knowledge about some potentially dangerous wild animals and will give you advice on how to respond in the event of an accidental confrontation. However never test or provoke wild animals as they don't always conform to general characteristic behaviour and there are always exceptions to the rule.

## POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS

This section gives general information about a few potentially dangerous animals that occur in the areas that we will be running. It will give you information on how to recognize danger signals and recommended way in which to respond in an animal/human conflict situation.

### LEOPARD

Leopard are seldom seen and have excellent camouflage. They are predominately nocturnal but may be seen during the day, hunting or sunning on rocks. Leopards like to lie up in rocky places and in trees, and will sometimes frequent caves. They cover a wide area when hunting. They move particularly silently and are extremely dangerous when wounded and will attack without hesitation and take refuge in trees when cornered.

Leopard, usually shy away from humans, and will not become aggressive unless threatened or provoked. Stumbling into a female with cubs can also invoke a dangerous situation. When attacking, however, they can cause considerable damage in a matter of seconds and disappear in a flash. They will attack any animal they can overpower, but feed mainly on baboon, nyala, bushbuck monkeys and other small mammals.

If you see a leopard and are not walking towards it, continue to walk and do not look at it or stand still. If it realises that it has been seen it might become threatened and attack if close. Should you encounter a leopard and it warns you with a grunting noise, retreat slowly, moving sideways and away rather than directly backwards, and don't stare at it. Try not to frighten the leopard and don't throw anything at it. A leopard charges very fast and low on the ground, and

will embrace its victim, with claws extended and full use will be made of the powerful dew claws. The victim is then mauled with teeth and all four clawed feet, and the killing bite is normally directed at the back of the head or neck or the throat.

## **IF YOU ENCOUNTER A LEOPARD DO NOT LOOK AT IT, RETREAT SLOWLY MOVING SIDWAYS AND AWAY**

It is more than likely that leopard will be walked past at close quarters and not be seen. Leopards store their kills in trees and it is advisable not to interfere with these kills. They are active, wary and cunning and are formidable adversaries when cornered but the chances are that they will “let you be” if you are minding your own business!!

### **HIPPO**

Hippo may be found in any large river or swamp and open water. They are known to travel many kilometres overland during the rainy season and will end up settling in small dams where no hippo have ever occurred before – so beware. Hippo are predominately nocturnal, sleeping during the day in the water or on partially submerged sandbanks, usually with their heads and backs protruding from the water.

They leave the water during the early evening to feed and may wander many kilometres to graze. Hippo are particularly dangerous at night on footpaths and built-up areas where people stumble into them accidentally, as they are extremely difficult to see at night without a powerful torch. In winter and in undisturbed areas they may graze during the day. So in hippo country be aware of hippo day and night.

They have good hearing and sense of smell and reasonable eye-sight. They are animals of habit and set tracks or paths in and out of the water. When disturbed they head for deep water to seek protection. As a rule, if not disturbed, they will mind their own business but can be bad-tempered and occasionally attack boats.

Hippo are extremely fleet of foot, and will outpace humans. They move very quietly and can be very dangerous if encountered suddenly. When a grazing hippo is disturbed, it is dangerous to be between it and the water as it will run blindly along its paths, trampling anything in its way. Hippos show aggression by opening their mouths, displaying their imposing teeth and making short charges through the water. When confronted by a hippo on land, the best thing one can do is dive out of its way. Avoid hippo by not going near thickets and reeds near the water, and do not camp near hippo paths or waterholes as hippo are attracted to fires and lights.

Be very vigilant during drought times as hippo will tend to concentrate in small waterholes and pans, and as they feel threatened in shallow water, will not hesitate to charge. They are quite capable of biting a human in half with little effort.

## **DO NOT PLACE YOURSELF BETWEEN A HIPPO AND THE WATER OR BETWEEN A COW AND HER CALF**

During the rut, males fight viciously and often to the death, leaving opponents with severe wounds. Females normally wander off to solitary confinement in areas of reed-beds to give birth and often keep their young away for the males who may occasionally kill them.

Hippo, especially in winter months, will lie up away from the water's edge. They, therefore can be very dangerous if a confrontation occurs which hinders their access back to the water.

### **HYENA**

Hyena have a good sense of smell, sight and hearing and are mainly nocturnal but may occasionally be seen during the day. Normally they are solitary or in pairs but they have been

recorded hunting in packs. They lie up during the day in unused ant-bear holes, rocky areas and caves. They are very noisy animals, and around a carcass they will laugh, howl, shriek, gurgle, cackle and grunt.

Hyena are generally not a danger to humans, but they normally become a problem when allowed to scavenge around camps. At night they will not enter a camp whilst people are awake, but will wait until everyone is asleep. There are many records of hyena attacking people when asleep in the beds, even entering tents. They have been known to sneak in on people who are sleeping outside or in tents with no doors, bite a portion of the anatomy and then retreat. They are however, cowardly and will run away if you adopt an aggressive stance.

Avoid sleep out in the open without precautions and do not leave food or dirty dishes about. Ensure that all food is safely out of the way and that left-over foodstuffs are kept some distance from the camp. If you are camping with young children, ensure that they do not wander around unattended, particularly at night-time.

If a hyena persistently and frequently scavenge around camps where children are staying – it would be wise to remove the animal.

## **CROCODILE**

Crocodiles may occur in any pool of water, no matter how small. Check for spoor on banks before taking for granted that the water is safe. Crocodiles are extremely well camouflaged and can strike swiftly and without warning. They use their very powerful tails in a sideways movement, and their large heads to knock prey down on the bank.

## **CROCODILES ARE SUPER PREDATORS AND OPPORTUNISTIC HUNTERS, THEY WILL ATTACK A POTENTIAL FOOD SOURCE AT ANYTIME**

Crocodile can be encountered away from water during the rainy season and if approached could become aggressive and sound off a grunting/hissing sound. Crocodiles have very acute senses and are extremely sly in the manner in which they attack their prey. They do not make a distinction between humans and animals and have no fear of humans.

Crocodiles are notorious for attacking and killing people, usually attacking them in shallow water. Once a crocodile has its prey in the water there is very little hope of escaping unless one is extremely lucky. If you are attacked by a crocodile and don't have a firearm, stab it in the eyes with a knife, or sharp object or even your fingers if you are able to.

## **SUMMARY**

**Here are some basic pointers on how to handle any encounters and avoid dangerous game:**

- Get into a habit of looking around and not directly in front of you. Learn to observe and take note of your surroundings. Don't look at your feet when walking/running in the bush.
- Do not approach animals closely and be alert.
- Do not make sudden movements or loud noises when an encounter occurs
- Do not veer off allocated routes and do not run down game paths, especially near any rivers.
- Keep a look out for spoor to warn you of the presence of dangerous animals.
- A final general rule – animals are likely to be more aggressive if you enter their space than if they enter your space where they are likely to be far more tolerant of your presence because the closeness is on "their terms"!