

# HOW TO AVOID DANGEROUS GAME



by

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# **IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

All wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous, especially those that are wounded, pursued, hunted and annoyed. Because of their size and ability to inflict mortal wounds, some animals should be treated with much more caution than others. Particular caution should be taken in an environment where there are lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo, hyaena, 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, hyaena 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. If you are working or living in an area where there are potentially dangerous wild animals, ensure that you are prepared for either avoiding confrontations or knowing how to deal with them. 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 behavior and there are always exceptions to the rule.

**ALL WILD ANIMALS ARE UNPREDICTABLE  
AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS**

## 2. POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS

This section gives general information about nine potentially dangerous animals, how to recognize danger signals and recommended way in which to respond in an animal/human conflict situation.

### 2.1 ELEPHANTS

Elephants are the earth's largest land mammals and should always be treated with extreme caution. Although they have poor eyesight, they have excellent hearing and sense of smell. Elephant can be found in diverse habitat types and if they feel threatened or under pressure they will most often seek refuge in thick vegetation.

Elephants are generally found in groups of up to 10 or more, are highly sociable, and are led by a cow elephant called a matriarch. At puberty, bulls leave the family unit and will wander alone or in the company of a number of other bulls and return occasionally to the "mother herd".

Under normal environmental circumstances, elephant will water at least once a day and can usually be found resting up in shady spots when it very hot.

There are many signs by which the presence of elephant can be detected. These include, a large spoor (50-60 cm), cylindrically shaped dung, loud feeding noises (breaking of branches), pushing over of tress, and stomach rumbles which can be heard while animals are resting. Elephant noises carry a long way and way and if one is alert there is no reason why you should come into close contact with elephant.

Bull elephant are far more tolerant towards humans than cow elephant. However, bulls are known to frequently "dummy charge" or demonstrate. If disturbed, elephant can move deceptively fast and should not be underestimated. When they do put on a threat display, they will advance with ears held out like large sails and the head held slightly back. They will then invariably turn aside with back arched and tail held high. Young bulls can be very 'playful' and mischievous and are more inclined to mock charge. In any event, always treat as a real charge.

Cow elephant are less tolerant than bulls, and will not hesitate to charge if they are disturbed, especially when they have small calves in the herd and have been encountered at short range. Cows will often charge on scent alone.

If you get surrounded by a herd of elephant during the day or night whilst in a vehicle, which can happen in thickly wooded areas especially at night – turn off the engine, turn off the lights, wind up the windows and sit very quietly. Do not hoot or panic and the elephant will move off. If people are in the back of the vehicle they should lie flat on the bin and get out of sight of the elephant until they have moved away,

When observing a herd, pay particular attention to any tuskless animals, as they have a bad reputation for being aggressive and will often be the first to "break rank" and cause trouble. Tuskless elephants are frequently bad-tempered and will become aggressive for little reason. Tuskless elephant usually display poor manners and aggression towards other animals in the herd, particularly when feeding.

## **AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH COW ELEPHANTS AND CALVES, AND WITH TUSKLESS ELEPHANTS**

### **2.1.1**

#### **ENCOUNTERING ELEPHANT AND DANGER SIGNALS**

If you should find yourself up-wind of elephant, they will normally give alarm in good time. They will stop feeding or raise their heads. Remain absolutely still until they resume feeding. They will flap their ears when they detect you. Elephants use trunk and ear-spreading postures to convey anger, suspicion, threat or curiosity.

Move quietly into a position down-wind and retreat with as little fuss as possible. Don't panic and don't run. Should an elephant mean business it will quickly outrun you. Elephant calm down very quickly when any threat to them has been removed. When retreating, do this deliberately and avoid where possible moving from side to side. Move in a direct line away from the animal and if possible use the cover of trees and bushes. The purpose here is to get out of sight of the animal as soon as possible so that it doesn't feel threatened. Agitated elephant will often display a rocking motion with one foot swinging side to side which can signify a charge. They will also shake their heads with a loud slapping of the ears.

When an elephant charges it will do so with the trunk held down and to the side, or tucked under the chin. This is often followed by shrill screaming and sharp blasts. Elephants move quickly so you need to react immediately. Very little stops an elephant and it presents a difficult target head-on when it is angry and charging. Elephants are slow up steep slopes; however they are capable of smashing down very large trees when charging.

### **IF YOU ENCOUNTER ELEPHANT, DON'T RUN BUT QUICKLY MOVE AWAY DOWNWIND AND OUT OF SIGHT**

### **2.2 BLACK RHINO**

The black or hook-lipped rhino has developed a reputation for being very bad-tempered and aggressive. However this shy and usually solitary animal has very poor eyesight and will often investigate any noise or strange smell which might account for its pugnacious reputation. Black rhino have exceptional hearing and smell and can communicate with each other on a level which is inaudible to humans.

When more than one animal is encountered it is usually a cow and calf, or a bull and cow pairing, with sometimes a third immature animal. Solitary animals are mostly adult males or immature animals that have been 'chased' away by a mother with a new calf. Caution must be exercised when a cow and calf is encountered as there is the good possibility that a third immature offspring could be in the immediate vicinity.

Black rhino generally follow a predictably routine. They drink soon after sundown in undisturbed areas and will often be found near waterholes or pans, drinking or wallowing

during the heat of the day. Because of their habit of wallowing they occasionally get stuck in the mud and eventually die from starvation and / or exhaustion.

Black rhino are creatures of habit and for this reason they easily fall victim to poachers. They form a daily routine and use the same well-worn paths when returning to their feeding area after watering.

### **2.2.1 ENCOUNTERING BLACK RHINO AND DANGER SIGNALS**

The individual temperament of a rhino always plays a part in deciding its response to a perceived threat. Some are moderately even-tempered, some irritable, and others are surprisingly timid. A cow with a small calf will put up a tremendous performance to protect its young at the sign of any human pressure/threat. Unless you get very close, a cow will seldom charge home, but will move off with the calf trailing behind her.

Black rhino also have a very keen sense of smell to which they react even when asleep. Many charges commence out of curiosity which then brings the animal closer to identifying a moving object and could then end up as a deliberate charge as the animal finds itself so close to the 'threat' that it fears retreat. If a black rhino sees you first it is most likely to charge. If it smells you first it is not likely charge and would probably make its departure without delay.

During a potential charge a black rhino holds its head high and will most often make snorting noises. The head is only lowered at the last moment to throw or batter the object of its annoyance. Should a black rhino charge, move quickly (don't run, you then become a moving target) and quietly get behind cover (any bush or tree). If you are nimble and able, you might feel more confident climbing a tree, however there have been occasions when people have panicked and fallen out of trees. A rhino will stand dead-still for as long as five minutes, just observing and listening with its ears cocked and head held high. It will just as suddenly charge off, usually making loud, abrupt snorts which sound aggressive. However, they make this same noise when they are alarmed so it is not necessarily the signal that they are going to charge. Once this snort is heard, evasive action must be taken. Check wind direction and if this favours the rhino and it has not been heard running off, then find cover behind a tree. If you have time, climb up a tree. Black rhino that have charged and missed their target will be very seldom return.

If the rhino runs off, which would be more than likely, watch carefully for the direction it takes so that it can be avoided later. If the animal hangs around, retreat in the direction with the wind in your favour and give the rhino a wide berth.

If rhino are encountered in open country, it must be remembered that the animal has very poor eye sight. If it has not seen you, move off downwind very slowly and quietly, avoiding sudden movements. Don't panic as this could be fatal, for once a rhino has 'tagged' a moving object there is little hope of escaping. On the other hand, it may advance a few paces, satisfy itself that there is no danger and continue with its feeding. If it becomes increasingly agitated, retreat slowly and quietly backwards without turning your back on the animal. If there is no cover a loud shout may discourage it from seeking you out. If all else fails lie perfectly still on the ground and it might leave you alone – assuming it can't see you!

### 2.3 WHITE RHINO

White rhino in many respects, are quite different from black rhino. They tend to be more sociable and placid, and less likely provoked into charging. Exclusively grazers, white rhino feed on perennial grasses and rest alternately throughout the day and night. Their feeding and watering spots are used with great regularity, and they are also fond of wallowing. Like the black rhino, their sight is very poor; although their hearing is keen as is their sense of smell. Faeces (dung) are usually dropped in one chosen spot (called a midden) and, after some time, accumulate into large piles.

#### **LISTEN FOR OXPECKERS AND EGRETS, THEY OFTEN ACCOMPANY WHITE RHINO AND WARN THEM OF AN INTRUDERS APPROACH**

Although large and bulky animals white rhino can easily out-pace humans and can reach speeds of up to 40 km/h over short distances. If you stumble upon a white rhino move away downwind very quietly and try to conceal yourself behind bush.

If you are approached by white rhino, clap gently. In most instances the animal will stop and change direction or back off.

### 2.4 LION

Lions are generally rather lazy animals and may be encountered at close quarters because of their excellent camouflage. They have excellent eye-sight and hearing and prefer open country mainly because their prey species are found there. Vultures are a good indication that lions are about. If these birds are settled in nearby trees then more than likely the lions are very close and on a kill. On the other hand, if vultures are on the ground the lions have moved away.

Males will sometimes show off in the presence of females and give growling warnings and short charges. Lions have a reputation as being rather fierce, however they seldom attack humans unless provoked, or have through circumstances starved and only then do they lose the sense of fear for human beings and start scavenging around camps. However, they can become dependent on humans to survive. In these modern times there is virtually no risk of lions becoming man-eaters, mainly because they are given protection in our areas where there is an abundance of game.

A wounded lion is extremely dangerous, but will never press home an attack without a warning roar or growl. A female with young cubs is more likely to cause concern and will aggressively protect her young. In general, lions are curious and will invade a camp at night. They have been known to steal bedding even when occupied. It is as well to remember that a hungry lion does not roar. They can move very fast indeed and precede a charge by lashing the tail to and fro and then by an up-and-down pumping action. Males are highly aggressive during mating - keep away from a mating pair.

#### **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD ONE EVER RUN FROM A CHARGING LION STAND YOUR GROUND**

## 2.5 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 SIDEWAYS 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!!

## 2.6 BUFFALO

Buffalo are very similar to cattle in appearance. They have fair sight and good hearing and sense of smell. They have difficulty in identifying objects at a distance and because of this are inclined to lift their heads and point muzzle and advance on unidentified objects. To the inexperienced this attitude can be uncomfortable but is not dangerous or aggressive.

### **IT IS WISE TO AVOID DENSE BUSH AND REEDS WHERE OLD BULLS MAY BE LYING UP**

Buffalo are not normally dangerous but caution should be taken with lone animals as they will, if injured or sick, show aggression. In the event of an attack, they charge from ambush with great courage and determination. There is very little danger if caught in the midst of a herd. They will move around you with no aggression. Under normal circumstances they frequent the more open country and will not cause any concern if given a wide berth.

In thickly wooded areas and especially riverine reedbeds be extra cautious of buffalo bulls which will charge without warning if exposed at short range,

When you encounter a buffalo, stand still and then move away slowly. If an aggressive buffalo charges, it will complete the charge. Try to climb a tree, as you will not outrun it. When charging only a fatal shot will stop it, and remember that a wounded buffalo may even double back and lie in wait for its pursuer.

## **2.7 HIPPO**

Hippo may be found in any large river or swamp and open water. They are known to travel many kilometers 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 kilometers 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 from 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.



## 2.8 HYAENA

Hyaena 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.

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

## 2.9 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

### HOW TO AVOID DANGEROUS GAME

**Here are some basic pointers on how to 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 in the bush.
- Do not approach animals closely and avoid dense bush where your range of vision is reduced. Walk down the centre of a riverbed rather than on the side as riverine vegetation carries the highest density of game.
- Be continually aware of the direction of the wind. Always walk down-wind of an Animal or herd. It may take a little longer to get your destination but the effort will be well worthwhile.
- Do not camp or rest at pans which attract game at night or camp on or near game paths.
- Keep a look out for spoor to warn you of the presence of dangerous animals.
- Strong smells are normally associated with elephant and rhino. The stronger and sharper the smell the more likely that the animals are still in the vicinity.
- Keep a look out for the warning call of oxpeckers, there could be rhino or buffalo about.
- Disturbed antelope may warn you of the presence of a lion.
- Be alert. Make frequent stops and listen and observe.
- 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”!