

Guiding on Foot

in a Dangerous Game Area

For many people the ultimate wildlife experience is hiking with an armed game ranger through the African bush in an area where dangerous game is present. This is an everyday experience for some people working in the wildlife industry.



In the tourism industry guiding is a regulated profession and is managed by an organisation known as THETA (Tourism, Hospitality, Sport Education and Training Authority). Tourist guiding consists of various categories such as nature guides, cultural guides, adventure guides, geological guides, archaeological guides, etc. All of these different categories have various levels of skill and on top of that, tourist guides can only operate in the various provinces for which they are qualified. To be able to guide tourists on foot in an area where dangerous game species occur, guides need to have at least a Nature Guide Level 4 qualification along with a skills qualification such as Advanced Weapons Handling. A qualification like this comes with years of training and experience and cannot be achieved overnight.

It is very important for a nature guide to be able to use a firearm safely and effectively. Some nature guides will go years and years without the need to discharge their firearms in the line of duty, but there could very well be a day when the use of a firearm will be unavoidable. When that day comes the nature guide will, in all probability, have only one shot to save the day.

The speed at which dangerous animals can travel over a distance of 20 or 30 metres can be seen below:

Reaction window or available response time when being charged by one of the following species			
Species	Time (sec.) from 30 m away	Time (sec.) from 20 m away	Charge speed (m/sec)
Elephant	2,70	1,80	11,10
Buffalo	1,90	1,30	15,60
Lion	1,40	0,90	22,20
Leopard	1,40	0,90	22,20
Hippo	3,00	2,00	10,00
Rhino	2,70	1,80	11,10



A nature guide doing regular guided hikes in wilderness areas where dangerous game species occur will frequently come into contact situations where the decision he or she makes at that given moment can save lives or can get people killed. When a guide finds themselves in a dangerous situation all of the following decisions have to be made and executed in the three second window of opportunity before things go bad...

Would it be worthwhile to try and chase the animal off without shooting it?

The hiking party standing behind the guide needs to be managed by means of verbal instructions. If the animal is going to carry through with its charge, the guide has to mark a certain spot or 'cut-off point'. When the charging animal reaches this 'cut-off point' lethal action is the only solution left to protect the hiking party.

When making these decisions the guide will also have to look at the body language of the dangerous game animal they have encountered;

use common sense and rely on his years of experience to get the hiking party safely back home again. Dangerous situations include coming upon a sleeping black rhino; getting between a hippo and the water; a lioness with small cubs; an elephant bull in musth; lions feeding and an elephant cow with a young one. These are all situations that will require decisions on the move.

All animals have a so called 'comfort zone' and an area often referred to by guides as 'the animals personal space'. The animal encountered will without exception provide the guide with a clear indication of the fact that things are fine or that the line has now been crossed.

Mock charges are frequently made by elephants, lions, hippos and cheetahs. Animals like buffalo, leopards and black rhino very seldom do a mock charge. When these animals start running towards you, you're already in a great deal of trouble and a plan needs to be executed immediately.

The pictures below indicate various forms of animal body language and the threat level (● - no problem, ● - caution, ● - danger) that goes along with it.



The animal is aware of the hiking party and at ease about the current situation. Everything seems to be under control.



The lions are relaxed, not aware of the hiking party and very much at ease. At present everything is under control.





The hiking party has moved into the "personal space" of this leopard and a slow retreat is the only option out of this situation. The situation could very easily get out of control.



The hiking party has moved into the "personal space" of this lion pride and a slow retreat has become a necessity. The situation could very easily get out of control.



Things have gone too far. There will be no time for running. Shooting this leopard by the guide is the only way people will get out of this situation without serious injury.



Things have turned for the worst. Surviving this situation will come in the form of a miracle or a well placed shot.



The situation will get even more desperate should the running from this scene nerves of steel and very tight pants to stand in a situation like this!



Bushveld Festival

mountain bike race

A part of the mountain bike race that took place during the Bushveld Festival took place on the Ledibeng Eco-Estate.

The total distance of the mountain bike race was 30 km and ± 7 km of the race was through the wildlife area on the Estate.



Heads *or* Tails?

The wildlife team noticed a number of heads sticking out of various holes in this termite mound. Is it a rat, a mouse or a mongoose?



Although they are almost the same size as a decent rat, these animals hiding in the termite mound are called Dwarf Mongooses. They usually travel in groups of 4-6 individuals and are black in colour. Because of their size (± 20 centimetres) they are very vulnerable to predators such as pythons, eagles and even hawks.

The number of animals in this group consisted of six individuals. Although they look small and cuddly, they are all fully grown individuals. They usually feed on insects, molluscs, bird eggs, lizards, and worms. They will under normal circumstances not confront large dangerous snakes but will attack and feed on smaller snake species.



For information on property sales contact:

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We would like to hear your story!

Should you have an event or story you would like to share, please send us your photos and a few words to **wildlife@lantic.net**

From your Wildlife Management Team

