



# Components of Animal Behavior

By Dean Harrison

It has been a long time now that I have been working and living with wild animals. My mom thought I would own a pet shop someday and maybe she was close, but instead my wife, Prayeri, and I own Out of Africa Wildlife Park in Camp Verde, Arizona.

The park is not a zoo or circus. It is an exotic garden where we live and work together with wild-by-nature animals. We have learned to speak their languages and they have learned ours. We teach them no tricks or human commands such as are common to training dogs or other domestic animals. We live with them and show them a better way to live, where they don't need to kill each other or, we hope, us.

Our primary emphasis is on behavior — both theirs and ours. In order to preserve them, we must understand them. They have needs that must be met in order for them to be fulfilled as individuals. If they are not met, then frustration prevails, where fear and boredom give way to psychological escapism. They want to be free — free to eat, roam, choose a territory, choose a mate or be a companion, free to explore and investigate, using all their senses. And in all this, they wish to make their own decisions concerning their own lives on a daily basis. To the extent that we can accommodate their quest and purpose in life, we can cohabitate with them.

In order to form this timeless relationship, we must identify why they do what they do as individual living beings. During almost fifty years of research, certain identifiable variables of motivation have emerged. Animal behavior is motivated by three general components — instinct, intellect and feelings. Instinct, which is an unlearned orientation to behave toward the goal of survival, is related to the actual body of the animal itself.

The tiger is a tiger due to its instinctual, physiological, and inherited genetic make-up. Instincts cannot be removed from the tiger without killing the tiger. If there is no life, there is no instinct — it is dead. Therefore, a tiger is not a pet: it is not fully tamable nor is it able to be domesticated, as we think of a dog, horse, cow, or pig. These animals are breeds, not species. Man makes breeds; God makes species. Tigers, elephants, and gorillas are species, in which man had no part in their making and they have a natural geographical place of origin.

The instinctual aspect of animal behavior consists of a series of inclinations to behave toward a specific goal. It is the dangerous part of the animal, the part that we generally think of as "unpredictable." But this is not necessarily so. The instincts are in order of importance to the animal's survival, and they can be referred to as primary instincts (goals):

1. Self-preservation
2. Acquisition of food
3. Maintenance of territory
4. Marriage and family relations

These primary instincts are supported by nine secondary instincts (manifested behavior):

1. Seasonal change
2. Possession
3. Protection
4. Play
5. Chase
6. Advantage
7. Holding and biting
8. Exploration and adventure
9. Courting

There are also assisting supportive instincts which are often specific to certain species such as swimming, flying, digging, scenting, catatonic positions, hunting, killing, and many more. The primary instincts are multifaceted and contain both offensive and defensive behaviors, designed to extend the quality of life of the individual, which, of course, perpetuates the species and all other life forms that integrate with it.

The second general component is intellect — the capacity to consider alternatives, to weigh consequences, and to make a choice or decision. This process is somewhat of a buffer zone; it cushions what the instincts would otherwise do. It keeps a leopard from attacking a lion, it cautions a zebra to be alert around a water hole, and it allows a tiger to consider not eating us, his friends, who love and care for him. Intellect is the balance in which life and death are weighed in the kingdom of animals. It perceives its influences in sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, telepathy, imagination, instincts, preferences, and memory both present and inherited. The higher the life form the greater the intellectual capacity. That is, the more one's behavior is influenced by choice of consequences, the more one is acting intelligently. If one's primary concern is focused on personal safety, starvation, or shelter from a harsh environment, then a more instinctual behavior is seen.

Intellect allows us to balance between fear and love, between a perceived unsafe state and a state of acceptance and worth. The only weapon against fear is love, which brings us to the third general component of behavior — feelings. Feelings are likes and dislikes both physical and psychological. They are preferences based on experiences and life forms or body types. They are emotions about anything perceived in the environment viewed from “good” to “bad.” Feelings are learned and are changeable if new information is allowed to be considered to form a new conclusion. Feelings learned first in life are more difficult to change and, like all emotions, require conscious thought and a decision to alter behavior. Good feelings make good behavior — and vice versa. As they say, “Attitude is everything.”

So these are the three general components of animal behavior — instinct, intellect, and feelings. In order for animals to coexist in large numbers, both with their own kind and with others, a system of laws must be established so they don't just kill each other upon each chance meeting. These laws can be referred to as “long-term survival principles.” They are traffic laws and they are tied to dangerous instincts. Just as we have agreed to drive our cars in a particular way so we don't run into each other, so too animals must learn appropriate ways of acting so they will not offend another and perhaps lose their

life. A cheetah who claims his established and well-marked territory over an incoming lion pride is drinking under the influence. He may be caught and killed for his insolence.

When a tiger is eating a deer he has just killed and another, smaller tiger accidentally chances upon the more powerful creature, the offender turns his eyes away and exhibits submissive behavior, so the stronger animal will not be offended to the point of attack. The dead deer has survival value, and where there is value, there is also protection. Where there is protection, there is also the law — the survival principle that gives remedy to the immediate problem. The situation is always based on fear to a greater or lesser degree, affecting one or more of the four primary instincts — self-preservation, food, territory, or marriage and family relations.

There are many principles of survival, but they all point behavior to one goal — respect. Respect is the essential concept between any two life forms. Respect is the demonstration of the mixture of love and fear that keeps one from taking advantage of another. It is a standard that our morality is based upon and the basis for all interpersonal contact. It is also the mortar between the bricks of a relationship and a need we all desire for personal achievement and fulfillment. Respect is the evidence of worth.

These are the factors affecting animal behavior. They are inherited and designed, complicated yet simple. They are organized and prioritized and are as real as the laws of physics. They are the stuff life is made of.