



# Instincts – A Way of Life

By Dean Harrison

At Out of Africa Wildlife Park, one of our objectives is to seek mutual cooperation between other species and ourselves. To achieve this, we learn to identify the needs of animals by looking at life from their point of view. We must first identify these needs and then achieve them. All aspects of their life must be considered so that discontentment and frustration will not arise because we missed a necessary component.

So, what must be considered to fulfill an animal's life? Instincts! Instincts are a prioritized series of natural behaviors that consist of inclinations to achieve specific goals. They contain both offensive and defensive behavior and are the part of the animal we generally think of as "unpredictable." But are they? Instincts are in order of importance to the animal's survival. They are multifaceted and designed to extend the quality of life of the individual. By doing so, instincts also perpetuate the species and other life forms it encounters. They are the common links of all life forms and, for that matter, life itself.

There are four primal instincts, which serve as goals to sustain life. They are as follows: self-preservation, food, territory, marriage and family relations. These motivating behaviors are what a life form needs to achieve in order to be fulfilled as an individual. All behavior is traceable to one or more of the four primal instincts.

So that the primal instincts can be obtained, animals have nine secondary, supporting instincts. These instincts are what we see an animal doing, such as barking, growling, stalking, or mating. They are as follows: seasonal change, possession, protection, play, chase, advantage, holding and biting, exploration and adventure, and courtship. The secondary instincts are not in any particular order. Any one or more can be used to achieve one or more of the primal instincts (goals).

In addition to the secondary, supporting instincts there are also a large number of assisting, supportive instincts. They are seen as swimming, flying, digging, scenting, catatonic positions, hunting, killing, and many more. Many are species-specific such as hibernation, metamorphosis, egg laying, and back biting (in lions). In the articles to come, we will discuss specific instincts and how they work.