

# Module 2 Component 3

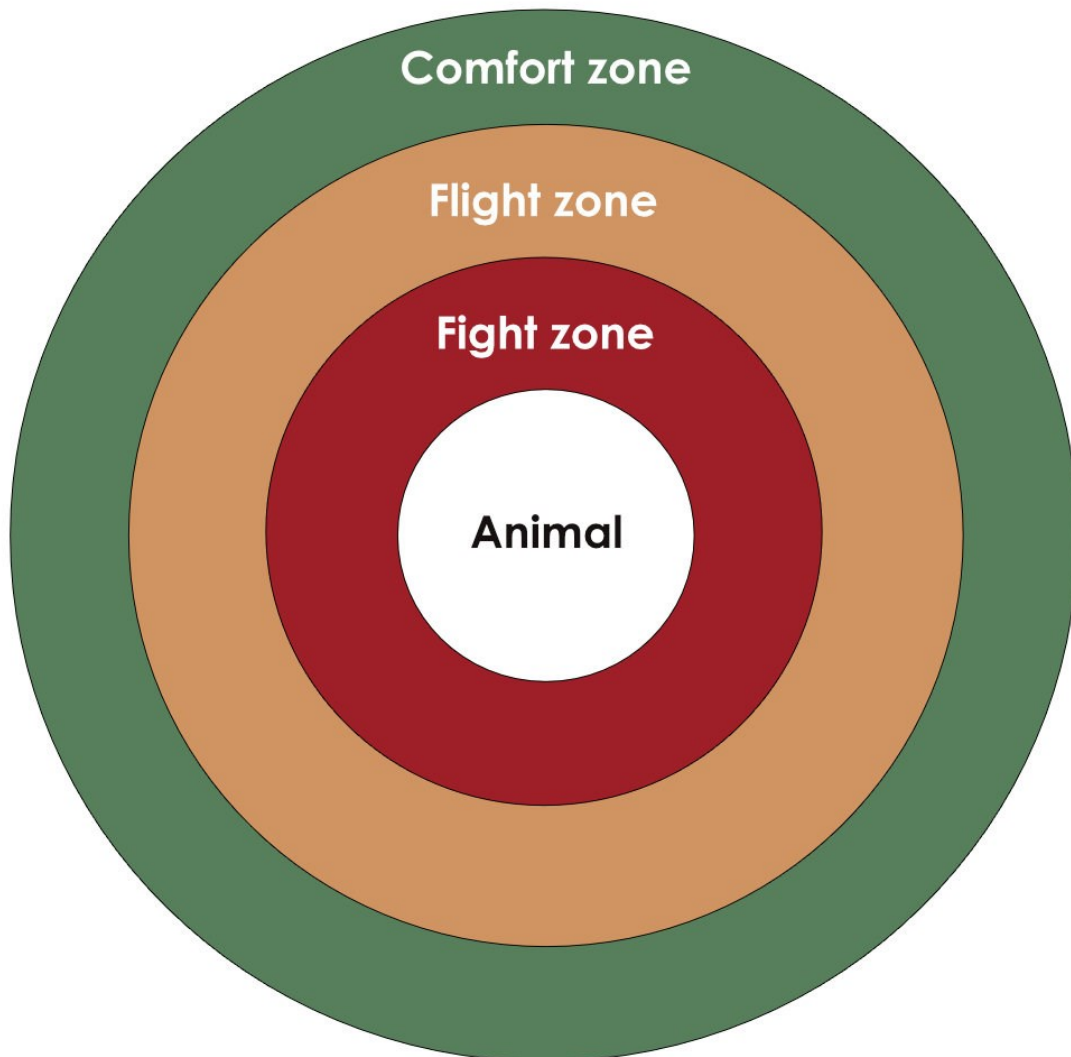


## The comfort zone

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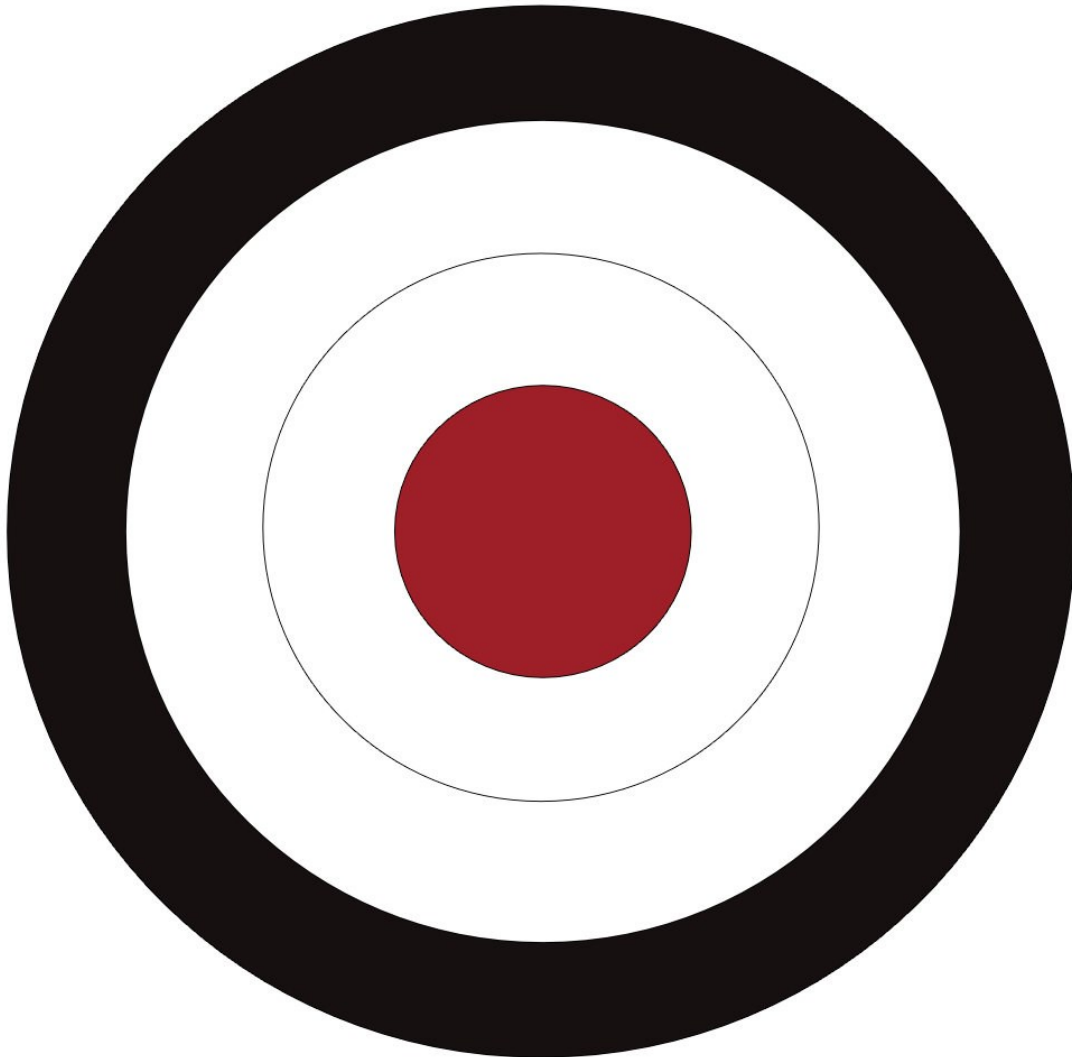
## Introduction

Animals have three psychological zones around them. The size and shape of these zones are dependent on the species, sex and individual nature of the individual animal, with adjustments made as the mood changes. Animals rely on their senses to warn them of intrusions into these zones, so conditions that inhibit these senses will also affect them. As a rule, animals will be aware of a human presence and move off long before the human is aware of them.



**If an approach is made so that both the human and the animal become aware of one another at the same time, the animal will react in one of four ways:**

## The comfort zone



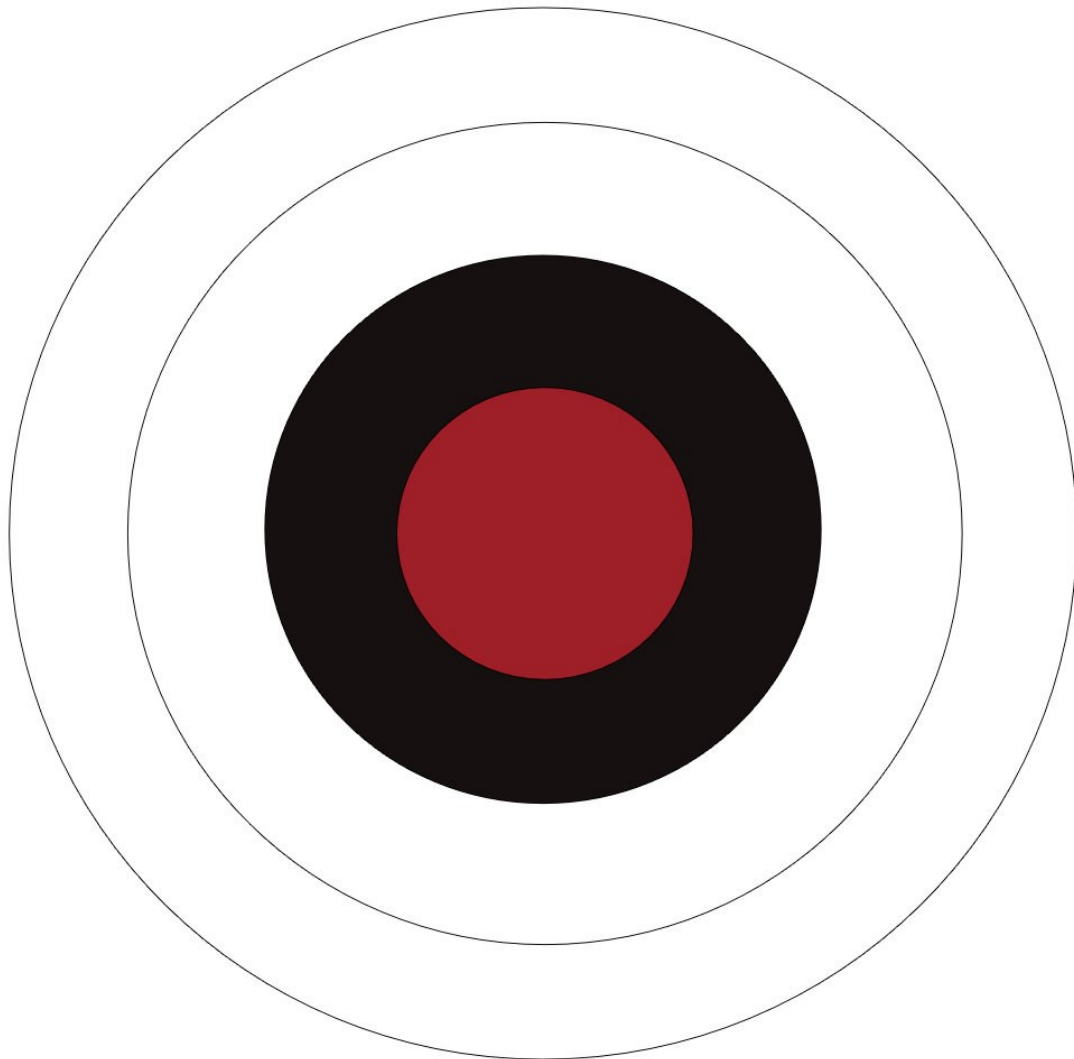
If the human is outside the comfort zone, the animal will generally continue its activity undisturbed but will keep an eye open for further movements. This is where the professional and ethical guide operates, as the guest experience is safe, and the sighting is of an animal behaving naturally. If the comfort zone is intruded upon, the animal will move off to try to maintain the distance. The ethical guide will then stop moving to allow the animal to relax and continue its activity without further disturbance.

## The flight zone



If the flight zone is entered, the animal will flee without hesitation or start giving warning signs to indicate that it feels threatened. While this often happens without intention, the ethical guide will try to prevent it. The only option is to back off as safely and speedily as possible and maintain a safe distance from the animal while moving around it.

## The fight zone



If the fight zone is entered, the animal has no option but to attack to defend itself. This is the most dangerous situation a professional guide will try to avoid at all costs.

## Aggressive and warning behaviour patterns

When an animal is unsure of what action to take due to **heightened psychological stress levels**, it often displays **displacement behaviour**. This entails a common or normal action that is carried out but is not done properly. For example, elephants may appear to be feeding, but no food is transferred to the mouth, or a lion may start grooming itself but does not actually do it properly. These are often the **first signs** that an animal is **uneasy** with the presence of humans. **Warning behaviour** takes many forms, such as showing the intruder that their presence is not wanted and preventing **a closer approach**. As most animal communication is visual, many warnings involve body posture, facial gestures, lifting body parts, displaying defensive weapons or piloerection.

Græme Mitchell



**Vocalisations** or expelling air to produce a hiss or spit are more intense and designed to **show acute displeasure**. Kicking up dust and destroying vegetation are overt displacement signs used for the same reason. A guide must **recognise** these signs in all animals so that the least amount of pressure is put on them. Understanding dangerous animal behaviour is essential to avoid a dangerous confrontation that may be lethal to a human or an animal. While the fundamentals of animal behaviour can be learned theoretically, the best way to get to know the signs is by observation and experience.

## Conclusion

Obviously, each species and, in fact, **each individual will react differently**. Animals may have become **habituated** and accustomed to the presence of people or may be inherently **aggressive**. There are no hard and fast rules here whatsoever. Many professional guides have gotten into dangerous situations because they felt they knew that animal and what it would do, having encountered it frequently. Just because a specific individual acted in the **same fashion repeatedly** does not mean it will continue to do so. There is a multitude of factors that may influence **its behaviour** on any specific day. One can only rely on an animal's **unpredictability** – expect it, and you will be able to handle the resulting situation.

