



Wild Tiger Health Centre Information Sheet

How to respond if you encounter a tiger

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCE SHOULD YOU EVER TURN YOUR BACK ON A TIGER AND ATTEMPT TO RUN AWAY.

In every case an encounter should be reported to the local authorities as soon as possible, and as much detail as possible provided. This will help to build a better picture of the tigers that are active in the area and help the authorities to take prompt and appropriate action. There are typically four different types of tiger encounter - crossed paths, non-aggressive advances, defensive behaviour and predation attempts.

Crossed paths – These may occur when a tiger is walking down a road or pathway or simply moving across it. Often the tiger may be some distance away, and while it may pause to acknowledge the human presence, it will not change direction to approach. These encounters are normally very brief, and the tiger will continue on its way. If this occurs people are advised to stand still and maintain eye-contact with the tiger. It is advisable to make a mental note of the direction the tiger is heading in and not to follow them. If the planned route crosses where the tiger has just passed, an alternative route is recommended or simply waiting a while before proceeding with caution. If any aggression was shown by the tiger, particularly a female tiger, do not proceed but turn back and find an alternative route. Similar advice applies if the tiger was with cubs.



Relaxed tiger walking across a track

Non-aggressive advances – In this type of an encounter the tiger makes a definite advance towards people. These animals are calm and may even appear to be curious. Tigers in these situations will often be clearly visible, not trying to hide or stalk, and will approach slowly with their ears up and forward. Where possible, people should maintain eye contact and either stand their ground or back away slowly. Leaving an item of

potential interest behind, such as a jacket or a backpack, may serve as a distraction. If the tiger continues to advance, making a loud noise by shouting or screaming and making yourself appear as big as possible may help to scare the tiger away. If available, devices such as handheld flares may also be deployed.

Defensive behaviour – This type of advance is very different. Tigers will be visibly distressed; their ears may be back or flattened against their head and they may roar or charge towards people. This type of behaviour is typically triggered when people surprise a tiger or get too close, particularly if the tiger in question is guarding cubs or a kill nearby. In these cases, it is better not to show aggression. Instead, people should be advised to back away slowly and adopt a submissive posture, with arms by their side, relaxed shoulders, a slight dropping of the head and avoidance of direct eye contact. The aim is to reassure the tiger you are not a threat and it does not need to defend itself further. If the tiger is appeased and desists from this behaviour, you should continue to back away slowly, keeping the tiger in sight for as long as possible. The encounter should then be immediately reported to the authorities and the local community should be made aware, so that they can avoid the area for a few days.



Tigers displaying defensive behaviour: Photos: John Goodrich

Predation attempts – These are less common, but may be more frequent in certain, high-risk, areas, such as the Sundarbans. In this case the tiger will normally approach from behind and the victim may be unaware of the tiger's presence until they are attacked. Once a tiger has attacked the victim should use whatever means possible to defend themselves and scare the tiger away. This should include shouting and screaming to attract help and trying to physically fight the tiger off as well as deploying any devices or weapons they may have on them.

Any tigers which are spotted stalking a person before they attack should be countered equally aggressively. Victims should make themselves as tall and wide as possible and shout loudly in an attempt to intimidate the tiger and attract help. If there are suitable sticks or rocks available, it may be advisable for people to arm themselves. However, bending or squatting to pick things up should be avoided if possible, as this may trigger an attack. Victims may back away from the tiger, to create distance, but this should be done in a slow controlled manner and at no point should they turn their back on the animal as this may trigger an attack. If multiple

people are present, moving slowly towards each other, to create a group, may be helpful. Children should be held, again ideally without bending or stooping over.

Whilst every attempt should be made to assist someone who is under attack, if it is evident that person has died, attempts should not be made to recover the body without the support of the local authorities.

Personal protection and deterrents – These are largely aimed at preventing an encounter from escalating into an attack. Tactics employed include; the use of masks worn on the back of the head (tigers are known to attack people from behind and it is thought by wearing a mask on the back of your head you may trick a tiger in to thinking you are facing the other way and have seen them), armoured headgear, handheld flares and pepper spray. Personal attack alarms have been advocated for use against other species, such as bears, and it is possible these could be useful. Electrified mannequins were trialled in Bangladesh with the aim of conditioning tigers against attacking, however it was felt this approach was not effective.