

Dear All

I'm raiding my contacts list so many of you do know me and some will have had mails from me in the past for various reasons (though admittedly it may have been months or years ago)! I have been in Windhoek for 6 years now and for the duration was employed by De Beers Marine Namibia as a Mine Surveyor. I have recently left De Beers after 12 years in their employ, to start my own business. They were letting people go and it seemed to be a good time for me to leave.

I have taught horse-riding on and off over the years (I am classically trained the British Horse Society instructors route and achieved Top Equine Business Management Student in 1993), used to compete at Horse Trials and 3-Day eventing whilst in the UK and jumping in the Western Cape, and currently stable my horses (two mares with foals at foot) at Tony Rust on the Daan Viljoen road. I don't do the competition thing anymore, and after doing some Parelli with Marinda Jensen a few years back, she opened my eyes and set me on the path towards natural horsemanship and a holistic approach to horses and riding.

I have opened a consultancy business here in Windhoek. I will be surveying (mining/hydrographic) but I will also be teaching and training again plus painting animal portraits. However, this is also the ideal opportunity for me to focus on getting my Animal Behaviour and TTouch qualifications.

Over the past 2 years I have been studying via a correspondence course towards an Animal Behaviour qualification. I got the first certificate at the end of 2007, but unfortunately the lecturer, Professor Odendaal, died suddenly and the Advanced Course was postponed. It has restarted at the beginning of this year and I am already deep into my case studies and assignments. The course is due to finish in November.

In addition to the theoretical training surrounding Animal Behaviour that I have done and are doing, I require 200 hours of practical experience. I am working on putting a portfolio together which I can submit at the end of this year to the SA Board for Companion Animal Professionals. Once I have my Advanced Certificate and registration with SABCAP I will be able to practice as a Behaviourist.

I am hoping that you may be able to assist me in my endeavour to attain the 200 hours of practical experience I require, by inviting me to do an assessment on one of your animals. Though I am specializing in horses, other companion animals (dogs and cats) also form part of the portfolio.

What is Animal Behaviour and why would you call a Behaviourist?

The motivation (cause, explanation, reason) for behaviour is the process in an animal's body and mind that is aimed at fulfilling their need for living or survival (i.e. he will drink if he is thirsty). Behaviour can be characterized as normal (natural or instinctive) or abnormal. It is also classified as acceptable or unacceptable (to us, the owner or rider). To understand behavioural problems in an animal, a sound knowledge of normal behavioral patterns has to be known. By knowing what is normal, a Behaviourist can assess if the problem behaviour exhibited is excessive or absent (and on a sliding scale between).

When a Behaviourist does an assessment of a behavioural problem (e.g. a horse refusing to load or a dog exhibiting excessive barking), the problem is assessed in a systematic way. Some behavioural problems may be associated with clinical problems like disease or injury in which case a vet would be consulted immediately. But as the case may be behavioral problems are often associated with the immediate context of the environment, the circumstances, other animals or people.

We ask a plethora of questions to get a proper history of the problem – e.g. is it recent or long term; does it occur only when the owner is present etc. We identify the problem by considering

1. the genetics (i.e. species-species and breed specific behaviours, selection processes and genetic pre-dispositions etc) and
2. the environmental factors (i.e. psychological and physiological needs, care and welfare, training and routines etc).

The purpose of this contextual approach is to determine

1. the animal's needs in a specific environment,
2. to evaluate the problem as part of the whole and
3. to systematically consider all factors relating to animal management.

In addition to the contextual assessment a comprehensive classification system is also used. Behavioural problems can be sub-divided into 6 main categories (e.g. Developmental, ethogram or adaptation), and from these categories there are further specific sub-divisions (e.g. attention-seeking, anxiety, ingestion or agnostic behaviours). Some problems may overlap in which case **all categories** involved in an assessment would be mentioned for clarity and completeness. Solving a problem is about getting down to the root cause(s) and eliminating them – *the root cause may not be what you might think*.

My assessments would happen in the animal's own environment – e.g. at the stables or at home, with the owner present. The assessment and site visit would be for about an hour or more and would be comprehensive with a detailed questionnaire to be completed so as not to miss any possibilities. A report is produced from this assessment and presented to the owner for his information and future reference.

Resolutions for the behavioural problem would be formulated and discussed with the owner. The resolutions are divided into two parts – the indirect approach and a direct approach.

The indirect approach provides help, advice, information, guidelines, assistance and knowledge exchange with the owner. This is managing the problem without modifying the behaviour of the animal.

The direct approach is about applying conditioning techniques that modify the behaviour of the animal. I would recommend other trainers, instructors and specialists whose techniques and training methods would assist the owner and animal partnership – I believe in a holistic approach and recommend the owner consider a whole range of approaches which can be used successfully in combination. As with people, animals are individual, and what may work for one, may not work for another – and it may be that a combination of methods would have to be applied to achieve the desired outcome.

If you are interested in talking to me to discuss anything in this email, please feel free to contact me on the numbers below. I would really appreciate any feedback, help and assistance. The assessments are *pro bono*, as this is my way of building up my portfolio. I am willing to travel locally (WHK and Okahandja), though if I need to travel a greater distance (Gobabis, Otjiwarongo or Swakopmund for instance) then some help with fuel would be appreciated!

If you know of anyone who may be looking for some help or assistance with a behavioural problem in their animal, then please feel free to forward my details onto them.

I take this opportunity to thank you for reading this rather long email, and look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks and regards,

Gaynor Deacon

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