

## CODE PRACTISE GAME CAPTURE - PILOT

### **The pilot**

Since it is well known that there are many possible causes of capture myopathy and that precautions have to be taken to prevent stress in wild animals, the helicopter pilot herding the animals has several tasks and should have the following abilities, qualities and knowledge:

- Besides being sympathetic towards animals, the pilot should be able to fly low and execute daring but safe manoeuvres in bush conditions. The welfare of the animals must always be the first priority.
- The pilot should have a fair knowledge of the behaviour of the animals to be captured, and should especially know how they behave when they are being herded.
- The pilot should advise the seller or buyer when the herding of the animals by helicopter is no longer economical.
- The pilot should report the sighting of any animal carcasses to the owner.
- It is important that the pilot has proper radio communication with the capture team at all times. The pilot should advise the ground team timeously as to the number of animals being herded, especially when tranquillizers or horn pipes are needed or male animals have to be separated from the rest. The capture team can also advise the pilot of changes in the wind direction or of any problems they may have, such as not being ready for the capture.
- Planning the erection of a capture boma from a helicopter saves time. Any roads leading to the site can be identified and scouted, and animal concentrations can be found by following the direction of animal trails. Thus, it can be established whether the boma is centrally and correctly placed.
- Special attention should be paid to tall trees, telephone lines, radio towers and power lines that could be a safety hazard.
- The pilot can help to plan the boma, thus easing the pressure on him if the boma is planned correctly with his needs in mind. This will also save capture time and

expenses. It is therefore necessary for the pilot to have a sound knowledge of boma planning, erection and function.

- The pilot should be able to recognize the sex and age differences of the animals to be captured.
- The pilot should fly low and slowly along the boma entrance to sweep the entrance before the capture. Any drag marks of the capture materials, and human scent and tracks will be blown away by the down draft caused by the rotor blades of the helicopter.
- A trial run is recommended to see whether there are any unforeseen problems.
- The pilot should be able to handle considerable stress with aplomb. Patience is also required when herding the animals.

### **2.9.3 Ethical considerations when herding animals with a helicopter**

The pilot should treat and herd the animals in the following way:

- He should allow the animals time to rest. The animals should also be herded slowly but surely while being kept together. It is only at the end that the animals should be pushed quickly into the capture boma or nets.
- It must always be remembered that the first signs of capture myopathy and stress may be seen when the animals are kept together and herded. A good pilot is therefore in an excellent position to prevent or limit the degree of capture myopathy and stress in wild animals.
- Animals found near a waterhole may have drunk recently and it may be detrimental to herd them over a long distance to the capture boma.
- Some animals such as impala, black wildebeest, springbok and tsessebe are difficult to herd because they do not fear the helicopter. Moreover, they can easily change direction while running. This happens especially when the animals have been herded before or are exhausted.
- Nyala and bushbuck are not herded easily by helicopter. They usually run off in any direction and try to hide under trees. Kudu bulls and impala rams often refuse to move at all.

- The pilot should note any animals that are next to or close to the perimeter fences. He should prevent them from jumping over the fence or going through it and escaping.
- Animals should not be captured after a heavy rainstorm when the ground and grass are wet and slippery. Under these conditions, the herded animals may slip and injure themselves by tearing muscles and straining tendons.
- Various species should not be mixed because they may fight and even kill one another.
- The animals should be herded from as close to the capture boma as possible because this saves time and money, and is less stressful for them.
- Animals in poor physical condition should be herded slowly and with exceptional care.
- All animals, but especially impala, should never be herded when the ambient temperature exceeds 25° C.
- Animals should never be herded fast through areas where ridges, rocks, deep sand, gulleys or dense bush occur because the animals may fracture their limbs or sustain other injuries.
- The pilot should be familiar with the calving times of the animals to be captured. Cows with young, unweaned calves should never be captured.
- Only manageable groups of animals should be herded at a time. Capturing too many animals at one time causes loading and sorting problems that may result in deaths.
- The animals should be directed to the boma entrance from a distance, whenever possible. This will make the drive easier because some animals are not easily turned when running at speed.
- The pilot should herd the animals past the first three curtains and then move the helicopter away. From there and on to the loading area the animals should be herded by the ground staff.
- Certain male animals such as adult impala rams fight with one another or with the females in a boma. They should be separated from the group before they reach the entrance, and can be captured at a later stage.
- The pilot should herd the animals along the shortest and easiest route to the capture boma.

- Different family groups of especially Burchell's zebra and the mountain zebra **should never be mixed during the capture.** Mixing different family groups is the major source of trauma and injury for zebra.
- Animals that are found near the boma entrance but are not part of the capture quota should be turned away before they enter the capture boma.
- Animals that refuse to enter the boma should be encouraged to join the groups that were cut out of the herd near the boma. If they are not turned away, they will refuse to enter the boma again, causing some of the herded animals to follow them and thus preventing their capture.