

Spotted Hyena

AZA carnivore aggression webinar

9/27/2024



Natural History

Aggression is a normal part of hyena life.

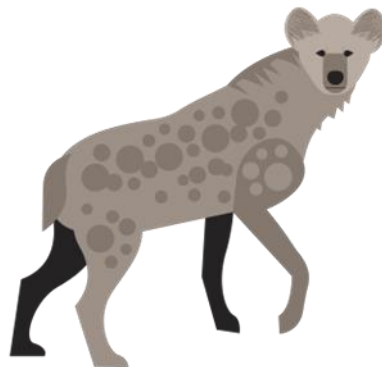
- Cannot be avoided. Hyena will fight.
- Starts on day 1 with siblings. Stable until reproductive ages.
- Changes in clans will cause the most aggression as they work through the new hierarchy.
- Used to maintain dominance and rank within clans.
- Hierarchy gives priority access to food but not breeding. Most fights occur between females to get better access to food to support lactation.
- Females always dominant over males and usually more aggressive. Males submissive to all females and do not fight for breeding rights.
- Fission/Fusion society. They may not want to be together all the time.
- **NEVER introduce unknown, unrelated females. This will result in death.**



Expected Aggression

Hierarchy Maintenance

- Occurs as needed or determined by female
- When they perceive a resources in the environment (food, staff, preferred resting spots, enrichment, etc.)
- Higher rates when younger. 15 yrs or younger
- Little to none as they age together with no changes
- Non-breeding clans and all male clans have the lowest rates of aggression
- Chasing to minor bites.
- Very brief, 1x events.



Change in Clan Members and Introductions

Aggression is highest when members are added or leave. Hierarchy is unstable during these transitions.

- Birth, Deaths, Introductions of new members, Reproductive status change in 2-3 year olds
- Higher rates in younger clans and breeding clans
- Chasing, minor to major bite wounds, loss of body parts. Not death.
- Aggression may come and go during these periods. They may start off fine and then suddenly get intense weeks after introduction

Dealing with Aggression in the Moment

What to do when the aggression occurs? The more we interfere, the worse we may make it!

Chasing

- Do not intervene, distract or shift animals
- Provide water to cool off when hot – pools, hoses, misters, ice
- Monitor foot pads closely.
- Reduce areas where they can become trapped. Create roundabouts and high places for escape
- If chasing is prolonged, take days off to allow for rest

Minor contact aggression

- Do not intervene, distract or shift animals. Let them work through it
- Monitor for wounds but do not treat
- Bites happen most to neck, head and back.
- May happen overnight when they are more active
- Can be triggered by resource guarding. Keepers are resources too!

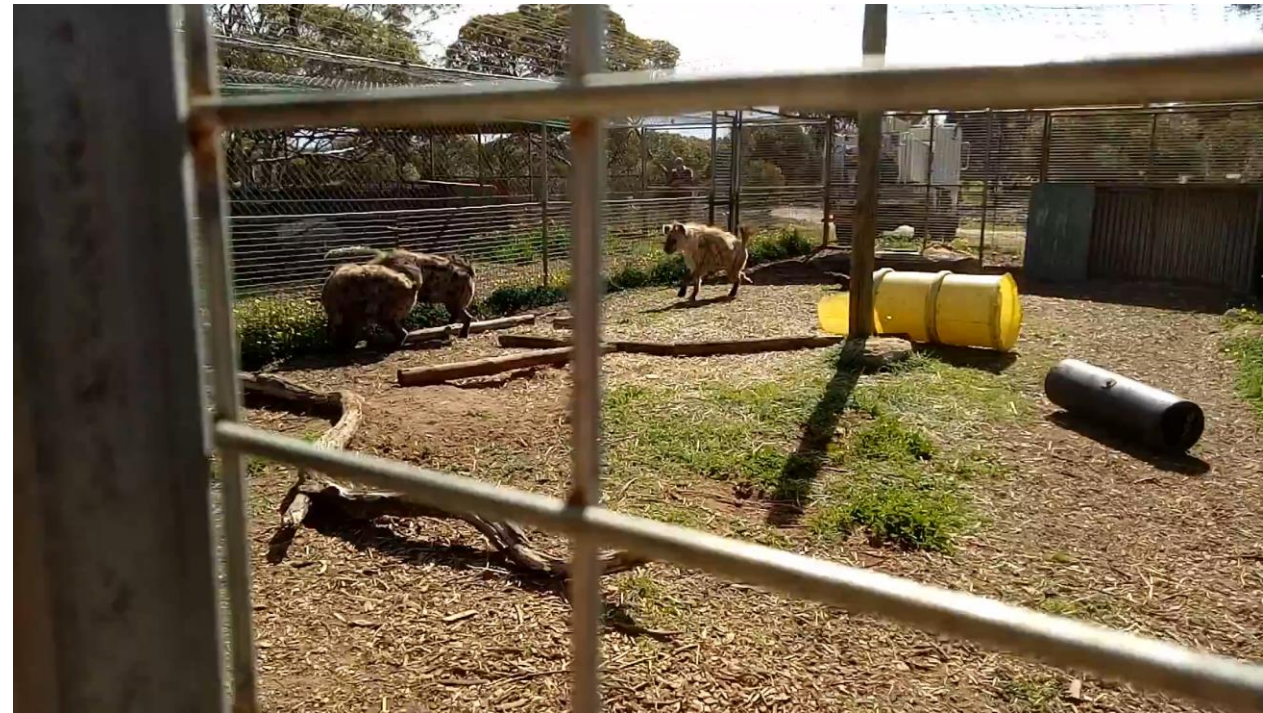


Major contact aggression

- Do not intervene during the fight. This will result in more fighting. They sound and look horrible so be prepared!
- Monitor wounds and treat as needed.
- Fights should result in clear victors.
- Mutual greeting ceremony is a key behavior to all introductions and repairs relationships after fights. Trust exercise.
- Their behavior should determine next steps.
- Change strategies if hierarchy is not settling. Reach out for help. Hgenter@denverzoo.org

Additional tips and tricks:

- Make it smelly!
- Use competitors to bond the clan (lions work best)
- Take it slow – howdy as long as needed, take breaks as needed during intros
- No resources, especially food
- Largest spaces possible with no dead ends. Lots of obstacles.



Wounds

Hyena have evolved to withstand major wounds

- Wounds heal incredibly fast and rarely get infected
- Most wounds do not require medical treatment and only the most extreme cases require sedations
- Flush with water or dilute nolvasan. Can apply creams like SSD
- Loss of body parts is common in cubs – toes, ears, tails, tongues
- Rest and time are the best treatment options.
- Visitors will struggle to understand





Thank You!

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