

Male antelopes deceive females to increase their chances of mating (w/ Video)

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Pictured are topi antelopes Credit: Dr. Jakob Bro-Jorgenson

Scientists at the University of Liverpool have discovered that male topi antelopes deceive their female counterparts in order to increase their chances of mating.

The study of topi antelopes in Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve Park found that male antelopes snort and look intently ahead if an ovulating female begins to stray from their territory. This type of behaviour suggests to the female that there is predator danger ahead. Typical predators of the topi include lions, cheetahs, leopards and humans. When scientists examined the behaviour closely they discovered that the male antelope's snort and intent look were a false call made to keep the female in his vicinity and there was no danger nearby. Rather than risk any danger of a predator the female stays within the male antelope's territory, which increases his chances of mating with her.

This type of intentional deception of a [sexual partner](#) has not been documented before in animals. Previous studies have shown that animals do deceive each other but mainly in hostile situations or to protect themselves. For example, the plover bird feigns injury in a - 'broken wing display'- in order to stop a [predator](#) finding their nest; certain bird species use false alarm calls to distract competitors away from food sources; male vervet monkeys use false alarms to dissolve conflicts between groups, and chimpanzees make false alarm calls to fool rivals and thereby gain access to mates.

The research, carried out by carried out by Dr Jakob Bro-Jorgensen at the University of Liverpool and Wiline Pangle at Michigan State University, studied the topi antelope over a four year period. Dr Bro-Jorgensen said: "Our study showed that males quite frequently pull this trick on the females in heat and one might ask why females keep responding to alarms at all. The answer seems to be that females are better off erring on the side of caution, because failing to react to a true alarm could easily mean death in a place like the Masai Mara where it is full of predators."

"This study reveals a new weapon used by animals in the battle of the sexes: whilst it is well known that males sometimes use their superior strength to force unwilling females, it is a new discovery that they may also actively falsify signals to get their own way."

More information: The research is published in journal The American Naturalist.

Provided by University of Liverpool

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