

# Research shows some people are surprisingly good at getting along with dangerous neighbours

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Macquarie University anthropologist Marcus Baynes-Rock has found

that people are not always quick to kill predators who attack their children. The people of the Hararge Region in Ethiopia are in fact intent on maintaining peaceful relations with spotted hyenas, despite frequent attacks.

In a study recently published in *Anthrozoös*, Baynes-Rock investigated the public reaction to a spate of hyena attacks on children in the Ethiopian town of Maalka Raafu. Rather than eradicating the [hyenas](#), the town officials worked hard to find a solution that did not involve retaliatory killings. The reason: they believed if they killed any hyenas, there would be more attacks and the conflict would escalate.

This led Baynes-Rock to conduct a series of surveys and interviews in villages across Hararge, where he discovered a remarkable tolerance and even an appreciation for the presence of hyenas in the region.

While the majority of the population is Muslim they retain elements of their pre-Islamic belief system. Most important of these is that hyenas control the numbers of harmful unseen spirits. They also deter thieves, control [pest species](#) and clean up animals dead of disease.

Most importantly, the respondents said that the hyenas are intent on maintaining peaceful relations as well.

Baynes-Rock says, "These people are really fond of hyenas, especially so in comparison to people in other parts of Africa."

So fond in fact that 88 per cent of survey respondents considered hyenas a benefit to the area and 51 per cent even supported an increase in hyena numbers. This was despite the fact that hyena attacks had occurred in every village surveyed.

In understanding the reasons behind the relatively peaceful coexistence,

Baynes-Rock says that some of the credit has to go to the hyenas. "It's amazing that hyenas don't attack people more often than they do. Considering the opportunities, they must be choosing not to on the majority of occasions."

This potential for peaceful co-existence is realised to its fullest in Harar, the regional capital. The human population of 100,000 shares the town with three clans of hyenas who enter the town at night and patrol the streets looking for food. The locals encourage the hyenas and actively promote their presence in the town.

'We can learn a lot from these people about trying to get along with other species. Even if relations break down sometimes they show us how it's important to at least make an effort to resolve conflict peacefully," says Baynes-Rock.

**More information:** Baynes-Rock, M. Local Tolerance of Hyena Attacks in East Hararge Region, Ethiopia, *Anthrozoos*, Volume 26, Number 3, September 2013. [www.ingentaconnect.com/content/.../26/00000003/art00008](http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/.../26/00000003/art00008)

Provided by Macquarie University

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