

## Ethograms

What is an ethogram?

- It is the basis for all behavioral studies.
- It is a catalog of behaviors exhibited by one study species, together with unambiguous descriptions of each behavior, as well as (in many cases), information on the context(s) in which each behavior occurs.
- See example of an ethogram in “Hyena Ethogram”, posted on the course website. This example ethogram is adopted from the Mara Hyena Project out of Michigan State University.

How to construct an ethogram?

- Descriptions should be clear, concise, objective and complete.
- Beware of empirical vs. functional description (pattern of muscular contraction vs. attempt to mate). Give only empirical descriptions to define a behavior. You can then supplement these definitions with notes on potential functions.
- Give broad definitions.
- Need to define specific parameters/context (age, sex, etc.) for each behavior
- Be very specific and concise
- Could you give your ethogram to another animal behaviorist and have them use it for observations?
- Be careful not to use the name of the behavior as part of the definition – you will be docked points for this.

Beware of:

- 1) Assuming function
- 2) Anthropomorphism
- 3) Circularity
- 4) Undue overlap
- 5) Incompleteness

Take notes on behaviors in your field journal prior to constructing an ethogram, then write-out the ethogram. See below for an example datasheet for compiling an ethogram.

