



PHOTO: VIVEK SINHA

"I became aware that the tiger was looking at me at a very short range."

THE HUNTER AND THE SIXTH SENSE

by Brian Marsh

One of the earliest and most experienced of professional hunters, and the author of an excellent biography on John "Pondoro" Taylor, Brian Marsh has researched the unscientific phenomenon of the sixth sense, through the writings of Jim Corbett, John Taylor and Ian Nyschens, and presents us with some hair-raising encounters in India and East Africa.

The American philosopher, Napoleon Hill, thus describes the workings of the sixth sense:

"So far, science has not discovered where this organ of the sixth sense is located, but this is not important. The fact remains that human beings do receive accurate knowledge through sources other than the physical senses. Such knowledge, generally, is received when the mind is under the influence of extraordinary stimulation. Any emergency which arouses the emotions, and causes the heart to beat more rapidly than normal may, and generally does, bring the sixth sense into action".

That there is a sixth sense that comes to the aid of hunters in dangerous situations is too well documented to be denied. It is a phenomenon which many hunters have experienced and described – some of them being very well known –

with Jim Corbett being among them. Famous for his books on hunting in India, Corbett makes frequent reference in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* to this sixth sense. One, in the chapter entitled *The Kanda Man-eater*, reads:

"The ground in front of me was strewn with large smooth boulders, among which a tiny stream meandered, forming wherever possible small crystal-clear pools. Shod with the thinnest of rubber-soled shoes, the going over these boulders was ideal for my purpose, and when I had cooled and dried I set off to stalk the kill in the hope of finding the tiger lying asleep near it.

"When three-quarters of the ground had been covered I caught sight of the kill tucked away from where the hill went steeply up to the ridge. The tiger was not in sight, and, very cautiously drawing level with the kill, I took up my position

on a flat boulder to scan every inch of ground visible.

"The premonition of impending danger is too well-known and established a fact to need any comment. For three or four minutes I had stood perfectly still with no thought of danger and then all at once I became aware that the tiger was looking at me at a very short range. The same sense that had conveyed the feeling of impending danger to me had evidently operated in the same way on the tiger, and awakened him from his sleep.

"To my left front were some dense bushes, growing on a bit of flat ground. On these bushes, distant fifteen or twenty feet from me, and about the same distance from the kill, my interest centred. Presently the bushes were gently stirred and the next second I caught sight of the tiger going at full speed up the steep hillside."

Corbett describes another incident in *The Chowgarh Tiger*:

“We had covered about half the distance we had to go along the ridge, when all at once, and without being able to ascribe any reason for it, I felt we were being followed. Arguing with myself against this feeling was of no avail; there was only one man-eater in all this area and she had procured a kill three miles away, which she was not likely to leave. However, the uneasy feeling persisted, and as we were now at the widest part of the grassy ridge I made my men sit down, instructing them not to move until I returned, and myself set out on a tour of investigation.

“Retracing my steps to where we had first come out on the ridge, I entered the jungle and carefully worked round the open ground and back to where the men were sitting. No alarm-call of animal or bird indicated that a tiger was anywhere in the vicinity, but from there on I made the four men walk in front of me, while I brought up the rear, with thumb on safety catch and a constant lookout behind.

“When we arrived at the little village my companions had started from, they asked for permission to leave me. I was very glad of this request, for I had a mile of dense scrub jungle to go through, and though the feeling that I was being followed had long since left me, I felt safer

and more comfortable with only my own life to guard. A little below the outlying terraced fields, and where the dense scrub started, there was a crystal-clear spring of water, from which the village drew its water supply. Here, in the soft, wet ground, I found the fresh pug marks of the man-eater.

“These pug marks, coming from the direction of the village I was making for, coupled with the uneasy feeling I had experienced on the ridge above, convinced me that something had gone wrong with the ‘kill’ and that my quest would be fruitless...

“For the next fourteen days I spent all the daylight hours either on the forest roads, on which no one but myself ever set foot, or in the jungle, and only twice during that period did I get near the tigress. On the first occasion I had been down to visit an isolated village, on the south face of the Kala Agar ridge, and on the way back had taken a cattle track that went over the ridge and down the far side to the forest road, when, approaching a pile of rocks, I suddenly felt there was danger ahead.

“The distance from the ridge to the forest road was roughly three hundred yards. The track, after leaving this ridge, went steeply down for a few yards and then turned to the right and ran diagonally across the hill for a hundred yards; the pile of rocks was about midway on

the right-hand side of this length of track. Beyond the rocks a hairpin bend carried the track to the left, and a hundred yards further on, another sharp bend took it down to its junction with the forest road.

“I had been along this track many times, and this was the first occasion on which I hesitated to pass the rocks. To avoid them I should either have had to go several hundred yards through the dense undergrowth or make a wide detour round and above them; the former would have subjected me to very great danger, and there was no time for the latter, for the sun was near setting and I still had two miles to go. So, whether I liked it or not, there was nothing for it but to face the rocks.

“The wind was blowing up the hill so I was able to ignore the thick cover on the left of the track, and concentrate all my attention to the rocks to my right. A hundred feet would see me clear of the danger zone, and this distance I covered foot by foot, walking sideways with my face to the rocks and the rifle to my shoulder: a strange mode of progression, had there been any to see it.

“Thirty yards beyond the rocks was an open glade, starting from the right-hand side of the track and extending up the hill for fifty or sixty yards, and screened from the rocks by a fringe of bushes. In this glade a karker was grazing. I saw



“Here, in the soft wet ground I found the pug marks of the maneater.”



her before she saw me, and watched her out of the corner of my eye. On catching sight of me she threw up her head, and as I was not looking in her direction and was moving slowly on she stood stock still, as these animals have a habit of doing when they are under the impression that they have not been seen. On arrival at the hairpin bend I looked over my shoulder and saw that the karker had lowered her head, and was once more cropping the grass.

"I had walked a short distance along the track after passing the bend when the karker went dashing up the hill, barking hysterically. In a few quick strides I was back at the bend, and was just in time to see a movement in the bushes on the lower side of the track. That the karker had seen the tigress was quite evident, and the only place she could have seen her was on the track. The movement I had seen might have been caused by the passage of a bird, on the other hand it might have been caused by the tigress, anyway, a little further investigation was necessary before proceeding further on my way.

"A trickle of water seeping out from under the rocks had damped the red clay of which the track was composed, making an ideal surface for the impression of tracks. In this damp clay I had left footprints, and over these footprints I now found the splayed-out pug marks of the tigress where she had jumped down from the rocks and followed me, until the karker had seen her and given its alarm-call, whereupon the tigress had left the track and entered the bushes where I had seen the movement.

"The tigress was undoubtedly familiar with every foot of ground and, not having had an opportunity of killing me at the rocks – and her chance of bagging me at the first hairpin bend having been spoiled by the karker – she was probably now making her way through the dense undergrowth to try to intercept me at the second bend.

"Further progress along the track was now inadvisable, so I followed the karker up the glade, and turning to the left worked my way down, over open ground, to the forest road below. Had there been sufficient daylight I believe I could, that evening, have turned the tables on the tigress, for the conditions, after she had left the shelter of the rocks, were all in my favour. I knew the ground as well as she did, and while she had no reason to suspect my intentions towards her, I had the advantage of knowing, very clearly, her intentions towards me. However, though the conditions were in my favour, I was unable to take advantage of them owing to the lateness of the evening.

"I have made mention elsewhere of the sense that warns us of impending dan-

ger, and I will not labour the subject further beyond stating that this sense is a very real one and that I do not know, and therefore cannot explain, what brings it into operation. On this occasion I had neither heard nor seen the tigress, nor had I received any indication from bird or beast of her presence, and yet I knew, without any doubt, that she was lying up for me somewhere among the rocks.

"I had been out for many hours that day and had covered many miles of jungle with unflinching caution, but without one moment's unease, and then, on cresting the ridge, and coming in sight of the rocks, I knew they held danger for me, and this knowledge was confirmed a few minutes later by the karker's warning call to the jungle folk, and by my finding the man-eater's pug marks superimposed on my footprints".

And this in *The Champawat Man-Eater*: "The tigress had carried the girl straight down to this spot, and my approach had disturbed her at her meal. Splinters of bone were scattered round the deep pug-marks into which discoloured water was slowly seeping and at the edge of the pool was an object which had puzzled me as I came down the watercourse, and which I now found was part of a human leg. In all the subsequent years I have hunted man-eaters I have not seen anything as pitiful as that young comely leg – bitten off a little below the knee as clean as though severed by the stroke of an axe – out of which warm blood was trickling.

"While looking at the leg I had forgotten all about the tigress until I suddenly felt that I was in great danger. Hurriedly grounding the butt of the rifle I put two fingers on the triggers, raising my head as I did so, and saw a little earth, from the fifteen-foot bank in front of me, come rolling down the steep side and plop into the pool...

"My prompt action in pointing the rifle upwards had possibly saved my life, and in stopping her spring, or in turning to get away, the tigress had dislodged the earth from the top of the bank".

And when hunting *The Mohan Man-Eater*:

"On the fourth evening, when I was returning at sunset after visiting the buffalo on the ridge, as I came around a bend in the road thirty yards from the overhanging rock, I suddenly, and for the first time since my arrival at Kartkanoula, felt I was in danger, and that the danger that threatened me was on the rock in front of me. For five minutes I stood perfectly still with my eyes fixed on the upper edge of the rock, watching for movement. At that short range the flicker of an eyelid would have caught my eyes, but there was not even this small movement; and after going forward ten paces, I again stood watch-

ing for several minutes.

"The fact that I had seen no movement did not in any way assure me – the man-eater was on the rock, of that I was sure, and the question was, what was I going to do about it? The hill, as I have already told you, was very steep, had great rocks jutting out of it, and was overgrown with long grass and tree and scrub jungle. Bad as the going was, had it been earlier in the day I would have gone back and worked round and above the tiger to try to get a shot at him, but with only half an hour of daylight left, and the best part of a mile still to go, it would have been madness to have left the road. So, slipping the safety-catch and putting the rifle to my shoulder, I started to pass the rock.

"The road here was about eight feet wide, and going to the extreme outer edge I started walking crab-fashion, feeling each step with my feet before putting my weight down to keep from stepping off into space. Progress was slow and difficult, but as I drew level with the overhanging rock and then began to pass it, hope rose high that the tiger would remain where he was until I reached that part of the road from which the flat bit of ground above the rock, on which he was lying, was visible. The tiger, however, having failed to catch me off my guard, was taking no chances, and I had just got clear of the rock when I heard a low muttered growl above me, and a little later a karker went off barking to the right, and then two hind sambhar started belling near the crest of the triangular hill.

"The tiger had got away with a sound skin, but, for the matter of that, so had I, so there was no occasion for regrets, and from the place on the hill where the sambhar said he was, I felt sure he would hear the bell I had hung round the neck of the buffalo that was tied on the ridge near the stagnant pool".

Linlithgow, Viceroy of India, wrote in the foreword of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*: "These stories are the true account of Major Corbett's experiences with man-eating tigers in the jungles of the United Provinces. I am most glad to commend them to all who enjoy a well told tale of action and adventure". The sixth sense that Corbett tells about was certainly no figment of imagination!

John 'Pondero' Taylor, equally well known as a hunter and a writer, also describes this sixth sense when in the presence of danger, and in *Maneaters and Marauders* he tells of it on several occasions. He wrote when telling of *The Benga Maneaters*:

"The night was so hot that after they had cooked their food even my African didn't want a fire and allowed it to die down. They were sleeping in a circle round the ashes of the fire, the nearest of

them only a few feet from my bed, the foot of which was some ten or twelve feet away from the road. My little cook-boy, whom I called Friday, did not for some reason join the circle but spread his sleeping mat between the foot of my bed and the road and lay down there all by himself.

“Having had much experience in man-eater country I had long trained myself to sleep with one eye and one ear open: moreover, there is an inner intuition which one can develop and which will always warn one of imminent danger either by day or night. I had long learnt to trust implicitly in this ‘sixth sense’, and had never known it to let me down.

“The sky was cloudless, but there was no moon. Somewhere around midnight I partially awoke and saw little Friday get up, pick up his sleeping mat by one corner and, dragging it behind him, walk drowsily over to the sleeping circle, drop the mat between two of the sleepers, lie down on it, kick his sheet over himself, and drop instantly asleep again... next morning we found the fresh pug mark of a lion within a few inches of where little Friday’s head had been.

“Had the same inner intuition warned the boy subconsciously so that, still more or less asleep, he had changed his position shortly before the lion arrived? His pug mark was only six feet from the foot of my bed, yet, as I have already mentioned, I experienced no trace of that

inner warning, I would not have expected to have if these had been ordinary ‘hunting’ lions – I have many times had such approach very close at night when I was sleeping, as the lions’ spoor clearly showed next morning, but because their approach had been merely out of curiosity I was in no danger”.

When telling of the hunting down of *The Nsungu Maneaters* he wrote:

“We got away early next morning to return to Nsungu. I was leading the way and we were, of course, proceeding in as compact a party as the narrow footpath would allow since there was at least one man-eater left out of this troop and, if all the accounts we had heard were accurate, possibly two more.

“We were, I suppose, a couple of miles or thereabouts beyond the village where I had shot the four when I suddenly felt uneasy. Up to that time I had been strolling along quite happily, pleased with my success so far, and feeling glad that the natives throughout the district had carried out my instructions about the burning off of all the grass. From our little hill at Nsungu I had been able to see the smoke of the grass fires in all directions, which shows they had done their work thoroughly.

“Without any warning I felt positive there was danger very, very close. I halted, brought my rifle down from my shoulder so as to hold it in two hands at the ‘ready’, slid forward the safety

catch, and indicated to my men to close right up. I then began to move very slowly and carefully forward. This sudden warning, which I knew so well, could only mean a man-eater: there was no other danger in this district.

“I have had occasion to refer to this inner premonition before, a premonition which has never let me down, so I will only say here that if you want it to work for you, you must always accept it instantly and act upon it. Never attempt to balance it against your reasoning powers.

“As I very cautiously moved forward I felt an irresistible urge to keep my eyes more and more to the right. This satisfied me that the danger lay there... As the sense of danger grew stronger I signed my fellows to leave the path and make their way out over more open ground to the left of the path... That she or another was there I had no possible doubt: I KNEW it... Another step and I spotted her...”

Another very experienced hunter who has had warnings from the sixth sense is Ian Nyschens, one-time professional ivory hunter turned game ranger. Ian commenced professional ivory hunting in northern Portuguese East Africa in 1947, at the age of 17, and when the open elephant permits were curtailed in that country in the early 1950s he was invited to become the very first game ranger to be appointed to the newly formed Southern

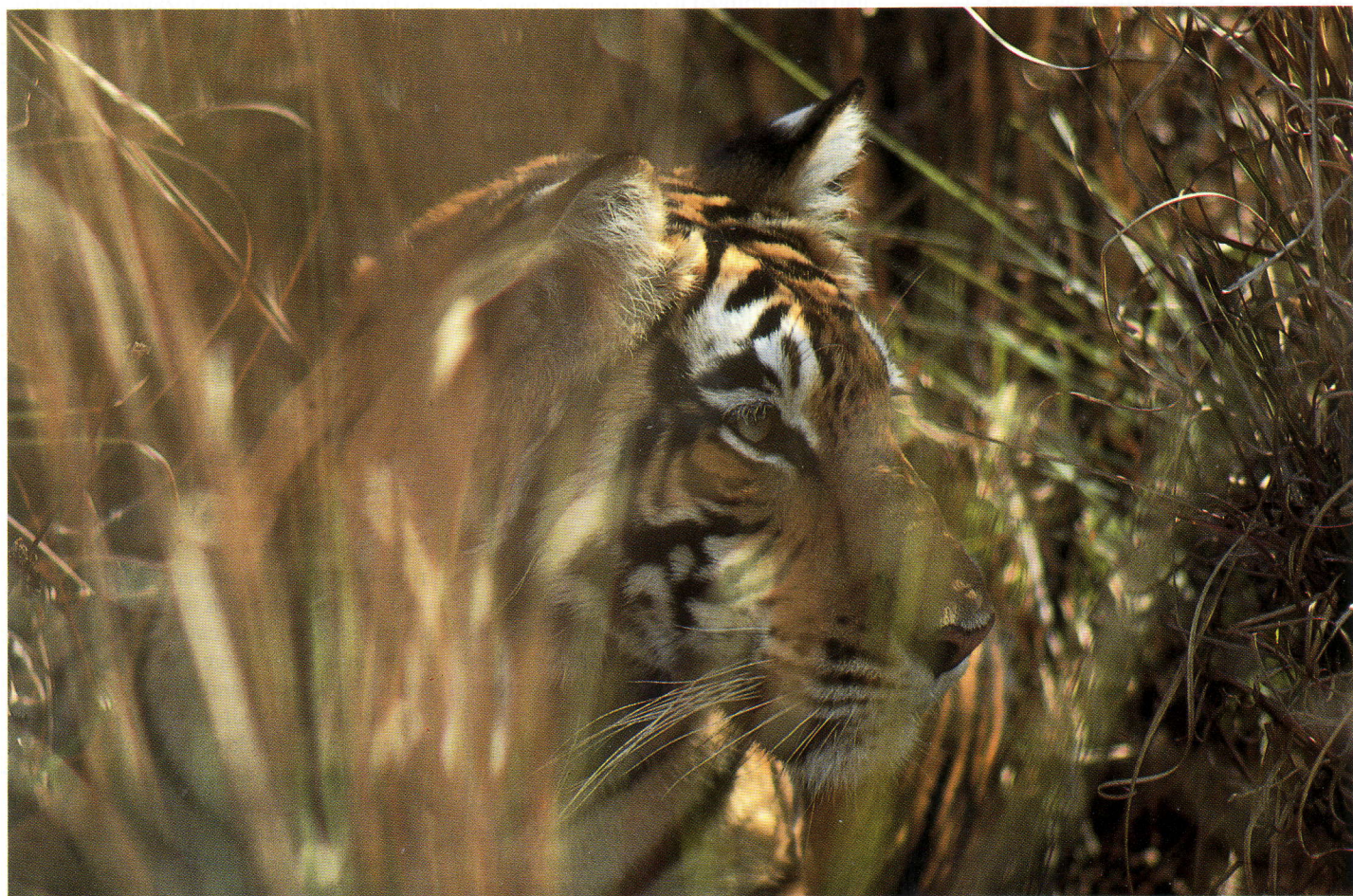


PHOTO: BELINDA WRIGHT

“I saw her before she saw me...”



PHOTO: BRUCE DAVIDSON

"I saw his ears flatten and the next instant he was coming."

Rhodesian Game Department.

Being a game ranger in those days meant only one thing: perpetual, on-going dangerous animal control, and for many years Ian's daily task was hunting down rogue or marauding elephant, buffalo, leopard and lion. It is no exaggeration to say – his returns are in the departmental files for anyone to see – that during Ian's game ranger days he had to shoot well into four figures of the two former species and, probably not unnaturally, had his fair share of narrow escapes. Ian remarked on the sixth sense in a taped interview:

"Imagination, perhaps, but whatever it was I answered to my instincts. My instincts warned me of danger ahead".

Ian believes the sixth sense, although he never referred to it as such, is a "powerful natural defence mechanism triggered by long exposure to over-taut nerves". He says the hunter is suddenly able to 'feel' the presence of the dangerous animal in the place where it is hiding in wait without any notification from any of the five known senses. He told of waking up in the dead of night to this feeling to see a lion in the moonlight stalking his stretcher, and on another occasion, to find an elephant standing over his stretcher, which attacked his mosquito net as he rolled out the other side. He gives a graphic account of a hunt for a man-eating lion that had been

wounded by a shot from a muzzle-loader:

"I had been obliged to go it alone, undertaking the tasks of both tracking and observing, because my tracker, a man I had not used before, proved to have no stomach for wounded man-eating lions and had become deliberately obstructionist so I had to send him back.

"Being now completely alone and having to do both tasks taxed my nerves to the extreme, and after going some way along the spoor, continually casting my eyes down to make sure I was still on the lion's tracks, which were hard to see in some places, and then looking quickly up to search the undergrowth for the lion, my instincts suddenly told me I had arrived at the place of close contact. I could "feel" that the lion was there in front of me.

"I stopped and stared for some minutes, trying to visually penetrate the dense vegetation, fully aware that the wounded man-eater was somewhere there watching me, and then I made out the very top of its head just showing above a screen of bush.

"Eye contact provided the spark that propelled the lion into his charge, I saw his ears flatten and the next instant he was coming, but because I had been warned by this inexplicable feeling of the lion's proximity, I was ready and waiting. A single bullet from my Jeffery

.450 brought the charge to a halt."

Ian told of a similar incident which occurred in northern Mozambique in the early days of his ivory hunting. Because the Portuguese authorities gave "special privileges" to hunters prepared to take on the task of hunting down man-eaters, and so removing a thorn from their side, Ian was always happy to oblige, and he tells of a time he witnessed how this "perception to danger" came to the aid of an African hunter he went with to hunt down a man-eating lion.

The hunter was armed with a shotgun, with which he had wounded the man-eater in his village the night before, and the following morning he and Ian went after it together, Ian armed with his Jeffery .450 No.2, and then still a comparative new-boy as far as wounded man-eating lions were concerned:

"On the follow-up the hunter, a tribesman from northern Mozambique who owned a shotgun with which he had wounded the man-eater when it had come into his village the night before, suddenly stopped and lifted his shotgun into the ready position, his eyes slowly traversing the thickets in front of him.

"Apart from the movement of his head and eyes the man was motionless, so I had to be the same. A good ten minutes passed. He stood with the shotgun raised to his waist, obviously certain that the lion was now in close proximity, but



Ian Nyschens spent considerable time winking marauding elephants out of the jesse.

how he knew this I had no idea. It only became clear to me later that he was responding to his instincts.

"If put to the test we all have certain instincts and in the wilds these become more pronounced – some more, some less, in different individuals. But to see this instinct so well developed, without any sight, sound or smell, was something uncanny.

"The hunter and I were side by side, a few feet apart, and he slightly in front of me, when suddenly, in an instant, the leaves of the thicket close in front of us parted, and without a grunt or a snarl of warning, the lion's head emerged.

"The lion took a bound through the air at the hunter. A charge of buckshot from the shotgun took the lion full in the face. I can still remember seeing bits of fluff being blown from it. The lion then crashed to the ground at the hunter's feet to disappear under the low scrub while I fired at whatever part of it that I could see – and went on firing till I knew it was dead.

"If the hunter had not been warned by his instincts that he had arrived at the lion's chosen killing ground, there can be no doubt that we would have walked right onto it. That man's "perception to danger" most certainly saved us".

Ian's Makorekore name is *Kapora-muchesa* – "the one who remains calm in the dense thickets". There are no denser thickets anywhere in Africa than the Zambezi Valley jesse, and Ian spent a considerable amount of his working time winking marauding elephant herds out the jesse – an extremely hazardous occupation. Ian admits he always remained calm, that for his very survival he had to remain calm, but that this kind of hunting played havoc with his nerves, and it may be of interest to record what he called "the second stage of this same defence mechanism".

These elephant herds had been much harassed by amateur hunters, which was why they hid by day in the jesse, and had the reputation of actually charging the

report of a rifle. After several months of this Ian reached a point when his nerves became stretched a bit too far, when he suddenly found he could not get the sight of grey wrinkled elephant hide out of his mind's eye. Whenever he was not thinking of anything specific, or when he was trying to relax, the vision of grey wrinkled elephant hide would appear before his eyes, and when he fell to sleep all he dreamt about was grey wrinkled elephant hide.

Then he started having hallucinations while out hunting, seeing elephant where there were none, and after he actually threw up his rifle and fired at the head of a "ghost" elephant that suddenly emerged from the bush right in front of him – he knew the time had arrived for him to quit.

He returned to base and asked Archie Frazer, the Chief Game Officer and Ian's boss, to send him to a place where all the elephants were real and which would only charge him one at a time. □