

ALCOHOLIC NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER July 26,2003

(Bob is crouching behind a bush while a small AA group is on his left)

BOB: Good afternoon and welcome to National Geographic Explorer. I'm your host Bob Beastie. Today we are going to look at a wild species of animal few people have seen up close: the recovering alcoholic. Luckily we have found some in their natural habitat.

CHAIR: (loud) Welcome to the Natural Habitat Group of AA. Please join me in the serenity prayer.

(group says serenity prayer quietly)

BOB: First off, observe how they congregate in friendly herds they call (pause) groups. Now these groups can be anywhere from two people to several hundreds. This group is rather small. They are unique in the animal kingdom as there is no hierarchy in the AA groups. No alpha male or female. They take turns and their leaders don't govern. However some older individuals have been none to be most territorial in claiming a specific spot week after week. Most unusual! Now watch as they communicate with one another.

MARY: My name is Mary and I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP: Hi Mary!

BOB: Ya see how the rest of the herd, I mean group responds to the call of the one female? Fascinating. That ritualistic greeting is common with these AA beasts. In their groups they talk and share and have been known to whine from time to time.

MARY: I know the book says the promises will come true if we work for them, but I want them to come true NOW!

BOB: There! That's the whining I was talking about. I didn't think we'd catch it on the first try. Anyway, unlike most other herds of animals that require ample supplies of water to sustain them, the AA group's primary source of hydration is massive amounts of coffee. Recovering alcoholics are identified with coffee like koalas are with eucalyptus leaves. Now and then

they do require other nourishment and they hold special meetings where they pool their food into something called a potluck. Sweets are popular among this species and they have been known to swell up like puffer fish when they first stop consuming alcohol and join a group. Let's listen in again.

CHAIR: Do we have any newcomers?

CHUCK: My name is Chuck and I ain't no alcoholic.

GROUP: Uh, Hi Chuck.

CHUCK: I've been listening to you losers talk about God and how much better your lives are today and blah blah blah. Sounds like a bunch of crap to me. I don't have a problem with alcohol but I do have one with my old lady, my boss, the cops and the probation department. If everyone would just leave me the hell alone I'd be fine.

BOB: This phenomenon is called denial. Obviously the mid-sized male is an alcoholic, but he is the last to admit it. The truly fascinating part is what happens next.

GROUP: Keep coming back!

BOB: You see? In most animal sub groups such as the Tanzanian Wildebeest or Sub Tropic Platypus a creature like Chuck would be viewed as a threat or unwanted infiltrator. At best he would be chased from the group by the alpha male; at worst he would be ripped to shreds and eaten. In the AA group, however, Chuck is welcomed and encouraged to keep coming back. Oh, these are strange creatures! Let's listen some more:

CHAIR: Do we have anyone who would like to share?

MERTLE: I'm Mertle, I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP: HI Mertle!

MERTLE: Well, I'm back. *(pause)* As most of you know I had 11 years of sobriety and I went back out last December. I wish I could point to a single reason why, but I can't. Well, I did stop going to meetings and stopped

communicating with my Higher Power. Anyway, I'm just SO glad to be back!

BOB: Mertle is a very interesting case. Back in October of last year, we shot Mertle with a tranquilizer dart. Fortunately, it was a speaker meeting so her brief unconscious state went undetected by others in the group. We secretly installed a tracking device on her to gain more insight into the migratory patterns of AA members. Well, we had an inkling something was amiss when we noticed she stopped frequenting her AA groups and instead was a regular at AI's Liquor Emporium, Bubba's Booze World and the county detention facility. This explains it. Now, like Chuck, Mertle is welcomed back with much affection. Finally, the closing of the meeting is truly a spectacle unlike any in the animal kingdom. Watch now as they rise from their perches and join hands.

(group gets up and joins hands)

After a brief prayer, they engage in a rhythmic ritual consisting of vocalizations and intricate hand movements. Oh, here it is:

GROUP: Keep coming back it works if you work it and you let it so work it cause you're worth it!

BOB: These strange sounds have been known to keep going on for up to five minutes as more and more lines are added. With that the group disperses and they go their separate ways. Some consume more caffeine and nicotine and others engage in an unapproved mating ritual called 13th Stepping. Well, that's all for this week. Join us next week for part two of our special look at recovering alcoholics when we will observe them in a hostile free-for-all they call a "business meeting". That episode is entitled "When Alcoholics Attack!" See you next week on National Geographic Explorer!