

Where *to* Push

Understanding an animal's bubble of security, knowing where and how to apply pressure to get cattle to move in the right direction at the right speed, can save wear and tear on cows and cowboys.

Story by

HEATHER SMITH THOMAS

When moving cattle, it helps to know how they will react to various things. Understanding cattle behavior can help you get the job done with fewer cowboys and less trauma for the cattle. If you are patient, understanding and consistent, you can move cattle with little stress and minimal effort.

Whether moving cattle on horseback or on foot, use their behavior patterns to your advantage, paying particular notice to their flight zone — their bubble of security. Each animal has its own space in which it feels safe and unthreatened. If you come closer than that imaginary boundary, the animal will move away from you.

This bubble is much larger for the wilder, suspicious animal than for a gentle, trusting individual. Wild cattle have a much wider flight zone than tame ones who have been handled frequently and quietly. A wild cow that rarely sees humans may not let you get within 50 yards.

Watch for signals

Cattle that are excited have a larger flight zone than they do when they are calmer.

If you are trying to move cattle without stressing them, pay close attention to the flight zone and stay in tune with the animals' signals and intentions. Approach quietly and slowly, giving the animal or herd time to see you and to realize you are not a threat.

If the cattle are accustomed to you, speak to them so they know it is you. Cattle that know you may be more relaxed once they recognize you, whereas they might be more upset by strangers.

Cattle have wide-angle vision and can see behind themselves without turning their heads, but they have a blind spot directly behind them and can be startled if you approach them the wrong way. They will be nervous if you go directly behind them where they can't see you.



It is their natural inclination for cattle to follow a leader. When moving cattle a long distance, they will travel better if you let them drift in a long string at their own speed. This will stress them least and will avoid a bunch milling around. [PHOTO BY CHRISTY COUCH]

You'll make better progress moving an individual or a herd if they stay calm. The calm animal is more apt to see the open gate instead of charging past it.

You can direct calm cattle by approaching, but not entering, the bubble of security. One or two people can move a herd or get an individual into a corral using patience and common sense, giving the necessary room for them to move away from you — in the proper direction — while keeping the situation calm and controlled.

Understanding the security bubble

is one of the keys to easy handling. When you get too close, the animals move. When you retreat from this personal space, they slow down or stop. To move cattle quietly, walk or ride on the edge of this flight zone, pressing it to make them move away from you, and easing off to slow or stop them. When they move in the proper direction at the proper speed, ease up as a reward. Press closer only if they stop.

When working cattle in a small space — such as a corral, alleyway or barn — remember that confined ani-

INSIGHT:**Avoid stress**

Minimize stress as much as possible when moving and working cattle. Stress reduces the ability to fight disease, decreases weight gain, inhibits proper rumen function and increases shrink, which can be important factors when gathering or working cattle to sell.

To avoid bruising, don't ram cattle through gates or beat on them. Stressful situations make cattle harder to handle next time, so minimize excitement, agitation and use of electric prods.

Your corral design can also be a factor in whether or not your cattle are easy to work. Corrals should be designed so cattle "flow" through them readily and can easily see their way.

Move cattle quietly. The people doing the moving are often the reason a herd won't move or runs the wrong way. Too much yelling, chasing and using aggressive dogs can excite cattle. They usually don't fear people, but noise and movement can quickly change that.

If cattle can be moved at a walk, with

no yelling and running, they will be more receptive to whatever you are trying to do. Once they start running, however, they're in an entirely different frame of mind. Worry and panic assume control. The cattle become extremely defensive and evasive, looking for an escape route and trying to avoid being corralled.

Use of dogs can be counter-productive, especially when sorting cattle. Dogs may distract or upset the animals so much that they are totally uncooperative. Well-trained dogs can be useful when moving cattle in large pastures, through brush or difficult terrain where it is hard for horse or human to go; but dogs in a small area can cause a lot more problems than they solve.

Dogs worry cattle and put them "on the fight," especially cows with calves. Some cows will spend a lot more energy chasing a dog than heading for the gate. And in the corral, a dog may cause a cow to run over you.

imals may become more nervous. Their "bubble" will be larger. If you get too close, they may become agitated, especially if you approach them head-on.

If an animal feels cornered, it won't stay calm. If you invade a cow's security space when she feels cornered, she may panic, try to jump the fence or run back over you. If cattle in a corral or sorting alley start to turn back, give them space, back up and get out of their flight zone to allow them to calm down.

If moving a cow forward, approach her from the rear half of her body, behind the shoulder. If you approach ahead of the shoulder, she will turn away from you or back up, defeating your purpose. To keep a cow moving forward, stay off to the side, at the edge of her security bubble, at a position behind her shoulder.

Don't follow directly behind a cow; you need to be a little to one side so she can see you. If you are in her blind spot, she will want to stop and turn around to face you. Cattle don't like a possible threat that is out of their sight. They want to know where you are at all times, and they are much more comfortable about your presence if they can see you. If you approach a cow too closely in her blind area, she may kick you.

Tips for moving cattle

Don't try to move cattle from the rear. They may run away or stop and turn. Move them at a slow walk and concentrate on moving the leaders. Where they go, the others will follow.

Get the herd moving, then you can steer them in a certain direction. Approach at an angle to start them in the direction you wish them to go. Once the leaders are moving, move with them, just behind the leader's shoulder to keep her moving. The herd will tend to stay together if you work quietly. If not alarmed and upset, the tailenders usually follow the rest.

A two-person job

Two people can move a large herd efficiently; one can go alongside the leaders while the other moves alongside the main herd in a position where cattle won't try to go between the front and rear person. Move up on them to encourage them to go forward in the proper direction. Keep the proper distance to get the proper response.

If the herd slows too much, move closer so they will start moving again, then veer off at an angle to relieve the pressure on their security bubble so they'll be at ease and won't move too fast.

Flighty cattle require more "playing





It's easy to move cattle if they are trained to come when you call and to follow you. Two people can round up and move a large herd a long way, even through difficult terrain, if the cattle know and trust you and realize you are moving them to new pasture. [PHOTO BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON]

room” than gentle cattle. You can't press too close or they may spook, causing the herd to split or stragglers to break off and go another direction.

If working cattle in a corral or through a gate, use body position to keep the herd movement under control and traveling at a sensible speed.

Cattle should be trained to respond to your movements so you are always in control.

Follow the leader

If moving cattle a long way, they will travel better if you let them drift in a long string at their own speed. It is their natural inclination to follow a leader, single file. This will stress them least and avoid the problem of a big bunch milling around in a trail or roadway without leaders.

It is easy to move cattle if they are

trained to come when you call and to follow you. One or two people can round up and move a large herd a long way, even through difficult terrain, if the cattle know and trust you and realize you are moving them to new pasture.

With one person going ahead of them, calling, and one person behind to herd the stragglers, two people can move a lot of cattle easily. My daughter and I can move our whole herd (more than 300 animals, including cows and calves) several miles up a steep mountain through heavy timber when gathering them off the range in the fall or taking them to the next range pasture.

One of us is positioned ahead of the herd, calling them. They trust us and know that every time we call them they are going to better pasture or home to the green fields. Cows that trust you will follow much more readily and eagerly

than they will drive, with a lot less energy expended by both them and you.

The best way to move cows is patiently and slowly, especially with calves in the group or fat ones that tire easily. Never hurry them on a hot day. Allowed to go their own speed, and knowing they are going to new pasture, they'll climb a steep mountain willingly without the yelling and chasing that wears out cowboys, horses and cattle.

There's a lot of truth in the old cowboy saying that the fastest way to move cows is slowly. If you pace cattle to their abilities, you get there faster and with much less stress than if you try to hurry them and they wear out and quit.

