

Many people find it exciting to watch the adventures of the contestants in Survivor, the reality programme on television.

But what can be seen on television is not what survival is about at all. What you see there is actually well choreographed games.

If you really want to experience survival, you should ride through one of Africa's nature reserves on your mountain bike. If you do that, you may encounter wild animals that are free to do what they want to because they are not directed by producers of television programmes.

During the past two weeks, two incidents occurred in South Africa in which mountain bikers had meetings with wild animals that could well have been fatal, while they were competing in races.

Switzerland's Kathrin Stirnemann and Sandro Soncin (BH Hai Bike) experienced the adventure of a lifetime during the fourth stage of the DCM Cape Pioneer Trek when they were 'attacked' by a herd of zebras.

Paul Valstar, race commentator, was driving behind them through the Gondwana Big Five Game Reserve just outside Albertinia.

Suddenly he saw a herd of zebras hurtling towards the two cyclists.

"It was amazing to see, but at the same time very frightening. I thought one of the zebras was going to run straight into Kathrin. That would have been catastrophic, because an adult zebra weighs about 350 to 400 kg and she weighs about 52kg.

"Luckily the zebra just missed her. I guess the gap between her and the zebra was less than a metre."

Stirnemann and Soncin admit that they had the fright of their lives.

Stirnemann said: "I was not aware of what was happening. I noticed some movement from the corner of my eye and when I turned my head to see what was happening, I saw this animal running straight towards me. At the time I did not realize that it was a zebra.

"I did not know what to do. All I could think of was to shout: 'Attention'. It did not work. The animal did not understand and just continued to run towards me. It was a great relief when it missed me,"

Ironically, the incident occurred right in front of a road sign warning drivers to be careful of animals crossing the road.

Stirnemann could rightfully wonder what she had sinned to anger animals. Her encounter with the zebra was the second time in 12 months that she was nearly hospitalized by an animal.

Last year she was kicked off her mountain bike by a cow in Switzerland.

The 17-year-old Evan van der Spuy, South African Youth Cross-country Cup Series champion for 2010, has been at the centre of global attention after an incident two weeks ago in which he was knocked off his mountain bike by a Red Hartebeest while he was competing in a race in KwaZulu-Natal.

The incident was filmed by his teammate of Team Jeep South Africa, Travis Walker, who was riding behind him with a handlebar-mounted video camera. The clip shows Van der Spuy riding at speed through a flat grassland section of the route. He notices movement to his right, points to the right, slackens off his pedalling for a moment before he is knocked off his bike by an adult hartebeest, which apparently tries to jump over him.

The antelope's head knocks Van der Spuy on the right side of his helmet-protected head and then rider and animal tumble to the ground. The buck, apparently uninjured, leaps up and runs off, while Van der Spuy writhes groggily on the ground, attended to by Walker. Van der Spuy is later seen standing in front of the camera, apparently dazed, while inspecting his damaged helmet.

This incident has been viewed on You Tube by more than ten million people.