

Week of April 4, 2011 – Wild Life Safety

It is not uncommon for workers performing field assignments at remote locations to encounter deer, mountain lions, coyotes, raccoons or bears while on the job. As a means to protect yourself and stay safe in the event of a wildlife encounter, it is important to understand animal behavior and learn how to respond appropriately.

Wild animals generally avoid human contact, but if you do see an animal in the wild, maintain your distance. Don't attempt to feed, catch or pet a wild animal. Never approach wildlife babies or animal mothers with their babies; the mother's protective response can be very fierce. Report injured or aggressive animals to authorities; don't attempt to give aid to injured wildlife. If an injured animal approaches you, move slowly away.

Mountain lion sightings are rare, but they have been known to attack humans. If you do encounter a mountain lion, don't run. Stay calm and hold your position or back away slowly. Convince the animal that you're not prey and that you might be dangerous. Face the lion and try to appear as large as possible by standing upright and raising your arms. If the lion acts aggressively, wave your arms and shout. Grab a stick or throw objects at the lion. If you are attacked, fight back.

Bears try to avoid people, but if you do see one, make as much noise as possible. Do not corner a bear. If the bear feels trapped, it may act aggressively. To avoid attracting hungry animals don't carry food products, don't keep food near you, and don't leave food in your opened vehicle.

Normally, coyotes and deer are not a threat to humans. Avoid them and do not feed them. When driving, watch for deer crossing signs. Of course this means that you need to be focused on driving – talking on cell phones or texting must be avoided. Adjust your speed according to the distance you can see up the road. If you see one deer cross the road, wait for others because they often travel together. If you cannot avoid a deer or other animal on the road, it's better to hit it rather than risk skidding off of the road and into a ditch or swerving into another vehicle or tree. This is easier-said-than done, so when driving on mountain roads, you need to be aware of the possibility that an animal may suddenly appear and therefore, condition yourself to not make any sudden turns should an animal unexpectedly appear in your driving path.

Wildlife encounters can expose you to rabies, a disease that causes brain swelling and death. Because the virus that causes the disease is present in animal saliva, a bite or even a lick from an infected animal can be serious. Infected animals may not show the symptoms of rabies such as frothing at the mouth. They may act aggressive or out of character, such as a nocturnal animal being active during the day.

Avoiding animals is the best prevention for rabies, but if you are bitten, scratched, or licked by a wild animal, wash the area with soap and water immediately. If it is possible and safe to do so, try to trap the animal for testing. Seek medical treatment right away. If you are in frequent contact with wild animals, there are vaccines available to prevent rabies.

As a last means of defense against aggressive animals, pepper spray can be used. To be effective, it must be sprayed directly into the animal's face. However, a breeze could blow the spray away or into your face. If you do decide to use pepper spray, get training to use it properly and safely.

For safety, keep your distance and keep your cool when encountering wild animals. Below are a few websites that have great information on staying safe when encountering wildlife.

The Center for Wildlife Information
"Viewing wildlife in Yellowstone"

“Mountain Lion Language”

“Mountain Lions” – Big Bend National Park.

In addition to the larger animals, snakes are always something we must be cognizant during the spring season. Before venturing out into the wilderness, familiarize yourself with the snakes of your area, both venomous and non-venomous species.

- Learn which habitats the venomous species in your region are likely to be encountered in, and use caution when in those habitats.
- Always take a buddy into the field with you.
- Wear boots and loose-fitting pants if you are venturing into venomous snake territory.
- Try as much as possible not to take a snake by surprise. Stay on trails, and watch where you place your hands and feet, especially when climbing or stepping over fences, large rocks, and logs, or when collecting firewood.

Venomous snakebites are rare, and they are rarely fatal to humans. Of the 8,000 snakebite victims in the United States each year, only about 10 to 15 die. However, for any snakebite the best course of action is to get medical care as soon as possible.

- Try to keep the snakebite victim still, as movement helps the venom spread through the body.
- Keep the injured body part motionless and just below heart level.
- Keep the victim warm, calm, and at rest, and transport him or her immediately to medical care. Do not allow him to eat or drink anything.
- If medical care is more than half an hour away, wrap a bandage a few inches above the bite, keeping it loose enough to enable blood flow (you should be able to fit a finger beneath it). Do not cut off blood flow with a tight tourniquet. Leave the bandage in place until reaching medical care.
- If you have a snakebite kit, wash the bite, and place the kit's suction device over the bite. (Do not suck the poison out with your mouth.) Do not remove the suction device until you reach a medical facility.
- Try to identify the snake so the proper antivenin can be administered, but do not waste time or endanger yourself trying to capture or kill it.
- If you are alone and on foot, start walking slowly toward help, exerting the injured area as little as possible. If you run or if the bite has delivered a large amount of venom, you may collapse, but a snakebite seldom results in death.

For more information on snakebites and their treatment see the following, on the U.S. Food & Drug Administration website:

[For Goodness Snakes!](#)

Working safely may get old, but so do those who practice it.

Safety saying of the Week