

NEVADA
DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE



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Too Close for Comfort!

Watching wildlife is fun, but is there ever a time when it's uncomfortable to be around wild animals? Sometimes wildlife is seen running down streets or through yards at the edge of town. This is the urban interface, where human environments meet natural environments. Humans have built their cities farther and farther into wildlife's natural habitats, **encroaching** into wild lands. The animals are being squeezed out of their home territories and don't know about the new borders that people have created.

To make the situation worse, people often put things in their urban landscapes that attract wildlife, such as fountains, golf courses, ponds, travel corridors and hiding places. If a food source is added, these places become irresistible to wildlife, especially if they are suffering from drought and starvation in the wild. Our trash, leftover pet food, and even small cats or dogs can attract hungry animals.

People who live close to nature, such as in rural areas, encounter wildlife more often than city dwellers and know how to deal with it. They have developed a certain tolerance level for the animals' presence, and vice-versa. However, when human-wildlife interactions result in a public safety hazard or financial loss, corrective measures must be taken.



How to be Safe around Wildlife

When we encounter wild animals near our homes or even on the trail, we need to know how to stay safe. It's good to have a healthy respect for the animals that live in the wild. Here are some things we can do to keep animals and people from getting too close to each other.

Don't feed pets outside, and don't leave food outside. Clean up trash and put it in a closed container. It's also important that we don't leave small pets outside alone, because they can be seen as food by coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions. Be careful not to leave open, flowing sources of water accessible to wandering animals. A fresh source of water may be irresistible to thirsty animals. We can also use things that will keep wild animals away from our

yards, like scaring devices and guard dogs.

If we do find ourselves face to face with predatory wildlife, we should not challenge the animal. That means don't tease it, chase it, or throw things at it. If a snake is nearby, stand still, then quietly back away. If a larger animal like a coyote, bobcat, or mountain lion is close, we should make ourselves look big and make a lot of noise. Running only triggers the chase instinct in the animal.

Other safety tips include giving wildlife its space. Remember to keep eyes open when playing near places where animals can hide, like around rocks, and in shrubbery. Remember that almost any wild animal can be dangerous.



For if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another might be lost, until the whole of things will vanish by piecemeal.

- Thomas
Jefferson





Coyote

Coyotes are a well-known symbol of the desert. We often see them depicted in drawings, howling at the moon. Actually, coyotes live all across the United States, but they are most often associated with the Desert Southwest. Here in the Mojave Desert, they live anywhere from low valleys to the tops of mountains and even around cities. The coyote's adaptability has enabled it to significantly expanded its **range**.

The coyote is a member of the dog family and is sometimes called a wild dog. It stands about two feet tall and weighs 20–40 pounds. Desert coyotes are leaner than those that live in the mountains. They have pointed ears and a pointed nose, both good adaptations for sensing prey. A coyote's legs are long to assist in running, and it can go as fast as 40 miles per hour. It can also travel as far as 100 miles in one night! A coyote's fur changes color and thickness with the seasons. Coyotes are considered **furbearers**, and it is legal to trap or hunt them with the proper licenses.



These animals are **omnivores**, and eat just about anything they can find, including small live animals, insects, plant material, **carion** (dead animals), and garbage. They will also prey on livestock and pets. Coyotes kill foxes because they are an animal that competes with them for food. Coyote pups are born in the spring (in dens) in litters of three to nine. Many of the youngsters will not live through their first year. Adults live for about five to seven years.

Do you wonder why they howl at the moon? Actually, the moon has nothing to do with it. Coyotes howl, bark and yelp to communicate and tell each other where they are. Coyotes are popular in stories about the Southwest, and usually take on the character of a trickster, probably because of their intelligence and their slyness. Sometimes coyotes have to be removed from an area if they cause depredation of livestock or pets.

Depredation

Have you ever heard of the fox in the hen house? This is a story of **depredation**. We all know what **predation** is. In the wild, this is the natural process where a predator kills and eats its prey. Depredation come from the same root word, **predate**, meaning to hunt. Add the prefix, "de-" and the word takes on a different meaning. Depredation, then, means to rob, lay plunder to, attack or raid. This definition implies that something is destroyed unnaturally, and something that is of value to people is lost. In other words, depredation occurs when wild animals destroy something of value to a person.

An example of depredation would be a coyote or mountain lion consuming **livestock**, or farm animals. Sometimes wildlife can even depredate our pets. Domestic animals are considered the property of humans. Wildlife can also cause damage to other human property, like crops and buildings, or to the ecosystem itself.

Depredation by wildlife usually occurs where humans and wildlife share a common area or boundary. Houses, farms or ranches that are located close to natural areas are especially vulnerable. Wildlife sometimes finds the manmade habitat and what it offers to be irresistible. Livestock and small pets are tempting food sources, and sources of water are especially attractive. Property such as hay piles, fences and barns can be harmed as well. Wildlife in human territory can cause nuisance, health, and safety problems.

Most of the depredation problems in Nevada are caused by bears, coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions. Sometimes, if a wild animal like a bobcat or mountain lion is depredating, there may be something wrong with it. These two animals Usually stay away from people. If wildlife is attacking a domestic animal or is seen as an immediate threat to human life, game wardens, animal control or other law enforcement officials may have to step in to remove the offending animal. Relocation is not always a good idea, since some animals are territorial and may be put in the wrong territory. Also, animals with an urban taste will most likely return to feed that taste. Contact your local Nevada Department of Wildlife office if you are having conflicts with wild animals.



Raven

The common raven is native to Nevada. In fact, it's called "common" because it is naturally distributed throughout the world. It lives in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia, in all different habitats, except tropical rain forests. This long-lived bird (15 years) has followed people all over the northern part of the globe, looking for a quick meal.

Ravens look like giant crows and are unmistakable because of their size. The raven is just about two feet long, and weighs one and a half to three and a half pounds. Its wingspan is almost four feet. These birds are entirely black, including their eyes, and have a long, thick, knife-like beak. They also have shaggy throat feathers and a wedge-shaped tail. Their wing tips have feathers that look like "fingers." A single bird or a pair are often sighted, rather than flocks of them. The raven appears to be a boastful individual, walking with a swagger and hopping assertively on two feet. Perhaps it is proud of its acrobatic flying ability, doing somersaults, dives, and even flying upside down. Or it may be proud of its cleverness, being able to hunt in teams and sneak food from humans. Ravens are a part of the folklore of many different cultures,



representing a variety of things, from creator to trickster to death. They are playful, known to play with sticks in midair, and are also good problem-solvers.

Ravens, like coyotes, are **omnivores** and eat just about anything they can. They hunt small animals and scavenge off of **carrion**. Also on the menu are other birds' eggs, fish, insects, scorpions, seeds and fruit, trash, pet food and even canine dung. Anything on the ground is fair game. Although they are ground **foragers**, ravens like their nests up high, on trees, cliffs, and power line poles. They are increasing in numbers and are sometimes considered pests around urban areas. In Nevada, ravens are predators on upland game animals, including the sage grouse. They are also predators on young desert tortoises. Sage grouse and desert tortoises are two species whose populations have decreased. However, the common raven is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and cannot be hunted or wounded. Its nests and eggs are also protected from disturbance. So wildlife biologists are working to keep raven predations from seriously affecting these two species.

Scavengers

In the dictionary, to **scavenge** means to clean away dirt or trash from, or to salvage usable material from something. It's like **recycling**, when we save the empty containers and make something else out of them. So scavengers are the clean-up guys in the food chain. They're often forgotten about, but they are very important. Think of what would happen if we didn't have any scavengers in the ecosystem.

Some scavengers only eat **carrion**, or dead animals. But many predators can also be scavengers, and will eat a dead animal if they can't find a live one to eat. These animals, including black bears, grizzly bears and wolverines are **opportunistic** scavengers. Invertebrate animals, such as insects, crustaceans, and worms, make up most of the scavengers on land and consume large amounts of dead and decaying animal carcasses. They move energy through the food chain, from **biomass** found in dead plants and animals to **nutrients** that can be returned to the earth. They also keep the danger of disease low, by eliminating the material that **pathogens** feed on.

In the Project Wild activity, *Which Niche*, students are asked to name jobs that fit different wild animals. Scavengers such as the coyote, raven, and turkey vulture are usually listed as trash men or the sanitation crew.



Project Wild



Project Wild teacher workshops for the fall are scheduled as follows:

Saturday, October 2 and Saturday, October 16, 2010, 8 am – 5 pm both days. You must register through CCSD's Pathlore system. Sorry, no walk-ins allowed.

We are still looking for anyone willing to host a Project Wild class in Pahrump or Tonopah for the Nye County School District. Please contact Margie Klein at 702-486-5127 x 3502 or mklein@ndow.org if you are interested.

You heard it here first!

Upcoming Events

Outdoor and environmental education events take place regularly in southern Nevada – you just have to know where to look!

On October 9, 2010, be sure to visit the Henderson Pavilion for National Trails Day and the rollout of the Nevada Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights campaign. The Outdoor Bill of Rights will provide activities around the state that will get children connected to the outdoors.

And for something to look forward to next spring, make a note of the Las Vegas Science Festival, May 1 – 7, 2011. The tag line is "Science in Las Vegas – What are the Odds?" Sponsored by the Las Vegas Natural History Museum in connection with the Science Festival Alliance and National Science Foundation, the festival will celebrate the many types of pure and applied science found in the Vegas Valley. Many partner organizations are joining the effort to bring interesting topics to school kids in the area.




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Activity: Predator—Prey Matching Game

INSTRUCTIONS:

Look at the list of animals in the left column. They are a list of predators, or animals that prey on other animals. Now look at the list of animals on the right. They are a list of animals that are prey for the predators. For each predator listed, find an animal in the prey column that this predator would eat. Draw a line to it. Every predator has at least one food source listed under the prey column. Also, every prey animal has at least one predator that eats them. All of the animals are found in Nevada.



PREDATOR

- Horned lizard
- Raven
- Chuckwalla
- Raptors
- Owls
- Gila monster
- Bobcat
- Coyote
- Mountain lion
- Roadrunner
- Badger
- Ringtail
- Snakes
- Gray fox
- Bats

PREY

- Chuckwalla
- Insects
- Rabbits
- Burrowing owl
- Rodents
- Lizards
- Quail eggs
- Deer
- Sage grouse
- Bighorn sheep
- Birds
- Ants
- Fish
- Amphibians