



Southern Nevada WILD

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Wildlife Watching

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Wildlife abounds in the desert, especially at an oasis, and seeing it is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. The best viewing times are early morning and dusk. This is when the majority of animals are most active, especially during the summer when they search for cover in the hottest part of the day. Nocturnal animals are active at night, and can sometimes be seen with special lighting techniques, where allowed. Wildlife viewing requires one important thing: patience. Bighorn sheep, rabbits, roadrunners, quail, and even a desert tortoise may surprise you with an appearance. And if you are near a body of water you have a good chance to see water birds flushing out. As with any encounter with wildlife, it is always important to respect the animals' space. So here are some general guidelines for wildlife viewing:

- When hiking, follow designated trails and avoid impacting natural areas. It is best to walk single file. If there are no trails, keep to hard surfaces, or walk in desert washes.
- When selecting a place to stop, do it with as little impact to the natural habitat as possible. Digging in the soil can disturb animals that live in holes, and it can also disturb the soil ecology. Wildlife can be affected by the movement of vegetation and rocks, so try to avoid moving them. It's also best to avoid steep slopes. And don't leave food out, for obvious reasons.
- Finally, keep your eyes open and enjoy the experience!



Outdoor Safety

Here are some tips for keeping kids safe when they are looking for wildlife.

- Tell your children to stay where they can see you or another adult. They should always be within earshot. Using the buddy system is best when exploring. But if they get lost, tell them to "hug a tree," that is, stay in one place. Kids should have a loud whistle with them, which they can use to call for help. Get them accustomed to observing things closely, so that they can remember which way they came. Keep eyes and ears wide open. Don't always look down; don't always look up. Look all around, up close and into the distance.
- Watch for animals, but also watch for burrows and nests. Never let them put their hands into a hole – it could be an animal's home. Try not to step on or crush animal homes. Dense brush can also be a good hiding place for wildlife – and not for kids.
- Don't approach wild animals. Never look a wild animal in the eye. Some animals see this as a challenge. Baby animals, although very appealing, should not be picked up or petted. Wildlife should not be offered food. Keep away from dead animals. Don't pursue wildlife, or harass them in any way. If a child comes upon an animal by chance, the best thing to do is stand still, then back away slowly. Most animals will run away, but dangerous animals such as snakes, coyotes and mountain lions may stand their ground.
- Remember to prepare for the children's' welfare in the outdoors – dress appropriately, wear sunscreen, and bring lots of water. General outdoor ethics should be practiced, too. Do look for new sights and do ask questions about what the kids have seen.

The problem (of conservation education)... is how to bring about a striving for harmony with land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness

- Aldo Leopold



Desert Bighorn Sheep

Do you know Nevada's most famous state animal? Nevada has several state animals, but the state mammal is the Desert Bighorn Sheep. It truly is a symbol of our state, often seen perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking wide-open land below. Desert bighorn sheep are just one kind of bighorn in the state – there are also California Bighorn and Rocky Mountain Bighorn. These wild sheep stand about 3 feet high and weigh about 150 pounds. The **range** where Desert bighorn live includes the southern portion of Nevada, southern California, and Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Texas and Mexico. Rocky mountainsides are their favorite terrain, because they are surefooted and have no trouble climbing. They feed on plants wherever they can.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife puts out **guzzlers** or watering troughs to provide the sheep with supplemental water in sparse times. Bighorns are a **game** animal in Nevada, which means they can be hunted, but only on a limited basis. Hunters have to draw for a tag, which usually takes ten years or more. The Wildlife Commission regularly evaluates how the Desert Bighorn population is doing and determines how many tags may be issued.

Those large curved horns are used for fighting during the breeding season, or **rut**, but they have another use. Bighorn sheep come with their own air-conditioning system. The horns are hollow and veins carry blood up inside of them. When the blood comes into contact with the air in the horn, it is cooled off. The cooled-off blood runs back into the animal's body. Animals with a similar adaptation are the rabbits, with long ears that expose blood in the veins to air. Try waving your hand in front of your face, and you'll see how it works!



Animal Adaptations: Springtime babies

The babies of many wildlife species are born in the spring. This is an adaptation – a built-in way to help them survive. Spring is often the best time to have babies for a number of reasons. The cold weather is over and it is warming up – a better time for birds with few feathers and mammals with thin fur. Rains fall and help the plants to grow. Plants are food for a lot of wildlife. Plants are also eaten by insects, which in turn provide food for animals like birds and lizards. Plants also provide nesting areas for many animals. Young wildlife will have the long summer months to grow strong before it's time to deal with harsh winter conditions.

In springtime, children like to think about soft, cute animal babies. We may think they need our help, but the best thing to do is leave them alone. Their parents can do the best job of taking care of them. Remember, "if you care, leave it there."

Environmental Gatherings: Spring into Action!

One of the precepts of environmental education (EE) after awareness, knowledge and skills, is getting students to take action. There are a number of events going on this spring that allow adults and children alike to take action for their environment.

- World Wetlands Day is Feb 2 (every year), and is sponsored by RAMSAR, with materials available at

<http://www.ramsar.org/wwd/8/cd/wwd2008.htm>.

- National EE week is April 13 – 19, 2008, sponsored by the National Environmental Education Foundation at <http://www.eeweek.org>.

- National Wildlife Week is April 20 – 26, 2008, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation at www.nwf.org. The last day of Wildlife Week is celebrated by a national wildlife watch. There is a Wildlife Watch led by NDOW that is scheduled for Saturday, April 26, 2008 at the Overton Wildlife Management Area.

- The official Earth Day is April 22, 2008, but in Las Vegas the day will be celebrated April 19 at the Summerlin Earthfaire. Get more info at <http://www.earthday.net> and <http://www.summerlin.com/news/events.php>.



Watch Out for Rattlesnakes!

What's that buzzing sound? It's the alarm sounded by one of five species of Nevada rattlesnakes! The shaking rattle of the snake's tail is telling you, "back off!" And back off you should, because rattlesnakes are **venomous**. These snakes are in the **pit viper** family and inject poison into their prey through their fangs when they bite them. You can tell a rattlesnake by its triangular head, narrow neck, thick body, and a tail tipped with a series of inter-locking segments that make up the rattle. It's not true that you can tell the age of a **rattler** by counting the segments in its rattle. A new segment is added every time the snake sheds its skin, but that can be several times a year.



Rattlesnakes live at all elevations and in all kinds of habitat. The species of rattlesnakes that can be found in Nevada include the Sidewinder, Mohave Green, Speckled, Western Diamondback, and Western Rattlesnake. They **prey** on animals such as rodents and lizards. Their jaws open to an amazing 180 degrees – that's a half circle – so that they can swallow their prey whole. They give birth to live babies instead of laying eggs, and young snakes can deliver venom in their bite. Rattles, starting out as a **button**, can't be heard until there are about three segments. But remember that these snakes do not always rattle in warning, so it's best to keep eyes open and hands and feet where you can see them when you are exploring in wild places.

Teachers: NDOW has a new version of the cooperative publication, "Venomous Reptiles of Nevada" available. You can access it at http://www.ndow.org/wild/animals/facts/Nevada_Venomous_Reptiles.pdf

Project Wild

Project Wild is scheduled for February 9 and 16, 2008. Aquatic Wild is scheduled for March 15 and 22, 2008. Classes are available for Clark County School District PDE credit and sign-up for classroom teachers is through Pathlore. Nonformal educators are also welcome – call Margie Klein for more information (486-5127 x 3502). We are looking to set up a special training just for homeschool parents – please call if you are interested! NDOW also offers the trainings in other counties. Nye County will be scheduling a training in Pahrump. If you are in Lincoln or Esmerelda Counties, please contact your school district to request training.



Aldo Leopold—Father of Wildlife Conservation



Heroes are great for children to look up to. Aldo Leopold was an ecological hero.

A life-long fisherman and hunter, Leopold is called the father of wildlife conservation in the United States. He started out as a forester and worked for the U.S. Forest Service in the southwest. He advocated for the first officially protected wilderness area in the country – the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. He was also one of the founders of the Wildlife Society and was influential in the development of modern environmental ethics. When Leopold took a job as Professor of Game Management at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, he was the first person to establish the topic as an academic field of study. His textbook, "Game Management," was the first of its kind and is regarded as a classic. Later he would explain his philosophy of a "land ethic" in the famous book "A Sand County Almanac." Through his writings, Leopold inspires us to see the natural world as a community to which we all belong. Teachers can find a curriculum based on the land ethic at the Leopold Education Project, <http://www.lep.org>. For information on this curriculum coming to Nevada, call Amanda Rowland at 702-293-8716.



Wildlife Times



The Wildlife Education program has been busy providing resources for teachers and parents to utilize.

NDOW has partnered with Vegas PBS to stream wildlife videos on the www.vegaspbs.org education website. The two natural history videos are Bats of Nevada and Venomous Reptiles of Nevada. There is an accompanying brochure for the Reptiles video available on the PBS website, and an accompanying brochure on Bats available by request from the NDOW office.

Besides this newsletter, NDOW is featured in The Cholla Spine, a newsletter of the natural, historic and cultural sites around Las Vegas. Cholla Spine is available on the CCSD interact website, under Beyond the Classroom. Be sure to check out NDOW's link on Beyond the Classroom as well.

NDOW has fact sheets on wildlife species, as well as general wildlife-interest articles on their website at www.ndow.org. Look for the NDOW booth at the Clark County Fair, April 10 – 13, 2008 in Logandale, and at the Summerlin Earthfaire, April 19 at Summerlin Centre Community Park. See you there!

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Totem Animal Activity

Supplies

- Note paper, pens or pencils
- Construction paper, scissors
- Markers or crayons
- Tape and glue
- Craft sticks and decorations
- Sheet of butcher paper



Introduction to Totems

This craft activity is a great way for children to connect to animals and nature. Totem animals show us how humans relate to nature. Animals are usually chosen for the qualities they represent – the way they look, the place that they live, or qualities that a person would like to have. A totem is any being which watches over or assists a group of people and can be found in cultures around the world.

Finding a totem

You may wish to take your child on a field trip to a nature center, a park, or even an art museum. Inspiration can be found in many places, from real-life animal sightings to taxidermy specimens or beautiful paintings. Children should be able to find an animal that they can relate to.

Making the totem

Your child can draw their totem animal on construction paper and cut it out. Help them to choose a color that is appropriate for the animal, then draw with markers or crayons to add detail to their animal. They can put their name on it, and write things about the animal that they like, or the way the animal makes them feel. They can also be decorated with any number of craft decorations to give them more character. A variation for younger children is to make totem face masks out of construction paper, then glue a craft stick to the bottom for a handle. Ask your child to come up with a short story about their totem animal. If you are doing the project with a group of children, you may instruct the children to have a "procession of animals," and act out how each animal would behave. As another group project, you can construct a totem pole made out of all the children's totem animals, or lay out a long piece of butcher paper and have the children make simple drawings of their animals on it. Your child will be proud of this very personal work!