

PREVENTING DANGEROUS INTERACTIONS WITH WILDLIFE

Cori Dolan and Bill Mannan

Living in rural areas offers many wonderful opportunities to see wildlife. Encounters with wild animals are often enjoyable and even exhilarating. There are some instances, however, when wildlife can become aggressive or dangerously defensive. Although occurrences are rare, mountain lions, bears, coyotes, and javelina have been known to attack people and pets. Attacks on people usually occur when animals associate people with food. Because these types of negative encounters with wildlife are usually set in motion by people, they are relatively simple to avoid.

The most important thing to remember is that as a homeowner in a rural area it is up to you to do everything you can to keep wild animals wild. Feeding wild animals, even inadvertently by leaving garbage cans or pet food in unprotected sites, can allow wild animals to habituate to the presence of people. Wild animals that recognize you as a source of food can become dangerous. Javelina that have been fed by well-meaning homeowners have been known to attack even leashed dogs.

Following the guidelines below will reduce the occurrence of wild animals becoming habituated to people and your chances of injury. First, be aware that wild animals have basic needs: food, water, and shelter. Properly managing these things on your property will reduce the likelihood that conflicts will occur.

- Food can include pet food, garbage, fallen fruit, birds or rodents attracted to bird feeders, and even unattended pets.
- Water sources can include a pet's water bowl, ponds or other water features, or a swimming pool.
- Shelter can include a storm drain or any cave-like area beneath a shed or unused building. Javelina will also use areas under porches or mobile homes, or crawlspaces beneath a house.

It may seem mean spirited at first, but discouraging these animals from living close to your home is the best way to help



COURTESY OF THE AZGFD

Coyotes can associate people with food and become a nuisance.

keep wild animals wild and prevent attacks. In addition to removing anything near your home that may attract animals, you can help wild animals keep their natural fear of people. When necessary, the Arizona Game and Fish Department recommends the following means of deterring unwanted wildlife:

- Make loud noises. Shout and bang pots and pans or rattle empty soda cans with pebbles in it (coyote shaker).
- Wave your hands or objects like sticks and brooms.
- Throw small stones or cans.
- Spray the animal with a hose.



Bird feeders can sometimes attract unwanted guests.

- Use a commercial repellent like Mace, if necessary, on bold animals that refuse to leave.
- Never feed wildlife and encourage your neighbors not to feed them or leave anything out that might attract the animals.
- Feed your pets inside and never leave them unattended, especially at dusk and dawn. If it's necessary to leave a small pet outside unattended, keep it in a sturdy enclosure with a roof.
- Keep poultry, rabbits, and rodents in secure enclosures.
- Keep all bird feeders in areas that are inaccessible to unwanted wildlife and keep bird feeding stations clean and free of fallen seeds.
- Trim and remove any ground-level shrubs and branches that provide hiding places or den sites for animals or their prey.
- Secure garbage containers and eliminate odors by cleaning trash cans with a 10% chlorine bleach solution. Put out trash containers on the morning of pickup, not the night before.

- Use block or solid skirting for mobile homes, decks and trailers, or use electric fencing for a temporary fix.
- Block entrance holes to any crawlspaces.

Wild animals that can become a danger to humans will keep coming back to your property if the things that attract them are not removed. Animals that repeatedly offend a homeowner can be dealt with by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, but keep in mind that relocations are rare. The more likely result is that the animal will be euthanized. To avoid this result, homeowners need to do their part.

Following these guidelines will help you behave responsibly, live safely, and help keep wildlife wild. For more information on these and other species' biology, conflicts and prevention, see the resources listed below.

Arizona Game and Fish Department Living with Wildlife
www.azgfd.gov/w_c/urban_wildlife.shtml

Javelina Resistant Plants
ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1238.pdf



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
TUCSON, ARIZONA 85721

CORI DOLAN
Program Coordinator

R. WILLIAM MANNAN
Professor, Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences

CONTACT:
R. WILLIAM MANNAN
mannan@ag.arizona.edu

This information has been reviewed by university faculty.
cals.arizona.edu/pubs/natresources/az1481d.pdf

Any products, services, or organizations that are mentioned, shown, or indirectly implied in this publication do not imply endorsement by The University of Arizona.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.