

# LIONS AND RATTTLERS

By CAROL SEAVEY, Live Well editor

# AND BEARS, OH MY!

## ARM YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE TO DEFEND AGAINST WYOMING'S WILDLIFE

Hiking up switchbacks on a hot summer day, you turn a corner to find a bear in your path. What you do next could be the difference between a great story and a tragic one.

"Any sort of recreating in the back country, or even the front country, is a fantastic experience," said Tara Teaschner, information and education specialist for Wyoming Game and Fish — Cody region. "However, we have to be aware that we

have wildlife species in Wyoming that could potentially cause a human safety threat."

While wildlife attacks are extremely rare, it's important to be prepared.

"Mental preparedness is probably the single most important tool that a person has, as far as safety goes," Teaschner said.

Before your next outdoor adventure, check out the information below and arm yourself with the knowledge to be safe.

### IDENTIFYING AND HABITAT



**PRAIRIE RATTLESNAKE**

Ken Driese/Star-Tribune contributor



**MIDGET RATTLESNAKE**

Zack Walker/Wyoming Game and Fish

Rattlesnakes are the only poisonous snakes that live in Wyoming. Two species make their home here: prairie rattlesnakes and midget shaded rattlesnakes. Both are identified by their elliptical pupils and rattlers.

"More often than not, prairie rattlesnakes are found below 6,500 feet in prairie or sagebrush habitats or rocky outcrops," said Zack Walker, a herpetologist for Wyoming Game and Fish. "Midgets are found in Flaming Gorge."

### AVOIDING ENCOUNTERS

Avoid stepping on or sticking your hands in brush, holes or rocky openings where snakes might hide.

"If you're walking around where there are snakes, anything on your legs — boots, clothing, gaiters — can keep a snake from getting a good hit on you," said Tod Schimelpfenig, curriculum director for the Wilderness Medicine Institute at National Outdoors Leadership School in Lander.

### IN AN ENCOUNTER

Leave it alone and give it some space. Do not handle, mess with or otherwise anger the snake. While a snake can strike from any position, being coiled up is a sure sign that it's ready to strike.

### IF THE SNAKE BITES

About one-third of snake bites are dry, Schimelpfenig said, but the other two-thirds require an antivenom. Head to the hospital immediately. You can call ahead to let the hospital know you're coming or to see if an ambulance can meet you. In the meantime, gently immobilize the limb and keep it level with your heart. Do not ice it. Do not apply a tourniquet. Do not suck the venom out. These treatments will only make matters worse, Schimelpfenig said. If there is venom, bruising and nausea will likely appear within a half hour of being bit.

### IDENTIFYING AND HABITAT



**BLACK BEARS**

Black bears have no shoulder hump. They have long, prominent ears, a long muzzle and straight facial profile. Their claws are less than two inches long, dark colored, sharp and curved. Their claws don't always show in their tracks. Black bears live in most forested, mountainous regions of Wyoming.



**GRIZZLY BEARS**

Grizzly bears have a distinctive hump on their shoulders. Their rumps are lower than their shoulder hump. (When a bear is wet from snow or rain, the hump may be less apparent, Teaschner warns.) Grizzly bears have small, round ears and a dishd facial profile. Their front claws are two to four inches long and usually light-colored. Grizzly bears can be found in northwestern Wyoming, including Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park.



**MOUNTAIN LIONS**

Photos by Mark Gocke/Star-Tribune Contributor

Mountain lions usually have tawny to light-cinnamon colored backs and sides, white chests and undersides, and black on the backs of their ears and tips of their tails. The average female is 90 pounds and 7 feet long and the average male is 150 pounds or more and 8 feet long. You'll know it from Wyoming's other cats — the lynx and bobcat — because grown mountain lions are much larger and have very long tails, measuring about one-third their body length.

They live in areas with conifer, deciduous timber, riparian and tall shrubs at mid-elevation in steep or rugged terrain. In Wyoming, they live in mountain ranges across the state, but are also spotted in the Red Desert and native grasslands north and east of Casper.

### AVOIDING ENCOUNTERS

- Make noise to avoid a surprise encounter, especially when visibility is limited or in noisy areas, such as near streams.

- Hike in a group of four or more — a group makes more noise, so bears are less likely to attack, Teaschner said.

- When in bear country, carry bear spray or a gun.

- Be aware of your surroundings. Ditch the earbuds.

- Steer clear of carcasses. If ravens, foxes or other scavengers seem keen on an area, there may be a carcass nearby.

- Avoid hiking at dusk and dawn, when bears are most active.

- Know the signs of bear activity: rolled rocks, torn up logs, diggings and, of course, scat.

### AGGRESSIVE DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOR:

The animal is acting aggressive in order to protect something, such as a food source, its cubs or its personal space.

Bears are not territorial, Teaschner said, but may have a bubble like you and I. These bears may bluff charge, yawn out of place, vocalize, huff and pop their jaws.

### IN AN ENCOUNTER:

Gather in your group and try to back away from the bear. Avoid direct eye contact with the bear and speak calmly to it. Do not run. Do not scream. Do not yell. If the bear continues its advance, stop and stand your ground. Have your defense ready (either bear spray or a gun) and use it, if needed.

### IN AN ATTACK:

If the bear makes physical contact, lie flat on the ground on your stomach with your hands laced behind your neck.

"Your body language is saying, 'I'm not going to disturb your food or cubs or personal space,'" Teaschner said. "Once that threat is minimized, it should no longer be interested in you."

If the bear rolls you over, roll back onto your stomach. Remain still until you are absolutely sure that the bear has left the area.

Note: In Wyoming, it is legal to shoot a black bear or mountain lion in self defense or defense of one's property. Grizzly bears may also be killed in defense of one's life, but not in defense of one's property.

### PREDATORY BEHAVIOR:

This behavior is very rare. The animal is not protecting anything. It may be interested in you as food, or because it thinks you have food. These animals may stay nearby all day long and approach you boldly and deliberately. For example, a bear that enters a tent is exhibiting predatory behavior. Unlike in aggressive defensive behavior, animals with predatory behavior exhibit none of the tell-tale signs of stress.

### IN AN ENCOUNTER:

Gather in your group and try to back away from the bear. Avoid direct eye contact with the bear and speak calmly to it. Do not run. Do not scream. Do not yell. If the bear advances toward you, stop and stand your ground. Make yourself look bigger by standing on a log or rock, opening your coat and holding it out. Use your bear spray or gun, if needed.

### IN AN ATTACK:

If it makes physical contact, yell and fight back using your fists, rocks or whatever else is at hand.