

Wildlife

Colorado Division of Wildlife, Watchable Wildlife Program

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Saguache County's wildlife is as diverse as its landscape. From the sagebrush covered alkali flats and rich agricultural lands on the valley floor through the pinion and juniper laden foothills and up into the high alpine crags that tower over the valley, wildlife abounds in many different forms. This area provides many opportunities for outdoor recreation of all types, and the beautiful landscape and bountiful wildlife provide the perfect backdrop.

When people think of wildlife, unquestionably the larger, more familiar species come to mind. Saguache County is relatively unique in that it contains all but one of the species of big game animals known to inhabit the state: Elk, Mule deer, Antelope, Moose, Bighorn sheep, Mountain goats, Black bears and Mountain lions. The only species of big game not found in this area on a regular basis are White-tailed deer, though there are reports of them in the valley intermittently.

Hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts enjoy the large populations of elk, which can be found throughout the county. Originally a plains animal, elk moved up into the mountains as their numbers declined in the 19th century. Elk numbers dwindled nearly to the point of extinction at one point, due to uncontrolled hunting and the value of their meat on the commercial market. In the early 1900s, the Division of Wildlife, with the help of many local citizens, transplanted elk into the San Juan Mountains from herds in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Through intensive management over the years, elk numbers have increased dramatically, and have even begun to diversify their habitat in this area again. Relatively large herds of elk can again be found on the valley floor, even throughout the summer.

Antelope are another wildlife success story. They were native to the county, but populations were virtually non-existent in the Valley in the early 1900s, again due to uncontrolled hunting. Many old-timers in the area talk of not seeing any antelope at all in the early 1900s. This changed, however in the 1940s, when the Division of Wildlife transplanted antelope into the San Luis Valley. Saguache County was actually a recipient of some of these first antelope, which were released in the La Garita area. Antelope were also planted in the Cochetopa pass area in the 1970s to supplement a small native herd. From those transplants, antelope have increased in numbers to the point that hunting is allowed on a limited basis, and populations seem to be stable once more.

Saguache County also boasts the largest bighorn sheep herd in the state. The Sangre de Cristo herd is currently estimated at approximately 700 animals. This is one of the largest bighorn sheep herds in the country, and is a native herd, which is rather unique. Most other herds have been transplanted into habitat that had previously held populations of sheep. The ruggedness and inaccessibility of the Sangre de Cristo range has allowed this herd of sheep to maintain when other populations have not. Sheep can also be found in the San Juans, and can often be seen from Highway 114 along Saguache Creek west of the town of Saguache.

Although still relatively uncommon in Saguache County, moose can sometimes be seen wandering through the drainages of the San Juan Mountains west of Saguache. These originate from the Creede area where moose were released in several areas along the upper Rio Grande in the early 1990s. These transplants were also successful, and populations are now estimated at nearly 400 animals.

Mountain goats are residents of some of the harshest habitat, staying at high elevations even through the bitter cold winters. They are also prone to wander, can be seen intermittently on the high rocky crags of the Sangre de Cristo range, and even occasionally in the San Juans.

Saguache County is also home to healthy populations of bears and mountain lions. Both of these species are usually rather timid around humans, but they are occasionally unwelcome visitors near campground areas or rural homes.

Bears especially tend to “come to town” when they are hungry - typically during dry periods when their natural food sources are diminished. They are usually simply looking for an easy meal, and will get into garbage cans, pet food, and compost piles. Conscientious elimination of these food sources by people will often solve these problems. Mountain lions are common, but are almost never seen. They feed on populations of deer and elk in the area and will follow these animals into town, on rare occasions.

It is true that wildlife follow water, and Saguache County has plenty of that. Even on the valley floor in some of the most desolate looking alkali flats, natural lakes, springs, and artesian wells are common in areas that are relatively isolated from people. These wet areas attract many forms of migratory birds, ranging from the relatively small Phalarope to the huge White Pelicans. Snowy Egrets White Faced Ibis, and Black-Crowned Night Herons have established nesting rookeries in many areas, and are common to Saguache County during the summer. Other migratory shorebirds include: American Avocet, Bittern, Great Blue Heron, Black-Necked Stilt, Rails, Killdeer, Black Tern, Sandhill Crane, and an occasional Whooping Crane, among other species. Migratory waterfowl round out the list, and many different species inhabit the wetland areas of the county, nesting during the summer, and/or passing through on their spring and fall migrations. Bald Eagles winter in Saguache County, and share their habitat with Golden Eagles, which are fairly common, as well as different species of hawks, falcons and owls.

Waterfowl hunting opportunities abound in the many warm water artesian ponds, and natural lakes south and east of Saguache. Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area is the most predominant of these, and provides access for small and big game hunting, as well as waterfowl hunting. Bird watchers and researchers regularly travel long distances to visit this 5,000 acre wetland complex, due to the fact that wildlife viewing opportunities are many and varied.

Small game and fur-bearers as well as many non-game animals are abundant in all habitat types throughout the county. Hundreds of different species occupy an equal number of niches in their habitat. Coyotes, bobcats and foxes are very

common on the valley floor and in the foothills, as are cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, prairie dogs (look for Burrowing owls around prairie dog towns), marmots (rock chucks), badgers, beaver, muskrat, and raccoons. At higher elevations, watch for weasels, pine martens, rock chucks, and pica.

Saguache County’s agricultural lands can be havens for different forms of wildlife, and farmers and ranchers in the area unquestionably provide huge tracts of crucial habitat. Iose cooperation on all sides and good working relationships are important to maintaining this habitat. Occasionally, wildlife interferes with agricultural operations, and in such cases, the Division of Wildlife negotiates with landowners to solve these problems. As a general rule, landowners are cooperative, even to the point of being tolerant. They, perhaps more than anyone, understand the importance of wildlife to the natural heritage of Saguache County.

Always be cognizant of laws, rules, and regulations that govern wildlife viewing and hunting. Many areas are closed to public access during certain seasons to allow for nesting, and rearing of young. Other areas have other restrictions in place to protect wildlife and/or habitat. If hunting, check the regulations before you hunt. Many changes occur each year, and it is the hunter’s responsibility to know the laws affecting this privilege. Respect the land, and the landowners, and always ask permission before entering private land. Finally, remember that Saguache County’s wildlife belongs to you, and you have the responsibility of respecting and protecting it. If you witness a wildlife violation occurring while out in the field, contact the Saguache County Sheriff’s Dept. at 719 655-2544 or Operation Game thief at 800 332-4155. Any questions can be referred to the Colorado Division of Wildlife Area Service Center 719 587-6900, or visit the CDOW website at: <http://www.huntcolorado.org>.

Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

A group of local landowners, the BLM and DOW have joined on a conservation plan for the Gunnison Sage Grouse near Poncha Pass. The multi-interest group seeks to develop a scientifically based plan to preserve and enhance Gunnison Sage Grouse populations and habitats,

Sage Grouse Conservation Plan, Continued -

while respecting private landowner rights, maintaining local control and incorporating economic, social and cultural values. The working group hopes to coordinate and support local efforts to achieve their goals in five years.

Sage grouse in southwestern Colorado occur in highly fragmented populations scattered in six different counties. Recently recognized as a separate species with less than 4,000 breeding individuals statewide, intensive inventories of the Poncha Pass Gunnison Sage Grouse during the 1999 field season indicated the population is at critically low levels.

The purpose of the Conservation Plan is to establish a framework to guide management efforts toward improving sage grouse habitat and reversing the long-term decline of the Poncha Pass population of Gunnison Sage Grouse.

Living With Wildlife In Saguache County

Welcome to Saguache County, a true "Paradise" for anyone who loves being surrounded by Colorado's wonderful wildlife species. Any of these wild creatures have lived in the mountains and valleys of Southern Colorado since their earliest ancestors evolved in North America. Some are large, powerful animals capable of destruction of property or even injury. Some are small, timid creatures who may be rarely seen. But all of these creatures, both great and small, play an important role in the ecosystems of Saguache County and southern Colorado.

From broad-tailed hummingbirds to black bears, those of us who live in, work in, and visit the magnificent slopes of the Sangre de Cristos, San Juans, La Garitas and the southern end of the Sawatch Mountains; those who wade in the wetlands of Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area and Mishak Lakes Preserve; those who hike into the rugged volcanic canyon country near Penitente Canyon and the town of La Garita; those who visit the spiritual centers around Crestone; and those who view the fertile, irrigated agricultural fields on the flat valley floor near Center, are sure to develop

a close relationship with the wild creatures that also inhabit the spectacular San Luis Valley.

The relationship that develops between man and beast may be something a little bit different for those of you who have not spent much time in a rural setting, where wildlife has as much of a place each day as people do. Many of the residents of Saguache County have chosen to live here, in a place where wild animals and wild places are their neighbors, to be able to enjoy a "daily dose of wildlife." There is something very special about listening to elk bugle along the roadside, watching thousands of Sandhill Cranes circling overhead, or feeling the stiff fur of a freshly hunted pronghorn. But, just as residents in a residential subdivision must learn to "get-along" with their neighbors, residents and visitors in Saguache County must also learn how to "get-along" with their wildlife neighbors. As in an urban setting, this means doing the things that foster a healthy relationship with wild animals and also means not doing things which could be dangerous or unhealthy to either you or them!

In a nutshell it means keeping wildlife wild!

At the Colorado Division of Wildlife, working with people and wildlife is our everyday job. Here are some tips to help you develop a healthy relationship with your wildlife neighbors, while you are here. These tips, gleaned from years of working with our state's resident wildlife and people, should make it easier to "get-along" with your wildlife neighbors and may even help you "get-along" better with some of your human neighbors, too.

Today, increasing numbers of people are living and playing in wildlife country, resulting in more wildlife/human encounters. For many folks, seeing or hunting wildlife is a rare and exciting outdoor experience. Learning about wildlife species and being aware of their habits will help you fully appreciate these unique animals and the habitat in which they live.

Bears

Most people think of black bears when they think of human / wildlife conflicts. During certain seasons, it is rare to pick up a newspaper anywhere in the mountainous western portion of Colorado

and not read about bear and human interactions. Some are benign, some are mutually beneficial, and some are dangerous for either or both of the parties involved. In Colorado, black bears may be tranquilized and relocated to another area if they are creating problem situations for landowners. These bears are tagged with a large yellow tag in their ear. Bears in Colorado only get two strikes – if a problem bear becomes a problem after it has been tagged and relocated – then it will be destroyed. Your efforts to minimize the temptations available to bears will help to keep them from becoming problem bears, and ultimately being destroyed. The following tips may help you keep your experiences with bears positive ones for both you and them.

- Make your property and/or campsite safe by keeping garbage out of the reach and smell of bears.
- If you have pets, do not store pet food or feed them outside.
- Keep your BBQ grill clean of grease and store inside.
- Hang birdseed, suet, and hummingbird feeders on a high wire between trees instead of on your deck or porch.
- Bring bird feeders inside at night.
- Beehives attract bears. If you keep bees, protect your hives with fences designed to keep bears out. Contact the Division of Wildlife for designs.
- Most bears sighted in residential areas within their habitat do not cause any harm. If a bear does not find abundant food, it will move on.
- Campers should store their food in closed containers in their vehicle, or suspended from a tree.
- Sleep well away from food areas.
- The smell of toiletries can also attract bears – store them with your food. Abstain from sexual activity. Practice good personal hygiene.
- Hiking at dawn or dusk may increase your chances of seeing all wildlife, including bears.
- Avoid berry patches or other food sources in the fall.
- Make sure children are close to you or within your sight at all times. Keep your dog on a leash.

What to do if you meet a black bear

There are no definite rules about what to do if you meet a bear. In nearly all cases, the bear will detect you first and avoid you or leave the area. But remember: Every situation is different with respect to the bear, the terrain, the people and their activity.

- **STAY CALM** - If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, calmly leave the area. As you move away, talk aloud to let the bear discover your presence.
- **STOP** - Back away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact, as bears may perceive this as a threat. Give the bear plenty of room to escape. Wild bears rarely attack people unless they feel threatened or provoked.
- **DON'T RUN** - If on a trail, step off the trail on the downhill side and slowly leave the area. Never run or make sudden movements. Running is likely to stimulate the predator response in wildlife. If a bear does chase you, you probably can't outrun it. Do not attempt climbing trees to escape black bears. This may stimulate the bear to follow and pull you out of the tree by the foot. Stand your ground on the ground!
- **SPEAK SOFTLY** - This may reassure the bear that no harm is meant to it. Try not to show fear.
- **CUBS** - Female black bears do not normally defend their cubs aggressively, but send them up trees. Remember: Their eyesight is good and their sense of smell is acute. If a bear stands upright or moves closer, it may be trying to detect smells in the air. This isn't a sign of aggression. Once the bear identifies you, it may leave the area or try to intimidate you by charging within a few feet before it withdraws.
- **FIGHT BACK** - if a black bear attacks you. Black bears have been driven away when people have fought back with rocks, sticks, binoculars and even bare hands.

Mountain Lions

Generally, lions are calm, quiet and elusive. They tend to live in remote, primitive country. Lions are most commonly found in areas with plentiful deer and adequate cover. In Saguache County, people and lions may interact almost anywhere. However, they are most likely found together in the

Mountain Lions, continued -

mountainous country around the edge of the valley floor. In many areas in Colorado, the number of mountain lion / human interactions has increased. This increase is likely due to a variety of reasons: more people moving into lion habitat, increase in local deer populations and deer density, presumed increase in lion numbers and expanded range, more people using hiking and running trails in lion habitat and a greater awareness of the presence of lions, so that people are more likely to be aware that lions are found in an area and be watching for them.

We can live with these incredibly efficient predators if we respect mountain lions and their habitat. To reduce the risk of problems with mountain lions on or near your property or campsite, we urge you to follow these simple precautions.

- **MAKE NOISE** – if you come and go during the times when mountain lions are most active - dusk to dawn.
- **GOOD LIGHTING** – in the areas around your home where you walk could help you see a lion if one were present.
- **SUPERVISE YOUR CHILDREN** – closely whenever they play outside. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside before dawn. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.
- **LANDSCAPE** – or remove vegetation around your home to eliminate hiding places for lions, especially around children's play areas and pet runs. Make it as difficult as possible for lions to approach unseen.
- **NON-NATIVE SHRUBS** – and other plants that deer often prefer to eat encourage wildlife to come onto your property. Predators follow prey.
- **FEEDING WILDLIFE** – can attract predators who prey on the species you are feeding. Be aware of the animals you are attracting and bring in feeders at night, to reduce the opportunities for problems.
- **PETS** – should be kept under control. Roaming pets are easy prey and can attract lions. Bring pets in at night. If you leave your pet outside, keep it in a kennel with a secure top. Feeding pets outside can attract raccoons and other animals that are eaten by lions. Pet food may also attract bears!

- **GARBAGE** – must be stored securely to avoid attracting wildlife.
- **LIVESTOCK** – should be placed in enclosed sheds or barns at night. Close doors to all outbuildings, since inquisitive lions may go inside for a look.
- **ENCOURAGE YOUR NEIGHBORS** – to follow these simple precautions. Prevention is far better than a possible lion confrontation.

What to do if you meet a mountain lion

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a mountain lion in the wild. Lion attacks on people are very rare, with fewer than a dozen fatalities in North America in more than 100 years. Most attacks are by young lions, perhaps forced out to hunt on their own and not yet living in established areas. Young lions may key in on the easiest prey, like pets and small children.

Based upon observations by people who have come upon lions, some patterns of behavior and response have emerged. With this in mind, the following suggestions may be helpful. Remember: Every situation is different with respect to the lion, the terrain, the people and their activity.

- When you walk or hike in lion country, go in groups and make plenty of noise to reduce your chances of surprising a lion. Make sure that children stay close to you and within your site at all times. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.
- A sturdy walking stick is a good idea; it can be used to ward off a lion.
- Do not approach a lion, especially one that is feeding or with kittens. Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
- **STAY CALM** – when you come upon a lion. Talk calmly yet firmly to it. Move slowly.
- **STOP OR BACK AWAY SLOWLY** – if you can do it safely. Running may stimulate a lion's instinct to chase and attack. Face the lion and stand upright.
- **DO ALL YOU CAN TO APPEAR LARGER** – Raise your arms. Open your jacket if you're wearing one. If you have small children with you, protect them by picking them up so they won't panic and run.
- If the lion behaves aggressively, throw stones, branches, or whatever you can get your hands on without crouching down or turning your

back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly. What you want to do is convince the lion you are not prey and that you may in fact be dangerous to it.

- **FIGHT BACK** – if a lion attacks you. Lions have been driven away by prey that fights back. People have fought back with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools and their bare hands successfully. Remain standing or try to get back up!!

Coyotes

Native Americans consider the coyote to be the smartest animal on earth. Some people curse their existence. No other wild animal has endured the wrath of humans while still evoking such genuine heartfelt admiration than the coyote.

However you feel about them, it is clear that they are extremely adaptable animals, adjusting rapidly to changing conditions. Past predator control campaigns have actually been shown to expand coyote populations, as they adapt to possible extermination.

In Saguache County, coyotes are found nearly everywhere, but are not that commonly seen. Coyotes are comfortable in the country, mountains, prairie, or in cities, as long as there is appropriate shelter and food. They tend to be wary of people in the wild where they are actively hunted and trapped. However, they can be aggressive and sometimes lose their fear of humans, especially in more urban areas. Here, they may threaten domestic pets. Coyote attacks on humans are extremely rare, but they have gone after young children.

We can live with coyotes if we better understand their habits and behavior and their habitat needs. These tips should help to keep your relationship with them healthy and happy.

- **PROTECT YOUR PETS** - Coyotes will attack and kill cats and dogs. Do not allow your pets to roam, especially at night. Keep your yard fenced with a fence at least six feet tall, or even better, keep your dog in a completely enclosed kennel with a strong roof.
- **DON'T LET DOGS RUN WITH COYOTES** - It may appear that they are "playing", but coyotes can turn on dogs and kill them to defend their territory.

- **DON'T LEAVE PET FOOD OUTSIDE** - This invites wildlife into your backyard and problems may result.
- **PROTECT LIVESTOCK** - especially chickens, young calves and sheep. Contact your local CSU Extension Office for appropriate methods to prevent predation.
- **KEEP GARBAGE STORED SECURELY** - in a tightly sealed container or storage facility. Clean your garbage cans regularly to reduce residual odors by using hot water and chlorine bleach.

What to do if you meet a coyote

- Coyotes provide an enjoyable wildlife viewing experience. Keep your distance and do not approach them or any other forms of wildlife. Enjoy the opportunity to view wildlife as one of the perks of living or visiting in Saguache County.
- Keep your pets on a leash when walking them.
- If a coyote approaches you or your pet, you can throw rocks or sticks to frighten it away.
- Use a loud, authoritative voice to frighten the animal.

Lynx

These quiet cats have stirred up quite a controversy during the past two years, as the Division of Wildlife has been hard at work reestablishing a healthy population of lynx in the San Juan Mts. east of Saguache County. With nearly one hundred of the cool cats released, all indications are that these shy critters are doing pretty well and settling down to life in Colorado. The lynx is one of three native wild felines that inhabit our state, with mountain lion and bobcat as the others. No one will ever mistake a lynx for a mountain lion, but they look so much like bobcats that it can be tough to tell the two apart at a distance.

Both the lynx and bobcat are about twice the size of a domestic cat, have short "bobbed" tails, long legs, a ruff of fur around the face, and tufts of fur bristling from the tips of triangular ears. The lynx's ear tufts are longer and thicker. Their feet are also much larger in diameter, which helps them traverse deep snows of the higher mountain life zones. Originally, biologists thought that these cats

Lynx, Continued -

fed exclusively on snowshoe hares, but the cats that have been released here have shown that they will eat whatever prey species are available.

So, why did the Division feel it so important to bring back these elusive cats? With evidence indicating only tenuous survival of many of the original lynx in the state, and with lynx a candidate to be put on the federal list of endangered species, Division of Wildlife biologists formulated a plan to reintroduce the lynx with the goal of establishing a sustainable population in the southern Rocky Mountains. Ringing back this feline predator helps to restore the biodiversity, or ecological richness, of Colorado's mountain ecosystems. Larger predators like wolves or grizzly bears have the toughest time dealing with the ever-expanding human population (4.5 million) in our state. It is hoped that we can learn enough about reintroduction through the lynx program to aid any future reintroduction efforts that Colorado residents might support. In addition, by preventing the listing of Colorado's lynx as an endangered species by the federal government, the state can avoid having restrictions placed on private landowners and state land managers.

Will it be a success? It is still too early to tell, but if current results are any indication, we should have a healthy, sustainable lynx population in Colorado for many years to come. These lynx are reclusive, so catching a look at one in the wild may not be too likely, but many people who like wildlife and wilderness like the idea of these wild creatures raising their own families high in the forests of the San Juan Mts.

Other Wildlife

Foxes, prairie dogs and other ground squirrels, wood rats, weasels, amphibians, raptors and other birds can be either a fascination to behold or a real pain in the neck, depending upon your relationship with them. Most people love to see these animals, but don't want them around their homes. Controlling garbage, keeping pet foods inside, and bringing in bird feeders at night, can all help to keep you and wildlife on friendly terms. Living with wildlife in their habitat can be a bit different than living in the city, but the rewards of experiencing wild creatures first hand can be very great, as well.

The key to avoiding problem wildlife encounters is keeping unwanted wildlife out of homes, buildings and yards. Here are some tips:

- Do not feed wildlife. Feeding songbirds is OK, but be aware that it may attract unwanted animals. Place bird feeders where they are only accessible to the birds you want to attract. Most wild animals are very capable of finding plenty of food on their own.
- Close any holes around and under the foundation of your home so that animals will not be tempted to homestead. Bury wire mesh 1 to 2 feet deep in places where animals might gain access.
- Don't give wildlife the opportunity to get into your garbage. Store it in metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep the cans in a garage or shed and put your trash out only when it is scheduled to be picked-up.
- Keep pet food inside.
- If birds are flying into large windows, mark them with strips of white tape or with raptor silhouettes.
- Fence gardens and don't plant non-native landscape plants that may attract deer or other wildlife.
- Screen fireplace chimneys and furnace, attic and dryer vents and keep dampers closed to avoid "drop-in" guests. Chimney tops should be screened from February to September to prevent birds and animals from nesting inside. To prevent fire and safety hazards, check with a knowledgeable source before attempting this.
- Seal all cracks and holes larger than one-quarter inch in diameter to keep out mice, chipmunks, bats and snakes.

Baby Animals

Every spring, well meaning homeowners and tourists find baby animals like nestling and fledgling birds and newborn squirrels and raccoons that are extremely cute, assume that they have been abandoned by their mothers and decide to "rescue" them. This rarely results in wild animals that can be returned to their environment. Most "rescued" animals have parents waiting just out of sight when they are picked up by well meaning humans. Most of these baby animals are doomed to die, as soon as they are taken from the wild into

captivity. The Colorado Division of Wildlife Offices see thousands of these “rescued” babies each year, and they hardly ever survive.

So, what can you do if you find a baby bird or another baby animal that appears to be abandoned?

- **LEAVE IT ALONE** - The chances are good that its parents are very near. If it appears to be in some immediate danger, (i.e. it is laying in a busy street) you can try to mitigate the danger to the baby animal by moving it to a safer location that is very near to the place you found it. This way, the parents will be able to find the youngster. Don't worry about the baby being rejected by its parents due to human scent. The parenting instinct is very strong in wildlife, they will nearly always care for their young, as they have a lot of time and energy invested in them.

Bats

Saguache County is the home of one of North America's largest bat colonies. At the privately owned Orient Mine, on the east side of the San Luis Valley there is a huge colony of about 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats. These bats have an incredible economic impact on the area, consuming literally tons of insects each evening in their nightly flights during the summer months, and the bathers at the nearby Valley View Hot Springs appreciate the lack of biting insects at the pools.

With that many bats around, the chances of seeing bats in Saguache County are better than average. The best time to look is just after dusk, when they begin their evening flights. Landowners can encourage bats to colonize their property, too, by putting up bat boxes where these flying mammals can roost each day. Contact the Monte Vista Division of Wildlife Office for bat box plans.

Many people have heard that bats can be carriers of rabies. Five species of wildlife are the main hosts of rabies in the U.S. – raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes and coyotes, in that order. Although studies have shown that probably less than 1% of all bats may be infected with rabies, they should not be handled, but neither should raccoons or skunks, for that matter.

Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers can be a nuisance when they are “drumming” on wood siding, eaves and shingles of homes. These birds are territorial; the drumming marks their territories and attracts mates. Woodpeckers also drill holes for food, nesting and roosting. These birds are protected by law. There are a number of different techniques you can use to discourage their activities and restore peace and quiet to your home.

- Provide an alternate drumming site. Nail two boards together at just one end (producing resonance) and hang on a secure surface.
- Place lightweight plastic mesh netting at least three inches from affected wood areas.
- Nail plywood over the excavated area.
- Hang aluminum foil strips, colored plastic streamers, hawk silhouettes or mirrors near the affected wood.
- Treat wood with sticky/tacky repellent. However, these repellents could stain home siding.
- Use noise-making tactics, such as clapping your hands or banging garbage can lids together.
- Spray the birds gently with water from a garden hose when they start to drill or drum.
- Eliminate any ledges or cracks on which the woodpecker is able to stand while drumming.
- Don't feed the birds.

If woodpeckers continue to be a problem, contact the Division of Wildlife Office in Monte Vista.

Squirrels

- Don't feed squirrels. Place bird feeders on a tall pipe so squirrels can't reach them.
- Screen attic vents on the inside with hardware cloth to keep squirrels out. Trim branches hanging over buildings.
- If a squirrel is loose in your house, block off the room it's in, provide one way out (open a window or door) and watch until you see the squirrel leave. Block off any openings that may lead into your house.
- If you discover a squirrel in your fireplace, close the damper immediately. Then, open the doors or screen slightly and use a hand-held fishing net to capture the squirrel. Cover the net opening with a board and take the

Squirrels, Continued -

animal outside for release. Work quickly! When handling any wild animal, use caution and appropriate protection, such as heavy gloves.

- Prevent squirrels from climbing trees by placing 18-inch metal cylinders on tree trunks.

Deer

Nearly everyone loves to see graceful mule deer in the wild, but having deer for neighbors can cause some homeowners problems.

- When deer appear around your home, it's usually best to leave them alone. In most situations they will move to new areas. Deer and other large animals are usually injured or killed when people try to capture them. In fact, tranquilizing and relocating deer, elk and other large animals is done only as a last resort.
- In areas where deer are common, shrub and tree damage may be a problem. Commercially available deer repellents or mixtures containing eggs have proven successful in warding off problem deer. However, these solutions may need to be reapplied after rain or snow. You can also keep deer from eating flowers and shrubs by placing wire cylinders and fences around the plants. Contact your CSU Cooperative Extension office to learn what plants deer avoid. Also, consider planting only native flowers and shrubs.
- Feeding deer is illegal in Colorado. People may be fined \$50 for doing so.
- Watch for deer crossing signs as you drive the roads. In areas where deer or elk are common, slow down and drive cautiously, especially at night. If you see one deer or elk along the road, there are probably more nearby. Collisions with deer and elk are not pleasant experiences.

Raccoons And Skunks

- Keep them out of house foundations, basements, chimneys and attics by screening or covering openings. Burying wire mesh 1 to 2 feet underground around the foundation of structures or using concrete or sheet metal to seal likely access points should keep them out.
- Make sure garbage is stored securely.
- A nylon stocking full of mothballs or ammonia

soaked towels placed under the house or other locations where skunks have gained access may help to drive them out. Make sure to attach a long string so you can remove them easily, later. Cover the ground at the entrance with soft soil or flour. When you see tracks leaving the entrance, close up the entrance with hardware cloth (check after 10 p.m. r first thing in the morning). If no tracks appear near the inside of the entrance, permanently seal the hole. Caution: Don't use this method if children are playing in the area.

- If you decide to trap a skunk, you must destroy the animal because state health laws do not permit relocation of skunks.

Snakes

Because of the relatively cold climate in the San Luis Valley, there are not many reptile species that can live in Saguache County. Bullsnares, garter snakes and rattlesnakes may be found here. Most of our snakes here are not only harmless but are actually beneficial to humans because of their appetites for insects and rodents.

To identify a rattlesnake from harmless species, look for these things: Rattlesnakes have elliptical pupils (shaped like a diamond), they have distinctive, heat-sensing pits (small holes) on the side of their face and usually rattles on the tail, though they can lose their rattles. Beneficial bullsnares sometimes mimic the behavior of rattlesnakes by coiling and shaking their rattle-less tail when threatened. If you live where rattlesnakes have been found or if you have an aversion to snakes, some simple habitat modification around your property will usually solve the problem.

- Keep firewood in a covered box.
- Do not landscape with expanses of large rocks, especially in sunny areas.
- Mow weeds and vegetation, and remove rocks, boards and debris.
- Reduce the rodent population on your property to reduce a major food source for snakes.
- Seal entrances to crawl spaces and basements.
- If you encounter a rattlesnake simply back off. The snake senses your presence by your body heat and movement. In Colorado, rattlesnakes may be legally killed if they pose a threat. All other snakes are protected by law.

Fences For Wildlife

For wild creatures, the less fence the better. If fencing is necessary, then it should allow for relatively free movement of wildlife. Solid rail fences provide highly visible boundaries that are easy for wildlife to overcome.

Fencing for livestock can easily incorporate designs that allow for wildlife movement without any additional cost. Spacing smooth or barbed wire 16-22-28-40 inches from the ground allows for passage of antelope, deer and elk with reduced fence damage. Leaving a 12 inch gap between the two highest wires will help reduce entanglement and wire twisting. Chain link fences severely restrict wildlife movement. However, chain link for kennels can provide security for pets from predators, provided the kennel is fully enclosed, including a sturdy roof.

Wildlife Laws You Should Know

Wild animals are fascinating creatures to observe. While they are intriguing to some and hopelessly cute to others, they do not make good pets. Wild animals are difficult to keep alive in captivity. Moreover, they usually cannot fend for themselves if they are confined for any length of time and later released. For these reasons, it is illegal in Colorado to possess most species of native wildlife.

Despite the fact that wildlife is best left alone, there are instances when people pick up injured or orphaned wildlife. If this does occur, call the Division of Wildlife. It is illegal to attempt to rehabilitate injured or orphaned wildlife without state and federal permits, and the Division of Wildlife will put you in touch with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

Hunting and fishing regulations booklets are available at all Division of Wildlife offices and license agents. Make sure you check the regulations in these publications before you head to the field to minimize the chance of committing a violation.

Wildlife Viewing

Saguache County residents and visitors are blessed with some of Colorado's best wildlife viewing right

outside the back door. Colorado's oldest wildlife festival – The Monte Vista Crane Festival – takes place each March, celebrating the return of 20,000 sandhill cranes to the San Luis Valley. Observing wildlife in their natural habitat is Colorado's fastest growing type of outdoor recreation. Here are some tips to help you enjoy wildlife viewing and be successful at it:

- The first and last hours of the day are generally the best times to view or photograph most animals. Wildlife viewing is usually poor during the middle of the day, especially during our infrequent hot spells.
- Be quiet. Quick movements and loud noises will normally scare wildlife. Your home or car can act as an effective "blind," allowing you to watch animals without alarming them. Whenever cover is unavailable, sit quietly, act disinterested and gaze all around, being careful never to stare directly at the animals.
- Binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses for your camera will help you to get that close-up look. You are probably too close if the animals alter their behavior, stop feeding, or appear nervous. If you note these signs, sit quietly or move away slowly until they resume their original behavior.
- Be patient. Wait quietly for animals to enter or return to an area. Give yourself plenty of time to allow animals to move within your view. Patience is often rewarded with a more complete viewing experience.
- For a safer and more complete viewing experience, get a good map of the area and field guides to western plants and animals.

Viewing Ethics

- Honor the rights of private landowners and gain permission before entering their property.
- Respect the rights of other wildlife viewers. Approaching animals too closely, making loud noises, and sudden movement are inappropriate.
- Neither man nor pets should ever chase wildlife, and harassment of wild animals is unlawful. Pets are best left at home or in the car during wildlife viewing excursions.
- Wild baby animals look cute and helpless, but resist the urge to handle the young creatures. They usually have not been abandoned or

Viewing Ethics, Continued -

- orphaned, and their parents are probably nearby.
- Honor your own right to enjoy the outdoors in the future. Leave wildlife habitat in better condition than you found it. Pick up litter that you encounter and dispose of it properly.

Additional Sources of Information

Most of the information in this article is available in brochures published by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Bear and Lion Seminars, Hunter Education Classes, Wildlife Watch Classes, informational brochures and fishing and hunting licenses are available from the Monte Vista Area Office. Get copies of the following brochures for more information:

Living with Wildlife in Bear Country
Living with Wildlife in Lion Country
Living with Wildlife in Coyote Country
Too Close for Comfort – How to avoid conflicts with wildlife in the city
Don't Feed the Wildlife – Wildlife and People at Risk
Developing with Wildlife in Mind
Bats and Rabies

The Colorado Wildlife Viewing Guide, 2nd Ed is a handy guide to great areas to view wildlife in Colorado. Ask to purchase a copy at the Division of Wildlife Office or at a local bookstore.

Additional brochures which contain information about recreation areas in the state from the Division of Wildlife include:

The Annual Fishing Regulations Brochure
The Annual Hunting Regulations Brochures for each specific season/species
The Colorado State Lands Recreation Brochure

Maps are available from the US Forest Service and the BLM for the Saguache County area and the rest of Colorado. Contact the Saguache District Ranger Office for more information.

Helpful Numbers

Colorado Division of Wildlife
Monte Vista Service Center,
Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area 719 587-6900

Alamosa-Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges,
Alamosa, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Friends of the San Luis Valley
Wildlife Refuges (Volunteer Organization)
719 589-4021

Brian Bechaver – Saguache County District
Wildlife Manager 719 587-6909 Voice Mail
719 850-1105 Cell Phone
brian.bechaver@state.co.us

Bureau of Land Management,
North Valley Office, Saguache
719 655-2547

Colorado Board of Stock Inspection,
Brand Inspector, Monte Vista
719 852-2236

Colorado State Forest Service,
Alamosa District Office (Annual Tree Sale)
719 589-2271

Colorado State Land Board,
Alamosa District Office
719 589-2360

Colorado State Parks,
Arkansas Headwaters
Recreation Area, Salida
719 539-7289

Colorado Water Conservation Board,
Division of Water Resources, Alamosa
719 589-6683

CSU Cooperative Extension Service,
Alamosa Office, 719 589-2271
719 852-3801 Toll free from Saguache

National Park Service, Great Sand Dunes
National Monument, Mosca
Friends of the Dunes (Volunteer Organization)
719 378-2312

Natural Resources Conservation Service,
Center Field Office
719 754-3402

The Nature Conservancy,
Medano-Zapata Ranch, Mosca 719 378-2356

Rio Grande Water Conservation District,
Alamosa, 719 589-6301

US Forest Service, Rio Grande National Forest,
Saguache Ranger District 719 655-2547

US Fish and Wildlife Service
(See Alamosa/Monte Vista National Wildlife
Refuge)

Colorado Division of Wildlife: Salida Area Office
7405 W. US Hwy 50, Salida 719 539-7068

Colorado Division of Wildlife:
Monte Vista Area Office
0722 S Rd 1E, Monte Vista 719 587-6900
Hotline Number 719 587-6901

US Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.wildlife.state.co.us>

Topo Maps, U.S.G.S., 303 202-4200
Maps 800 456-8703



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