

# Wildlife Encounter Information

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Last Updated: April 24, 2018

## **RMBL Policies Regarding Wildlife:**

One of the joys of living and working in Gothic is the opportunity to see different wildlife. However, it is important to remain respectful to the wildlife. Almost any of these organisms can be a study organism for a researcher. There are laws governing the humane treatment of vertebrates and RMBL follows this structure and these laws. This includes not touching or feeding animals. Within the townsite of Gothic you typically see, deer, fox, marmots, pika, and ground squirrels. Do NOT interfere, touch, or feed marmots, ground squirrels, pika, fox, or deer. This is especially important when pups are emerging.

Marmots and ground squirrels often like to hop up in car engines so it is important to check vehicles (pop open the hood) to make sure you are not driving away with an animal. This can be harmful to the animal and your car.

Below is information about other animals found within the back country where you may be doing your research.

There are many resources available to help if you are experiencing conflicts with wildlife. If you experience wildlife conflict issues involving big game species, you should contact the [Gunnison Parks and Wildlife Division at: 970-641-7060](#) or law enforcement. Please make sure, if the conflict poses immediate danger, but not if the conflict is simply 'nuisance' in nature. Big game species include deer, elk, pronghorn, sheep, goats, bear, and moose.

Below is information about specific animals and if you encounter them.

## **BLACK BEARS**

Black bears are curious, smart and very adaptable. They're not fussy and will eat just about anything with calories. Bears want to get the most energy they can with the least amount of effort. Every bear's goal is to get fat enough to live through the winter.

Most conflicts between people and bears can be traced to easy-to-get-at human food, garbage, pet food, bird seed or other attractants. When people allow bears to find food, a bear's natural drive to eat can overcome its wariness of humans. Bears that get too comfortable around people can destroy property or even become a threat to human safety. Habituated bears must often be destroyed. Please don't let bears die needlessly. Do your part to properly dispose of trash, recyclables, and keep your food secure within cabins. If you store food outside or go camping, purchase a bear proof container. Also make sure to place the bars over dumpsters and lock the doors to your cabin.

Black bears are not naturally aggressive, but they are strong, powerful animals. A bear intent on getting a meal can easily injure someone who gets in its way, particularly if they feel trapped.

### **Before You Go Into the Field:**

- Any signs of bear scat, and shredded logs are signs you're in bear country.
- Be alert at all times and do not wear headphones. Be extra cautious at dawn and dusk, when the wind is in your face, visibility is limited or you're walking by a noisy stream. A firm clap or quick shout warns bears that humans are in the area.
- In late summer and fall, bears need to forage up to 20 hours a day, so avoid trails that go through berry patches, oak brush and other natural food sources.
- Double bag food, and never leave any trash or leftovers behind. Finding treats teaches bears to associate trails with food.
- ***Never approach bears or offer food.*** If you're lucky enough to see a bear, watch from a safe distance, enjoy this very special experience and take a picture. If your presence causes the bear to look up or change its behavior in any way, you're too close.

### **If You Encounter a Bear:**

- Black bears are highly intelligent, with individual responses to people and situations. Wild black bears seldom attack unless they feel threatened, cornered, or are provoked.
- If you Encounter a bear on a trail, stand still, stay calm and let the bear identify you and leave. Talk in a normal tone of voice. Be sure the bear has an escape route.
- Never run or climb a tree.
- If you see cubs, their mother is usually close by. Leave the area immediately.

### **If the Bear Doesn't Leave**

- A bear standing up is just trying to identify what you are by getting a better look and smell.
- Wave your arms slowly overhead and talk calmly. If the bear huffs, pops it jaws or stomps a paw, it wants you to give it space.
- Step off the trail to the downhill side, keep looking at the bear and slowly back away until the bear is out of sight.

### **If the Bear Approaches**

- A bear knowingly approaching a person could be a food-conditioned bear looking for a handout or, very rarely, an aggressive bear. Stand your ground. Yell or throw small rocks in the direction of the bear.
- Get out your bear spray and use it when the bear is about 40 feet away.
- If you're attacked, don't play dead. Fight back with anything available. People have successfully defended themselves with pen knives, trekking poles, and even bare hands. There have only been 25 fatal bear attacks in North America in the past 20 years.

## MOUNTAIN LIONS

Mountain lions are generally calm, quiet, and elusive. They tend to live in remote, primitive country with plentiful deer and adequate cover. Such conditions exist in mountain subdivisions, urban fringes, and open spaces. Recently, the number of mountain lion/human interactions has increased.

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a mountain lion in the wild. Lion attacks on people are rare, with fewer than a dozen fatalities in North America in more than 100 years. Most of the attacks were by young lions, perhaps forced out to hunt on their own and not yet living in established areas. Young lions may key in on easy prey, like pets and small children. There have been less than 12 fatalities from mountain lions in 100 years.

### **If You Encounter a Mountain Lion:**

Every situation is different with respect to the lion, the terrain, the people, and their activity.

- **Go in groups** when you walk or hike in mountain lion country, and make plenty of noise to reduce your chances of surprising a lion. A sturdy walking stick is a good idea; it can be used to ward off a lion. Make sure children are close to you and within your sight at all times. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.
- **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 and 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 a danger to the lion.
- **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!

## **MOOSE**

It may be hard to believe, but until 20 years ago hardly anyone ever saw a moose in Colorado, let alone hunted one. Today the state's moose populations are thriving, thanks to successful reintroduction efforts by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Colorado's Shiras moose (*Alces alces shirasi*) are Colorado's largest big game animal with adults weighing 800 to 1,200 pounds. Bulls stand up to 6 feet at the shoulder.

### **If You Encounter a Moose:**

Any moose, at any time of year, may respond aggressively if provoked by your presence, though the chances of a confrontation increase during certain times of year. Cows with calves are particularly protective, especially in early summer when their young are most vulnerable. In the fall, bull moose often act more aggressively as they compete with other males for breeding opportunities. But no matter what the season, the best strategy is to avoid a confrontational situation in the first place. Keep your distance. If a moose is on the trail, wait for it to move along. You need to give moose time to get out of the way.

If a moose feels threatened by your presence, it does one of two things. Often the moose simply leaves the area to avoid the threat. But sometimes it responds aggressively to make you leave the area instead. The minimum safe distance from a moose varies widely depending on the surrounding environment and the temperament of the animal. As a general rule, if you are causing the moose to change its behavior in any way, you are too close. Even if the moose appears undisturbed by your presence, you must still be able to evade the animal should it abruptly charge you.

Anxious or agitated moose can display a range of warning signs:

- Lay their ears back
- The hair on the back of the neck and above the hips might stand up
- They may smack their lips
- Show the whites of their eyes
- Toss their head upward
- Urinate

If you see any of these warning signs, it is a clear indication that you are too close and in a potentially dangerous situation.

### **If You are Charged by a Moose:**

An aggressive, confrontational moose is trying to do one thing: drive you off. So if a moose approaches you, back away. If it charges, RUN! Do not stand your ground. If possible, place a tree or other nearby object between you and the moose as you retreat. Once the moose has driven you far enough away, it will leave you alone. If it makes contact and knocks you down curl up in a ball until it stops and leaves the area.