



"Protecting Yourself from Wildlife"

Part One of Two

Have you ever wondered what you would do if while out walking in the woods, or taking your trash out, you ran face to face with a black bear, wolf, coyote, or any number of other creatures that live around us? Knowing safety guidelines may be the difference between escaping uninjured or being mauled by one of them.

Your first instinct would always be to run as fast as you can, but this may be the worse thing you can do! As big and ferocious as a black bear may seem to you, they are actually quite afraid of humans. The best reaction would be to stand your ground, wave your arms, and most of all DO NOT show fear. Bears, along with other wildlife, normally will back down from someone who appears to be stronger than they are. Most creatures prey on the weak, which is what they perceive you to be when running from them. Make a loud noise; they will most likely retreat back to the woods.

Being that I live on a bear trail, and have had numerous visits in the past year by bears, I have learned what works, and what doesn't. Most of the time, if I saw a bear out in my yard prior to going outside to let the dogs out, I would normally wait a few minutes until they retreated to the woods on their own. If they appeared to be hanging around longer for one reason or another, it would normally take me opening the front door, and letting my dog bark; this would definitely work. In knowing the bears were out there and probably watching me from behind the brush; I

would carry with me an air horn and pepper spray. I have found that the bears run frantically away from the sound of an air horn. And if by chance one comes too close for comfort, I won't hesitate to use the pepper spray. It has been proven to be very effective on bears and other wildlife that may invade your space.

Being that most of the wildlife that can cause bodily harm to a human in the North Georgia Mountains are nocturnal, it is not a wise idea to venture out at night. If for one reason or another you do venture out at night, it may be a good idea to take with you other items that may help protect you. First and foremost never go out alone, and if you do, always tell someone that you are going, and what time you should be returning. Take with you a bright flashlight, an air horn, pepper spray, cell phone, or walkie-talkie, a compass, and if you feel comfortable with one, and know how to use it, take a small handgun, (I am not an advocate for guns, and don't own one, but many people in this area do). Keep the flashlight turned on at all



"Puma Sunset" by Scott Anna

times, shining into the tree branches, and ground all around you. You will probably have a chance to see several species of animals that live in the tree branches around here, like the owl, opossum, raccoon, and quite possibly if you are lucky as I was last fall, an eastern puma. Generally, the first thing you see in the beam of the flashlight, is their eyes.

While driving along the dark roads that surround us, there are precautionary measures to keep in mind. Scan the road as you drive, watching the edges for wildlife about to cross. Not only will this help you to avoid harming or killing wildlife, but it will also

make you more aware of other hazards such as bicyclists, children at play, and slowly moving vehicles. Be particularly aware of deer, they are not too bright, and will jump right out in front of you. This can cause serious injury to your vehicle and perhaps you as well if they come crashing through your windshield. There have been a reported 214 cases of automobiles hitting deer on the roadways of North Georgia in the past 2 years alone.

Be Alert! Be especially watchful for wildlife at dawn, dusk, and in the first few hours after darkness falls. Many species of wildlife are most active at these times. Edges of roads that border corn fields or natural woodlands are places to be particularly watchful for wildlife. Assume that animals do not know to get out of your way. Young animals, in particular, do not recognize cars as a threat. A deer will freeze in your headlights. Lower your dashboard lights slightly. You'll be more likely to see your headlights reflected in the eyes of animals in time to brake.

Every apple core, french fry, and smelly sandwich wrapper tossed out of a car attracts wildlife to roadsides—often with fatal results. Never throw litter from your car.

Remember that where there is one animal crossing, there may be more, young animals following their mother or male animals pursuing a mate.

Try to slow down, especially after dark. Many animals needlessly become victims simply because people drive too fast to avoid hitting them. Speed poses a risk to human safety as well.

What to Do if You Injure an Animal:

Do not put your own safety at risk. Unless you can move the animal from the road in absolute safety, do not attempt to do so. Use your hazard lights or emergency road flares to warn oncoming traffic of the injured animal. Never attempt to handle a large animal, like a deer, bear, or one that could give a serious bite, like a raccoon, fox, coyote or wolf.

Please look for Part Two of this article in Next Weeks "Foot Prints in the Mountains".