

Staying Safe Around Animals

June 2022



In Manitoba, there is an abundance of wildlife, and this can provide opportunities for both positive and negative interactions between people and animals. Positive interactions can lead to viewing and learning opportunities while negative interactions can include threats to the safety and health of people and pets as well as property damage.

Wild animals are found throughout Manitoba, which means that interactions can occur in urban, rural and wilderness areas of the province. The risk of a dangerous encounter generally increases with the distance from urban developments. As populations and urban development continue to grow, people and wildlife are increasingly interacting and competing for resources, which can lead to more human-wildlife interaction. It is common to see wildlife in school playgrounds and children should be taught to treat them with caution and respect.

Manitoba Natural Resources and Northern Development suggests that there are three major factors that can increase the risk of wildlife-human conflict:

- 1. Attractants:** Wildlife may be drawn into an area of human activity due to the attraction of food, and water sources.
- 2. Habituation:** A habituated animal has learned through repeated encounters with people that there is little to fear and don't avoid people like normal wild animals.
- 3. Food-conditioning:** Wild animals become food conditioned when they are attracted to human foods or garbage because previous food rewards have given them positive reinforcement for this behaviour. Secure refuse bins and check school grounds for unattended food (i.e.. uneaten lunches/snacks).

People can take action to reduce attractants, habituation, and food conditioning to reduce the risk of conflict. Coyotes have become more prevalent with the attraction of food sources (garbage) and prey (rabbits). In addition, schools must educate children about wildlife in their area and what to do when encountering wild animals. The following actions should be part of an education program:

- Be aware that any wild animal may attack if it senses a threat to itself, its young or its food source.
- Never feed or approach a wild animal (avoid bird feeders near schools).
- Teach children how to recognize wildlife and how to respond in an encounter.
- In wilderness areas, walk as a group and make noise to scare animals away (whistle or air horn). In areas where bear presence is higher, consider carrying bear spray.
- Keep pets on a leash and under control.
- If you encounter an animal, never run as this may provoke a chase and attack.
- Ensure the animal has an escape route and if you have encountered an animal, slowly back away.

Continued on next page.



Playing Safely with Pets

Never pet or touch a strange dog or cat even if it seems friendly. If a dog starts running towards you, don't run. Try to stand very still, but often the dog will become bored and walk away. If the dog tries to sniff you, let it sniff – this is its way of checking you out. Back away from a strange dog very slowly and don't make a lot of noise as this will only excite the dog.

Pets can't tell you if they are upset or scared, so they show you. They might do this by biting or scratching.



Rabies

Rabies is a fatal but preventable viral disease. It can spread to people or pets if they are bitten or scratched by a rabid animal. Rabies is mostly found in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, and foxes. However, dogs may still carry rabies, and most rabies deaths in people are caused by dog bites. With rabies infections, prevention requires swift action.

If children contact any wild animals, they should be inspected carefully for bites or scratches. Illnesses can result from seemingly harmless interactions, but complications can be avoided by seeking medical attention immediately.

