

WILDLIFE SAFETY TIPS FOR CAMPERS AND HIKERS

Simple precautions can help make encounters with wildlife while camping in Canada this summer a safe and fun experience for everyone.

As summer approaches, people flock to campgrounds across Canada, looking to experience the great outdoors with their families.

Many are excited about the possibilities of seeing wild animals, and don't think about the safety concerns involved in such sightings.

A little bit of preparation can keep everyone safe on the family camping trip.

Encounters with Wild Animals

Wild animals are usually wary of human beings and "more inclined to flee than to attack".

However, in places such as campgrounds and national parks, where there are lots of people in the same areas that animals like to hang out, animals get used to human presence. *This is when the trouble starts.*

Remember that any wild animal, even a white-tailed deer, can be dangerous.

Give them their space. Move slowly around or away from them.

Parks Canada advises, "Resist that impulse to get close, reach out, or call out to wildlife."

Take pictures, but use a zoom lens or enlarge the picture later—don't try to move closer to the animal to snap a better picture.

If you plan to do a lot of wildlife viewing, bring a pair of good binoculars or a telescope.

Wild Animals Statistically speaking, you are 300 times more likely to be killed hitting a deer on the highway than to die in the clutches of a mountain lion.

Even if you stumble upon a wild cat, chances are it won't be seeking human prey.

While bears can pose a real and

immediate threat, most wildlife encounters involve non-aggressive elk, deer, moose, sheep, goats and wolves.

But don't make the mistake of thinking these animals are like the ones at your local petting zoo.

Treat any encounter with a wild animal like coming face to face with James Bond on a bad day - they're armed and dangerous and have a license to kill.

To prevent close encounters of the wild kind

- > Look from afar: Never approach or entice wildlife, no matter how gentle it appears. Want a closer look? Use
 - binoculars
 - a telephoto lens.

- Keep your distance: Even docile vegetarian animals have horns that can gouge. To make sure you don't get caught off guard by a sudden attack, give
 - predators (bears, cougars, wolves) 100 yards or 10 bus lengths
 - grazers (elk, moose, deer, mountain goats) at least 30 yards or about 3 bus lengths.

- Lock it up: Store your food in bear-proof containers. Not only will this discourage bears, but it will foil other pesky wildlife, like raccoons.

- Keep a clean camp: Wild animals of all descriptions are attracted to
 - food scraps or leftovers
 - dishwater
 - dirty dishes
 - barbecues
 - empty bottles or cans
 - food wrappers
 - toothpaste
 - soap and other toiletries

- pet food dishes (full or empty).

If a Wild Animal Becomes Interested in You

If a wild animal notices you, back away, making sure you face them. They'll probably lose interest as you retreat. Even if they ignore you, don't resume the path. Instead, change your route to avoid them.

If a Wild Animal Approaches

While all animals are different, most will leave you off the lunch menu with some help:

- Make noise: Yell, stomp your feet, blow your whistle.
- Look big: Wave your arms.
- Get ready to defend yourself: Pull out the bear repellent (if you have it) and use it if necessary.
- Fight dirty: If attacked, use a stick, throw dirt in their eyes, go for the tender snout with your Swiss army knife.
- Never turn your back on the animal.

Campground Etiquette

Keeping campgrounds clean isn't just about making it look good.

A clean campground is also safer for the animals.

"Fastidious housekeeping is the best way to avoid attracting undesirable wildlife to a campsite."