

## How To Survive An Animal Attack

Occasionally you cannot avoid an aggressive encounter with an animal in the wild (or in the neighborhood or backyard), so here's what you need to do if you are faced with these situations.

### Bears



Staying still, appearing large, and making noise are good deterrents for most bear encounters, but they are not foolproof. Some area rangers suggest saying “Hey bear!” is enough to get a bear to leave an area, but really, prevention is again the best course of action. Don't have loose, unprotected food, smell like food or blood around a bear area, and certainly don't have any pieces of food where you sleep or on your clothes, as these things will certainly convince a bear to explore you or your area. Bears have a personal space, so don't violate it. Realize that if they can see you, then you are at risk for violating their space. They can run as fast as thirty-five to forty miles per hour and can cause incredible damage with a single swing of their arms, so do what you can to put distance between the two of you as calmly and smoothly as possible. Don't climb a tree, as the bear is a tree-climbing machine and will be able to outdo you. Don't taunt a bear or offer food unless it can keep you from being attacked, as the bear may have to be killed afterward (and of course because the bear doesn't like to be taunted). If in bear country, carry bear spray with you, observe basic guidelines for bear safety, and, if possible, carry [a capable rifle](#) or handgun with potent and effective calibers—enough to kill a bear if it gets to that point. Don't come between a bear and its kill, young, food, or it will consider you an immediate threat which requires action. In simpler terms—you become food.

### Charging Bucks

Believe it or not, [this is not a joke](#). Surely you don't expect to be featured in the headline of the small town newspaper (“Bambi Mauls 200-Pound Hunter”), but there is a risk of medium game charging you when provoked. Provocation is a funny word, as no one really knows what the threshold is for any animal. Generally speaking, animals that are wounded, spooked, eating, mating, or with their young should be avoided, as they are a high risk of attack for you. Distance is key, but not necessarily the end-all-be-all, as there is probably not one animal you will encounter that you can outrun for a sustained distance. Caribou and deer alike have similar patterns in charging, and you should pay attention carefully. During mating season, you will be seen as the enemy, whether you mean to or not. Presenting is a key indicator that things are about to move up a level in discomfort for all involved. When they show their antlers to you and

turn their heads to the side, that's a clue for their readiness to make a move. Their two signature moves consist of bucking with the front legs while rearing back on the hind ones and attempting to gore you with their antler tips. Stand well back and inch away, but keep your balance, so if a charge does happen fully, you may be able to avoid being gored. The best way to avoid this is to attempt to redirect the antlers to a side position, to avoid full contact. If you can use your balance and strength to attempt to push the antlers away, it may be enough to make the animal forget about further attacks. Be careful not to get caught flat footed, and try to minimize your impact by avoiding flailing or outreached arms, which may be your way of "presenting" your "antlers" and cause them to initiate further attacks. It's a mind game too—being calm shows them they will win, and a soft, calm voice and small posture (without crouching or appearing small) will inevitably be more valuable to you than trying to frighten them away. During mating season, it's all about ego and show of strength. Trust your instincts: You don't have anything to prove to a bunch of deer or caribou.

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## **Mountain Lions**

Many sightings happen each year, and occasionally (actually quite often), the mountain lion is aggressive and attacks without provocation. Typically the victim is small or moving (as in running away) and seems like good prey to a mountain lion. These animals are not particularly large and do not like to have their food fight back, which could actually stop an attack. Frequently (and unfortunately), those at risk are too preoccupied or too uninitiated to fight back. Chances are if you encounter one and do the following, then you will not be a victim. Appear large and loud and seem as though you may be a threat to the cat. If by chance these things don't work, attempt to throw rocks at the cat and/or grab a large but wieldable stick to fight back with and put distance between you and them. DO NOT turn and run, but DO try to level the ground between you and them, as these animals typically ambush from above and go for the neck area. Avoid bites and swings of the animal's teeth and claws around the neck area, as a single swipe could kill even the largest man. They tend to avoid prolonged battles, and you may just "win" if you can avoid damage to these areas. Children should be immobilized with you, and should be picked up or moved to protection (behind a backpack, under a picnic bench, etc.), as they are much more likely to be attacked than larger, non-panicked adults. If traveling in an area where there have been frequent sightings, carry a gun for protection (just make sure it is legal to do so). These animals can be very aggressive, and by the time you see them, they already know what you are doing.

## **Snakes**

Not all snakes show themselves when they are ready to strike, and not all of them require a posture to strike, so the best advice for avoiding a snakebite is avoiding a snake, and the best advice for avoiding a snake is good situational and locational awareness. Know what is around you, and don't go looking for things in areas where you can't be sure of the contents. A snake can usually only strike about one to three times the length of its body, so distance will be the key to avoiding concerns. Snake identification can be useful as well: If you know what to avoid and

where it may be, then you can easily prevent concerns. Snakes don't like to be surprised, and they don't like aggressive or sharp movements. Essentially, if you are in snake country in warmer weather, wear gaiters, know where snakes may be at, and know what's in front and below you before you take a step. If you encounter a snake that gives you warning as to its intent to strike you (a rattlesnake's rattle, for example), then make yourself large and calm and back away slowly until the snake retreats. Distance is the key piece in a snake encounter, so don't panic—just put distance between you and the snake and everything else should iron itself out. If you are struck, avoid high heart rate, excess movement, and panic and attempt to get to a hospital as soon as possible with a good description of the snake that struck you. Try to remembering as much as possible, including the posture, the angle of the attack, and identifying features and colors of the reptile, as these can be clues to the type of venom in your system.

### **Africanized Bees**

These are everywhere in the U.S. now; they are aggressive and swarm in large numbers and can easily kill a human who sticks around too long. Aside from [always carrying a Benadryl tablet with you](#) in your wallet or purse (as many people advocate), there are very few ways to mitigate bee stings, so the best bet is to either run away or get into a shelter that the bees cannot follow you into. It's simple: Some bees will follow you for up to 200 yards, so keep running until they are gone and do what you can to find adequate shelter after that. Avoid provoking bees by messing with their hive, swatting at them, spraying them with water, or otherwise antagonizing them, as they are likely more aggressive than you are, and they have venom in their stingers that can cause anaphylactic shock.

### **Pit Bulls**

Avoidance is a good technique here as well, as aggressive pit bulls can be very dangerous. They are not only for their lockjaw and incredible bite strength, but also for the risk of diseases like rabies. Standing tall and not showing weakness can be intimidating to the animal, though it isn't a sure thing that your technique will keep you whole. Standing still or distancing yourself from an aggressive dog slowly, without moving sharply or shrinking down in size, is also one of the better techniques. If you are attacked, try to use an item like a stick or purse to give the dog something to grab onto; realize that it is nearly impossible to get your limbs out of a pit bull's jaws, so prepare yourself for that. Try to avoid excess movement by yourself or by the animal, as the real damage usually comes from the animal's head jerking or the reaction to try and remove your body part; immobilize the animal between your legs or with the help of others if possible. You can attempt to put the animal to sleep using a choke hold or to poke it in the eyes; if others are around, they may be able to beat the animal away or put it in a choke hold, which will make its muscles and joints relax enough to force the jaws open.

The threat of attacks from these animals is real. You should take the time to understand the risk you face when in the natural habitat and on the level with animals that can become aggressive in order to know how to handle a potential attack. In case you are attacked, the above information is simple enough to help you remember and avoid the consequences of a lesser-prepared victim.