Mr. Badger and his courage

Walking down one of the aisles at the Montrose Library, I spied a book I haven't read since ... well, a very long time.

Wind in the Willows was first published in 1908, and our local library has three copies. Among the pages are the adventures of Rat and Mole "simply messing about in boats." The escapades of Toad are here; and the wisdom and stability of Badger.

The book jumped off the shelf at me. I sure enjoyed Kenneth Graham's book — it's a short read — but Badger seemed to reach me more this time.

One of my first encounters with a badger was not far from the South Rim Campground at Black Canyon. Out on an early morning foot patrol, I spotted a white, brown, and black-furred creature waddling along on one of the loops in the road.

It was uninterested in me; I'm sure it was searching for a morsel. After a brief snort at me, it strode off in a manner that was half trot, half waddle. I followed it, knowing these creatures can be cantankerous.

It turned on me with a growl and a clacking of its teeth. I'm sure I was seven times its weight and many more times its size. Yet the badger acted as though it would give me a charge. Courage is not uncommon in the natural world, but this animal was startling.

Badgers have reason to be nervy, as two adaptations have made them formidable. Their skulls have a pronounced sagittal crest. It's a bony ridge on top of the skull to which the jaw muscles are attached.



Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

Adaptations to their jaw structure combine with extra strong muscles to give these predators a powerful, swift bite when encountered. One researcher found they are powerful enough to leave teeth marks on the iron of a spring trap.

As burrowing mammals. badgers are also equipped with great digging muscles.

The front feet have noteworthy claws for loosening earth, and the toes are partially webbed for better scooping. After a suitable amount of excavating has been done, they shift gears and the rear legs push the dirt backwards and out the hole.

And they have a nictitating membrane This is a clear layer that acts as an inner eyelid. It covers the eye to keep dust out and moisture in. It gives this mammal an edge when pursuing prey below the ground's surface.

Badgers are pretty clever hunters. They might lurk within a squirrel's burrow for an ambush when the rodent returns, or they might use human-made features to cloak their movements. They will eat almost anything — insects, reptiles (rattlesnakes seem to be on the menu), birds, mammals, and if in need of some roughage, they have been known to eat berries and nuts.

They usually dig after their prey, but research shows that they team up with coyotes to catch their targets. The coyote might chase its quarry underground. The badger goes after it, forcing the first one out another hole for the coyote, but catches the other rodents that are still below ground.



Badgers prefer open meadows and sagebrush plains for their homes. One North Rim ranger at Black Canyon saw one of these secretive creatures a couple of times late this summer. (Photo courtesy of National Park Service)

Estimates suggest that coyotes are onethird more likely to succeed in catching prey this way.

But if a coyote is that hungry, why not just eat the badger? Badgers are smaller, slower, and offer more to eat than a couple of mice. Remember that surly attitude? They are fierce creatures that can stand up for themselves. Mark Twain had it right when he wrote, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog."

This might have been the kind of boldness that another ranger encountered on the Rock Point Trail years ago. The badger was snarling and chomping at him. It rushed him and then retreated. His thought was that maybe we should relocate the badger away from the visitor area. My thought was, yeah — you go ahead and

grab him.

Badgers are committed by their daring and have carved out a place on earth. We can all take a lesson from Mr. Badger's playbook. The mindset we bring to our approach with others is what matters. Ambling away is sometimes the best strategy, yet somehow badgers become more than they would be by their courage.

Or as he says in Wind in the Willows, "The Wild Wood is pretty well populated by now; with all the usual lot, good, bad, and indifferent ... It takes all sorts to make a world."

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Hiking with Children 101

Anne Janik

FRIENDS OF YOUTH AND NATURE

Fresh air, exercise, family bonding, and exploring nature are just some of the benefits of hiking with your children.

If you are at all uneasy about this family outing, here are a few tips and tricks that will help you have fun and ensure your kids will want to go again and again.

For the kick-off hike, pick an easy and interesting trail, go slow, and be enthused — it's contagious! A destination hike can motivate kids to keep going to reach an endpoint — an overlook, cave, rock art, or waterfall. When you reach that point, have lunch, a special treat, or a fun activity like an energizing jump into a swimming hole. Also, at the end of your hike, have a good refreshing treat waiting in the cooler. Plan lots of stops to observe and play.

The best kid-friendly hikes usually involve scrambling over rocks or boulders, wading through shallow creeks, or walking around a lake. Your kids can practice skipping stones, discovering aquatic bugs under wet rocks, naming wildflowers, or spying fish darting about. Definitely have dry socks and shoes at the car.

Glance off-trail and look around often. A shiny object can get a curious child off course — that's a good thing! Observation is a great skill, and improves with practice. The more you look, the more things you will see. Point out a lizard scurrying in the shade of a rock, a strange sound in the forest, the soft feel of moss on a log, the earthy scents of a decomposing log. Guide your children's interaction with nature and try to appeal to all their senses.

A hike can combine the best parts of being in nature — freedom, adventure and discovery. Take breaks often. Pick a boulder or a log to rest, enjoy the view, and have a snack — the best part of a hike. Pack lots of light snacks, like nuts, protein bars, and fruit. Surprise your kids with a few unexpected incentives to keep them going like Skittles, gummy worms, or Smarties. Take more water than you think your family will drink and drink it often.

Remain upbeat through the melt-downs and whines. Your kids will feed off of your energy, but be flexible. Change your plans if things are not working out. Remember that you are trying to introduce your family to a nature outing; they won't want to go again if they aren't having fun. When boredom sets in, distraction is the name of the game, and there are lots of trail games to keep everyone occupied and hiking. Your family is also having fun together!

Here are a few to keep in mind.

• Who doesn't love a scavenger hunt? Make a list of items everyone has to find such as four different shades of green, something smooth, rough, or wet; something blue; an animal track or animal sign; something made by humans.

• Guess the animal: Take turns thinking of an animal; everyone asks questions to figure out what that animal is.

• I Spy: You pick something along the trail and give hints until kids guess it.

• A fistful of sounds: With a minute of silence and eyes closed, each person tallies all the sounds they hear using their fingers. After a minute, eyes open, and everyone sees who has heard the most sounds.



Kids playing in a sunflower meadow on the Grand Mesa National Forest (Submitted Photo/Ryan

Let them talk — ask questions about their favorite animal, place, food, or game. Share stories. Enjoy this priceless bonding time. Life is busy; but when you are unplugged and surrounded by nature, this is a perfect time to just let your kids talk while you listen. They will love this undivided attention from you, and what they have to say may surprise you!

Some additional trail tips:

- Keep a simple first aid kit in your
- Dress in layers, and have rain gear for everyone.
- Keep track of the time; make stops, but keep moving so you can get to your destination.
- Know before you go. Check the trail and weather conditions. Cancel your plans if the weather is not working in your favor.

For more outdoor safety tips, trail game ideas, and hiking trails, visit the Friends of Youth and Nature website: (www.friend-sofyouthandnature.org). FOYAN is a non-profit that promotes opportunities for youth and families to go outside, experience outdoor activities and explore nature.

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Friend or feral

We have a large window in a rec room located along the back of our house that overlooks the creek bottom and farm fields behind us. I love to sit there and watch the wildlife. With binoculars, I watch and study everything from geese, ducks and pheasants, to deer, fox and prairie dogs. Many of the pictures I have used in articles over the years were shot overlooking this area.

Technically I am working when I am in that room, studying animals. My wife refers to it as "goofing off." When she confronts me about it, I try in vain to explain my actions. She utters something about my studying with my eyes closed and then laughs herself silly as she exits. I find her evil chortle very unladylike and plan on telling her so next chance I get.

One of the critters I see more and more of lately are cats. Not the



Tips from the Posse By Mark Rackay

cat types, but the house cat variety. The population seems to grow every year and it got me to study on the situation and see what is going on.

Sometimes these cats

mountain lion or bob-

Sometimes these cats you see belong to a neighbor. The cat is out doing the "cat thing" and will most likely return back home to a

warm bed and bowl of cat food. Some of these cats however, are strays that have been lost or abandoned by careless owners, and others are actually feral cats.

Feral cats are unsocialized and tend to be somewhat fearful of people, trying to keep their distance. They usually live in groups called colonies, and share a common food source and

FERAL

FROM PAGE A8

territory. The colony may include recently abandoned cats or those who were recently lost by their owners.

Feral in a cat is a behavioral characteristic and not a biological one. An outdoor kitten can be born feral, taken indoors and socialized as a family pet. It takes longer to bring around a feral cat so a great deal of patience is important.

The older a kitten born in the wild is, the more difficult it is to domesticate them. A full-grown adult cat that was born in the wild may take years to socialize, if ever.

True feral cats avoid contact with humans. They will be difficult, if not impossible to approach. Most often, a feral will crawl, crouch, hide and stay low to the ground with their tail protecting their body.

A feral cat will not make eye contact like a domestic cat will. Speaking to the feral will usually go unanswered with no purrs or meows. Caution should be exercised when approaching because they can lash out and be aggressive if cornered or threatened.

If you encounter a cat that is dirty and its fur is a mess, something that looks like it is wild, it is probably someone's lost or abandoned pet. A feral cat will probably have a clean and well-kept coat because the cats in a feral colony groom each other.

Feral behavior will increase with each successive feral generation. The more feral generations from a once socialized ancestor, the wilder that cat will be. The amount of human contact a cat has can also influence just how wild he or she may become.

The important thing to remember is that no matter how long a cat may live in the wild, it will never become wildlife. While they live outside

year-round and exhibit wild behavior, very few subsist on hunting alone. The vast majority relies on some form of human-based food source, such as dumpsters or trash cans or food bowls of pets left in the yard. If a cat is mewing and begging for food from you, it is probably a lost pet and not a feral.

A further concern is not only the number of cats released and abandoned, but also their amazing fertility rate. It is estimated that a single pair of feral cats can grow to a population of 10,000 within five years. In some locales, the feral population exceeds the number of domestics.

The Humane Society estimates that there are 30 to 40 million feral cats living in colonies throughout the United States. These wild-cat colonies have coexisted with humans for over 10,000 years.

All is not peaceful with the feral cat populations. The IWRC, Education and Resource for Wildlife Conservation Worldwide estimates that up to four billion wild birds are killed by feral cats each year in the United States.

Transmission of infectious diseases from feral cats to wild species has become an emerging threat for wildlife conservation. There are shared infectious agents between domestic cats and wild cats, such as pumas and bobcats.

The removal of feral cat colonies always stirs up the emotions of the community. Most people do not support the use of euthanasia to remove them. People still view the wild tabby as someone's former pet, and rightfully so, aside from a few generations. Remember, they are not wildlife.

Some jurisdictions practice a sterilization program. These programs, called trap-neuter-release (TNR) have been used in large metropolitan areas with somewhat contradictory results.

Some studies of the effectiveness of



This colony of feral cats lives behind a business on South Townsend Avenue. They were very skittish and would not let me approach for a picture. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

TNR programs show an effective rate with as little as a 55 percent neuter rate, while other studies show without neutering 100 percent of females success will not be attained. Many ecologists suggest that TNR is not effective at reducing, and ultimately, removing feral cat populations, especially if contact with owned cats cannot be prevented.

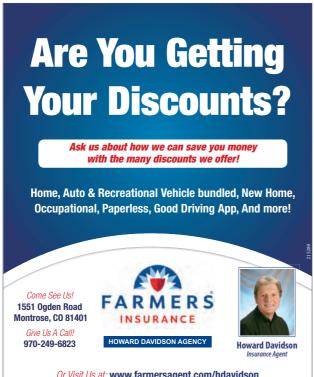
There is no real answer to the feral cat problem. We have to look back at ourselves, because people have caused this problem. I will continue studying wildlife from my perch in the backroom of the house. My wife does not

realize that occasionally, I have to close my eyes to properly absorb what I have seen. I have tried to explain it but she just doesn't get it.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77 @bresnan.net







[:32] *** Friends With Benefits [2011] Justin Timberlake, Mila Kunis. Complications [:26] *** Monty Python's The Meaning of Life [1983,

unfold when two friends add sex to their relationship. 'R' (cc)

Comedy) Graham Chapman, John Cleese. 'R' (cc)

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60	13	182	278	DSC	Gold Rush: Pay Di	rt "Never Say Die"	Gold Rush "No Gut		(:01) Gold Rush Dakota Fred drops a bombshell. (N) (cc)				Gold Rush "No Guts, No Gold" (cc)		(:01) Gold Rush (N	l) (cc)	
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3	30	108	252	LIFE	** Unforgettable (2017, Suspense) Rosario Dawson, Katherine Heigl, Geoff Stults. A her ex-husband's fiancee. (cc)				alous woman terrorizes (:33) The Perfect Soulmate (2017, Suspense) Cassandra Scerbo, Alex Paxton-Beesley, Scott Gibson. (cc)				(:01) ** Unforget	t able (2017, Suspense) Rosario Dawson, Kath	erine Heigl, Geoff	
63	14	241	241		(4:30) *** 21 Jump Street (2012) Bellator MMA Live (N) (cc)						edy) Jonah Hill, Channing Tatum, Brie Larson. (cc)		(:45) Cops (cc)				
22	34	131	254	AMC	(5:30) *** Taken (2008, Action) Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace. *** Taken (2008, Slavers kidnap the daughter of a former spy. (cc)				Action) Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace, Famke Janssen. Slavers kidnap Fear the Walking er spy. (cc) Fear the Walking						nds" Rick's group		
23	24	105	242		Modern Family (cc) (DVS)	Modern Family "Red Alert"	Modern Family	Modern Family	Modern Family "Yes-Woman"	Modern Family "Commencement"	Modern Family "Three Dinners"	Modern Family	Modern Family "The Feud"	Modern Family	Chrisley Knows Best	Chrisley Knows Best	
23	36	136	248	EVD		lypse (2016, Action) J	ames McAvoy, Michael						Action) Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone, Rhys Ifans. Peter Parker investigates his parents'				
27	29	170	299		SpongeBob	SpongeBob	SpongeBob	SpongeBob					Friends (cc)			(:35) Mom (cc)	
		176	296	TOON	We Bare Bears	We Bare Bears	American Dad	American Dad		Bob's Burgers	Family Guy (cc)	Family Guy (cc)	, ,	Eric Andre Show		Bob's Burgers	
29	3	180	311	FREE		lams Family (1991) / ther, Uncle Fester, return			amily Values (1993, Comedy) Anjelica Huston, Raul Julia, Christopher Lloyd. A greedy and murder Uncle Fester. (cc)			(9:50) ** Hocus Pocus (1993, Children's) Bette Midler, Sarah Jessica Parker. Youths conjure up three child-hungry witches on Halloween. (cc)					
32	33	118	265			0.04.19" (N) (Live) (cc	<u> </u>	1 . / / .		Live Rescue: Rewind "Live Rescue: Rewind No. 18" (N) (cc)				Live PD "Live PD 10.04.19" (cc)			
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32	17	138	245	TNT		ormers (2007, Action age war on Earth. (cc) (Shia LaBeouf, Tyrese Gibson, Josh Duhamel. VS)		*** Cast Away (2000, Drama) Tom Hanks, Helen Hunt, Nick (cc)			arcy. A courier company executive is marooned on a remote is		on a remote island.	. *** Twister (1996, Action) Helen Hunt, Bill Paxton. (cc) (DVS)		
44			249				(:15) South Park "		, ,	(:25) South Park		South Park (cc)			Celebrities roast Rob La		
			244				017, Action) Dacre Mor	<u> </u>	Van Helsing "Dark		Futurama (cc)	Futurama (cc)	(:15) Futurama (co		Gary-Demons	Hills Hve Eyes	
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			282	ANPL	The Crocodile Hun		The Zoo: San Dieg	o "Miracle Calf"	The Secret Life of		The Secret Life of		The Zoo: San Dieg		The Crocodile Hur	ter: Another Bite	
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	19		312	ШАП	Christmas at Peml	berley Manor (2018)) Jessica Lowndes, Mich	' '	All of My Heart: T	he Wedding (2018, F	Romance) Brennan Ellio	ott, Lacey Chabert,	The Golden Girls	The Golden Girls	The Golden Girls	The Golden Girls	
		premium cable channels													(cc)		
318	20	303	504	НВОР	(:15) * Getaway (2013, Action) Ethan Hawke, Selena Gomez. A former race-car driver must save his kidnapped wife. 'PG-13' (cc)								tic (2019) Rebel Wilson. A woman becomes romantic comedy. 'PG-13' Real Time With Bill Maher The host's groundbreaking career on TV. (cc)				
349	22	311	516	MAVD	(5:40) *** Eve's I			** The Good Son	(1993) Macaulay Culki		** Rampage (201	8, Action) Dwayne John rk on a path of destruction	nson, Naomie Harris. Pre		(10:50) ** The Isl Ewan McGregor. 'PG	and (2005, Action)	
	_		545	CHOM		se With a Clock in	Murder in the Bay known informants. (N	rou The victims were		*** Young Adult		n. A writer returns to her			(:05) Couples Therapy "105"	(:35) Inside the NFL (cc)	
421	21	351	528	CT7D	(5:59) *** Hot Fu	zz (2007, Comedy) Sir	mon Pegg, Nick Frost, Ji	· ·	(:02) ** The Girl i	n the Spider's Web	(2018, Action) Claire I	Foy. A computer hacker	Power "Inside Man"	_ · ·	Vida "Episode	(:36) Slaughter-	
-	_					y British village. 'R' (cc) Ladels (2008, Com-	+++ Fact Times at	Pidgement High /1		clear weapon codes. 'R	· ·	I Luctin Timberlake Mile	hostage. (cc)	(-26) +++ Manha	16" (cc)	house Rulez 'R'	

*** Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) Sean Penn. California teenagers enjoy malls, sex and rock 'n' roll. 'R'

(5:18) *** Role Models (2008, Com-