

INSECTS

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bear is 80-85 percent correct in its predictions.

In the fall Woolly bears are searching for places to over winter. Places like under bark or inside cavities of logs are always ideal. That's why you see so many of them crossing roads and sidewalks during autumn. Woolly bears spend the winter in a kind of "hairy" frozen stage until they begin to change and transform into white moths with little dark spots. At this stage of life they're known as tiger moths. They feed on a large variety of plants, but because the feeding is so late in the year and so minimal, nobody worries about it. Did you know that there's an annual Woolly Worm Festival held in Banner Elk, North Carolina? It draws thousands of Woolly bear fans, and includes Woolly bear races, several vendors, food, music and fun for all. I guess I'm not the only one who loves them.

The praying mantis is another cool insect that is actually around all summer but I always seem to see more of them in the fall. Maybe this is because it's the time of year when she deposits her eggs on a twig or side of a building. She then produces a Styrofoam-like substance where the eggs will develop and over winter. Sad as it seems, she will die after this. In the meantime, I enjoy watching them as I work in the garden while they watch me. My daughter doesn't share my thoughts though. Just last week she told me about a three-inch long mantis that chased her across the yard and into the house while she ran flailing her arms and screaming. I'm actually sorry I missed that. This is not usually the case though. If you don't bother them they do nothing more than ignore you



As seen here, this cat-faced spider is the most commonly encountered spider in the Orb weaver family and is a cousin to the 'barn spider' of the Midwest, Araneus cavaticus, which is well-known through the book Charlotte's Web. (Charlotte's full name is Charlotte A. Cavaticus). (Linda Corwine McIntosh/ Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

or keep an eye on you to make sure you are not going to hurt them. I know it can be creepy when they turn their head around like an owl, but it's also kind of interesting. I actually don't think of mantids as all that beneficial because they will eat any insect that crosses their path. But that's part of the problem. They don't go very far out of their way to eat a pesky bug. They wait until it comes to them. Nonetheless, the egg cases should be preserved so the eggs can hatch next spring. So if you see an egg case let it be. There's really no reason to remove it.

The coolest spiders show up in the fall. The cat-faced orb weaver spider Araneus gemmoides is one great spider. It kind of looks like a little tan ball that many people describe as looking like a "cats face" because of the projections on its abdomen, dimples and markings. Apparently I'm not the only one who enjoys these harmless beneficial spiders because this month CSU in Fort Collins is having the 11th Annual How-Big-Is-Your-Cat-faced Spider Contest. You have to take your spider to the university for weigh in, and then

they will return it to the handler. They're even offering a prize for the biggest one! Yes, they can bite if provoked but it won't hurt you. Just handle them with care.

Argiope trifasciata Forsskal is a large spider that's kind of silver with several thin black and yellow lines across its body. Its long legs are dark yellowish-brown with darker rings. It's actually pretty good looking as far as spiders go. This spider can catch small grasshoppers and wasps in its nest, which makes it a fantastic spider in my book. They have probably been in your garden since late June. It just seems like I always see more of them in the fall.

With the recent cold snap I hope these great insects are hunkered down and you'll still have a chance to see them before they're gone. Even so, the good news is, there will be a new generation to take their place and we'll be able to enjoy them again next season.

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Search and rescue missions, like this one, find the lost or injured person within 24 hours, 93 percent of the time. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

The reasons people become lost

If you spend enough time padding around in the outdoors, eventually you will become lost. We don't like to use that word "lost." Let's just call it "temporarily misguided."

I spent many years fishing in Everglades National Park and the Florida Keys. An area I used to frequent was called Hell's Bay. This area was comprised of thousands of small islands, oyster bars and the convergence of salt and freshwater from the everglades. It was also teeming with fish, because the area was so confusing to navigate, people avoided the area.

Feeling a mite big for my britches, I ventured into the bay much farther than I should have. GPS and Loran were not used much in backcountry boats in those days, and would have been useless anyway. When it was time to return home, I suddenly realized I had no idea, which cut or pass to head through.

Since waiting for search and rescue was not an option (because there wasn't a SAR in the Keys) I started trying different passes through a series of trial and error. The big question was whether I would run out of fuel before I found a way out. I finally found a pass that took me to the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, in black dark that took me the 40 miles back home. I got lucky, as a mistake deep in the Glades could have cancelled my life memberships.

Recently I had an opportunity to review a study on the top reasons people become lost. The study covered the years 2004 through 2014 and the 46,609 people who required Search and Rescue (SAR) in the country's national parks. The National Park Service maintains very detailed records of all SAR missions conducted within their boundaries.

The death toll for those missions was 1,578, while 13,957 people were injured or fell ill, during the same time frame. The cost of those SAR missions topped \$51.4 million. It is important to note that these missions only pertained to the 84 million acres of national parks. There were many more missions not included in these totals that occurred on land other than within park boundaries.

Just some random statistics for this massive study indicated that 53 percent of the people needing help were men, compared to 33 percent for women. The largest age group needing help, 17 percent, were between 20 and 29 years old.

The most common location for the missions was mountains and foothills at 35 percent, with 15 percent more occurring in canyons. This pretty well describes our little corner of Colorado.

Factors that contributed to the people needing assistance were: fatigue/physical condition, 22.8 percent, people making an error in judgment 18.8 percent, falls accounted for 10 percent, insufficient clothing or equipment and clothing was 8 percent, and darkness caused 6 percent.

The most important statistic I obtained from this study was that of the activity the people were doing at the time. Daytime hiking accounted for 42 percent of the missions and only 13 percent involved an overnighter. This shows me that even the little day "walk through the woods" can turn deadly.

Misjudging distances is probably the most common mistake a hiker makes. Carrying a pack, going in uneven or rough terrain or misjudging your pace, can all lead to a miscalculation in how far you have travelled.

The preventative medicine for this would be to use a GPS to cover your entire trip. Use a compass and map, together with landmarks, as a backup as you progress on the hike. The secret to not getting lost is to "stay found."

Lack of situational awareness and wandering around aimlessly is very inadvisable as you hike through the woods. Not paying attention can lead to a misstep, causing a fall, stepping on a poisonous snake, or missing a trail marker. Keep



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

your wits about you the entire time you are on the hike.

Taking unnecessary chances while outdoors is another problem leading to a SAR mission. When your ego runs amuck, and talks you into taking chances, especially in rough or tricky terrain, it can lead to a problem. Save the chance taking for an activity closer to home.

The famous short cut often leads straight to trouble. There is an old saying, "short cuts make for long delays." There is a reason the trail you are on goes the way it does. Once a course is planned and mapped out, don't deviate.

Most trails go around the worst of the terrain. What you can't see ahead of you could be a big canyon. That canyon can cause you to turn back, or make a poor decision, such as crossing it.

The same can be said about following game trails through the woods. I have followed many trails over the years and realize that game can pass through much thicker, steeper, and rougher terrain than I can. While it may seem like an easy option, somewhere down the game trail, it will turn rough. Best stay on the people trail because it is there for a reason.

Getting caught after dark is pretty easy to remedy, if you have the right mindset and prepared properly. Carry a flashlight or two and lots of extra batteries. The mindset part comes into play when you decide to just stay put until morning. If you have some supplies, can make a fire, and have no idea where you are, just sit tight until morning. The world may appear as a much better place in the daylight, besides, your risk of injury due to a misstep grows as you attempt to move in the dark.

Changing weather conditions, as are so common in the Colorado Mountains are a factor that must be considered. A snowstorm can strand you just as quickly as the falling of darkness.

Even if it is "just a short hike" carry the supplies and equipment for the just in case scenario. This should include extra clothes for the changing weather, and equipment necessary in case you do have to spend the night. Remember that your travel partner, Mr. Murphy, make have plans other than "just a short hike" for you.

I would like to throw something in here about splitting up from your party. We have local SAR missions involving hikers and hunters who have "split up" during the course of their day, every year. There is safety in numbers and a pair or more of people can handle an emergency much better than one person alone. Stay together at all times.

When the inevitable "your turn" in getting temporarily misguided, rest easy knowing you are prepared and have the training and supplies to see you through the ordeal. SAR finds 93 percent of all lost persons within 24 hours, so most of these ordeals are short lived.

Keep in the back of your mind that 3 percent of lost persons are never found; not a trace. Being in the woods, even for just a day hike, is serious business.

Looking back on my trip into Hell's Bay, I should have done better. Instead of being driven with the mindset of catching fish, I should have paid more attention to the charts and compass. Staying found and watching the passes and ever changing tides would have been much smarter than running around for 12 hours looking for an escape route. Next time I will do better.

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



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