

Not-so-docile animals: Angry beavers



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Having lived an outdoor lifestyle for most of my life, I have come across a wide assortment of animals in distress. I once saved a baby pronghorn that misjudged the height of a barbed wire fence, and a similar situation with a doe mule deer that had both hind legs tangled in the wire.

There was the time I freed up two bucks that were fighting and had locked their antlers in a manner that would have meant death to the both of them. During my years on the waters around the keys, I saved countless seabirds from fishhooks and entanglements with improperly discarded monofilament line. Once, I got into the water to untangle a 300-pound sea turtle that was hopelessly twisted up in an improperly deployed fisherman's net.

In all of those rescue missions, I might point out that I never received so much as a thank-you from any of the animals I saved. Without exception, every animal attempted to bite, stab, gore, kick, thrash, charge, or otherwise attempt to inflict great bodily harm to my person as a gesture of goodwill for my attempts to assist them.

I just read a story of a man who found two bull elk locked in mortal combat. The scenario had played on so long, that one of the participants had already died, the other looked hopelessly with the dead one's antlers.

This nature-loving chap decided to try and saw off the antler of the dead elk, in an attempt to free the still alive one. It worked, sort of. He did manage to free the still living elk, but the bull came back and attacked the man, goring him in the neck for his troubles. The man lived and was somewhat wiser. I am adding this guy to my Christmas card list because his story is one, I can relate to.



I have fished around beavers and their ponds all my life, but have never considered them dangerous, until now. (David Hannigan/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

As a general rule, I have found wild animals to be nonaggressive, for the most part. Unless you have a flair for challenging kismet, if you leave them alone, they generally will go hence without day and grant you the same professional courtesy.

Sure, you occasionally read about the idiot tourist who tried to feed a marshmallow to a 1,200-pound bison in a National Park and got stamped, cancelled and rolled into a fair resemblance of a shaggy tollhouse cookie mix. There is also the occasional camper who gets into a losing argument with a bear and gets fully subdivided for his troubles.

Lately, I have been seeing some very disturbing reports about beavers. My relationship with the beaver goes way back to my childhood and ranch days with my grandparents.

We had several creeks that flowed through our little ground. The water was very important to us, but for different reasons. My grandfather wanted the water to flow, free of obstructions, and irrigate his hay fields, so he could make money to keep us in daily gruel. I wanted the creeks for fishing.

The beavers dammed up

the creeks, making wonderful ponds that held many trout.

I would waste these ponds amongst the many beavers, and they basically ignored me. They never attacked me or threatened me for that matter. We maintained a very equitable relationship. They made ponds for me to fish in, and I kept the information from my grandfather, lest he blow the ponds, much to the dismay of the beavers and me.

Science tells us that beavers can be very aggressive when defending their territory against interlopers. They might also attack humans when infected with rabies, although it is rare for a beaver to become rabid. There is also some thinking that beavers can become disoriented during the daylight hours and attack out of fear.

I have never found a beaver to be aggressive. I have walked up next to them, fished alongside of them, and watched them work on a pond for hours, never having one display any type of aggressiveness towards me. Perhaps that is about to change.

A 60-year-old fisherman in Belarus (a landlocked country in Europe) died when he was attacked by a beaver. The beaver

tore open an artery and the man bled to death.

The media described the incident as "the latest in a series of beaver attacks on humans in the country." Authorities claim the beaver was rabid, while others stated the man grabbed the beaver in an attempt to take a picture with it, hence the marshmallow and bison outcome.

There was the recent attack of a snorkeler off the coast of Nova Scotia by a beaver. This was an interesting event because beavers don't go near saltwater. Closer to home, an elderly woman in Virginia was severely mauled by a beaver, reported to be rabid.

A man named Dan Wherley and his 7-year-old daughter were kayaking on a Pennsylvania river when a beaver came out and attacked their kayak. Wherley beat back the beaver with his paddle, only to have the beaver attack his daughter's kayak. The battle carried onto the shore where hand-to-hand combat ensued until the beaver finally was killed. The beaver later tested positive for rabies.

Another kayaker, Michael Cavanaugh, was brutally attacked and knocked out of his vessel by

a very angry beaver. The man managed to beat the beaver away with his paddle, but not before sustaining severe lacerations from the angry animal.

Recently, a rabid beaver attacked 2 girls. Both girls were severely mauled and were hospitalized and treated for rabies. These reports seem to be more common in the last few years, with attacks on the upswing.

I am not sure if the beavers are seeking reparations for the years of trapping, they endured or if they hate kayakers. In either event, I am going to start keeping a closer eye on them when I am fishing a beaver pond. They may still be angry about the way my grandfather used to blow their ponds with dynamite.

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What's happening in your early autumn garden?

Even though fall is upon us, there's still a lot of growing to do. Just in case you're wondering, our average frost date for the Montrose area is around October 7, so don't stop gardening quite yet.

This is a fantastic time of year to plant trees, shrubs, perennials and spring blooming bulbs! I know, we usually think spring is the time to plant most things, but late summer and early fall shouldn't be overlooked as



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corvine McIntosh

a great time plant.

You may not give it much thought but the soil is warmer than it is in the spring and the air is cooler

which is great for helping plants establish.

In fact, fall planting actually gives your new plants time to overcome transplant shock without the added demands of producing leaves and flowers.

Plants can actually establish a bit more easily than they would in the spring and they will hit the ground running when spring rolls around.

That is, if you provide the needed extra moisture

throughout the winter months. Because our winters have the nasty habit of becoming dry these days, watering them every month or so is important!

September or early October is a great time to plant spring flowering bulbs and garlic. You may want to add a little phosphorous or bone meal to the soil when you plant. Just don't breathe the bone meal dust when you're using it. Also note, bone

meal might attract bears if they're a problem in your area.

Garlic is sold in the spring, but it's also sold in the fall and rightly so. You may be surprised to learn that fall is an excellent time to plant garlic for next year's harvest! To plant it, separate the garlic cloves from the bulb and plant each little piece about 12 inches apart in loose soil with added organic matter. Garlic will do best if you plant

it when soil temperatures are 40°F, but before the ground freezes.

Fall favorites like mums and asters are available everywhere in pots for seasonal decorating. You could enjoy them as an eye catching porch decoration, and as the season progresses and they stop blooming, you could plant them in your perennial flowerbed to be enjoyed for years to come.

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