



These aren't exactly feral people, but if you run into this pair in the backcountry, be careful. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

## Feral people in the great outdoors?

In keeping with the upcoming Halloween weekend, I felt it would be appropriate to explore a bit of the possible supernatural side of the great outdoors. Everyone who recreates outdoors eventually has an experience that is not easily explained away. Take my friend Randy from Florida as an example.

Randy was on a camping trip in the Florida Everglades, where the glades meet up with the Gulf of Mexico and miles of deserted white sand beaches exist as they have for thousands of years. The area is known for tremendous fishing. Randy was hunkered in for the night, after consuming several oversize glasses of gin and tonic, garnished with fresh slices of Florida Key limes.

Randy claims he was snatched from his bed by space aliens who took him to their spacecraft, where over the course of several hours, they performed several social, as well as medical, experiments on him. Randy claims that due to a certain characteristic of Florida Key limes, he is somewhat hazy on the details. All he knows is that he woke up in his sleeping bag the next morning and felt awful.

My wife and I had an eerie encounter about a century ago, or so it seems, when we were first married. We had loaded up the truck with camping gear and blew out of town late Friday night after work. Willow Creek Campground, near the



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

town of Jefferson was our destination.

We turned off Highway 285 shortly after midnight, onto the 2-track that led to the campground. A fresh snow of about half a foot covered everything and we followed a single set of tracks into the woods. We figured there was at least one other group of folks that had the idea of camping and fishing for the weekend.

Several miles in, we discovered a truck in front of us, driver door open, blocking any further progress up the 2-track. I grabbed a flashlight and walked up to the truck to help but found the vehicle empty. The engine was not cool, indicating it had been there for an hour or thereabouts.

Heading away from the truck, directly into the woods, was a single set of footprints. I followed these tracks for several hundred yards until the tracks abruptly stopped. There was no sign of where the person who made the tracks had gone, not up nor down. It was as though the person was

abducted into thin air.

I left the scene with a haste that a casual observer might have described as "blinding speed" because I was suddenly reminded of business I had elsewhere. My wife and I drove another 50 miles to a different area to camp. If I recall, we slept in the truck cab that night.

You must have heard the urban legends of people living in the forests, parks, swamps, and jungles. There are also stories of feral people living in our own national parks. Feral people are those who live in the forest for as long as they might exist. Therefore, people believe these feral people are accustomed to feeding on lost campers and hikers and are responsible for many unsolved disappearances each year.

A television documentary, "Missing 411," sparked conspiracies about an estimated 1,600 people who have mysteriously vanished from public lands around the country. One case involved a 3-year-old Colorado boy who went missing on the Big South Trail in Roosevelt National Forest some 22 years ago.

The remains of the boy were found some four years after his disappearance. His death, after investigation of the remains, was believed to have been caused by an animal attack, but many people do not believe this to be the case.

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## Spiders may not be as spooky as you think

This is the time of year when spooky sights are everywhere. Jack-o-lanterns, ghosts, black cats, zombies, and witches are to be expected, but nothing comes close to scaring some people as much as spiders.

If spiders alone aren't spooky enough, it certainly doesn't help when they have names like: cellar spider, wolf spider, black widow, brown recluse, or jumping spider.

If you're one who freaks out when you see a spider, take a deep breath and hear me out. Most spiders should not be feared! These little guys are often just misunderstood. I know, (eye roll) but think about why you may have a bit of arachnophobia. Maybe it's because spiders

startle you? Maybe it's because you think they're going to attack and bite you? Is it because they can move so darn fast? Whatever the reason, knowing a few facts about the little critters may help.

I wonder if you've ever experienced a spider running across the floor coming straight towards you? This wasn't because it wanted to attack you or freak you out.

It was probably just confused by vibrations and movement, and moved towards you. When spiders discover you are a bigger creature than them, and figure out you could actually harm them, they run in fear and hide. You'll feel so tough when this happens!

Would it help you to know that even though they have eight eyes,



### Gardening from A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

most spiders don't see too well? However, wolf spiders have pretty good eyesight. A spider will sometimes run towards you if something behind it has frightened it but it's not trying to attack you! There are very few species that will actually harm people.

Most spiders have such small mouthparts that the skin may not even be broken if you're bitten, or the bite will be very minimal. When a spider does bite, it's usually our fault. Spiders will only bite for two reasons; they're either trying to defend themselves or they want to immobilize prey. If a spider is trapped against the skin, it may feel threatened and bite to protect itself. Venom is a precious resource that spiders don't want to waste. They would much rather avoid confrontation.

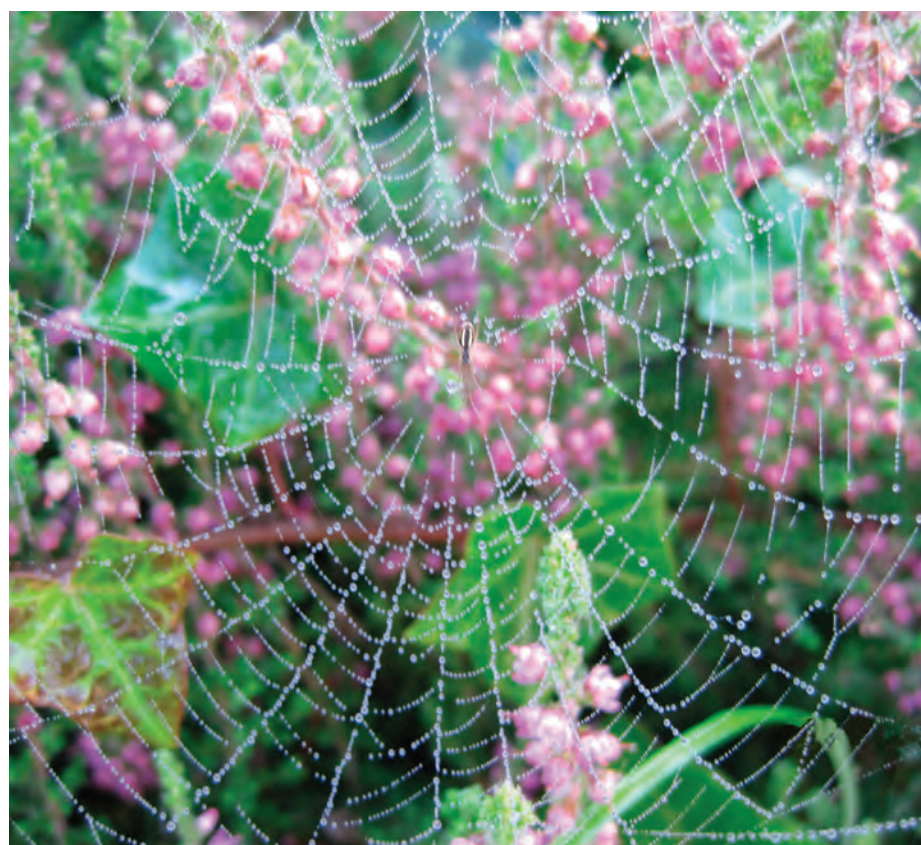
Here's some interesting spider facts that might help you understand and appreciate them a little bit more. Wolf spider carries her babies on her back to protect them. Now that's a pretty good mom. Spiders actually use their front feet to taste. If you wipe an entry point to

your house with a dryer sheet the spider will find it distasteful and won't step on it.

Speaking of feet, have you ever wondered how spiders can walk across their web without getting stuck in it like other insects do? The trick is, they have two to three "claws" called setae that enable them to walk across the web without getting tangled. A spider may occasionally walk across another spider's web but they will never use another's web. Now, have you pondered how they can walk across the ceiling without falling? They actually have hundreds of little clusters of microscopic hairs on the pads of their feet. These hairs spread out causing an adhesion when they flatten out. This grip is so strong that they say it can hold 170 times their own weight.

Do you know that spiders actually clean their mouth after they eat? I think that's impressive. (Praying mantis also clean their face after eating.) Some spiders such as orb weavers and cat face spiders will eat their webs and build new ones each day. They say the protein in the web material helps them recover some of the energy they've expended on building them. Another interesting use of spider webs is that they've got quite a lot of a vitamin K in them, which can help blood to clot. Before the use of gauze, they say some people used to put spider webs on wounds! Now isn't that interesting?

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Spider webs can be quite amazing when you think about the work and design that went into creating the web. (Linda Corwine McIntosh/Special to the MDP)



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# C'mon, get flappy: Bat Week facts

STAFF REPORT

National Bat Week is underway until Oct. 31. Conservationists use people’s tendency to associate bats with Halloween to highlight the winged mammal and to promote species health.

Here are some fast facts, courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife and others:

- 18 species of bats live in Colorado; some permanently, others migrate through. And they are the” big brown bat; big free-tailed bat; Brazilian free-tailed bat; California myotis; eastern pipistrelle (tri-colored bat); fringed myotis; hoary bat; little brown bat; long-eared myotis; long-legged myotis; pallid bat; red bat; silver-haired bat; spotted bat; Townsend’s big-eared bat; western pipistrelle (canyon bat); western small-footed myoti and Yuma myotis.
- They can be found everywhere — mountains to plains; rural to metro.
- Bats are pollinators!
- They’re also important for insect control, with the little brown bat able to catch and consume more than 150 mosquitoes in fewer than 15 minutes.
- CPW is studying Western Slope bats to locate where they hibernate — the location is referred



The Yuma myotis is one of 18 bat species known to call Colorado home. (Courtesy photo/ Dan Neubaum)

to as a “hibernaculum.” If you locate hibernating bats, treat them as though there is a “do not disturb” sign present.

- The study will also help monitor for white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease deadly to bats. Signs of the disease include bats moving to the openings of their hibernaculum during winter; leaving the site during

winter, especially on cold days; bats with a white powder on their nose, ears or wings, and dead bats.

- Report the sighting of active or dead bats to a special hotline, 303-291-7771, to assist CPW with studies and with spotting white-nose syndrome.
- Healthy bats are not health hazards when left undisturbed, Colorado Pest Management,

a Denver-based wildlife control company, reminds.

Avoid close contact with them, especially those that get into your home or that you find lying on the ground. Avoid bats that are roosting in the open during daytime and those that are flying erratically. Contact CPW (970-252-6000) or a wildlife control specialist.

Do not touch bats. If you are bitten, seek immediate medical attention and report it.

Make sure house pets are vaccinated for rabies, especially if you let them outside.

**Now for the fun stuff:**

- Make a bat box to provide living space for the animals. You can watch a video about how to make a bat box at [cpw.state.co.us/](http://cpw.state.co.us/)

[learn/Pages/Bats.aspx](http://learn/Pages/Bats.aspx). The page also has other suggestions for helping bats.

- Visit [batweek.org](http://batweek.org) for a digital toolkit, educational materials, videos and more.
- Check out [batcon.org](http://batcon.org) (Bat Conservation International’s website) for yet more information.

*Information compiled from [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us) and [coloradopestmanagement.com](http://coloradopestmanagement.com)*

## PEOPLE

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Another mysterious case involved a 19-year-old named Joseph Keller, who went for a jog from his family’s dude ranch in the San Juans in southern Colorado. The competitive runner jogged up Forest Road 250, never to be seen again.

A search engaged 15 search and rescue dogs, 200 SAR personnel, horses, ATVs, and aircraft equipped with infrared-equipment. After several weeks with no clues, it was called off. His disappearance remains an unsolved mystery.

The Department of the Interior knows how many grizzly bears there are, and how many wolves roam the lands, but has no idea how many people are missing from public lands. The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, maintained by the Department of Justice tries, but reporting to the database is voluntary in all but 10 states. Participation of cops and coroners is strictly voluntary as well.

That leaves actual numbers of these mysterious disappearances as only estimates and guesses by outdoor people and conspiracy theorists alike. There are many that believe the actual number is over 1,600, and perhaps many times that number,

of persons who remain missing on public lands under circumstances that defy logical explanation.

It is important to recognize there is no evidence, reports, pictures, or trail cams footage of any feral people living on public lands. Despite the outspread rumors about mythical beasts, cannibals, or a feral population in the national parks of the United States, there is virtually no actual evidence of their reality. Most missing person cases were due to injuries, old age, improper preparation for the elements, or they just flat got lost.

Still, if you never find the body, the truth is missing also. You just never know. I know my friend Randy still stands by his story some 20 years later, but then again, you must know Randy.

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## SPIDERS

FROM PAGE A11

I’m guessing at some point you’ve stepped into the shower and found a big spider trying to climb the shower wall or one hanging around by your feet. No, it wasn’t trying to reenact a scene from the movie Psycho. It was there because it has sought out a quiet, secluded, place with some much needed moisture. You can simply wash the spider down the drain, and go about your shower as if nothing happened, if you think you can get over the trauma of drowning an innocent little spider.

According to the Colorado Department of Health, 80% of what people think are spider bites aren’t. However, if by chance you happen to get bitten by a spider, most species that we find in the Montrose area will produce no more than an itchy, mosquito bite-like reaction. Now that doesn’t sound too bad, does it? I know the thought of the creepy little things crawling on you does more than make your skin crawl, but just brush it off.]

With all of this said, there are a couple of spiders that you need

to be watchful of in our area. One is the notorious black widow that most people think of as the Halloween spider. These usually have a red hourglass marking on their abdomen. Sometimes the hourglass can be a bit orange in color, if it even has a color. Young widows and males will not have the typical red hourglass marking. Widows will produce an ugly, painful bite, and should be taken seriously.

Fortunately, these spiders prefer cool, dark, undisturbed places and seldom leave their webs. Just be cautious when picking up objects that have laid in the landscape all summer. Check the underside when picking such items up to avoid a close encounter. If you’re going into your crawl space, pay attention. Even though these guys don’t want to hurt you, I do suggest you kill them!

Brown recluse spiders are another spider to be aware of. These have never been officially identified as being present in the Montrose area. However, if a questionable spider bites you, try to capture it and bring it to the Extension office to get it positively identified.

When I saw my first brown recluse at an

entomology class, I was surprised by how small they are. People often think they’ve seen a brown recluse but it usually turns out to be a funnel web spider or some other innocent spider. However, if the spider has a distinct violin shape on its back, be careful and try to capture it for a positive ID.

The yellow sac spider Cheiracanthium is a newcomer to Colorado, and I’ve never seen one here but you should be aware of it. This little tan spider will bite but is not aggressive. Once again, it just wants to protect itself.

Would it give you comfort to know that most spiders in Colorado have a lifespan of only one year? That is, all except black widows and some wolf spiders, which can live up to a few years. Oh yeah, and tarantulas that can survive a decade or more. My pet “rescue” tarantula, “Bert” lived at least 20 years. The good news is, we really don’t have many tarantulas in our area and most of us will never see one around here.

I’m sure you don’t want to put up with spiders in your home, and those festive spider webs can’t be passed off as decorations

after Halloween. So what can you do? The occasional spiders can be removed by hand in a tissue (wear rubber gloves when in doubt) or trap the spider in a container and relocate it outside. Of course you could vacuum it up or smoosh it, but that’s kind of sad.

Even though spiders don’t really bother me, I don’t like finding them where they don’t belong. Just to be on the safe side at this time of year, I always check my shoes and shake my clothes before putting them on. Did you know that reducing outdoor lighting can help reduce spiders? Replacing an outdoor light bulb with a yellow bulb or sodium vapor bulbs can reduce spider populations because they’re not attracted to these lights.

Keep in mind that spiders are beneficial insects! They do a great job of controlling unwanted insects in our gardens. Try to look for the good in spiders and avoid watching movies like Arachnophobia or Big Ass Spider while alone in a dark room. Have a Happy Halloween!

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