



# **Living with Desert Wildlife at Edwards AFB**

**L**iving or working on Edwards Air Force Base, people can't help but notice the numerous critters throughout the base. Especially when they come into housing and work areas.

To desert animals, Edwards AFB is an oasis of well-watered lawns and landscaped areas. It's no wonder wildlife of all sorts can be seen throughout the base. In fact, the opportunity to observe wild animals from a distance is one of the benefits of living and working here.

## **Animals Try to Avoid People**

Desert animals are not attracted to people. They are attracted to the conditions that people create. In fact, most animals instinctually try to avoid humans at all costs. However, sometimes the benefits of a relatively lush habitat with easily found food outweigh the costs of being near people. When this happens, wildlife and people must find a way to coexist as well as possible.

Remember that wild animals take advantage of opportunities – like convenient places to hide or abundant food and water sources. Residents and base workers can help keep these animals out of yards and away from facility landscaping by taking some

simple precautions. But no matter how much you do to avoid or discourage the wildlife on base, there will be times where you will come into contact with animals.

Most of the time, if you encounter wildlife on base, there is no need to do anything but admire it from a distance. However, **if you come across an injured or sick animal, leave it alone and call Environmental Management at 277-1401.**

We need to remember that we live in the desert, which is home to more than 470 animal species. Because people live, work and visit the base, understanding the responsibilities of wildlife safety are important in keeping both people and animals free from harm.

## **Learn More About Desert Natives**

Whether they deserve it or not, several animals that live at Edwards AFB have developed reputations for being dangerous. The following guide will help you better understand some of the base's more infamous residents and what you can do to reduce the chance of coming in close contact with them.

## Black Widows

Male and juvenile black widows are virtually harmless. Female black widow bites rarely cause death to humans because the bites involve only very small amounts of venom.

This spider almost never leaves its web. So if you know where the web is, you know where the spider is. They feed primarily on insects. Unless you aren't paying attention or are harassing the spider, there is almost no concern of being bitten.

To be safe, never reach into an area you can't see. Be especially careful in dark storage areas and garages where there isn't a lot of regular activity. Never leave gloves or shoes outdoors when not in use. To help keep spiders away, remove habitat such as piles of logs and bricks and keep shrubs manicured properly.

If bitten, apply an ice pack over the bite. Keep the bite area elevated to heart level and call 911. As important, remember black widow bites almost always can be treated with no long-term effects – so stay calm.



Black widow



Desert hairy scorpion

## Scorpions

The scorpion found at Edwards AFB is the desert hairy scorpion. Their natural tendency when confronted by a human is to escape and hide, not to attack.

These scorpions can control venom flow and most stings involve very little or no venom at all. Their sting is similar to a bee sting. Scorpions feed primarily on insects and spiders and have no desire to be anywhere near people.

To be safe, never reach into an area you can't see and wear shoes when outdoors. To help keep scorpions away, remove possible habitat such as piles of logs, boards, or bricks. Keep lawns mowed and shrubs pruned. Scorpions are rarely found in the housing areas.



Tarantula

## Tarantulas

The tarantula found here is the desert tarantula. Females are usually larger and brown colored, while the males are usually smaller and black. Desert tarantulas rarely bite humans. However, even if a bite happens, it is weaker than a bee sting and may cause very slight swelling. Tarantulas are very inactive and spend most of their time hidden in burrows waiting for food, which

means it's very rare to see them. They feed mainly on insects and other spiders, so they are very beneficial to the ecosystem. If bitten, simply clean the bite with soap and water to protect from infection.

## Snakes

Almost all snakes on base are nonvenomous. There are two venomous snakes that live on Edwards AFB: the sidewinder and Mojave *green* rattlesnake. Sidewinders are almost exclusively seen in remote, sandy areas of base. The Mojave green is not as picky about where it will live.

Snakes are only aggressive if provoked. In fact, a snake will only show aggression toward a human when it feels threatened. Almost all snakes will strike if they feel threatened, but when given room and respect, they will retreat or simply stay where they are.

Rattlesnakes are mainly active during the night, early morning and early evening. Keep your eyes open during these times and maybe you'll be one of the lucky few to see one. However,



snakes prefer to not come into contact with people, so if you see one, it will most likely try to find a place to hide.

Rattlesnakes are most dangerous when people act irresponsibly. Almost half of the known bites are because people try to catch wild rattlesnakes or handle pet rattlesnakes carelessly. Not all rattlesnake bites involve venom: between 25 and 50 percent of bites are known as “dry” bites where no venom is injected.

Like many animals, snakes are beneficial to the base by helping to control the number of rodents attracted to the abundant on-base water and food supplies.

To be safe, always watch where you walk. Never put your hands or face near burrows, rock piles or similar shaded places where snakes like to hide and stay out of the extreme temperatures in the Mojave Desert. Wear high ankle boots and heavy pants when in the desert. Never corner, harass, or try to catch any snake. If you come across a snake of any kind, simply give the snake distance and leave the area.

To help keep snakes at a distance: take away possible habitat such as debris piles, boards on the ground and rock piles. Remove food sources and water that attract the rodents snakes feed upon.

If you see a rattlesnake, remain calm, leave the area, and contact Environmental Management at 277-1401.



Mojave  
green  
rattlesnake



Gopher snake

## First Aid for Rattlesnake Bites

Although rattlesnake bites are very rare, follow these rules if one does occur:

- » Protect the person from further bites.
- » Call 911 and wait for an ambulance.
- » Keep the person as calm and still as possible.
- » Do not give the person anything to eat or drink.
- » Remove clothing or jewelry that constricts blood flow in the area bitten.
- » Wash the wound with soap and water – not with chemicals.
- » Do not cut into the bite to try and drain the venom or apply a tourniquet.



## Bobcats

Bobcats prefer to avoid populated areas, but with the water and food sources found on base, they can be seen here. There has never been a recorded bobcat attack on humans or domesticated animals on base. Bobcats in this area are similar in size to a large domestic cat, and can be active day or night. They feed mainly on rodents and rabbits, so they also help keep these pest populations in control.

Bobcats will usually move from area to area, so don't expect them to stay too long in one place. To be safe, never approach, corner or try to catch a bobcat, especially the young kittens. Never feed a bobcat. Never run away from a bobcat: always back away slowly. If you see a bobcat, make loud noises to scare them off.



Bobcat with kittens



Coyote

## Coyotes

Coyotes are about the size of a medium-sized dog. Here in the desert, they average about 20 pounds. They mainly live in surrounding desert areas, but can be found anywhere on base. They are attracted to rodents and rabbits, food trash from humans, and available water sources found on base.

Coyotes can be seen day and night, but usually go out of their way to avoid humans. To be safe, keep your dogs on a leash when taking walks. Never run from a coyote – they will run right along with you. Never feed, harass or approach a coyote. To keep them away, keep garbage can lids closed tightly; do not leave pet food outside or throw out food of any kind; don't leave small pets unattended; and don't provide sources of water.

## Bats

All bats found on Edwards AFB feed only on insects. The infamous vampire bats are found in tropical and subtropical areas – nowhere near Edwards AFB. The bats here are no more than a few inches in length. To be safe, never try to catch a bat and stay away from injured or sick bats. To keep them away, ensure there are no openings leading from the outside of your house into attics and garages. Remove standing water – it attracts the insects that bats feed on.



Bat

## **General Guidelines**

- » Watch wildlife from a distance.
- » Report any animals of concern to Environmental Management at 277-1401.
- » Never corner a wild animal – always give it enough distance to feel comfortable.
- » Never try to catch or harass wild animals.
- » Never try to help injured or sick animals yourself – call Environmental Management at 277-1401.
- » Educate children about wildlife safety.
- » Check the yard for animals before allowing children to play or letting out pets.
- » Supervise children at all times when in the desert.
- » Never feed wild animals.
- » Don't leave pet food outdoors.
- » Don't leave standing water outdoors.
- » Prune shrubs and maintain landscaping around homes and work areas to reduce wildlife habitat.
- » Don't leave piles of leaves, wood or rocks around homes and work areas.
- » Keep pets on leashes when leaving your yard or going into the desert.
- » When walking at night, carry a flashlight to see the area ahead of you.

If you have any further questions about desert animals, please contact Environmental Management at 277-1401. **Should you feel threatened by an animal, please call the Security Forces Squadron Law Enforcement Desk at 277-3340.**



412th Civil Engineer Group  
Environmental Management  
120 North Rosamond Boulevard, Bldg. 3735  
Edwards Air Force Base, CA 93524-8400