

Enjoy Central Oregon's wildlife safely

By Jodi Schneider
Correspondent

Central Oregon is full of wonderful wilderness areas and has some of the most spectacular hiking areas in the country. But any wilderness adventure carries with it some degree of risk. The best way to reduce risks is to plan ahead and be prepared. Be aware of your surroundings, of others and the wildlife that roams the wilderness areas. From large mammals like bears and cougars to tiny hummingbirds and butterflies, the diversity of wildlife in Central Oregon is amazing and something to celebrate, with caution.

Today people and wildlife often find themselves living in the same area, as the human population grows and pushes further out into the hinterlands. When wildlife habitat, food and water resources start to disappear, animals often look for food and nest sites around homes and garages.

Mule deer and elk are abundant in Oregon's forests and for the most part are likely wary of people. The exception is when they get used to humans feeding them and begin to feel entitled to whatever treats you may have in your pocket.

There is a substantial deer population in Sisters Country, and that includes inside the city limits of Sisters itself. The urban area provides a relatively safe haven from predators and is an attractive source of food for deer.

When deer become habituated to the presence of humans, they lose their natural wariness of humans. Although deer may look cute and harmless, they can become aggressive to people and dogs.

A couple of years ago the City of Sisters passed an ordinance making it illegal to feed mule deer anywhere within the city limits. Their growing numbers in town could attract their chief predator, the cougar, which no one wants in their backyard.

Natives of Oregon, cougars roam the mountains, deserts, and lower elevations of Central Oregon and range all over the state. Cougars are most active from dusk to dawn, but it is not unusual for cougars to hunt any time during the day. Adult cougars typically prey on deer, elk, moose, mountain goats, and wild sheep, with deer being the preferred and most common prey. Other prey species, especially for younger cougars, include raccoons,

coyotes, rabbits, hares, small rodents, and occasionally pets and livestock.

On the slim chance you do encounter a cougar, Sisters resident and naturalist Jim Anderson gives this advice:

"Never lose eye contact. Never try to outrun a cougar, either on foot or bike. That only brings on the chase response. And if you meet one head-on keep eye contact, shout at the animal and raise your arms over your head. If on a bike, dismount and slowly retreat, keeping the bike between you and the animal. Don't roll it on its wheels; use it as a shield. Don't scream, shout."

If the big cat attacks, which is rare, the ODFW recommends you "fight back with rocks, sticks, garden tools or any other items available."

According to the ODFW there are more than 6,000 cougars, aka mountain lion, and 25,000 to 30,000 black bears that roam throughout Oregon.

A small number of black bears roam the east side of the Cascade mountains. Most bears will run away when they spot you and are probably more scared of you than you realize. But if you encounter a bear give it plenty of room and be calm. If the bear is on the same trail as you, back away slowly and take an alternate route if you can. The chances of a black bear attacking you are slim but if it does happen, stand tall and be loud.

"Bears should never be allowed access to human food or garbage; it habituates them to people and increases the chance of conflict," the ODFW said on their website. "Once habituated to finding

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Firearms training arms women

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

Women learn to shoot guns for a variety of reasons: hunting, competitive shooting, self- and home-defense, and the ability to control an object capable of inflicting great harm. Shooting responsibly, knowing how to care for a firearm and having the right mindset about the whole issue is just as crucial as being able to hit a target accurately.

Maureen Rogers incorporates all those aspects in her business, "Lady Gets a Gun."

Her goal is to assist women to become comfortable with firearms while also addressing related fears and dismantling fallacies surrounding guns.

"Desensitizing someone to a gun starts with handling it. It is kinesthetic, not academic," she said.

The act of holding, taking apart, cleaning and putting a firearm back together gives a sense of confidence and ownership right from the start. Working in small groups or in private sessions builds on that. Overcoming obstacles to being comfortable around guns often brings out hidden emotional issues that Rogers is able to help her students work through.

One of her students faced down a repressed memory of being threatened with a gun as a child. It wasn't until she saw a firearm lying on the table that the memory started



PHOTO PROVIDED

Women are learning to handle firearms safely and effectively.

to return. With Rogers' help and the act of handling and firing the gun herself, she was able to overcome the trauma that had sat hidden and unresolved all her life.

"Hearing the heart stories of my students is what drives me to do this," Rogers said.

Rogers was a special-education teacher for 35 years, in Hawaii and Central Oregon. She came to her current vocation after realizing that she needed and wanted to do something useful in her retirement and that many women are intimidated by firearms and co-ed classes. (Rogers and her husband, Norman, do teach co-ed classes for those who wish to learn with a friend or partner).

She has been teaching firearms classes formally for 10 years. Her credentials from the NRA are as a pistol,

rifle, shotgun, home firearm safety instructor and chief range safety officer. Her courses cover two days, with the first spent in a classroom. The second day is at the Redmond Rod and Gun Club.

The next course is set for November 8-9; there is a break during winter and the 2020 classes begin in March. For more information, visit www.ladygetsagun.com or email ladygetsagun@gmail.com.

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