



# Life with Wildlife

It's their world, too, and we need to be able to get along together.

► **By Faith Maloney**

I could hear the coyotes off in the distance, warbling their distinctive song. My dogs were at full attention, ears pricked, bodies tense, looking over in the direction of the sound. As the singing faded, their attention went back to soaking up the fresh morning smells.

We had made the turn to go back home, when I heard a yelp coming from behind me. I turned to see Schnibbles, my eight-pound, elderly Chihuahua, being sniffed by two huge adolescent coyotes. Before I could get a word out of my mouth to shoo them off, Tiny and Nellie, my fierce mother and daughter Chihuahua mixes, took off after the coyotes.

To Schnibbles' and my great relief, the coyotes took off like bats out of hell being chased by this strange-looking doggie twosome, each of whom was a tiny fraction of their size. And no one got hurt, thankfully.

When you live out in the middle of acres of wild terrain, you have to expect some kind of interaction with the wildlife inhabitants. We think of it as their land first. We are the intruders with our homes, our dog runs, and our catteries. We try to show respect by not taking up too much space, and by being considerate of their need to live and raise their families.

Rattlesnakes are common around here, and from our earliest days here at Best Friends we have learned to live alongside them. A few years ago, a new volunteer, in a great panic, came rushing into one of the Octagon kennels where I was doing the morning feeding.

"There's a rattlesnake in one of the compounds. It's going to kill all the dogs," she said, trying to catch her breath. Our alpha dog person, Tyson, and I looked at each other casually as he put down his coffee cup and reached for our homemade snake stick, and a large garbage pail with a lid.

"I'll just go move him on then," he said in his slow Texas drawl.

My volunteer was beginning to calm down as she confessed to having almost killed the snake. She had been pooper scooping when she saw the little fella slide through the fence. Fear took hold, not for herself, but for the dogs. She was going to bop the snake on the head with the poop-scoop pan when a voice inside her said, "You're at a no-kill animal sanctuary. I expect that ap-

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Illustration: Marc Brown

plies to snakes, too.”

That snake and many, many more over the years have been safely removed from around Dogtown, where they might be a danger to the dogs or where they might be in danger from the dogs, and relocated a little ways away.

Tragically, we humans are moving into territory once occupied by hundreds of species of wildlife, and displacing them with sometimes fatal consequences. Hungry bears, coyotes, and mountain lions have killed people and pet animals to survive or just to assert their claim on the land. Few people seem to take the hint and move out. Instead, the bears, coyotes, and mountain lions are hunted and pushed further back until the region can no longer provide enough food to sustain them.

It's a troubling conflict. People need places to live and animals need range in order to survive. Living and interacting with wildlife is a balancing act, and we should be taking the lead instead of acting like the lady who called our Wild Friends director one day and asked how she could “get rid of” the cougars and coyotes that lived around her new home, because she wanted to keep her llamas safe. Aren't llamas from South America? She was advised that there are many ways of protecting the llamas without resorting to killing the native wildlife.

With a bit of common sense and responsible thinking, we can safeguard as many animals as possible: pets, livestock, and the wildlife. Sometimes, though, we seem to become incredibly stupid when it comes to doing this. Like, for example, when it comes to feeding bears. The phrase “A fed bear is a dead bear” means that bears who are fed become dependent on food from people. The bears raid campsites or trash cans, which then poses a big threat to anyone else in those areas.

Here are some other ways in which we can minimize our impact on the wildlife around us.

If you have cats and want them to enjoy the outdoors, build an enclosed cattery. Special cat fencing can keep the cats safe in a yard, but does not always protect the wildlife.

If you are planning on building a home and the site needs to be cleared, consider doing it in the fall, after the baby animals born in the spring and summer have grown up. The same applies to tree pruning. The fall is better for that, too.

Many common substances are toxic to wildlife – especially birds. All chemicals are potentially fatal to birds, including herbicides, paint (especially spray paint), candles and lights meant to ward off insects, many household and car cleaning products, oil, wood treatment materials, and glue. To minimize the harmful effects of these everyday items, use them sparingly or find a safer alternative. Check out [www.ecomall.com/biz/cleaning.htm](http://www.ecomall.com/biz/cleaning.htm) for some ideas.

Trash wreaks havoc with wildlife – plastic bags, soft drink cans, string, and the plastic rings that go around six packs of beer or soda (which should be cut with scissors before being discarded) can all be harmful. Even that apple core casually thrown out of the car window for some wild critter to eat can cause death to some animals, because the seeds contain a toxic substance.

The rescue, care, feeding, and treatment of wildlife is best left to the experts. If you see any kind of bird or mammal that you think needs help, contact your local wildlife rehabilitator. He or she has the knowledge, experience, and resources to tackle any problem that you may encounter. 🐾

**To find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area, call the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association at (320) 259-4086, the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council at (707) 864-1761, or the U.S. Department of Fish & Game in your own state. Know who your local rehabbers are ahead of time, and keep the numbers by the phone for easy reference.**