



Coexisting With Large Carnivores

GENERAL TIPS

FACTS

- Our islands are habitat for large wildlife. Records of cougar on Vashon start as early as 1915 with occasional visits reported through the 1920s, 2011, 2015, and 2016-17. Black bears have been recorded several times since the 1980s. The first coyote on Vashon was recorded in 1960, with multiple packs becoming established by 2005.
- Coyotes are highly social members of the dog family. They are dedicated parents and will defend their pups (born April-May). The island coyote diet is made up largely—90%—of rodents. They also eat fruit, vegetables, deer, raccoon, squirrels, and unprotected pets and livestock. These “song dogs” have one of the most sophisticated vocal communication systems of any mammal!
- Bears are common in Washington state. It is estimated we have more than 25,000! Black bears are intelligent and adaptable. They will take advantage of unsecured food—from garbage to feeder bird seed to livestock—they also eat deer. Bears tend to be seen most often here in late fall, when they are preparing for torpor (a state of reduced physiological activity, but not complete hibernation), or in early spring when they are waking up to fill their bellies.
- Cougars have existed in North America for more than 10,000 years, and are our largest cat. Mature males preside over territories that overlap the homes of several females. Between 18-24 months, young male cougars are forced to disperse from their mother’s territory and often move to small temporary territories on the urban fringe, where they are safe from adult males while they grow to maturity. Our islands provide a safe temporary range, a short swim from the mainland. Most of our cougar visitors are young males. Cougars eat mostly deer, but will occasionally take unprotected pets/livestock.
- It is prudent to learn to live with wildlife: New research shows that killing coyotes and cougars may lead to higher levels of human-wildlife conflict. High rates of culling or trophy hunting disrupts existing natural social controls in animal societies. Killing older, wiser animals leaves younger, more desperate animals that are less experienced around humans.
- Coyote, bear, and cougar populations have built-in controls: Established animals are highly territorial and will defend boundaries to the death against invaders. Coyote females have been shown to regulate ovulation when food diminishes or coyote numbers increase.

We can coexist: We hope this information empowers you to enjoy nature here and appreciate the rich diversity of wildlife sharing these islands with us. Do bring a camera, and all of your senses!

ANIMAL ETIQUETTE



IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COUGAR

Stop, pick up small children and pets, don't run. Face the cougar, talk to it firmly, back away. Always leave a cougar an escape route, and give time for it to retreat—cougars rarely run from humans; they walk, appearing nonchalant. Do anything you can to look large; don't crouch down. Always maintain eye contact and if a cougar continues to approach or starts to growl, throw something at the cougar. Fight if necessary, or use bear spray. People have successfully fought cougars off with their bare hands.



IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BLACK BEAR

Stop, remain calm. If the bear walks towards you, stand tall, wave your arms, and talk to the bear in a low voice. Do not throw anything at a bear and always avoid direct eye contact. Clap your hands for noise, stomp feet, yell, but don't run (bears can run 35 mph and climb trees). In the unlikely event that the bear attacks, fight aggressively aiming for the eyes and face, or use bear spray if you have it.



IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE

Coyotes should flee running. If they don't, pick up small children and secure pets. Haze the coyote: yell at it, clap your hands, stomp your feet, spray a hose or vinegar water, and use a noise maker. If the coyote is still reluctant to leave, assess: is the coyote is sick or injured? Are you standing near a den site (more likely between February-June in forested ravines)? If so, keep pets and children secure, leave the areas, and report your experience to a local wildlife agency. If not, continue to haze until the coyote leaves.

SAFETY TIPS

- **Don't feed wildlife:** Secure garbage, compost, bird feeders, pets, and livestock. Feed pets only inside.
- **Keep pets on a leash:** Most wildlife conflicts in natural areas have been initiated by off-leash pets. On the islands, loose dogs have been bitten or chased after finding coyote den areas.
- **Keep pets indoors at night:** This will not eliminate risk, but it will greatly reduce it.
- **Consider building a catio:** This is an indoor/outdoor enclosure for cats.
- **Know your animal etiquette:** So you will be prepared if you encounter these animals.
- **Bear spray:** If you decide to purchase bear spray, do not substitute pepper spray made for humans as it is not strong enough for wildlife. Watch a tutorial on how to use it before carrying it.
- **Do not feed:** Feral cats, raccoons, or other animals that may attract predators to your home.
- **Research and use:** Fencing options, motion-sensing lights, guard animals, and night enclosures for livestock.
- **Other safety suggestions:** Recreate with a buddy, use a walking stick, wear lights when biking/running/walking in low-light conditions, make noise by talking or singing.

For more information, including a coexistence packet with resources for livestock and pet owners, visit: vashonnaturecenter.org/living-wildlife/