

The Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund's  
**Greater Yellowstone  
Wildlife Safety Guide**



**Todd Wilkinson**

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How to enjoy wildlife in the Yellowstone and Grand Teton regions by living in safety and harmony with our wildlife friends, and how to find them!

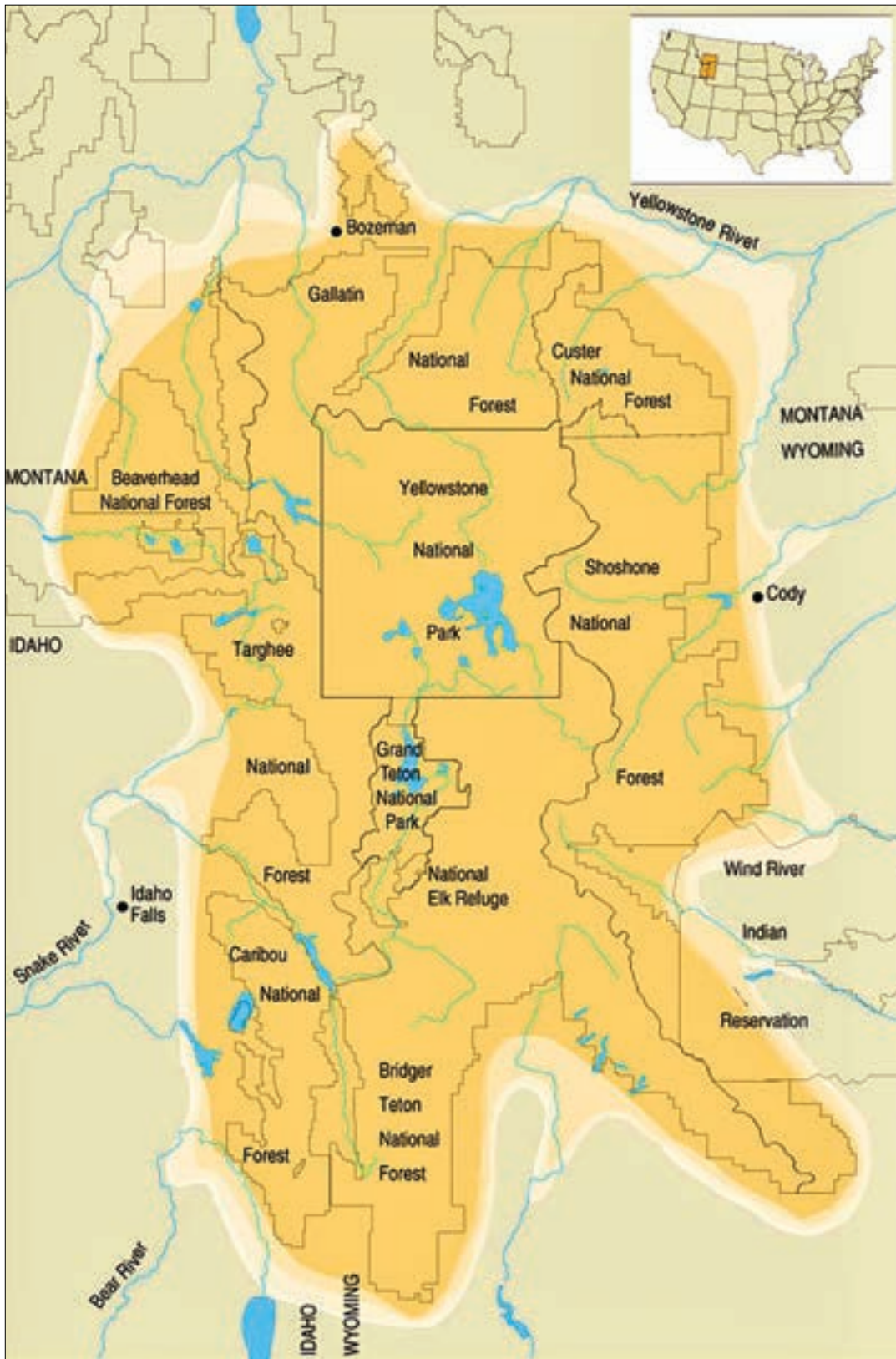
## Here are Quick Tips for Keeping You and Your Family Safe

1. Stay at least 100 yards away from Bears, Mountain Lions, and Wolves. Stand your ground, if charged. You can't outrun them. Best to stay in your car.
2. Stay at least 25 yards away from Bison, Elk, Moose, Coyotes, Foxes, Goats, Big Horn Sheep, Pronghorns, and Trumpeter Swans.
3. Never bring your dog anywhere near wildlife. They consider it a wolf and you can be hurt along with your dog.
4. Never feed wildlife or have food and garbage not safely secured while camping, hiking or even at home in the region.
5. When hiking, go in groups of at least four and talk a lot.
6. Acquire, learn to use, and always carry Bear Spray when walking anywhere in the parks or surrounding areas.
7. If you drive fast, especially when it is dark, you will often kill wildlife and possibly yourself.



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Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, by the National Park Service as depicted on Wikimedia Commons.

# Welcome to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

(The most wildlife-rich  
ecosystem in the Lower 48)

This region isn't like any other place on the planet we share, nor is it matched by any other part of the United States. Greater Yellowstone, which spans 23 million acres of public and private land, is the only ecosystem in the Lower 48 states that still has all the major native mammals and every other species present here in 1491, the year before Europeans arrived on this continent. People travel from around the globe just to catch sight of Greater Yellowstone's grizzly bears, wolves, bison, migrating elk, pronghorn (known to some as "antelope") and mule deer as well as an array of others including moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, the last bastions of wild cold-water trout and more than 200 other mammals and birds. If you wanted to find America's rough equivalent to Africa's Serengeti Plain, this would join it as a wildlife wonder of Earth. The ecosystem is home to the longest known migrations of elk, mule deer and pronghorn on earth. All these animals move seasonally between higher and lower elevations.

Forming the geographic heart of Greater Yellowstone are two famous nature preserves—Yellowstone, the first and most recognized national park in the world, and neighboring Grand Teton National Park set at the foot of the majestic Teton mountain range. They represent the epicenter of arguably the best and easiest wildlife watching, involving large "charismatic megafauna," in the Western Hemisphere.

Along with the special thrill of seeing such creatures in the wild comes personal responsibility—not only to ensure your safety and that of your loved ones, but to protect the animals who call Greater Yellowstone home. When you do this, you are contributing to wildlife conservation and paying forward opportunities for others to enjoy seeing wildlife in its native habitat.

This guide represents a congealing of some of the best advice offered by land and wildlife management agencies, conservation organizations and scientists. The creation of this short guide was paid for by the Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund, is intended to provide important safety tips on how you can have a wildlife-watching adventure that you will remember for the rest of your life. If you are a resident of Greater Yellowstone, you will also find these safety tips valuable.

Before you do anything else, it is important that you do a little homework and become educated about wild animal behavior and acquaint yourself with long established rules and regulations governing your own navigation of wild nature. Safe, enjoyable, responsible wildlife watching, after all, is more a “people management issue” than it is a “wildlife management issue.” When you enter Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, you are a guest, and it is important that you conduct yourself respectfully inside the living spaces of these wild animal residents. You should also be aware that these creatures are not just in the national parks but roam over a great deal of the surrounding intersection of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

This guide is intended to keep you informed in two ways. The first part provides general guidelines and the second focuses on the habits of different species you might encounter from grizzly bears down to ravens, chipmunks, and squirrels—whose survival depends on decisions you make.

## Being Smart the Deidre Way



Deidre Bainbridge

Many of the animals you may encounter you may never see anywhere else—except in urban zoos where they are captive. The point of this wildlife safety guide most certainly is not to sow fear. Irrational human fear directed at some of the animals you will learn about in this guide has been used as justification to eliminate species based on the misguided premise that we cannot wisely co-exist with them. Based on Old World fairy tales, ignorant Hollywood

movie scripts, and fear mongering that flares in local saloons, fear toward wildlife has sometimes bred hatred and intolerance, when the truth is that the Greater Yellowstone region has demonstrated humans and wildlife can share the same public landscapes. This was a core conviction of the late Deidre Bainbridge, an environmental attorney and activist.

Human injuries and fatalities caused by wildlife in Greater Yellowstone are extremely rare. Most are the result of people who are not prepared or lack knowledge about the terrain they are exploring or happen in collisions with vehicles. Some people have been killed by vehicle accidents involving wildlife and again hundreds of animals die every year in such wrecks. This has resulted in calls for more wildlife bridges, taking the form of overpasses and underpasses, to be built in key wildlife migration areas where there are busy highways. The easiest remedy to reduce the possibility of the latter happening is to drive more attentively, keep your eyes on the road and, most importantly, to slow down, heeding the posted speed limits. Thousands of animals, large and small, become roadkill every year and many are preventable if people just slowed down.

More than anything in the world, Deidre and her close friends devoted their lives to preserving Greater Yellowstone's wildlife. While she was an advocate for all species, Deidre had a special place in her heart for grizzly bears. The bear that prompted her to become a passionate protector was a famous mother bruin known as Jackson Hole Grizzly 399.

## A Few General Guides

1. Do not approach within 100 yards (300 feet/91 m) of a grizzly bear or wolf or closer than 25 yards (75 feet/23 m) into the space of a bison, elk, or moose. If you want to gain a close-up picture, use a long camera lens;
2. If you have a surprise encounter with a grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, or mountain lion, do not panic and run. Fleeing can trigger the pursuit instinct in predatory animals. They may not intend to do you any harm, but trying to get away by running is not a good idea. These animals can move far faster than the fastest human can sprint;
3. Never throw food to an animal, whether human or natural food. Doing so is not only illegal but it can result in an animal adopting a taste and an addiction to human food. When animals associate people with free meals, they can become more aggressive;

4. When hiking down a trail, try to travel in groups of four or more, make noise, carry bear spray and if you encounter an animal in the middle of the trail move gently in the opposite direction and create distance;
5. You are no longer in the city and the goal is not to get from point A to point B as fast as possible. Drive the designated speed limit and be attentive as a driver. The fringe hours of day (dusk and dawn) tend to be when the most vehicle collisions occur with wildlife attempting to cross a road. Here, unique kinds of traffic gridlock happen; they're called "bear jams" and "bison jams" and they pertain to areas where traffic has come to a standstill because of animals visible near the road. Always be patient, never honk your horn, do not drive aggressively and if you are going to park try to find the nearest highway turnout or pull over to the edge of the road so you don't block traffic. Try your best to avoid driving over sensitive vegetation and be certain you are not parking in tall grass where your hot vehicle undercarriage might start a wildfire;
6. In both Yellowstone and Grand Teton, stop at visitor centers and solicit the advice of park rangers. They are happy to help. Frequently in Yellowstone you will find rangers along the roadsides and in Grand Teton there is a special group of people who are part of the park's "wildlife brigade" there to impart tips on how to safely see animals and manage human crowds wherever they gather;
7. If you witness people behaving aggressively toward wildlife, or animals acting strangely, call 911 or report it to rangers immediately.

## A Few Important Words About Dogs

When entering wildlife-rich landscapes like Greater Yellowstone, especially in the national parks, it is best that you leave your dog at home. But if that is not possible, if your dog is traveling with you in the car, then there are things you need to know:

The presence of dogs can elicit aggressive behavior from wild animals that might feel threatened by your pet. Moose have trampled people walking their dogs because the pet left the moose agitated and aggressive.

1. It is illegal for your dog to harass public wildlife. Allowing that to happen can result in a fine assessed to you, and, worse-case scenario, your pet being killed by a game officer. If you are taking a hike in another public land like, say, a national forest or staying in a campground, it may not be required to always keep your dog on leash, but it is strongly recommended;
2. It is illegal to hike on backcountry and front country trails with your dog in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks;
3. Even when in a parking lot or at a park hotel, your dog must be always leashed; it cannot run free;
4. Never allow your dog to chase a wild animal. There are fines that can be levied against pet owners for having their dog harass wildlife and that includes harassing domestic horses, cattle and sheep. One reason for this regulation is prevent dogs from disturbing or killing wildlife, but pets can also introduce diseases to wildlife.



Mother Grizzly 399 and cubs going to den in winter

# You Are Now Entering The Historic Homeland of Grizzly 399

Jackson Hole is famously known as the land of Grizzly 399. Born in 1996, this ancient female bear was bestowed with her name by researchers because she was the 399<sup>th</sup> grizzly caught and fitted with a radio tracking collar. During her more than quarter-century existence, 399 gave birth to multiple different broods of cubs—three separate groups of triplets, two pair groups, two single cubs and what brought her the most public attention, quadruplets which she gave birth to in 2020, her 24<sup>th</sup> year.

What made 399 a star was not only her longevity but the fact that she preferred to search for natural foods within the vicinity of established roads in Grand Teton National Park. Part of the reason she chose these areas is because large male bears tend to stay away from such busy places. It is believed that 399's very first cub was killed by a male grizzly in the backcountry, prompting her to inhabit the front country closer to people. As a result, millions of photographs have been taken of her by thousands of people blessed with the opportunity to catch sight of her and her offspring.

In so many ways, 399 is also an emblem of why it is important for we humans to adhere to the rules and regulations pertaining to ethical and safe wildlife watching.

399, however, is just one of perhaps five dozen grizzlies that inhabit or move through the larger wildland complex encompassing Grand Teton National Park and, more largely, Jackson Hole. She is among hundreds of others that roam the front and backcountry of Yellowstone and the estimated 1,000 grizzlies in the three-state Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Since 1975, grizzlies in Greater Yellowstone have received protection as a threatened bear population under the Endangered Species Act. As a result, sport hunting of grizzlies was prohibited, and measures were put in place to safeguard bear habitat. Along with this, an unprecedented effort was made to clean up open pit garbage dumps that attracted bears

and install trash cans that prevented grizzly and black bears from getting into them. These efforts speak to another important fact as you embark on your next wildlife-watching journey in Greater Yellowstone: it is vital that you take special care to dispose of your trash, keep a clean campsite, refrain from tossing food to bears (which is illegal and punishable by fine) and advise others to uphold these same high standards.

There's an expression in Greater Yellowstone which goes like this: "a fed bear is a dead bear." It means simply that when people give food to bears or do things that allow bears to have access to unnatural foods, it increases the likelihood those bears will develop a taste for those edibles, become aggressive in seeking them out and then must be removed from the wild by government wildlife managers. On several occasions, violations of these rules by visitors almost resulted in Grizzly 399 becoming addicted to human foods, which might have caused her death or injury to a person. Remember: we humans are not doing a bear or any other wild animal a favor by feeding them. Literally, the future of grizzlies and your favorite species resides in your hands. Be Responsible: Do Not Feed Wildlife!

# Grizzlies and Black Bears

Grizzlies are typically recognizable for being larger than black bears, noted for their shoulder hump, circular “dish” face, long visible front claws and brown or blonde hair. But then again, some black bears also occur in brown or blonde hair, and it can sometimes be a challenge telling them apart. When in doubt, look for the shoulder hump and long front claws and most likely it is a grizzly.

While the sheer power of grizzlies makes them formidable, black bears can be aggressive, particularly if people have made the grave mistake of feeding them or not secured their trash and stored their food. Every year, both grizzly and black bears are captured, removed, relocated or euthanized from the ecosystem because they have become conditioned to human food.

Both species of bears are synonymous with Yellowstone and when it comes to grizzlies only in recent decades have they expanded in number beyond Yellowstone and wilderness areas into Grand Teton National Park and Jackson Hole.

Fear surrounds bears. It is essential to point out, however, that bear attacks on people are extremely rare and usually precipitated by something a person has done—either by getting close to a mother bear with cubs, surprising a bear while hiking down a trail, or a hungry bear seeking to claim a downed big game animal on public land during hunting season. Yellowstone Park officials put the odds of a human-bear encounter in perspective: Since 1979, Yellowstone has hosted over 118 million visits. During this time, 44 people were injured by grizzly bears in the park. For all park visitors combined, the chances of being injured by a grizzly bear are approximately 1 in 2.7 million visits. The risk is significantly lower for people who don't leave developed areas or roadsides, and higher for anyone hiking in the backcountry.

Since Yellowstone was established in 1872, eight people have been killed by bears in the park. More people in the park have died from drowning (125 incidents) and burns (after falling into hot springs, 23 incidents) than have been killed by bears. To put it in perspective, the probability of being killed by a bear in the park (8 incidents) is only slightly higher than the probability of being killed by a falling tree (7 incidents), in an avalanche (6 incidents),



or being struck and killed by lightning (5 incidents). Meanwhile, in Grand Teton National Park there have been six bear attacks since 1994 and none of them resulted in a fatality.

The point? By using common sense, the chances of being harmed by a grizzly or black bear are highly unlikely. And there are things you can do to make a possible encounter even rarer. Do not approach bears, secure your food, and most importantly, carry bear spray and know how to use it.

When a grizzly is stressed or threatened by your presence, the bear may begin to pace back and forth, circle you, click its teeth, tuck its ears flat against its head. A bear might also commence a bluff charge to show its displeasure. A stern warning, this does not mean an attack is certain, but you need to be ready.

That's why bear experts suggest that when hiking down a trail, you do so in groups of four or more, you let your approach known by talking loudly so that you don't surprise a bear, especially in trails wending along rivers where rushing water can drown out sounds or through thick vegetation where sightlines are reduced.

If you are car camping and you are sleeping in a tent, set up your tent well away from the place where you are cooking dinner, secure any food in your vehicle, do not wear the same clothes you cooked in when you crawl into your sleeping bag, do not keep any food or other things in your tent that might attract a bear, and always have bear spray with you.

Bear spray, which is made of an extract found in hot peppers, temporarily immobilizes a bear's sense of smell and sight when the aerosol components in the can are successfully sprayed into the face of an approaching bear. Statistics related to the effectiveness of bear spray are compelling. While it is not difficult to learn how to effectively use bear spray, a key factor is knowing how and when to deploy the product and having it readily accessible so that it can be used in an instant. Go to YouTube and Yellowstone's official website. There are several good videos available for free viewing that provide excellent information.

Here, verbatim, is what Yellowstone experts recommend: "If a bear charges you after a surprise encounter, stay still and stand your ground. Most of the time, the bear is likely to break off the charge or veer away. If you run, you're likely to trigger a chase response from the bear. If you have bear spray, this is the time to use it. Start spraying the charging bear when it is about 60 feet away or less.

If the bear continues to charge, it's important not to drop to the ground and 'play dead' until the bear makes contact, or the second before the bear makes contact. Drop to the ground; keep your pack on to protect your back. Lie on your stomach and clasp your hands

over the back of your neck with your elbows protecting the sides of your face. Remain still and stay silent to convince the bear that you are not a threat.

After the bear leaves, wait several minutes before moving. Listen and look around cautiously before you get up to make certain the bear is no longer nearby. If the bear is gone, get up and walk (don't run) out of the area. Remember, a sow grizzly needs time to gather up her cubs which may have climbed trees or hidden in nearby brush. If you get up too soon, she may attack again.

During a surprise encounter where the bear is reacting defensively, you should not fight back. Fighting back will only prolong the attack and will likely result in more serious injuries. Since 1970, people who played dead when attacked by a bear during a surprise encounter in Yellowstone received only minor injuries 75 percent of the time. However, those that fought back during surprise encounters received very severe injuries 80 percent of the time.”

In the event of a surprise encounter with a bear, Yellowstone wildlife specialists say: “Do not run, shout, or make sudden movements: you don't want to startle the bear. Running may trigger a chase response in the bear and you can't outrun a bear. Bears in Yellowstone chase down elk calves all the time. You do not want to look like a slow elk calf.”

To learn more about bears and possible encounters, go to:

<https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/bearreact.htm>

**Where to look for bears:** The good news is that as you are traveling through Yellowstone and Grand Teton the first sign that a bear is visible along the roadside will be a crowd of people gathering. Both parks have avid groups of wildlife watchers who share information. In Yellowstone, grizzly bear sightings are common. Some of the best places to see grizzlies are the Lamar Valley and the Hayden Valley vicinity especially in spring and fall. In Grand Teton, the best grizzly bear viewing occurs along the US Highway 191 corridor. Remember: when you are driving, slow down and obey the speed limits. Have your passengers do the looking for wildlife. Keep your eyes focused on the road and be attentive for the possibility that an animal may suddenly attempt to cross the road.

# Bison

The free-ranging plains bison you see in Yellowstone and Jackson Hole are special. They are descendants of animals that survived the near annihilation of the species. For that reason, many native American tribes that co-evolved with bison regard them as being especially sacred. In fact, Yellowstone is the only place where bison have lived continuously since the post-Pleistocene epoch that followed the end of the last Ice Age.

At one point, just 23 wild bison persisted in Yellowstone following the decimation of 30 million animals or more that peppered the high plains and western prairie early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considered enduring symbols of the American West and the largest land animal in North America, few animals are more photogenic. Not only were bison declared the official national land mammal of the United States by Congress, but their profile appears on the insignia of the U.S. Interior Department, the National Park Service, coinage and on several state flags, including that of Wyoming.

Bison is the official scientific name, but they are also known colloquially as “buffalo.” More than 5,000 bison today inhabit public lands in and around Yellowstone and the herd that exists in Jackson Hole can be traced back to animals from Yellowstone that escaped an enclosure and moved southward.

Bull bison are huge, weighing more than a ton. Often, bull bison upon reaching adulthood, range alone. Mother bison with calves and yearlings are highly sociable. They usually band together in small groups. A delight of viewing bison in spring and summer is observing newborn reddish-brown calves, nicknamed “red dogs.” Male and female bison have horns and males have a more pronounced hump on their backs.

While they may appear docile and lumbering, don't let that perceived behavior fool you. Temperamental and unpredictable, especially during the summer rut, bison can be dangerous. Wildlife officials note that bison can sprint between 35-45 miles per hour (55-70 km/h). When a bison becomes agitated, telltale signs are snorting, raking its front hooves across the ground and swirling its tail. More people have been injured by bison in Yellowstone than any other animal, including grizzly and black bears.



## Bison

A scientific paper, published in 2016, found that “since 1980 bison have injured more pedestrian visitors to Yellowstone National Park than any other animal.” Typically, most injuries have occurred when people get too close to bison or while standing near bison they turn their backs on the animals to take selfies with their camera.

Always, heed national park regulations mandating that visitors maintain at least a 25-yard distance between themselves and bison at all times. Never leave the roadway to go wandering among a herd in a treeless meadow. If bison move toward the road, get back in your car and close the door until the animals pass. When behind the wheel of a vehicle, slow down when approaching bison wandering along the roadside and do not pressure them to flee by driving too close. In addition, though this should seem obvious, when in your vehicle and a bison walks by at close range, do not roll down your window and lean outside to take a photograph.

**Where to look for bison:** In Yellowstone, bison inhabit most roadside areas of the park but the best viewing happens in Hayden Valley, the Lamar Valley and in the geyser basins near the Old Faithful Developed Area and extending north. In Grand Teton, bison often can be seen east of U.S. Highway 191 between the National Elk Refuge just north of the town of Jackson and extending for 30 miles north to Moran Junction.



# Elk

Each year, travelers with cameras come from around the world to take pictures of bull elk engaging on their annual late summer and early autumn mating ritual known as “the rut.” The highlight involves large antlered bulls trying to gather females into groups and fending off rivals through aggressive behavior, antler jousting, and sonorous vocalizations known as bugling.

With mist rising off the rivers as warm water meets with chilly mountain air, it is a preternatural wonder to hear bulls and their loud, high-pitched wailing sounds that really do sound like a brassy instrument. However, any month of the year is a good time to see elk, also known by the nickname wapiti, which is pronounced “wah-pitt-tee.”

Elk, like moose, are large members of the cervid or deer family. Like male moose, mule deer and white-tailed deer, all of which reside in Greater Yellowstone, bull elk undergo changes. Shedding their antlers in spring, the warm weather months bring with them a period of rapid re-growth of antlers which involve the protrusion of sprouting branches and tines. Made of bone, these pieces of headgear are covered in an outer fuzzy layer that looks like velvet. As summer advances, the new antlers grow and harden, then bulls rub off the exterior layer until it is shiny. Antlers can be used by bulls to exert their dominance, to repel predators and engage in pitched battles with other bulls.

Female elk, called cows, do not grow antlers. Often, they migrate into the national parks in spring where they give birth to calves. Then, for the following months, cows will gather in “nursery bands” as part of their social nature but also knowing there is strength in numbers as a technique for spotting and evading predators such as grizzly bears, wolves and mountain lions that prey upon calves when they are young and most vulnerable.

Cows generally like to avoid people. Although incidents involving human injury are rare, they do happen when people venture too close. A much bigger safety risk happens during later August and extending through October during the rut. Bulls are highly territorial and become aggressive when they are wound up trying to breed with cows and fend off other bulls. It is vitally important that wildlife watchers keep their distance of at least 25 yards

(75 feet/23 m) and when bulls approach to give them space and get out of their way. If you are not near your vehicle or a building and a bull approaches, seek protection behind trees.

**Where to look for elk:** In Yellowstone, bull and cow elk with calves can be seen year around in the vicinity of Mammoth Hot Springs and during winter on the slopes and flatland around Gardiner, Montana. Other choice places for observing the rut are the Lamar Valley and the flanks of the Madison River between Madison Junction and West Yellowstone, Montana. In Grand Teton, especially in autumn, elk often are viewed west of U.S. Highway 191 along the Snake River corridor and along the inner park highway which passes beneath the Teton Range. During the winter months, more than 7,000 elk are fed at the National Elk Refuge just north of the town of Jackson. Here, you can go on an informational sleigh ride and photograph elk safely.

# Moose

The species of moose found in Greater Yellowstone is the Shiras Moose. Moose are the largest member of the deer (or cervid) family in North America; however, the Shiras (*Alces alces shirasi*) is the smallest of four moose subspecies on the continent. The shape and size of moose, especially bull moose with antlers, make them unmistakable. Typically slow moving and lumbering, their apparent docile nature can be deceiving. Moose have been known to charge and stomp people who get too close or represent a threat. A mother moose, with calves at her side, will become aggressive with humans if she feels provoked. As with the recommendation for observing other wildlife, respect the space of moose, be aware and pay special attention if you see a mother moose with young.





Bull moose are distinctive for the shape and size of their antlers (they can be five-feet wide from side to side) plus the back hump just behind their shoulders. From ground to top of head, a bull moose can stand six feet tall.

It can be easy to mistake a female moose for a female elk. The easiest way to tell them apart is to take notice of the longer snouts moose have, their deep brown hair, their preference for marshy, lake and riverine habitat (i.e. being close to water where they eat aquatic vegetation) and their size. A male moose typically weighs upwards of 1,000 pounds and a female moose weighs less, up to 900 pounds.

Signs the animal might be agitated by your presence: when a moose is unsettled and may be ready to charge, its ears will often tuck back. If that happens, back slowly away, always facing the animal. If a moose becomes aggressive and you are near your car or a building, get inside. If you are not near a vehicle or building to seek shelter, identify a place behind trees where you can retreat. If the moose remains aggressive, use a thick branch to thwart its advance. Never walk your dog in areas where moose or wildlife roam.

## Moose

**Where to look for moose:** in wetland habitats or near waterways lined by willow. A few good places for moose watching are the Oxbow Bend of the Snake River and along the Gros Ventre River corridor in Grand Teton National Park, and, in Yellowstone, in the vicinity of both the Lewis and Yellowstone rivers and lakes, at forest edges around Canyon, and in the northeast corner of Yellowstone between the Lamar Valley and Cooke City. Moose are sometimes seen strolling through neighborhoods or towns. If that happens, in order to spare them stress, it is always best to respect their space and make sure your dog is inside.



# Wolves and Mountain Lions

Wolves are coursing predators meaning they follow the herds of their prey species. Mountain lions (also known as cougar, pumas and catamounts) are ambush predators.

While it is exceedingly rare for park visitors to have a physical encounter with bears and other animals, it is even less likely to get into trouble with wolves and mountain lions. The record with both species is clear: they want to avoid people. If there is a factor that increases the possibility of wolves behaving aggressively, it is while you are in the company of a pet dog. Only a handful of wolf attacks on people have occurred during the last three decades in all of North America, and there have been no attacks by wolves on people in Greater Yellowstone.

Read the advisement again about why it is illegal to hike with your dogs in national parks. Wolf attacks on people seldom happen and usually there are extenuating circumstances, the three scenarios most likely is that a wolf responded aggressively to a domestic dog, that the wolf had somehow become habituated to human food or trash, or that the animal was sick.

Regarding mountain lions, these big wild cats have been known to be territorial or protective during an encounter if it involves an aggressive domestic dog, if a mother lion has cubs, or the lion is feeding on the carcass of a deer or other wild animal.

If you encounter an aggressive wolf or mountain lion there are things you can do. Never run, always stand your ground and make yourselves appear bigger. It's a huge bonus if you have bear spray available and ready to use as the same ingredient that repels bears is thought to work on wolves and mountain lions. If a lion keeps advancing, yelling and throwing large sticks or rocks toward the animal has been found to work in some instances. Note: sighting of lions and attacks on people are rare.

Encounters with mountain lions are extremely rare, though the chances of one happening increase if you take a dog on the trail. Should you meet a mountain lion on the trail, do not run. Maintain eye contact, make yourself appear as large as possible, if it approaches, make a lot of noise, and do things with your arms to make yourselves appear bigger. If necessary and the cat keeps coming, ready your bear spray and be prepared to throw rocks or sticks. Note: Do not throw rocks and sticks at bears.

No matter what, if you see wolves or mountain lions ahead on the trail, stop and go the other way. If that is not possible, then wait a half hour and proceed but make a lot of noise. If you have a dog, do not unleash it to chase the wolf or lion. There have been a few reports over the years of a dog chasing a bear or lion and then turning tail to run back to its human companions only to have the bear or lion in pursuit.

**Where to look for mountain lions and wolves:** First, it is impossible to predict when a mountain lion sighting might occur. These big cats are elusive and rare. However, for wolves, the premier wolf-watching location on the planet is in Yellowstone's Lamar Valley. Routinely when driving through the Lamar you will come upon devoted wolf watchers with spotting scopes set up along the road. Most of the time they are friendly and happy to assist you in catching a glimpse of Yellowstone's famous wolf packs.

## Coyotes and Red Fox

Coyotes and red foxes in that order represent the next two native wild canines after wolves. Coyotes are a wild dog species only native to North America and they can be a delight to both observe and listen to their singular and group-yipping vocalizations most frequently heard just before dusk, at night and just before dawn.

Coyotes if not bothered by humans will form pack structures like wolves and those extended family groups occupy distinct territories. Coyotes are generalist foragers and will eat everything from young elk and pronghorn to ground nesting birds, rodents, rabbits, and a wide variety of plants. Highly adaptable, coyotes have demonstrated their success inhabiting both wilderness and human cities and suburbs.





Foxes, meanwhile, have their own niche and, like coyotes, eat birds and small mammals. Both coyotes and foxes are common in Greater Yellowstone. In general, coyotes and foxes are not aggressive toward people. In recent years, there has been a problem with tourists feeding coyotes and foxes, causing them to become habituated to human foods. While they are not likely to kill a person, people can and have been bitten by coyotes and foxes. If they approach, stand your ground, and report their behavior to park rangers so they can take management action. Again, bear spray can also be used to keep an aggressive coyote or fox at bay.

## Other Wildlife That Can Become Potentially Aggressive

The cause of most incidents involving other aggressive animals is often linked to illegal feeding. That chipmunk, raven, crow, Clark's nutcracker, or other habituated animal might appear tame and friendly, but its behavior is the result of a park visitor or local resident who came before you and broke the code of responsible conduct. Don't fuel that animal's addiction to food.

Other incidents in Greater Yellowstone involving aggressive smaller animals have tended to involve adult wildlife protecting their young. Boaters have experienced this with river otter, beaver, and Canada geese.

### The Four Best Places To Look For Wildlife In Greater Yellowstone

1. The Lamar Valley in Yellowstone where you might see wolves, grizzly bears, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep and coyotes.
2. Hayden Valley in the center of Yellowstone where you may see bison, grizzly bears, elk, trumpeter swans on the Yellowstone River, river otter and bald eagles.
3. The Firehole-Madison rivers that flow through the geyser basins and geothermal areas of Yellowstone where you might see bison, grizzly bears, elk, bobcats, bald eagles, osprey, and trumpeter swans.
4. The Oxbow Bend of the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park offers the best wildlife viewing in Jackson Hole. There you may see grizzly bears, elk, moose, black bears, wolves, river otter, beaver and a wide array of birds ranging from bald eagles and osprey to great blue herons and sandhill cranes.

**A final note:** Now that you know more, have fun! Use the power of your knowledge to become an advocate for the wildlife of Greater Yellowstone. The power of conservation resides in the chorus of people who say that protecting wildlife matters to them. Let your North American nature safari begin. Here's a list of the most likely species you have a chance of seeing. Keep track, with this wildlife viewing scorecard of how many animals you have seen. Remember, don't just look for animals in order to achieve a higher total—learn about each species and the role they play in a wild ecosystem.

## A Wildlife Viewing Scorecard

CREATURE	SEX(F,M)	DATE SEEN	LOCATION
American dipper (water ouzel)			
American white pelican			
Badger			
Bald eagle #Eaglets			
Beaver			
Belted kingfisher			
Bighorn (mountain sheep)			
Bison #Red Dogs			
Black bear #Cubs			
Boreal owl			
Canada goose			
Canada lynx			
Chipmunk			
Clark's nutcracker			
Common loon			
Cooper's hawk			
Coyote # Pups			

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CREATURE	SEX(F,M)	DATE SEEN	LOCATION
Crow			
Double-crested cormorant			
Dusky (blue) grouse			
Elk #Calves			
Ermine			
Fisher			
Golden eagle #Eaglets			
Gray fox			
Gray wolf			
Great Blue heron			
Great Horned owl			
Grizzly bear #Cubs			
Mallard duck			
Marten			
Moose #Calves			
Mountain goat			
Mountain lion #Cubs			
Mule deer #Fawns			
Northern goshawk			
Northern pintail			
Northern pygmy owl			

Wildlife Viewing Scorecard

CREATURE	SEX(F,M)	DATE SEEN	LOCATION
Northern saw-whet owl			
Osprey			
Peregrine falcon			
Pika			
Pronghorn #Fawns			
Raven			
Red fox			
Red-tailed hawk			
River otter			
Ruffed grouse			
Sandhill crane			
Sharp-shinned hawk			
Swainson's hawk			
Trumpeter swan #Cygnet			
White-tailed deer #Fawns			
Wolverine			
Yellow-bellied marmot			

# Acknowledgments

Todd Wilkinson, author of

*Greater Yellowstone Wildlife Safety Guide*

Todd Wilkinson has been writing about the American West for nearly 40 years and is best known for his environmental reporting on the Greater Yellowstone region. Assignments have taken him around the world. His stories have appeared in *National Geographic* and *The Guardian*, among three dozen different national newspapers and magazines. He also is a critically-acclaimed author. His most recent award-winning book is *Ripple Effects: How to Save Yellowstone and America's Most Iconic Wildlife-Rich Ecosystem*. In addition, along with noted nature photographer Thomas Mangelsen ([mangelsen.com](http://mangelsen.com)), he wrote *Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek* about the extraordinary life of famous Jackson Hole grizzly 399. That book won a High Plains Book Award and has a sequel, *Grizzly 399: The World's Most Famous Bear* coming out in August 2023. Beyond these books, Wilkinson wrote an acclaimed biography about media-mogul-turned-bison baron and pathfinding conservationist Ted Turner, another about scientific whistleblowers, and several others. In 2017, Wilkinson founded the widely-read non-profit conservation journalism site, Mountain Journal ([mountainjournal.org](http://mountainjournal.org)) which focuses on wildlife in Greater Yellowstone and has readers in 200 countries. He lives in Bozeman, Montana and for a few years after being a violent crime reporter in Chicago, he also worked as a journalist in Jackson Hole. You can learn more about Wilkinson at [toddwilkinsonwriter.com](http://toddwilkinsonwriter.com)

## The Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund, publisher

The publisher is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization in Jackson, Wyoming ([grizzly399.org](http://grizzly399.org)). It was founded in 2021 to promote wildlife education and safety so humans and animals could live in peaceful harmony. The organization was named in honor of Deidre Bainbridge, an environmental attorney and activist who served as a champion for large wild animals in Greater Yellowstone like the grizzly bear and elk. It launched the Grizzly 399 Project in 2022, with Mother Grizzly 399 as its ambassador to raise funds for wildlife education and safety. A larger than life bronze sculpture of 399 and her cubs will be installed mid-2023 in front of the new National Museum of Military Vehicles ([nmmv.org](http://nmmv.org)) in Dubois, Wyoming, near the eastern entrance to Grand Teton National Park on the southern route to Yellowstone National Park. The Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund has no employees, and all of its work is performed by unpaid founders and volunteers. It has been a lot of work, but a true labor of love. All photographs in this Guide were provided without charge by Tim Tennyson and Ray Thomas.

Tim Tennyson, Terri and Ray Thomas  
The Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund

**DISCLAIMER:** The Deidre Bainbridge Wildlife Fund and Todd Wilkinson are not dispensing professional advice. This safety guide is merely intended to provide general information based upon expert opinion and years of experience from public land and wildlife managers. We drew all suggestions from them. Animal behavior is unpredictable and there are no certainties with regard to how an animal might respond in a given situation to your presence.



**Not the end,  
but just the beginning.**