

What to do if you see a moose

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What should you do if you see a moose? Leave it alone. Photo by Elaine Collins

I'm walking along my neighborhood trail and there is a moose ahead, what do I do?

We are entering the time of year when moose typically begin wandering onto trails, roads and even ski slopes and doorsteps. In fact, the local moose population has grown so much that Colorado Parks and Wildlife ramped up its moose hunting licenses last year in an effort to keep better tabs on the species and mitigate potential conflicts.

While moose might appear to be gentle giants, gnawing peacefully on branches and bushes that comprise the majority of its herbivorous diet, they are actually highly dangerous and unpredictable creatures that are best left alone and admired from afar.

“Some people think moose are these big, harmless veggie eaters, but they’re by far the most dangerous animal in North America,” Parks and Wildlife District Wildlife Manager Tom Davies said. “They are the most unpredictable animal I’ve worked with in my career. Distance is always, always the safe bet.”

Some of you might recall hearing about a couple of harrowing moose encounters in Breckenridge last winter. In one incident, a woman was caught on video apparently trying to pet a moose that was hanging out near a busy area of town. In another incident, a moose trampled and seriously injured a woman in the Peak 7 neighborhood after she attempted to guide it away from the premises. The moose was later euthanized. In both cases, the behavior of the people involved presented clear examples of what not to do when a moose is nearby.

As Davies said, the most important course of action is to keep your distance, back away slowly and calmly, and don’t run or make any sudden movements because moose are easily provoked.

“I think everything gets a moose angry,” Davies said. “I’ve used every technique we’ve used in the wildlife business: yelling, pepper spray, Taser — every single time I’ve been charged by a moose. There’s not one good thing that works.

Keep your distance. Leave them alone. Don't take selfies. If you need to be late or take a day off work because a moose is lying on your porch, do it. We hear about people walking home at night, and they realize there's a moose right next to them chewing on a tree. In that case, they should calmly distance themselves, take another route or gently give it a really wide berth."

Another potentially life-saving piece of advice is to keep your dogs leashed at all times.

"Dogs and moose do not mix," Davies said. "I would say 95% of the moose conflicts we've had involved a dog and 90% of those involved a dog off leash. If you have your dog off leash, and it chases a moose, when it realizes the moose is 10 to 20 times its size, it's going to turn and run the other direction. The moose is going to start charging after it. Guess where the dog will run? Right back to you. Dogs on leash are a lot safer for everyone involved."

Here are simple precautions to take to avoid a dangerous moose encounter:

What to do:

- Keep your distance
- Leave it alone
- Keep your dog on a leash at all times
- Calmly and slowly back away
- Give the moose a wide berth
- Respect the animal and admire it or take photos from afar

What not to do:

- Get closer
- Take selfies
- Run or yell
- Throw anything at it
- Try to scare it away
- Make any sudden noises or movements
- Let your dog off leash