

Published August 9th, 2017

Exercise caution when encountering local wildlife

By Mona Miller, DVM



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com. She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

in our pet dogs and cats. The most widely used vaccines are extremely effective and very safe; it is very unlikely that a vaccinated animal bit by a rabid bat will develop the disease. This is a legal mandatory requirement in dogs in the United States. California law now allows for dogs and cats to be vaccinated at 12 weeks old. In my opinion, all cats, even those kept exclusively indoors, should be vaccinated as well. By vaccinating our pets, we provide a protective "firewall" for humans, as well as for the pet. One client of mine described how her friend's senior cat caught a bat inside the house. At a recent social gathering, a friend relayed a story about his son touching a dead bat while camping, and had to receive prophylactic rabies exposure vaccinations.

When encountering wildlife, I recommend avoiding handling wild animals. Be especially careful around mammals that seem to behave unusually, such as bats active during daylight, animals approaching without fear, or exhibiting twitching, salivating or seizures. These animals should all be reported to local animal control.

In general, wild animals that are injured or scared will often fight back when they feel cornered, and will resort to biting. Bites often result in bacterial infection, notwithstanding the possibility of rabies as discussed above, and further injury to both the wild animal and the rescuer.

I suggest that you keep your pets current on rabies vaccinations and seek veterinary care if your dog or cat has wounds that could be from a bite. Contra Costa Animal Services recommends that you do not handle wild animals - dead or alive. If you find a dead animal, contact Animal Services directly, or the sheriff's office if Animal Services is closed.

Further information about rabies can be found at the websites for Contra Costa Health Services and Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://cchealth.org/rabies/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

During the last week of July, a positive rabies test result came back on a bat discovered in a Clayton park. This bat was found sick and brought in for treatment, but died several days later, serving as a reminder to us all that rabies is present everywhere in the continental United States, and to exercise caution when encountering wildlife, whether dead or alive.

Rabies is a deadly virus that infects the central nervous system, and can affect all mammals. Bats, skunk, raccoons, coyotes and foxes are the most common carriers in the United States, and transmit the virus most often through saliva and bite wounds. The virus then travels through the nervous system to the brain. In humans, once symptoms start, the disease is almost always fatal. Luckily, humans who have been exposed to rabies can be successfully treated before signs start, with a series of post-exposure injections. Unfortunately, this is a disease that is not treated in animals - it is always fatal. Diagnosis in animals is made after death, with brain tissue analysis.

The California Department of Public Health 2015 report shows that all 58 counties in California have been rabies areas since 1987. In 2015, 230 animals had confirmed rabies, which is an increase from the previous 10 years, which averaged 205 cases per year. In California, the most common animals carrying rabies are bats (198), followed by skunks (29), cats (2) and coyote (1). Contra Costa County had seven rabies-positive animals - all bats - and there were 13 bats in Alameda County in 2015.

With regular vaccination, rabies is a preventable disease

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA