Natural Resource Preservation Brief #8

Hazardous Animals

Antietam, like all other rural and natural areas, has its compliment of what are classified as hazardous animals. Almost without exception, these organizms are unassuming, little publicized, but well known. The exception to this are the two species of venomous snakes which are found in Maryland.

From a management and policy point of view, these species are an integral element of the natural aspects of the park. They are therefore provided protection unless certain circumstances arise. Although visitor and employee safety is a significant concern when making decisions about wildlife management, it can not be used as the sole reason for management actions.

Following is a brief outline of the considerations which the natural resource management staff looks at when deciding if and how to manage a hazardous animal.

1. What kind of a hazard does the animal pose?
2. How serious is the hazard? Is it lethal or merely an aggravation?
3. How can human contact with the animal be prevented or reduced?
4. Are the animals numerous or are they rarely encountered?
5. How many actual injuries or illnesses have been sustained?
6. What facilities exist for dealing with those injuries or illnesses?
7. How practical are control strategies?

Keeping these factors in mind, let us now turn our attention to the specific species that can be found at Antietam.

VENOMOUS SNAKES

Certainly the best known group of hazardous animals found in the park is the venomous snakes. Two species are found in Maryland, one of which, known as the Copperhead, is a park resident. The other species, the Timber Rattlesnake, may also be found in the park on an accidental basis. More detail about these snakes and snake bite treatment is contained in the attached brochures.

Outside of habitat alteration, very little can be done to prevent encounters with snakes. Mowing a two foot strip on both sides of the Snavely Ford Trail makes snakes more visible and patching holes in structures will eliminate their use of buildings. Public and employee awareness is the best preventive measure.

RABID WILDLIFE

During the past several years a major public affairs campaign has been underway to educate the public about the threat of rabies. Rabies is a viral

disease which can occur in all warm-blooded animals, but, most frequently appears in raccoons, skunks, and bats. Rabies may be contracted by humans through contact (ingestion or through open wounds) with the urine, saliva, tears, and nerve tissue of an infected animal. The virus is not found in the blood of infected animals.

Symptons of rabies and transmission of the virus tends to be highly unpredictable. Not all rabid animals shed the virus; not all humans who have come in contact with a rabid animal will contract the virus; behavior of rabid animals is inconsistent and difficult to characterize. Perhaps the only statement which can be made is that universally true is that rabid animals behave abnormally. Nocturnal animals may be seen during the day. Animals may act confused or friendly. Some animals may salivate.

If an employee or visitor encounters a rabid animal, please notify the natural resource management staff so we can monitor its activities and destroy it if necessary. If an employee or visitor is bitten by an animal which is suspected to be rabid, flush the wound out thoroughly with soap and water and transport the individual to the hospital for antirabies treatment. The animal which inflicted the bite must be examined to determine if it is actually rabid. Please notify the natural resource management staff immediately so they can destroy the rabid animal.

BEES, WASPS, YELLOWJACKETS

Stinging insects tend to frighten everyone. Aside from the pain caused by these insects, some stings result in allergic reactions. If not treated promptly and correctly, those reactions may terminate with death of some individuals.

Many species exist in this group and a discussion of each is beyond the scope of this publication.

The U.S. Forest Service has done an extensive amount of research in this field and has developed explicit guidelines for dealing with insect stings. Those are attached.

Eradication of individual nests may be accomplished through use of Wasp Freeze (R).

No other chemical sprays may be used.

Sanitation as a means of control should be stressed. Trash cans should be emptied and cleaned frequently. Where possible, trash can lids with tightly fitting doors should be installed.

Visitors should be instructed to minimize the amount of sugar they consume during picnics (soft drinks, fruit juices, ice cream, cake, etc.). Bees and wasps are naturally attracted to these substances and are therefore brought into direct contact with people.

SPIDERS

Black Widow

The black widow is common in Maryland, but is not often found indoors. They are most often found in basement window wells, beneath lawn benches or

porches, and in garages, tool sheds, old lumber piles, rock piles, trash piles, and water meters. Probably they are most often brought inside in objects such as boxes, flowerpots, and baskets where they have established their irregular cobwebs.

The black widow female becomes mature in late summer and fall She is confined to her web and is very clumsy when walking on a flat surface. Her appearance is as follows: body about ½ inch long, jet black with a large, round, shiny abdomen marked with a bright red hour glass on the belly. This red mark is easily seen because she hangs upside down in the web. Sometimes there may be small dull red marks on the top of the abdomen and at the tip No other spider in Maryland looks like the black widow nor is any as poisonous. Death has resulted form the bite of this spider; it is more dangerous to children than to adults.

The black widow is not agressive. They will, however, bite instinctively when touched or pressed, and for this reason one should be very careful when working around areas where black widows may be established. Take proper precautions - wear gloves and pay attention to where you are working.

Black widow bites are sharp and painful, and the victim should go to the doctor immediately for treatment. It is important to recognize this spider and describe the symptoms accurately and fully so the physician can diagnose the trouble correctly.

To control the black widow, carefully remove all materials where they might hide. They can be cleaned out of an area simply by knocking the webs, spiders, and round, tan egg sacs down with a stick and crushing them under foot.

Brown Recluse

The spider is not found in Maryland, but it is a poisonous spider principally in the Midwest and Southwestern United States. The bite of the brown recluse spider causes a wound which takes up to six weeks or more to heal. In rare instances, it has caused death to sensitive individuals. This spider, where it is common, is very shy and reclusive. It is not active in rooms which are commonly used, but stays in storage areas, closets and infrequently used clothes and beds.

The appearance of the brown recluse spider is unique. Its body is about ¼ inch long, the legs covering the area of a coin the size of a quarter. The front half of the spider is marked with a violin shaped design and the rear half or abdomen is unmarked and tan or brown. All other brown colored spiders this size have either no design at all or have stripes or spots on the front half - never a violin shaped design. Abodmens of other spiders are rarely unmarked but generally exhibit spots, triangles or bands.

The brown recluse spider makes no conspicuous web and moves about rapidly. Bites are always contracted when the spider is inadvertently pressed or touched.

The brown recluse spider does not survive in Maryland. A closely related spe-

cies with identical markings is however, periodically imported from Europe. This foreign spider has been known to live in the homes in which it is introduced but it apparently does not spread.

Find the area of the home where spiders live. Apply direct sprays on the spiders. Clean the area and apply aerosols in cracks and crevices where spiders hide. Inspect boxes where European material is stored.

TICKS & CHIGGERS

Chiggers, although they caused some aggravation, are not considered a hazardous animal.

Ticks, on the other hand, can transmit a number of illnesses including Colorado Tick Fever, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Tularemia, tick paralysis, and Lyme disease. Don't be fooled by the names of these diseases, all can occur here in Maryland. Infact, Maryland seems to have high rates of occurence.

As with the bees and wasps, there are numerous species of ticks. Some of which bite people and others which don't. Differentiation among these species is purely academic.

Nothing can be done to control ticks in the wild. Control of ticks indoors and on pets is routine but is not presently a problem at the park.

Visitors and employees can, however, take steps to avoid being bitten by ticks. A brief outline of those steps, along wth precautions which should be taken with all other forms of hazardous animals addressed in this publication, has been prepared by the Forest Service and is attached.

In summary, the most logical and effective means for reducing the hazards posed by animals, in the park, is to educate the visitor and employee. Eradiction of species is pointless. Most of these species are too numerous and population control also reduces predators and anti-body pools in wildlife populations. Sanitation and maintenance are also highly effective in reducing food and shelter.

Medical facilities are close at hand and the very low number of hazardous animal incidents the park has had are justification enough to take no further steps beyond those outlined above.

If you want further information on these species and their hazards, please contact a member of the natural resource management staff.

The Natural Resource Management Staff