

11 Cute Animals You Should Never, Ever Approach

Just because these critters look adorable and inviting, it doesn't mean they're friendly or even safe to touch. Whenever you're lucky enough to see one of these in the wild, enjoy their cuteness from a distance - or else.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Trying to touch or otherwise interfere with wild animals is not only disruptive to them ... it's potentially dangerous to you
- Examples of animals that appear cute and cuddly, but can be quite dangerous, include deer, swans, meerkats, panda bears, kangaroos, beavers and more

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 17, 2015.

Just because an animal is cute, it doesn't mean it's friendly. This is one of the first lessons we should teach our children, who are drawn to furry and fuzzy creatures of all kinds. But running up to and trying to pet a strange animal is rarely a good idea, especially if you haven't asked its owner if it's ok.

Then there are the animals with no owners ... the wild animals that share the Earth with us. Many are cute to look at and most are fascinating to watch ... but be sure you do so from a distance. Trying to touch or otherwise interfere with wild animals is not only disruptive to them ... it's potentially dangerous to you.

Discovery News recently featured 11 such examples of animals that appear cute and friendly, but, like all wild animals, should not be approached.¹ It may seem strange we would have to remind folks not to approach any wild animal, no matter how approachable or harmless they seem, and yet all of the animals on this list have stories of people compelled to approach them, which is always a bad idea.

11 Cute Animals You Don't Want to Make Mad

1. **Deer** — Deer do not generally pose a risk to people, but last year a woman in Pennsylvania stopped to take a picture of one and was attacked. In this case, the deer was rabid and had green foam coming from its mouth (a sure sign to stay away).

In autumn, when mating or "rutting" season begins, bucks can be aggressive toward humans, and a doe may become dangerous if she feels her fawns are threatened. Deer also pose a risk when you're on the road, as they're involved in more than 1 million motor vehicle accidents (including 200 deaths) each year.

2. **Swans** — If a swan feels threatened, it will give out a warning call. If you don't back off, it may become aggressive. In 2014, an Illinois man hired to care for swans living at a condo complex was attacked while on the water in a kayak.

The man fell off the kayak into the water, and the swan continued attacking, causing the man to drown.² Male swans, in particular, are known to be highly territorial and will defend their nest, especially during the spring nesting season.

3. **Dolphins** — Dolphins are highly intelligent and have a reputation for helping people in the water, not hurting them. However, there is a new trend of “dolphin-assisted” birth that could be quite dangerous. The Sirius Institute offers underwater births with dolphins to “reconnect humans with dolphins,” but as CBS News reported:³

“This is ‘possibly the worst idea, ever,’ Discover reports, noting that a powerful carnivorous animal might not be the ideal companion for a woman giving birth, or for her newborn.

‘They’re wild animals, and they are known to do some pretty terrible things,’ the Discover article said. Male dolphins, in particular, can be aggressive and have been known to rape and kill other dolphins; killings have also reportedly included infanticide.”

4. **Meerkats** — Meerkats are small animals, weighing in at about two pounds (about the weight of a squirrel). But these highly social animals also have a very efficient mode of protection. One stands watch as guard and if an intruder is spotted, the entire clan will mob him.

They’ve also become a somewhat trendy “pet,” but meerkats can be highly destructive and have a strong bite. In addition, they require socialization, stimulation and outdoor living, and should not be kept as a single pet in a home.

According to one meerkat owner, who also runs a petting zoo, in the Daily Mail:⁴

“Meerkats have the worst bite of any animal I know. I was bitten last year by [meerkat] Lola’s sister Lily. It was an accident, but it almost went down to the bone.

‘The bruise took about three months to heal and the scar is only just fading now. If that was a child it would have caused severe damage and meerkats are known for biting people’s noses, which can cause facial scarring.”

5. **Chimps** — Wild chimpanzees are generally afraid of humans and will run away if spotted, however you wouldn’t want to make one angry. According to Frans de Waal, lead biologist from the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, in Scientific American:

“The chimpanzee has strength for a human that is utterly incomprehensible ... Chimpanzee males have been measured as having five times the arm strength as a human male. Even a young chimpanzee of four or five years, you could not hold it still if you wanted to.

Pound-for-pound, their muscles are much stronger. And the adult males ... have big canine teeth. So you have a very dangerous creature in front of you that is impossible to control.

In the wild they're pretty aggressive. They have warfare among groups, where males kill other males, and they have been known to commit infanticide. Aggression is a common part of the chimpanzee behavior, whether it's between or within groups.

They can show tremendous mutilation. They go for the face; they go for the hands and feet; they go for the testicles. To outsiders, they have very nasty behaviors."

In addition, chimps have a habit of flinging feces at rivals or threats, and even as a form of self-expression.

6. **Kangaroos** — Although male kangaroos will "box" using their front legs in a show of dominance or competition over mates, it's their hind legs and sharp toenails that are most dangerous.

While kangaroo attacks on humans are uncommon, there are at least a handful of kangaroo-related injuries reported in Australia each year.⁵ In 2014, for instance, an Australian politician was attacked by a kangaroo while out on a jog, leaving him with deep scratches and bruises.

7. **Beavers** — Beavers aren't generally dangerous, but they do have big teeth and powerful jaws capable of cutting down a three-foot-wide tree. There are rare reports of beavers attacking kayakers and snorkelers. Typically, a beaver would only attack a human if it had rabies or was protecting its young.
8. **Hippos** — Nearly 3,000 people are killed by hippos in Africa every year.⁶ Paw Nation reported:⁷

"Hippopotamuses are among the most dangerous animals on earth because they are known to charge humans when threatened. Unfortunately, since their habitat is mostly gone, they are forced to forage among crops, which in turn causes them to come face to face with angry farmers.

It is during these interactions with humans, as well as unwary fishermen, that hippos and humans come together, a situation that will almost always end in death. Despite its speed, size and aggression, the hippo is no match for a human with a powerful gun, so it's usually the hippopotamus that loses her life."

The Guardian reported on one particularly striking account, however, of a tour guide in Africa who was attacked and swallowed by a hippo — and lived to tell about it.⁸

9. **Pandas** — Pandas have large teeth, powerful jaws, and sharp claws, along with muscular strength. Although they're thought of as cuddly, they have the potential to be as dangerous as any other bear — and they are known to be very territorial. In 2014, former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing entered a panda cage at a Paris zoo. The panda jumped on him and had to be removed by zoo workers.
10. **Poisonous frogs** — Poisonous frogs' bright colors might draw you in, but they're actually a warning to stay away. These frogs have toxins on their skin that are so poisonous a single drop can be fatal if ingested.
11. **Polar bears** — Polar bears can be deadly to humans, and attacks in Canada have been increasing as melting ice has forced the bears to look for food on land.⁹ Still, such attacks are rare. Polar bears have killed only 19 people in all of recorded Russian history, and only eight people have died in polar bear attacks in the US and Canada in the last three decades.

Sources and References

¹ [Discovery News July 14, 2014](#)

² [Daily Mail April 22, 2014](#)

³ [CBS News May 28, 2013](#)

⁴ [Daily Mail August 22, 2014](#)

⁵ [NSW Office of Environment & Heritage, Living With Kangaroos](#)

⁶ [Care2 August 16, 2014](#)

⁷ [Paw Nation, The Dangers of a Hippopotamus](#)

⁸ [The Guardian May 4, 2013](#)

⁹ [The Guardian November 4, 2013](#)
