

# Utah Wildlife

## Our guide to some of Utah's Critters

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Utah's natural areas are a fantastic gateway to adventure and discovery and offer up many opportunities to observe wildlife in their natural habitat. Here are some of our favorite critters to come upon while outdoors, and a few tips for safely observing them. The biggest safety tips for every animal is to keep your distance and DO NOT feed the wildlife.

### **Moose**

Moose are often the first animal that comes up when talking with our guests about wildlife in Utah. These majestic creatures are always a treat to see on the trail and it never ceases to amaze me how giant they actually are when seeing them on the trail. While impressive to observe, it is especially important to keep your distance from these animals. They won't eat you, however they do weigh 800-1200 pounds and get moving up to 35 miles per hour! When I come across a moose on a trail, I first look for any signs of aggression (hair standing

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up on their neck, snout licking, or ears back.) If none of these are present, I'll proceed slowly and cautiously and will calmly talk to the moose so that it knows we're cool. If it decides we're not cool I'll back away slowly and hide behind a tree until it loses interest.

## **Mule Deer**

Despite being one of the more common animals in the state of Utah, I am always excited when I get to see mule deer hopping around the forests. In the summer there's a better chance to see them higher up in the mountains as the snow melts and food becomes more available, and in the winters you'll see them come down to the valley floors to avoid the deeper snows on the mountains. As with all wildlife, keep your distance and don't give them food. Another consideration is If you see a fawn seemingly abandoned, the best thing to do is stay away and leave the animal. The mother is almost always close by!

## **Ground Squirrels**

Often mistaken for gophers or groundhogs, the Uinta Ground Squirrel might be my favorite animal in Utah. Most commonly seen in more populated areas such as picnic areas and ski resort base areas. Notorious beggars, it is especially important to avoid feeding these critters despite how cute they look. As winter approaches, the ground squirrels start stocking up on food as they hibernate for the winter. Because of this, and the resulting bellies, many locals refer to the ground squirrels as "potguts."

## **Black Bear**

Black bears are Utah's largest predators (they can be between 120-300 pounds) and only bear species currently found in Utah. In spite of this they can be rather elusive, which isn't really anything to complain about! Exploring the forests you can occasionally come across tracks, scat, or turned over rocks and shredded logs where they've been scrounging for bugs. These indicators are the best way to observe the bears, as I know personally I'm fine keeping a healthy distance from an actual bear. If you do happen to come across a bear,

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don't run away or try and climb a tree, instead stand your ground and get out the bear spray. If you're in a group, make as much noise as you can to scare the bear off. While hiking, be sure to keep all your trash with you and do not leave any goodies around a bear could eat!

## **Wild Turkeys**

One of the biggest surprises to me when I first began hiking around Utah was how often I kept running into wild turkeys! We often see and hear them around Sundance and Midway. Don't let the fact that they're turkeys get your guard down though, these critters can be feisty and rather foul tempered during the spring mating season. Also it wouldn't be wise to gobble at these turkeys either, since the gobbling of a male turkey is a challenge to other guy turkeys in the area. If you forget and still gobble at a turkey, fortunately you can usually shoosh the birds out of the way with your jacket, backpack, or hiking poles.