



## Safety

As you enjoy your visit at San Mateo County Parks, please keep in mind that you are a "guest" of the many plants and animals that call our parks their home. Remember the golden rule: Leave the plants and animals alone and they will leave you alone. You will have a more safe and enjoyable stay at the parks after educating yourself about the wildlife around you. Please be aware of the following natural features found at the parks and take the necessary steps to avoid danger to yourself or our local wildlife. **If you have an emergency, call 9-1-1 for assistance.**

*Please click on one of the following links for more information*

### Poisonous & Stinging Plants

[Poison Oak](#)  
[Stinging Nettle](#)

### Insect Life

[Ticks](#)  
[Yellowjackets](#)

### Animal Life

[Bobcats & Mountain Lions](#)  
[Raccoons](#)  
[Rattle Snakes](#)  
[Wild Pigs](#)

### General Trail Safety

[Guidelines](#)

### Poisonous & Stinging Plants



**Poison Oak** (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) is common throughout the park system. It can grow as a shrub or as a vine which scales trees. It is recognizable by a grouping of three leaves which range in color from green, to yellow, to red. When Poison Oak is contacted its oil may cause an irritating rash. Pets running loose around poison oak may get the oil on their fur and later pass it on to their owners. If you come into contact with poison oak:

- Wash your skin with soap and warm water as soon as possible (The oil typically penetrates the skin within ten minutes). Scrub under fingernails with a brush to avoid spreading oil to other parts of the body.
- Wash clothing and shoes and bathe pets that may have been in contact with the plant.
- Reactions range from very mild to very severe, sometimes requiring emergency care at the hospital.
- If rash develops, calamine lotion may be used on the skin to decrease itching. This, as well as other ointments and creams, can be found at your local drug store. Rashes usually last for a week or two.
- Call your physician if the rash/itching is severe or does not stop.

[Back to top](#)



**Stinging Nettle** (*Urtica dioica*) grows in moist, shady places throughout the park system. Its bright green leaves and stems are covered with hollow hairs which come off easily when the plant is brushed. These hairs are filled with formic acid, the same acid ants have in their saliva glands, which causes an instant painful stinging sensation. Also, as the skin reacts, a rash forms lasting about a day. If you come in contact with stinging nettle:

- Stinging nettle acid can be neutralized by applying a paste of baking soda (made by adding a little water). Apply to the infected area immediately.
- Human saliva may help when rubbed into the itchy area if baking soda is not handy.
- A local plant, the Curled Dock *Rumex Crispus*, grows in the same habitat as stinging nettle and can help when crushed and rubbed on the itchy area.

[Back to top](#)

## Insect Life



**Ticks** are parasites that feed on the blood of their host by digging into the skin using the sharp pointy anchors below their mouths. Ticks don't fly like bees, or jump like fleas, or drop from trees like spiders. Instead, they climb vegetation and wait for a new host to brush up against them. A host can be a human being or an animal. Ticks can carry many diseases transmittable to humans including [Lyme Disease](#) carried by the Western Black-Legged tick. An early sign of Lyme disease may include a spreading rash accompanied by fever, aches and fatigue. Attack of the heart and nervous system may occur, as well as extreme arthritis. If you are bitten by a tick:

- Grasp the tick with a tissue or tweezers as close to your skin as possible. Never use your bare hands. Exposure to the tick's body fluids may lead to transmission of disease.
- Pull the tick from the skin in a gentle manner. Do not twist or crush the tick. Do not remove the tick by burning or applying vaseline, kerosene, oil, etc.
- Apply an antiseptic to the bite area after removing the tick.
- Saving the tick for identification is a good idea. Contact your local health department to find out if the tick is capable of transmitting Lyme disease.
- If the tick cannot be removed, consult your physician.

[Back to top](#)



**Yellowjackets** are the common name for several different species of wasps indigenous to the state of California. Some species found at county parks are considered pests, favoring picnic areas, garbage cans and refreshment stands. Yellowjackets live in colonies ruled by a single queen. They sometimes attach their nests to trees, shrubs, or buildings though native pest species tend to construct their nests underground. Yellowjackets are attracted to sweet foods such as honey, candy, fruits, and soft drinks. In addition, the common pest species collect red meats, chicken and fish. Yellowjackets can defend themselves by delivering a painful sting which may cause swelling and itching. Certain people allergic to yellowjackets can encounter serious medical complications from a single sting. If you are stung by a yellowjacket:

- Remove the stinger, if left in your skin, by scraping from the side with your fingernail.
- Apply cold water or ice in a wet cloth.
- Lie down if you feel faint or dizzy.
- Lower the stung arm or leg.
- Do not consume alcohol.
- If allergic to yellowjacket venom seek medical attention immediately.

[Back to top](#)

## Animal Life



**Bobcats and Mountain Lions** hunt alone at night. Bobcats, the smaller of the two wild cats, weigh up to 60 pounds and have spotted orange fur, a short tail, and black-tipped ears. They hunt small creatures such as squirrels and rabbits. Mountain Lions weigh up to 150 pounds, have yellowish brown fur, and have a dark-tipped tail that may be 2 to 3 feet long. Mountain Lions hunt larger animals such as deer, elk and big horn sheep, dependent on the geographical area. If you encounter a mountain lion or bobcat:

- Shout and wave your arms or your coat. The objective is to make yourself look as large and imposing as possible.
- Maintain eye contact with the wild cat, and do not crouch down.
- Throw any sticks and stones you can reach without bending down.
- Pick up small children and keep them from panicking and running.
- If attacked, FIGHT BACK! Try to remain standing and face the attacking animal.

[Back to top](#)



**Raccoons** are 23 to 41 inches in length with grayish-brown fur. Their body tends to be heavily built weighing up to 40 lb. The face has a distinguishing black mask and the tail usually has about six black rings encircling the tail. Raccoons, like squirrels, skunks, and foxes are scavengers and are often seen around campgrounds, foraging through garbage cans. They like to feed on food left out by park visitors. Although they seem calm, these animals are wild and may bite or claw you. Raccoons may carry diseases such as rabies. If you encounter a raccoon:

- Do not touch or pick up the raccoon.
- Do not feed the raccoon.
- Move away from the raccoon so that it can run away.



**Rattlesnakes** are common throughout the park system and are important members of the natural community. Helping to keep the rodent population under control, they feed on small rodents, rabbits, birds, and almost anything alive that can be swallowed. Rattlesnakes are venomous snakes with movable front fangs and typically have a rattle at the end of their tail. The rattle sound is a warning by the snake which it uses to make its presence known. They will not attack, but if disturbed or cornered, they will defend themselves. Rattlesnakes are found around rocks and are usually out when the weather is warm. If you encounter a rattle snake:

- Do not pick up the snake.
- Do not disturb or corner the snake.
- Move away and the snake will flee most of the time.



**Wild pigs** are introduced members of the natural habitat and are commonly seen in the park system. They can become a nuisance when accustomed to humans disturbing camping, picnic, and natural areas. Pigs can be dangerous and aggressive when cornered or when tempted by food. Wild animals that become aggressive may have to be destroyed. If you encounter a pig:

- Do not approach a wild pig.
- Back away slowly, giving the pig an opportunity to escape.
- Pigs have poor eye sight, so wave your arms side to side, make noise, and speak loudly in a non-threatening manner.

## General Trail Safety



### Guidelines

- Stay on designated trails.
- Keep children close to you at all times.
- Avoid hiking alone.
- Make noise while you hike so as not to surprise any of the animal life mentioned above.
- When encountering wildlife back away slowly, giving wildlife an opportunity to escape.
- Do not feed or leave food for any wild animal.
- Store food & ice chests in a car or food locker.
- Maintain a clean area and place trash in garbage cans.
- Never harass, chase, or corner any wild animal.
- Report any unusual animal behavior to park staff.
- Please follow park regulations.