

Heavy rain and flooding in Texas has wild animals on the move

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An alligator bares its teeth. In Texas, animals are being displaced by the heavy rain following Hurricane Harvey. Photo by: NASA Kennedy/Flickr

As Tropical Storm Harvey continues to flood the Houston, Texas, area, people are not the only ones going to higher ground. The wild animals are, too.

The area is home to thousands of alligators, several kinds of snakes and many fire ants. There also are deer, raccoons and other animals. All of them are struggling to escape the rising waters. They are showing up in some unusual spots, say Texas wildlife workers.

Kelly Norrid is a scientist for Texas Parks and Wildlife. Animals that do not want to be in the water might go into an attic or garage, he said.

Still, experts say that there is no reason to panic.

Beware Of Alligators

Alligators do not do well in the rainwater that is rushing through. So some will move away from it. However, that does not mean the area is full of gators.

Norrid said they are hearing reports of 8-foot alligators in the front yard. However, that is not unusual in southeast Texas, he said.

Chris Stephens has an alligator moving company, Gator Squad. He has gotten more calls lately from Fort Bend County, near Houston. Alligators usually are not as common there. However, road closings are slowing him down. He and his partner can respond only to life-threatening situations. They have removed just three gators since the flooding began.

Stephens said he is telling callers to stay calm and keep their distance. They also should not try for a photo with the animal, he said.

David Steen works at the Auburn University Museum of Natural History in Alabama. He offered suggestions.

Pay attention to where you put your hands and feet, he said. "Do not try to mess with animals," he said. A snake or alligator does not want to fight right now, he said. Animals are trying to get through the storm, too.

Slithering Snakes

Norrid said the area has many kinds of snakes, and all of them can swim. Many will slither up buildings or trees to stay dry.

A TV station shared a photo of a snake slithering up a brick house. Steen said it was a rat snake. These snakes often climb up trees. It might not have been the flooding that made it climb.

People should not bother snakes, Steen said. That is usually when snake bites happen, he said.

Fire Ants Band Together

Fire ants are ants with a powerful sting. Their sting can cause burning and blisters.

During floods, the ants help each other. The ants come together in bunches. They hold on to each other to form floating rafts. These "rafts" can be several feet wide.

Norrid does not like the ants. He says they make every Texan "cringe." He saw one of their islands on his street.

Bats In Danger

Norrid says his main wildlife worry is about Houston's Mexican free-tailed bats. They are fast little animals that live in the cracks of more than 30 bridges.

The Waugh Bridge near downtown is home to about 300,000 bats. Their sunset appearance is considered a must-see wildlife event. The bottom of the bridge was underwater by Sunday.

A newspaper said that some bats were spotted on nearby buildings. A few hundred others were rescued from the bridge and water.