

Scorpions, spiders and bees – Oh my! Myths and facts

BY MIKE BUTLER TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

You're bound to hear a lot of folklore from Arizona old-timers about venomous bites and the indigenous critters that inflict the damage.

While entertaining and well-meaning, many of those stories are wrong, despite the sources' sincerest attestations.

Many myths focus on the icon of the Sonoran Desert, the rattlesnake, but there are some doozies about scorpions, too.

Most outdoor-savvy hikers know that it's actually pretty difficult to get attacked by a diamondback without provocation.

Andy Baldwin, chair of Life Science at Mesa Community College, said that – compared to killer bees, scorpions and spiders – rattlesnakes are mannerly. “They give you many chances to walk away.”

When you see a rattlesnake, and it sees you, its first instinct is to flee. If it can't escape, it will coil up. Baldwin said rattlesnakes commonly employ a bluff strike to get you to back away before they resort to biting.

If you are bitten, you need to get to an

emergency room pronto. But there are many 'don'ts.'

- Don't panic.
- Don't do anything like what you may have seen in an old Western, such as cutting the bite and sucking out the venom.
- Don't restrict blood flow with a belt or tourniquet.
- Don't waste valuable time trying to kill the snake and bring it to the hospital. Treatment is not snake-specific, according to Banner Health.

As for those old stories, here's the skinny on some of Arizona's most dangerous creatures:

Myth: Rattlesnakes grow a new rattle each year.

Fact: Rattlesnakes grow a new rattle each time they shed their skin. That could be three times a year when food is plentiful and fewer times when nourishment is scarce.

Myth: Baby rattlesnakes can't control their venom.

Fact: This is sometimes said about baby scorpions, too. Both are false. Metabolically speaking, venom is a costly

substance to make. It takes time to manufacture, and during that time the venomous creature is defenseless. If baby scorpions and rattlesnakes couldn't control their venom, they wouldn't survive.

Myth: A baby scorpion bite is worse than that of an adult.

Fact: The venom in a baby scorpion's stinger is no more or less potent than an adult's.

Myth: Scorpions bite

Fact: Nope. It's that barb on the tail you need to worry about.

Myth: Scorpions will sting themselves to death if surrounded by fire or sprayed with alcohol.

Myth: Scorpions will sting themselves to death if trapped by fire or come into contact with alcohol.

Fact: In the throes of a traumatic death, scorpions will lash out at anything they can and sometimes hit their own body. But they're not really trying to kill themselves

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