

Redwood Shores raccoon attack builds new call for awareness

An incident leads to emergency room visit

By Ana Mata, Daily Journal staff

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Lisa Benigno poses with her dog, an Australian shepherd-Great Pyrenees mix.



When Lisa Benigno, a resident in Redwood Shores, was walking her dog with her son one evening in September, five raccoons swarmed and attacked leaving Benigno with multiple bite wounds and a need to go to the emergency room.

The encounter has left Benigno more on edge than usual, and also with a goal to make sure residents don't underestimate the masked critters.

“I just want people to be alert,” Benigno said. “They can be very threatening.”

A routine walk in her housing complex turned for the worse when a “fairly large” raccoon came from between two parked cars and approached Benigno’s dog – an Australian shepherd-Great Pyrenees mix who she said was not barking or advancing toward the raccoon in aggression.

“I go out trail running and all kinds of stuff and I know about animals and wildlife, but it was just so unprovoked,” Benigno said. “There was no fear whatsoever.”

Next thing she knew, four more slightly smaller, yet still large, raccoons surrounded Benigno’s legs and bit at her ankles, causing her to stumble.

Benigno suffered a bite to her ankle, finger and thigh. Still marked on her ankle, Benigno said her fingernail has just begun growing back after the bite broke her bone.

Even when Benigno and her son attempted to retreat and run away, the raccoons attempted to follow for another 20 feet, she said.

“There was no fear whatsoever,” she said. “What people don’t understand, they’re very fast, once they get around you.”

Benigno visited the emergency room afterward to receive the appropriate shots to treat any possible infection from the bites. She received two shots of immunoglobulin in each of the three bite sites and was given the vaccine to fight against possible rabies.

The vaccine must also be administered three days, seven days and 14 days after the first dose.

“The worst part is just the experience of the attack, you just don’t want to go through that,” Benigno said. “I don’t want to go through that again.”

According to the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA, there is no indication that there is an abnormal presence of raccoons, but Benigno feels like their population has noticeably grown, and she’s not alone.

“It is possible that more juveniles are dispersing, as this is the time their mothers turn them loose to be on their own after their spring/early summer births,” Colleen Crowley, PHS/SCPA communications manager, said in a statement.

Ken Castle, a San Carlos resident who often walks his pets in Redwood Shores, said he has increasingly seen grass torn up in the area, suggesting the presence of raccoons or other wildlife.

“They’re tearing up the place all over,” Castle said. “Every time we go out, especially into Redwood Shores.”

The homeowner association for the complex Benigno lives in sent out an email to residents advising them to remain cautious, and that they would do routine checks to make sure any garbage receptacle is properly closed, she said.

Benigno says she still avoids the area where she was attacked, and now carries a whistle, wears a headlight, and advises others to do the same.

“If residents encounter a raccoon, give the raccoon a wide birth, leave it alone, give it plenty of space, and please don’t feed it,” Crowley wrote. “Don’t ever touch a raccoon.”

There have also been coyote sightings and interactions recently along the Peninsula, most notably in Foster City where one woman reported being chased by a pack while she was walking her dog. People in other areas like San Carlos and Millbrae have also reported coyote sightings.

The Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA offers tips for residents to address these sorts of issues and encounters with wildlife, and are welcomed to call the general number at (650) 340-7022 and select the wildlife option.

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