



Desert wildlife is lively

Desert Wildlife
I have been asked many questions on the wildlife or more to the point, the lack of wildlife in Arizona. The Arizona Desert is perceived as a barren, inhospitable, lonely land of sand, cactus, blazing sun and endless summer. Nothing could be further from the truth. I remember when I lived in Phoenix for four years while going to high school. We would walk in the desert during spring, and the desert cactus flowers were so beautiful.

We would run into a Diamondback Rattlesnake once in awhile. But, they give you plenty of warning to get slowly away from them. I have also seen the very ugly gila monster. I have never seen a live scorpion and that's okay with me.

If you are close to the desert mountain sides, you may see white-tailed deer or its cousin, the beautiful and fleet-footed pronghorn. If you look further up the steep and rocky slope of the desert mountain range, a herd of Bighorn Sheep with their mighty curving horns can be spotted. America's biggest and the tawny mountain lion, also live in the desert mountains.

When driving north to Flagstaff, there are big signs that say "Watch for Elk" for many miles. We have yet to spot a living elk. I hope to some day see a live elk in the woods.

I have seen three sightings of coyotes here in Arizona, but I have seen coyotes in Farmington on Farmington Road on garbage collection day.

In our back yard in Arizona, there are cute little lizards running around for which our indoor cats like to play with when the lizards run up the screen doors.

Over the holidays in December 1999, we took the Verde Canyon four-hour train ride out of Clarkdale, AZ. It was great fun plus the bonus was we saw two bald eagles soaring in the sky above us!

Each time this column is published, I will write about one or two desert critters.

Harris Antelope Ground Squirrel

This cute and quick Harris Antelope Ground Squirrel is active during the day and sleeps at night. We see them when we go on top of South Mountain most of the time. He is a relative of the prairie dog and gopher. In colder areas, they hibernate during the winter. They feed on seeds and nuts and will gather and store their food for winter.

Gambel's Quail

We see clutches of Gambel's Quail running around shrubs in our park and at the Phoenix Zoo. They are running from shrub to shrub. I think they are very pretty and cute the way they run. The striking Quail is common to the drier habitat of the Southwest. Only the Gambel's Quail and the California Quail, which is similarly marked, have the unusual teardrop topknot. Even though the female's body feathers are not as colorful as the males, she has the black topknot like the male Gambel's Quail.

To have questions answered, you can e-mail Bev Cornell at bev.bristol.dog@msn.com. Last year Bev and her family moved to Arizona from Farmington Hills. She is a retired veterinary assistant and former wildlife rehabilitator licensed by the Department of Natural Resources.

Blood protein is key to heart complications

A blood protein may help predict a person's risk of developing life-threatening complications following angioplasty, a common procedure used to unblock blood vessels to alleviate chest pain, according to a report in Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association.

The blood protein, called creatine kinase, or CK-MB, detects heart muscle damage and is used to help diagnose heart attack. Researchers found that the protein predicted which patients faced the highest risk of dying in the year following their angioplasty.

"This marker can offer physicians a powerful new tool for providing targeted therapy to those patients most at risk in the year after angioplasty," says Mun Hong, M.D., the study's lead investigator and an interventional cardiologist at the Cardiovascular Research Foundation, Washington Hospital Center, Washington D.C.

The researchers found that those with the highest elevation of the protein — five times the normal level — were the most likely to die in the year following the procedure.

Researchers examined 1,056 patients who had angioplasty to unblock the saphenous vein that had previously been used as a graft during heart bypass surgery. The saphenous leg vein is often used in bypass surgery to re-route blood flow around a blocked coronary artery. However, the grafted vein often re-blocks. The patients in the study underwent angioplasty — a non-surgical procedure — to clear the grafted vein so they could avoid additional surgery.

Following study group

About 15 percent of individuals who underwent the angioplasty procedure had CK-MB elevations. After one year, 11.7 percent of the individuals with the highest levels of the protein

died, compared to 4.8 percent of those with normal levels.

Hong says that although this study does not prove a cause and effect relationship prevention of the CK-MB elevation seems warranted. At present, there are two main approaches that could be used to prevent CK-MB elevation during saphenous vein angioplasty, although both are still in the investigational stages.

Hong and his team suspect that bits of plaque and/or blood clots that sometimes break off during a saphenous vein angioplasty may contribute to elevated CK-MB levels.

These bits can move "downstream" and block a smaller blood vessel. One approach to prevent this would be to insert a self-expanding metal device during angioplasty that would open inside the vein just past the blockage to trap the debris. The device would act like sort of an umbrella and would be removed

after the angioplasty is completed.

As yet, there have been no randomized controlled trials to prove the merits of this approach, but a trial is currently under way.

Another method involves a relatively new class of drugs called glycoprotein inhibitors, says Hong. In a trial called EPIC, the drug abciximab — a type of super aspirin — was shown to help minimize complications in a small group of patients who had undergone the saphenous vein angioplasty. However, the study size was small and further studies are needed to assess the benefits and risks of using this new class of drugs, Hong says.

Co-authors are Roxana Mehran, M.D., George Dangas, M.D., PhD, Gary Mintz, M.D., Alexandra Lansky, M.D., Augusto Richard, M.D., Kenneth Kent, M.D., PhD, Lowell Sather, M.D., Gregg Stone, M.D. and Martin Leon, M.D.

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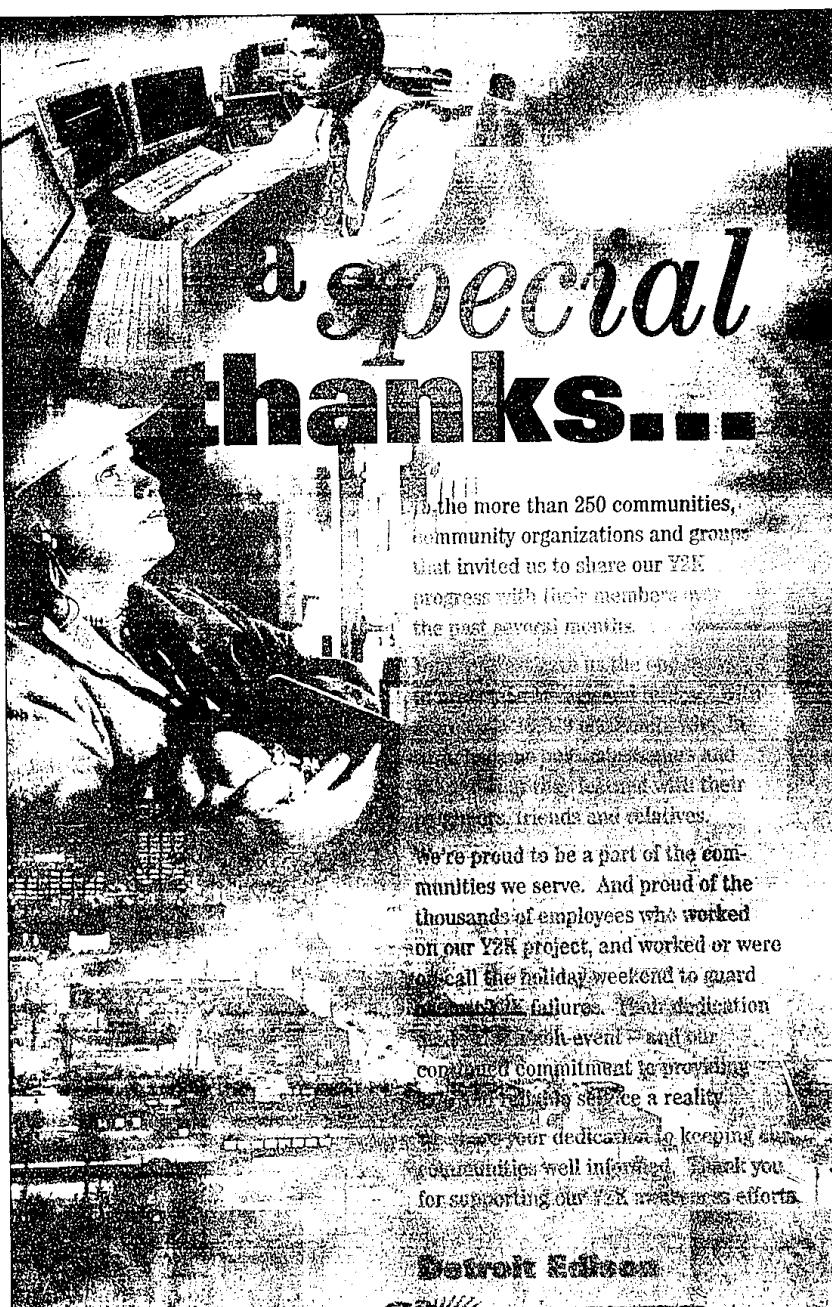
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