



NCPOC Newsletter



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Wildlife and Health in Atyrau

by Olivier S. G. Pauwels and Syed Ahmed

Atyrau City is surrounded by a steppe environment inhabited by animals that are mostly harmless to humans. However, some of them may be a nuisance, and others, a potential health hazard. Thanks to the extensive biodiversity inventories made during the environmental surveys supported by the Venture, we have a good record of the local fauna and its occurrence in and around our assets and work places. Hazardous wildlife can grossly be divided into four main categories: venomous, non-venomous but potentially harmful, parasites and disease carriers.



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survey

Do you believe that you are sufficiently informed about the direction of NCPOC?

Yes 34

No 19



Your exposure to these will vary depending on your lifestyle, but some are just unavoidable. That includes the mosquitoes in the parasite category, which, although varying in numbers and species between seasons and years, are always present in the city. Scorpions, in the venomous animals' category, are locally represented by a single species, normally living in the steppe, but occasionally found in city houses. Although not deadly, its sting can be painful and requires immediate medical attention. Two venomous snakes are found in the Atyrau area, the Steppe Ribbon Racer and the Steppe Viper; only the latter is dangerous because of its potent venom, but fortunately it has never been found within the city. Two other snakes, the Dice snake and the Grass snake, are regularly seen inside the city, generally along the Ural River, but they are harmless. Only three local spider species are of 'medical' importance, but luckily they do not enter houses in the city. Among the parasites, those that currently pose the most serious health threats are ticks, common in all grassy areas in and around Atyrau, especially where cattle and feral (wild) dogs and cats gather. Other parasites, such as gnats, horse flies, sand flies and midges, are found within the city in the warm season, as well as the world-wide ranging human parasites. Feral cats and dogs are plenty in and around Atyrau, and one must not approach them, since they can bite, and carry diseases such as rabies, or be carriers of parasites such as ticks and fleas.

Globally the health risks linked to wildlife in Atyrau are slightly higher than most rural areas in Europe. Avoiding most of these risks often requires following just a few easy and basic rules. Among them, use of appropriate insect-repellent and mosquito nets are the most obvious.

To help our colleagues and their families to better understand the potential risks and nuisances generated by the local fauna, and to disseminate the best practices in interacting with Atyrau wildlife, an illustrated presentation entitled "*Wildlife & Health in Atyrau and Mangistau Regions*" has been prepared, and will be presented on request to newly arrived employees, contractors and their families. It is of special importance for those of us who regularly go out of the city, for family picnics, cycling, or for their work, to be well aware of these risks and how to mitigate them, to make sure that Atyrau biodiversity continues to be a pleasant and safe experience.

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