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A Divers Guide to Things That Sting

This is the continuation of an article in the previous issue.

Hydroids - They may grow on line which has been left in the water, such as mooring lines. Many of these hydroids can cause painful stings which may last for several days and require treatment by a physician.

Portuguese Man-of-War - This beautiful siphonophore floats at the surface by means of a large, inflated, violet-colored float. The float is usually about 6 inches in length with dangerous tentacles that may trail behind as much as 60 feet. The animals are often seen washed up on the shore, and may appear dead. Whether they seem dead or alive, they should not be handled, as contact with a Portuguese Man-of-War can cause pain great enough to send a person into shock. If severely stung, seek immediate medical attention.

Sea Wasps - Several species of sea wasps occur in the Caribbean. They are free-floating and have a four-sided bell shape, with tentacles that trail behind. Sea wasps are generally encountered on the surface at night, and may collect near lights on docks. Sea wasps have been known on very rare occasions to produce a fatal sting. If stung by a sea wasp seek medical assistance immediately, as difficulty in breathing could develop. Tentacles may be scraped off the skin with a knife blade.

SPONGES

Sponges are living animals of the Phylum Porifera. The animals attach to hard objects on the bottom and feed by pumping water through small pores, filtering plankton. Several sponges found in the Virgin Islands can produce stings.

Do-Not-Touch-Me Sponge - This brown sponge is usually found at the base of elkhorn or staghorn corals. This species is highly toxic; if handled with bare hands, it may cause severe burning and blistering.

Fire Sponge - This species is bright red to orange, with a smooth outer surface, and is commonly found in bays or lagoons. This sponge is highly toxic to most people, and can produce painful burns and rashes similar to a bad case of poison ivy.

WORMS

A word of warning - if you see what appears to be a fuzzy worm underwater...don't touch it! Chances are, it is a type of bristle worm. These worms appear harmless, but their bristles contain a toxin which can cause a painful, long lasting sting. The bristles are shed easily, so avoid coming into contact with them.

Green Bristle Worm - This large greenish worm is commonly found under stones or in grass beds, and also on the reef. It can reach lengths of up to 10 inches.

Orange Bristle Worm - This worm is similar to the green bristle worm, but is somewhat smaller and more slender. Its body is orange to yellow in color, with white bristles along the side. This species is usually found on the reef flat and along rocky areas.

Red-Tipped Bristle Worm - The red-tipped worm reaches a length of only about 4-5 inches, but has a 2 inch wide band of bristles along either side. Its bristles are white, with orange or red tips. This worm is usually found in deeper water than the others, on open sand and mud bottoms.

SEA URCHINS

Long-spined Sea Urchin - This tropical reef-dwelling urchin is well known to most divers and snorkelers. The body or test of the urchin is usually about 4 inches in diameter, with long, sharp spines that can be up to 16 inches long. The sea urchin is usually tucked into crevices along the reef. These animals do not have nematocysts, and are not capable of aggressively attacking swimmers or divers. However, their spines do contain a toxin which can be painful if the spine is broken off in a person's skin. The spines are difficult to remove from the skin, and are best left in place, as they will dissolve in time. Vinegar can also be used to dissolve them.

Article to be continued next issue. Article written by Cathy C. Lawlor former DFW employee.

Quote

"If only we could overcome cruelty with compassion we should be well on the way to creating a new and boundless ethic -- one that would respect all living things."

Dr. Jane Goodall

Domestic Cats Pose Threat to Millions of Birds Each Year

Free-ranging domestic cats destroy millions of birds each year in Wisconsin. This situation is probably true throughout the world. Many of these tabbies kill for fun rather than for food. Unlike wild predators, domestic cats hunt whether they are hungry or not. Cats can be described as "subsidized predators" because they receive a steady supply of food at home. "Pet cats can hunt longer and are less susceptible to disease than many wild predators," states Professor Stan Temple of the University of Wisconsin (UW).

The problem is so severe that in 1997 the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) began a national campaign to educate cat owners about the threat to birds from cat predation. The new campaign is called, "Cats Indoor!"

The cuddly kitty that provides companionship indoors transforms into a ferocious feline hunter when it gets outside. UW studies show that the diet of free-ranging domestic cats is composed of 70 percent small mammals (predominantly mice and ground squirrels), 20 percent birds, and 10 percent other animals.

In addition to killing birds, free-ranging domestic cats also rob food from native predators such as foxes, snakes, and raccoons. In some study areas of Wisconsin, cat densities reach more than 100 animals per square mile - several times more than all similar-sized wild predators (skunks, foxes and raccoons) combined.

Wildlife officials believe the only way to reduce the damage to birds by free-ranging cats is for cat owners to keep their pets indoors. Many municipalities currently have ordinances that

require cats to be kept indoors or on a leash. However, these measures are rarely enforced, causing some bird fans to take matters into their own hands.

How Responsible Cat Owners Can Help Conserve Birds

- Keep only as many pet cats as you can feed and care for.
- Keep your cat indoors - for the sake of your cat and the local wildlife.
- Bells are generally ineffective in preventing predation because even if the bell rings, it's usually too late for the prey being stalked.
- Locate bird feeders in sites that do not provide cover for cats to wait in ambush for birds. Cats are significant cause of mortality among birds that come to feeders. Put animal guards around any trees in your yard that may have nesting birds.
- Don't dispose of unwanted cats by releasing them in rural areas. Contact your local animal welfare organization for help.

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