

INTRODUCTION

Hello! Thanks for coming on this journey and letting me tell you some stories from my perspective. It's a wild adventure.

After all, it's not every day a snake gets to tell the story.

Here we are in the middle of the National Forest, which is home to many, many animals. Humans are usually only visitors. As I slither around on the ground, and into rocky crevices, I often see my fellow wild ones encounter those human visitors.

Let's start at the beginning.

I am an Arizona Black Rattlesnake. Unlike the diamondback rattler, who lives primarily in desert areas and has pale tan desert colors for camouflage, I am black (hence the name), with lovely rich white-, gold-, or yellow-striped patterns across my handsome black back. I prefer to live in the higher elevations, more like 4,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level, in the mountains among the oaks and evergreens. Like the diamondback, my bite is poisonous. After all, we're **pit vipers**. That's how the good Lord made us. So, be forewarned.

I stick to the ground and, with the exception of gobbling up certain **prey** like mice and lizards — a fellow does need to eat, doesn't he? — I avoid others. But I do get around — into caves and burrows, under bushes, crossing a dirt road or, in some cases, sunbathing on the steps of a cabin.



A Rattler's Tale

So, I can share with you a few short vignettes about my fellow non-human creatures for whom this forest is home. And, because some humans have a cabin here in these woods, I have chosen to share some stories about our run-ins with them.

And just as an FYI, all the words in our stories that pertain to us are in the *Glossary* and typed in **bold**. If you want to check the definitions, the *Glossary* is after our *End — and Beginning Chapter*. Some of us are typed in **bold** by name, and you can also find a brief description of us in the *Brief Description section*, which follows the *Glossary*.

The words you see typed in italics, like *crotalos cerberus* (that's me), are the Latin names for us. That is the language in which all plants and animals are put into categories. Why? I don't know. I'm just here to tell you what I've been observing in my neighborhood.

Feel free to keep a notebook close by so you can take notes or make your own drawings. And also check our website, www.NuggetPress.com.

I hope you enjoy meeting some of my people as they encounter some of your people.

Signed,

Mr. Arizona Black Rattlesnake



SAVED BY A BRONCO



This all happens so fast that I wouldn't believe it if you had told me. But I see it for myself.

I'm off to the side of the dirt road, catching the first sunny day of spring. I see this crazy encounter with my own elliptical beady snake-eyes. It's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

A lone deer is busily nibbling a bush that must have been overlooked last fall. She's on the downhill side of the road. A few berries hang low. Green shoots pop up from the ground looking tender and tasty.

Deer don't migrate to warmer climates during the winter. They don't hibernate either. They bed down together, soaking up warmth from pine needles and oak leaves. They sleep for only minute at a time. Their ears are always on high alert. They are constantly on guard. That's the sad lot in life of animals who are prey, and rightfully so. Just think of the critters that could feed off one downed deer. The mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, eagles, hawks, and more.

Normally deer are watchful and wary. But on this particular day in April, Mrs. White Tail must be so grateful to find a leftover batch of greens and berries that she concentrates on only one thing — food.



A Rattler's Tale

Meanwhile, another non-migrating, non-hibernating member of our community is out and about — the mountain lion. His *modus operandi* (way of operating) is to adapt to the harsh environment, subsisting on voles and rats if he must, but always on the prowl for the big one that will compensate for the harsh winter's lean food supply.

Usually he's a **crepuscular** (twilight) and **nocturnal** cat, but here he stands in broad daylight, alert and opportunistic as only a cat can be.

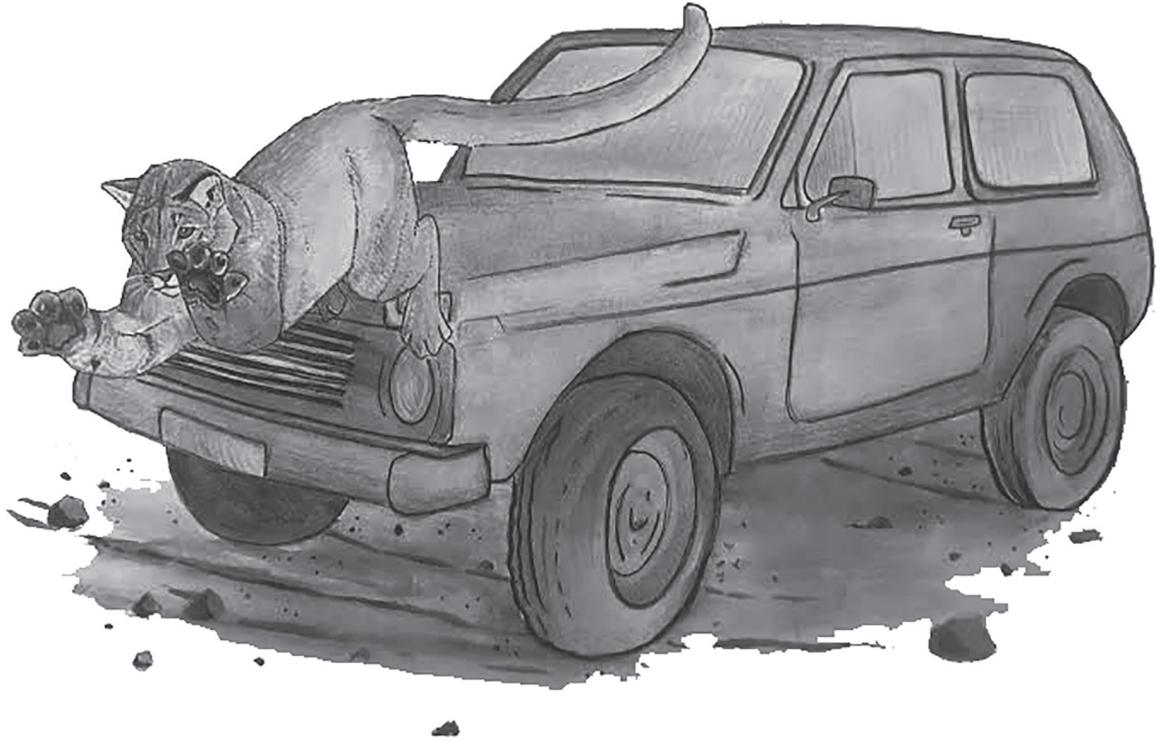
Mr. Mountain Lion crouches on a huge boulder uphill, up-wind, across the road from Mrs. Deer. She — uncharacteristically — does not have a clue what is about to befall her.

Mr. M. L., tail switching silently in the ready, is about to pounce.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, that gaggle of humans careens around a rocky corner in their Bronco, driving too fast.

Startled, Mr. M. L. leaps. Equally startled, Mrs. D. freezes, exhibiting a bad case of DIHS (Deer In the Headlights Syndrome). At that moment, the Bronco screeches to a halt as Mr. M. L. lands on the hood and bounces against the windshield.





Quicker than the humans can see what almost hit them, Mr. M. L. regains his footing while still on the hood — the way that only cats can do. Then, with his big filthy front paws extended, he leaps onto the road and dashes back up the hill from whence he came. Simultaneously, Mrs. Deer awakes from her DIHS, jumps over a log and hops down the other side of the hill, disappearing deep into the underbrush.

A Rattler's Tale

Time stops. By sheer luck, Mr. M. L.'s fall has not broken the windshield. But his 100+ pound body has made a serious dent in the hood. From where I lay, I think I can hear human hearts thumping and lungs pumping. Slowly, they recover from the surprise and Mr. H. drives toward the cabin.

Like I say, I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

