

Dear Fellow KAMFES Members and Friends:

I've done my share of fishing in my life. As a matter of fact, I just got back. However, surprisingly, it took me 20+ years on the water to see my first otter swimming around in the wild. For those of you who are not familiar with these critters, they look a lot like an overgrown ferret or mink. You won't typically mistake an otter for a mink as an otter may grow to 3 or 4 feet long and minks are just plain cute with their much smaller stature (and scarf / hat potentials). Fishermen recognize otters for one main reason.....they are much better at catching fish than we are. If you see one backstroking around and showing off, the likelihood of you catching a fish is slim in that area. We typically think of these things as adorable, but make no mistake, otters have sharp claws and even sharper teeth used to cut into shells and shred fish. (oh, to heck with it, they are still pretty cute) The reason I bring this critter up is due to a 96 year old man being attacked by one in Venice, Florida. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/video/elderly-man-violently-attacked-otter-10041566> The otter attacked the man on his morning walk. Someone found the man on the ground *with the otter eating on him*. The 3 footer was hit with a shovel, its head stomped and crushed...and still it attacked another man and authorities before it was finally shot and killed. It was tested and found positive for rabies. The lesson to be learned is that even cute critters, if they are warm blooded, could have rabies. I've seen people playing with and feeding raccoons in nearly every State Park we have in Kentucky. Sure they are cute "*and use their little hands*" to eat with, but I have to wonder when the day will come that someone gets a finger bitten off by a rabid one (or just one having a bad day). The fact is the general public doesn't seem to have the awareness or fear to stay away from angry wild animals due to their seemingly cute appearance. The public service analogy today is.....Cujo was cute too when he chased his tail and begged for treats...later, as I recall, he ate half of a Toyota trying to bite people. Yes, it was a movie, but it is enough for me.

On the rabies cusp...it appears bats in the northeast may have a cocaine problem, and they are coming this way with free samples. OK, so I made up the part about the cocaine, but "White Nose Syndrome" is indeed plaguing bat populations and experts in Kentucky and Indiana fear the disease is on its way here. Last month 2 bats near the Kentucky border in Tennessee were diagnosed with the syndrome. First found in 2006 in New York, white nose syndrome has moved its way down the east coast bringing with it the potential to kill every bat in a cave when it attacks. Ironically, many believe it has been in European countries for as many as 23 years....only....its not killing their bats (the quality of cave life and bat health care system is just not as good here in the U.S...I have no idea if that's true actually...I use a HMO so maybe I'm just bitter) Its believed to be a fungus that forms a white ring around the bat's muzzle and sometimes on their wings. The cause of the disease has yet to be determined (although my theory for a cure is to supply them with Kleenex so they can blow their little noses..my little girl gets white around her muzzle all the time). Some experts believe that the syndrome wakes bats up from hibernation only for them to go out into the snowy winter looking for food and die. Personally, I think they itch themselves to death (if you've ever had athlete's foot, you'll understand). Either way, bats are dying....by the thousands. Initially you might think, "oh well...bats freak me out anyway....good riddance"-and *I understand*. But the problem is that any given bat can consume up to 3,000 insects in ONE NIGHT. Do the

math in your head on how many bugs that 300,000 bats eat in a summer and depending on your math skills, at some point you'll realize.....you are going to need more OFF. While bats themselves are vectors for diseases such as rabies, encounters with them are rare. On the other hand, encounters with mosquitoes, also vectors for many more diseases and major food source for bats, are NOT uncommon and could become a lot MORE common. <http://www.wlky.com/news/22878774/detail.html> Hey, I'm no bat lover, but I'm thinking we may miss the little fellas. Keep an eye on this...More information about White Nose can be found here:
http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/

Thanks for being a member of the Kentucky Association of Milk, Food and Environmental Sanitarians.
KAMFES Membership

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