

Vida del Mar Safety and Security Committee

Insects, Snakes, and Amphibians

Vida del Mar (VDM) was carved from the Mexican jungle. While VDM appears to be a lush landscaped area, it is still just a jungle under the control of the gardening staff. Without constant care, Vida would return to a jungle state in a very short time. There are many species of the animal world at Vida. Most are not aggressive and want to avoid you as much as you want to avoid them. Remember, unknown does not mean bad.

INSECTS AND SPIDERS: There are a few insects and spiders that we would like to help you understand.

1. **Scorpions.** There are a number of varieties of scorpions in the area. They are most recognizable by their curved tail and pincers. They are nocturnal, hunt at night and look for a safe place to spend the daylight hours. Be sure to shake out shoes and slippers before putting them on. Also be careful when putting your hand under counters to pull things out. They can climb so higher units are as susceptible to scorpions as lower units, but in general, scorpion sightings are not that common. Don't let children or pets get near, as scorpions are fast and can strike with venom that can be very dangerous. In general, black, shiny scorpions are not as dangerous as the smaller brown scorpions. If stung, go to a clinic immediately for a serum shot. If you see a scorpion, do not try to handle it yourself. Call the office.
2. **Paper Wasps.** Individual hornets and wasps can be very dangerous and can be very aggressive especially near a nest. Unfortunately, paper wasp nests are very common in our area. They are often golf ball size or smaller and are found hanging from cement overhangs such as our outdoor walkways and bridges. They leave one wasp as a guard and if you get too close the guard wasp may attack and sting. A general tip is to look up when you exit your condo door to see if a new nest has been started near your location. Call the office to report new nests so the gardening staff can remove them. Stings from wasps and hornets can be painful and if a person is allergic to the venom, it can be life threatening.
3. **Bees.** Most bees in our area are of the honeybee variety. They are non-aggressive if you leave them alone. More people are stung by this specie at the beach than in the vicinity of the condos. People step on bees on the beach when not wearing shoes. The bees are grounded because of salt accumulation during flight over the water. They are washed up onto the beach, dying. People are not expecting to see bees on the beach, step on them and are stung. Best advice is to watch for them and wear something on your feet at the beach.
The big, black Mexican bumble bees are pollinators. They are not aggressive if left alone. The small, black, slow flying bees commonly found near ficus and ixora bushes (common near Vida's roads) are the main pollinators for these two types of plants and are very beneficial. Best advice, observe and enjoy.

4. **Tarantulas.** Big, black, hairy and scary-looking, tarantulas are non-aggressive and non-lethal. They are ground dwellers and cannot climb so it is a very rare occurrence when one is found in a Vida condo. In the wild, simply observe and enjoy.
5. **Madre de Alacron.** “Mother of Scorpions” is really a “false scorpion.” Although fierce looking, this is a solitary hunter that moves at night and because of its size and appearance, it is often destroyed. It can give off a vinegar-like smell when annoyed. It is harmless and if one is in your condo, ask the office to have it removed/released. Observe and enjoy.
6. **Small jumping spiders.** These spiders, 1/8 to 1/4 “ in diameter are very common in our area. They are solitary hunters but do not make webs. They are not aggressive but do not handle. Observe and enjoy.
7. **Mosquitoes.** Mosquitoes themselves are more of an annoyance than a threat to safety. The threat comes from the diseases they can carry. In our area, the major threat is from dengue fever. There are 4 kinds of dengue fever. Two have flu-like symptoms and can be dealt with easily like you treat the flu – rest, hydration, etc. Two types of dengue are quite severe and require medical attention. Dengue fever is spread by daytime mosquitoes as they make their rounds. A mosquito will bite someone infected with dengue and draw blood, then go to the next person who they will then infect from the first person. Always wear insect repellent if going into town or where crowds of people gather during the day. Mosquitoes are also active in the late afternoon and early evening so be prepared with a good insect repellent when visiting friends on the decks of condos, open-air restaurants, near woods, wetlands or areas near still fresh water..
8. **Ants.** Ants are the jungle clean up team. Ants use scouts who are sent out looking for sources of food in the jungle. When the scout finds something, the ant colony is notified and collectors are sent to bring the food source home. Unfortunately, ants do not recognize Vida’s property lines. They send scouts who come onto Vida property and into condos where they see kitchens, countertops and garbage cans as just another possible source of food. If the scouts find something, they contact the ant colony and collectors are dispatched to bring the food home. By keeping floors and countertops clean of scraps, crumbs, etc., and garbage cans clean, the scouts will have nothing to find and continue their search at another location. There are times when large numbers of ants will move to relocate or times when they are at war with another ant colony. If this should happen, call the office. They have chemicals to deal with these situations. Stay away from a moving colony of ants.
9. **Termites.** Termites eat cellulose and love to find a piece of wood in a wet area or in contact with the soil. Fix any leaks in your kitchen or bathroom plumbing or you will have a condition where the moisture from the leak will mix with the wood in your cabinets and make an ideal location for termites to set up shop.

10. **Preying mantis.** This is among the most beneficial of all insects but is also one of the most curious in appearance. They look similar to branches, can be green to brown in color, they can fly, they have triangular heads, similar to comic artists' depictions of Martians, and they grow to be 4-6". They are insect feeders; flies, bees, ants and plant-killing aphids. Observe and respect this magnificent insect.

SNAKES: There are several types of snakes in our area. Most are not aggressive but all should be respected.

1. **Coral Snakes and King Snakes.** These two types of snakes are similar in appearance but are a world apart in risk spectrum. Both have bands around their bodies but while a king snake is harmless when left alone, a coral snake is poisonous and quite dangerous if handled. They are similar enough in appearance so that neither should be approached. Call the office to report either of these snakes. Do not even touch a "dead" snake because of the danger of the venom.
2. **Boas.** Boas are harmless unless irritated. They can bite so stay away. Movies have given boas a bad rap. They will not attack and wrap themselves around you. They much prefer smaller prey that is easier to swallow and digest. Call the office if you have a concern.
3. **Vine snakes.** Vine snakes have stripes the length of their bodies. They are long and thin, very fast and are often found in or near vines or bushes where they hunt for insects during the day. They are harmless to humans, shy and rarely seen. Call the office if you have a concern.

AMPHIBIANS: There is just one amphibian to be concerned about in this area.

1. **Pacific Marine Toad.** Pacific Toads are quite common. They are dark brown in color with dry and warty skin. They are territorial and often stay for years in the same area. These toads hunt at night and it is often reported that they hunt in pairs. If left alone, they are non-aggressive. Pacific toads have poison glands on the top of their heads. They can release a toxin, so it is best not to handle them. Normally, there is no problem with the toxin for humans unless one has a cut or open sore. **THE PROBLEM IS WITH PETS.** A dog or cat that bites or mouths a Pacific toad, may have a seizure or may even die as a result of the toxin. Be very careful at night with your pets.
2. **Frogs.** The frogs found in our area are harmless. Respect and enjoy.

TIDE POOLS: Tide pools are very interesting places to explore because we never know what we will find there. Most living things that reside in tide pools have ways to protect themselves when the water is shallow. This includes spines, camouflage, chemicals, teeth, etc. When exploring our tide pools, always protect your hands and feet and enjoy the experience.

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Thank you, Susan and Richard.



Scorpion



Paper Wasp



Tarantula



Termites



Praying Mantis



Coral Snake



Kingsnake



Boa Constrictor



Vine Snake



Pacific Cane Toad



Madre de Alacron (Mother of Scorpions)