

Get into WALKING

SURVIVING FARM ANIMALS

Everyone's heard the horror stories about deadly cattle-trampings, and most of us have been herded across a field by curious cows. Here we show you how to negotiate everything from bulls to bull-terriers.

OUR EXPERTS



Mervin Mullard,
Farmer at Middle
Knuck Farm, Shrops.



Eugene Suggett,
Senior Policy Officer
at the Ramblers.



Ed Bailey, President of
the National Farmers'
Union Cymru.

Cattle

Bovines tend to be placid beasts, so cattle-versus-walker confrontations are thankfully rare. The Health and Safety Executive investigated only 46 incidents between 1996 and 2006, of which seven unfortunately resulted in death. The common factors in those cases were cows with calves and walkers with dogs. But armed with our expert advice, you have nothing to fear.

BULLS

WHAT'S THE LAW?

Dairy breeds such as Ayrshires, Friesians and Holsteins are banned from fields with public rights of way as part of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Bulls under 10 months old are allowed, and so are other breeds if they are accompanied by cows or heifers.

WHEN ARE BULLS DANGEROUS?

Farmer Mervin Mullard from Middle Knuck Farm, Shropshire, says, "Bulls only act aggressively to protect their herd if they are threatened, which they may feel if you have a dog or approach them."

Eugene Suggett, Senior Policy Officer for the Ramblers, advises: "Signs that a bull is about to charge include pawing the ground. A bull may also 'growl', glare, toss his head and show you his side to display how powerfully big he is.

Talk quietly and calmly, and cattle will be your friend.



PHOTO: DICK W. MANNING/GETTY IMAGES

☞ Cows can be more dangerous than bulls if their calf is threatened. They see dogs as the enemy, and if you're trying to protect a dog it can spell trouble. ☞

WHAT CAN I DO?

"If you run, the bull may chase you," says Mervin. "Walk calmly through the field, talking in a relaxed tone to show you pose no threat, and keep your dog under control."

Adds Eugene, "If a bull displays charging signs, back away slowly to the nearest exit. Bullocks – young castrated bulls – will sometimes charge out of curiosity, and if you stand your ground they will stop short of you. If a bull charges from close quarters you will not be able to outrun him, so throw your backpack or jacket as hard as you can to one side and he should follow that instead. If that fails, stand your ground, yell at him, then quickly side-step out of his way and run to safety."

COWS

WHAT'S THE LAW?

There are no restrictions on cows in fields with public rights of way across them, but farmers do try to use alternative fields when cows are calving. Farmers can also erect temporary fencing or provide an alternative route.

WHEN ARE COWS DANGEROUS?

"Cows can be more dangerous than bulls if their calf is threatened," says Mervin. Most incidents occur due to cows protecting their calves from a dog, even if it has no plans to attack. "Cows see dogs as the enemy and if you're trying to

protect a dog, you may be in trouble," says Ed Bailey, President of the National Farmers' Union Cymru (NFU). Any cow can also become aggressive when stressed by weather, illness or simply an unusual disturbance.

WHAT CAN I DO?

"It's very dangerous to pass between a cow and its calf," says Eugene. "Move quickly and quietly through the field, walking around the herd, giving them a wide berth and keeping dogs under control."

Mervin adds, "If cattle chase you, let your dog go. They will usually chase the dog instead. Unless it's old or injured it can outrun cattle and get through a hedge far more easily than you can!"

Dogs

There were over 5,000 hospital admissions caused by people being bitten or struck by a dog in England in 2008-9, but the figures don't show where the incidents took place. "Farm dogs tend not to be aggressive because they are working dogs and farmers need an animal they can control," says Mervin.

WHAT'S THE LAW?

Aggressive dogs are not supposed to run loose on any property with a right-of-way through it, as they could cause an obstruction of the highway under the Highways Act 1980, or a common-law nuisance.

"By law, you must control your dog so it doesn't 'worry' the farm animals," says Mervin. Farmers are legally allowed to shoot any dog that worries their animals.

WHEN ARE DOGS DANGEROUS?

As the saying goes, their bark is often worse than their bite. "When a farm dog barks it is simply warning you that you are on its property," says Mervin. "As long as you don't approach it or start running, it usually won't bother you."

WHAT CAN I DO?

If you run away the dog will have his suspicions confirmed and chase you like a real intruder! Mervin has the answer: "Talk quietly to the dog. It doesn't matter what you say but your tone should be non-aggressive."

Dog trainer Graham Thompson adds, "The key is not to look at the dog but stand sideways or with your back to it. Consciously relax your whole body by loosening and dropping your shoulders and

slouching a little while you move away slowly. Keeping a backpack or loose jacket in between you and the dog can also protect you from a bite, but never waggle these as this will increase excitement."

If you have a dog, a farm hound may view it as a threat: "Stay alert to where you are walking and get your dog on a lead before you reach a farm," advises Mervin.

Any dog about to fight may stare, growl, posture and exhibit stiff body movements. Prevention is best, so keep your dog close and use command words to get its attention focused back on you.

If a fight does ensue, options include spraying them with water, or (keeping your hands away from their heads) pulling back on their hind legs or tail to separate them – but watch out for them turning to bite you while doing it!

Your instinct is to run, and fast, but it's better to walk away slowly.



FIVE MORE VICIOUS BEASTS

According to Natural England, all animals are usually very placid, and will only turn nasty if they feel threatened. Give them a wide berth and walk past calmly and confidently, with your dog under strict control.



HORSES

It's very rare for a horse to pay attention to a walker. Avoid feeding them, as this can cause inter-horse rivalry and jostling. Walk slowly past via the front end to avoid an unexpected kick.

SHEEP

Overly curious sheep can be a nuisance, but nothing more. Just keep on walking through.

SNAKES

Adders are our only venomous snake and there hasn't been a fatality for 20 years. Stand away until they move, or rustle something to alert them to your presence if they're snoozing. Never poke them, as UK reptiles are protected.

GOATS

A goat's desire to see if your backpack is edible can be a pain. Avoid carrying goat's cheese sarnies.

GEESE

Geese have an aggressive hiss – so hiss back and extend your arm. The goose will think you're a bigger goose with a really long neck, and back down. Genius!

► For more advice visit naturalengland.org.uk; hse.gov.uk; and ramblers.org.uk

