

In the News

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Screwworm outbreak in Key deer

In September 2016, officials discovered an outbreak of New World screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) in Florida's endangered Key deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), this outbreak, which killed >135 animals, was the first in Florida in 50 years. So far, Florida has spent about US\$500,000 to protect native wildlife and the state's US\$1 billion ranching industry from the deadly disease. Despite devastating effects of the disease, infected animals can be treated with antiparasite medicine during early stages, allowing a full recovery and preventing further spreading the disease. The USDA also released >100 million sterile screwworm flies to combat the spread of the disease, according to the *Miami Herald*. As of January 2017, only 1 infected screwworm fly had been recovered from the wild, and no new cases of the disease had been found in wild Key deer.



Figure 1. Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

Rabid bobcat attacks diners

A bobcat (*Lynx rufus*; Figure 1) interrupted the lunch of 20 people in Connecticut in January 2017 when it entered a greenhouse where the group was eating and jumped on a woman, according to a local news station. After being fought off by 2 other diners, the bobcat headed to a nearby wooded area but became aggressive



Figure 2. Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

again when officers arrived on the scene. Officers shot and killed the animal, which later tested positive for rabies. The diners involved in the altercation were taken to a local hospital and treated for injuries.

Another record year for Florida panther deaths

For the third year in a row, Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*; Figure 2) deaths have reached a record high in 2016, The *Florida Times-Union* reported. The deaths were mostly a product of panther–vehicle collisions. Of the 42 panthers killed, 34 were the result of collisions with vehicles, which also sets a record for the number killed by vehicles in a single year. Because of the high number of roadway deaths, organizations such as The Humane Society are calling for increased numbers of wildlife

crossing structures to allow panthers and other wildlife to avoid vehicles. This record year comes with the first female panther recorded north of the Caloosahatchee River since 1973. The Caloosahatchee was previously thought to be the northern boundary of panther breeding territory in Florida.

Western states feed winter wildlife

Due to the harsh winter conditions in the western United States, state wildlife agencies have supplied supplemental food for both elk (*Cervus canadensis*; Figure 3) and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), according to the *LA Times*. In many areas, feed sites keep elk from foraging on hay bales put out for cattle or gathering near roadways, where they pose a danger to drivers. In areas where winter feeding of elk is common, such as Elk National Wildlife Refuge, feeding began several weeks earlier than normal because of bad weather. Winter weather was also blamed for the death of 50 pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) when the animals were forced into residential areas, where they fed on poisonous Japanese yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) shrubs.



Figure 3. Bull elk (*Cervus canadensis*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

Fences reduce animal–vehicle collisions

During spring 2017, the Colorado Department of Transportation will be expanding its wildlife exclusion fence along I-70, a local news station reported. An additional 18.5 miles will be added to the existing 33 miles of fencing along the interstate. In some areas of Colorado, such as along Highway 9, wildlife exclusion fences have reduced animal–vehicle collisions 90%, a promising number that facilitates the approval of future wildlife mitigation projects.



Figure 4. Bison (*Bison bison*) with calves (Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

Bison under quarantine

Bison (*Bison bison*) near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation are under quarantine after an illegal application of the rodenticide, Rozol, had been used to kill prairie dogs on a nearby ranch, according to the Associated Press. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigated the incident after several bison and bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) were found dead on the ranch. The EPA's findings indicate that the rodenticide was broadcast on the ground rather than applied to burrows and that carcasses were not removed, allowing both bison (Figure 4) and eagles access to the poison. A mitigation effort is underway to prevent additional animals from being harmed by the poison.

Raccoons making a home in Philly

A local news station in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania reported that overabundant raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are causing problems for local residents. The Animal Care and Control Team of Philadelphia receives daily calls about raccoons foraging in residents' trash or crawling into attics and walls. As a solution to the problem, the City Council passed a bill in 2011 that would allow for the capture and relocation of raccoons from the city, but state law prohibits the release of captured wildlife. In some parts of the city, however, active efforts to clean up abandoned buildings have reduced the number of areas available for raccoons to use and helped to control the human–wildlife conflicts.