

In the News

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Cormorants killing cypress trees

Residents living near Reelfoot Lake in western Tennessee are concerned about the numbers of double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*; Figure 1) that inhabit the lake, a local TV station reported. These migratory waterbirds often roost or



Figure 1. Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

nest in trees located in the middle of bodies of water. Cormorant roosts are causing problems for Reelfoot's famed bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) as feces accumulate on and eventually kill the trees. Many cypress trees are older than Reelfoot, which was created during the earthquake of 1812. Much of Reelfoot's value comes from its scenic beauty that draws in tourists and fishermen, but locals fear the value will be lost if something is not done to protect the iconic cypress. Some states with similar problems, such as South Carolina and Wisconsin, recently tried to control cormorant populations, but progress has been little and slow, forcing many states to apply for federal permits to kill the birds.

Painted tortoises...and birds

In early August 2016, Florida wildlife officials issued a statement asking residents not to paint turtles and tortoises, the Washington Post reported. The statement came after 2 gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*) turned up with brightly painted shells. In Florida, it is illegal to possess turtles and tortoises with painted shells, and gopher tortoises receive

extra protection as a threatened species in the state. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), painting a turtle or tortoise shell makes the animal more vulnerable to predators, reduces its ability to absorb sunlight, and introduces toxins into the animal's body. Several days after its first announcement, FWC released another statement instructing people not to artificially color wildlife after a white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) was found covered in orange spray paint. Paint restricts the bird's ability to thermoregulate and makes it more visible to predators. White ibises, are a protected bird species in the state.

Hawk breaks into home

A New Jersey man was startled one morning in late July 2016 to find a red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*; Figure 2) had broken through a window of his house and was trapped in his sun room. Local police and wildlife officials captured and released the bird, which flew away unharmed.



Figure 2. Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

Eagle attacks Coast Guard officer

While hiking up a mountain near Unalaska, Alaska, an off-duty Coast Guard official was accosted by an unidentified eagle, according to Alaska Dispatch News. The bird swooped at the Coast Guardsman several times before hooking a talon into the hood of the man's sweatshirt. As the man fled, his cell phone fell out of his pocket and was carted off by the eagle. Eagle populations are abnormally high in the Unalaska area because eagles use household and fishing waste from humans as food sources. Once considered an endangered species in the contiguous United States, eagles have made a comeback due to the elimination of eagle hunting and the prohibition of the use of the pesticide DDT, as well as protection under federal law.

Protecting crop-raiding elephants

Conservationists in Tanzania are using an unorthodox method to deter elephants (*Loxodonta* spp.) from invading crops. The new method is a 4-stage process of flashing lights, loud noises, chili-powder-filled condoms, and Roman candles. Lights and noise are the first line of defense, but if those do not deter the elephants, villagers can throw condoms packed with chili powder and a firecracker that disperses the powder in the air and affects the elephants' olfactory system. If all else fails, Roman candles are set off near an intruding elephant, which usually deters them. Other methods of deterrent are being researched, such as placing beehives around crop fields or playing calls of defensive female elephants to ward off lone males. Contact with humans endangers elephants, as villagers often kill the animals if trouble persists. Providing locals with affordable, non-lethal control methods could make people more likely to turn in poachers, rather than letting the poachers remove problem elephants.

No black bear hunt in Florida

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has decided not to have a black bear (*Ursus americanus*) hunt in 2016, a Tampa news station reported. The state held a highly controversial bear hunt during the fall of 2015 in an attempt to reduce negative bear-human interactions (Figure 3). The original hunt was shut down after 304 bears were harvested in just 2 days, exceeding the number of desired bear harvests in several regions opened for hunting. Before deciding against the hunt, commissioners considered a more conservative hunt with special regulations to better control bear



Figure 3. Black bear (*Ursus americanus*) taking trash from residential area (Photos by Mike W. Matthews)

harvests, but ultimately decided to delay another hunt until 2017. Critics of the hunt say state wildlife officials have not adequately studied the impacts a hunt might have on the state's population of bears, which was only recently removed from the state's list of threatened species. According to *Field and Stream* (2016), environmental groups even petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to declare the Florida black bear an endangered species in April 2016. On the other hand, proponents of the hunt cite increasing bear-human conflicts as a reason to reduce the bear population. Additionally, the 2015 bear hunt raised more than \$375,000 that will directly be used in the state's bear management program, one of the largest funding events for the program.

Wildlife:2, Large Hadron Collider:0

The Large Hadron Collider, designed to smash protons together at almost the speed of light, was shut down in April after a weasel (*Mustela* spp.) chewed through the power cables, causing a short circuit, according to W. Hoffman of Inverse. This was not the first time that wildlife has shut down the Large Hadron Collider, which cost >\$13 billion to build and operate. In 2009, a bird dropped a baguette onto the collider and shut down operations for approximately a month. The shutdown caused by the weasel will only take a few days to repair, but getting the machine recalibrated and ready for proton smashing will take a few additional weeks.