

In the News

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Coyotes cause problems at airports

In November 2016, 5 coyotes (*Canis latrans*; Figure 1) were euthanized near LaGuardia Airport in New York after officials stated that the animals posed a significant threat to passengers and employees. However, the action sparked outrage from animal rights activists, who claimed that the animals should have been removed and sent to a wildlife sanctuary. According to the *New York Daily News*, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation responded, saying that relocation is not possible for animals accustomed to humans. New York is not the only state with recent coyote problems at airports. Airports in both Kentucky and Texas, as well as some Canadian airports, have reported flight delays because of coyotes in recent months.



Figure 1. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

No one likes a rat, especially the kiwis

In late 2016, the government of New Zealand launched a new program to rid the nation of non-native, nuisance animals by 2050, NPR reported. Prior to European settlement, the islands of New Zealand lacked mammalian predators, which allowed for thriving communities of unique birds, such as the iconic kiwi (*Apteryx australis*). Now, rats (*Rattus* sp.), brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*,

and other non-native predators number in the tens of millions. Estimates put the cost of the nationwide program in billions of dollars. However, volunteers are already stepping up to assist in the program by setting and checking traplines for rats and other rodents. Scientists and private companies are working on innovative solutions to cut costs and create new tools, but some critics claim the eradication program is too ambitious and expensive. Other critics attacked the program as too lenient, since it did not target feral cats. Proponents of the program are hopeful that growing public support will provide the momentum necessary for the project to succeed.

Wildlife petting industry questioned

A sharp rise in the number of captive-wildlife attacks on tourists prompted officials in the South-African government to reevaluate the wildlife-petting industry, according to a local newspaper in South Africa. While the wildlife-petting industry is an important tourist attraction in South Africa, many critics worry that allowing tourists into enclosures with large carnivores, such as lions (*Panthera leo*; Figure 2) and cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) is an unnecessary risk. Additionally, since many of the preserves that allow wildlife petting also have ongoing reintroduction efforts, released



Figure 2. Lion (*Panthera leo*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

animals often have trouble readjusting to the wild after close interaction with humans while in captivity. Conservation organizations, such as the Endangered Wildlife Trust, hope that the response to these attacks will place more value on wildlife in the wild and less on treating them like pets.

Dumpster-diving vultures

In central Spain, Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) are making a remarkable comeback by utilizing open-air landfills as a food source, *New Scientist* reported. In previous decades, Egyptian vulture populations declined significantly across the globe due to poisoning, collisions with powerlines, and increased regulations on the disposal of carcasses, which limited food sources. As of 2014, the population of Egyptian vultures in Catalonia included 25 breeding pairs, up from just 1 breeding pair in 1988. Despite the hope recent population increases bring, landfills are becoming a thing of the past, as the European Commission seeks to limit construction of new landfills. If Egyptian vulture populations are expected to persist, officials need to rethink current regulations that limit vultures' natural food supply.

When vampires (bats) attack

In northeast Brazil, a string of vampire bat (*Desmodus* sp.) attacks on humans has sparked fear among local residents, according to *The Telegraph*. At least 40 people have been treated for rabies and 1 man has died after being bitten by vampire bats. Due to loss of habitat, vampire bats are nesting closer to humans, increasing the number of human–bat encounters. Officials are working to reduce vampire bat populations in populated areas. In the meantime, residents are being advised to keep windows and doors shut at night to exclude the bats from their homes.

New feral hog bait

Introduced as a new tool to help eradicate wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*; Figure 3), Kaput® Feral Hog Bait contains a popular rodenticide, warfarin. The drug, to which hogs are very susceptible, is also known as the blood thinner, Coumadin. While the bait has been approved by the EPA, some officials have raised concerns over the bait's effects on non-target animals and humans. Warfarin doses in humans are tricky to



Figure 3. Feral hog (*Sus scrofa*; Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

prescribe, since a safe dose for 1 person can be toxic to another. Biologists in Louisiana worried that black bears (*Ursus americanus*) might inadvertently consume the bait, according to *The Times-Picayune*. *The New York Times* also reported that meat processors in Texas worry about selling potentially contaminated meat. Kaput® Feral Hog Bait contains a fat-soluble dye that is supposed to indicate contaminated pigs; however, low doses of warfarin may not be detected in slaughtered animals. Due to concern about Kaput® Feral Hog Bait, some states that had originally greenlighted the product are pulling back. Scimetrics also pulled its registration from Texas due to impending legal battles.

Iconic white Yellowstone wolf shot

In early April 2017, hikers in Yellowstone National Park found an injured grey wolf (*Canis lupis*) that was later euthanized by park officials. The 12-year-old, alpha female was 1 of 3 known white wolves within Yellowstone and was sought by photographers due to her unique coat coloration. The National Park Service and Wolves of the Rockies, a wolf advocacy group, are offering a joint \$10,200 for information about the incident. More than 20 years after the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone, some local residents are still unhappy with this charismatic carnivore roaming the landscape.