

In the News

JASON MATTHEWS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, 600 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Place, Suite 322, Louisville, KY 40202, USA jason_matthews@fws.gov

JOE N. CAUDELL, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Bloomington Field Office, 5596 East State Road 46, Bloomington, IN 47401, USA

Wildlife Services sued over animal control methods

In summer 2017, animal welfare groups filed a federal lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services (WS) to force the agency to examine its methods for controlling human–wildlife conflicts in northern California. Plaintiffs argued that lethal-control methods employed by WS violate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires federal agencies to examine and periodically reevaluate the environmental impacts of their actions and proposed alternative actions. Plaintiffs argued that WS has not adequately evaluated “significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.” According to *Newsweek*, an attorney for one of the plaintiffs cited an incident in early 2017 in which an M-44 placed by WS in Idaho injured a teen and killed his dog as a tragic incident, requiring supplemental NEPA analysis of WS animal control methods. WS conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) in 1997 and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for their Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) program in northern California. However, according to the plaintiffs, the documents are outdated, and a new EA or Environmental Impact Statement is required. In 2016, WS announced its plan to phase out their 1994 Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and rewrite existing NEPA documents for their WDM program to reflect updated information.

CWD-infected monkeys

Preliminary results from an ongoing study conducted by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency claim to have infected cynomolgus macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) through consumption of meat from infected deer. An infectious disease found in cervids and caused by prions, CWD is a nearly indestructible, misfolded protein that

degenerates brain tissue. The Canadian study is the first known transmission of CWD to a nonhuman primate. While the Centers for Disease Control and many state wildlife agencies recommend not eating meat from infected deer, elk, or moose, there is no known case of CWD transmission to humans. The Canadian study is scheduled to conclude in 2018, and the results have yet to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

A bobcat “rescue”

A well-intentioned woman in western Tennessee who brought home what she thought was an injured bobcat (*Lynx rufus*; Figure 1) needed rescuing herself after the animal holed up in her laundry room, a local NBC station reported. After driving the bobcat home in the front seat of her vehicle, the woman enclosed it in her laundry room until she could get it to a wildlife rehabilitation center the next morning. However, after getting some rest, the bobcat became “unmanageable,” according to the woman. Officials with the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) released the bobcat and reiterated that the public should leave capturing injured wildlife to professionals.

Kangaroos confuse self-driving cars

As many car-manufacturing companies develop self-driving cars, Volvo has discovered an unexpected problem with the Large Animal



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

Detection system in its automated vehicles: kangaroos (*Macropus* spp.). According to *The Guardian*, the software system designed to detect movements of animals such as moose (*Alces alces*) does not recognize the hopping movements of kangaroos. The system uses the road as a reference point for determining an animal's distance from the vehicle, which works well for linear-moving animals, since the amount of road visible between the animal and vehicle remains constant. However, as kangaroos hop across the road, more road is visible when the animal is in the air, causing the vehicle to reason that the kangaroo is farther away, which could result in crashes. Volvo is currently working to solve the problem before the release of its vehicle in 2020.

Rabid deer confirmed in N.C.

In September 2017, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) confirmed a rare case of rabies in a white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), according to the *Citizen-Times*. The infected deer was reported to the NCWRC and tested for rabies by the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, since it exhibited alopecia (baldness), a common clinical sign of rabies in deer. Rabies is rare in deer, but all mammals are susceptible to the disease, including humans and pets. Officials with NCWRC warned residents to be wary of animals that seem sick or injured and to report them to the agency.

Woodpeckers damage power poles

Over the past year, woodpeckers (Picidae) in southeast England damaged thousands of power poles by drilling holes into posts, according to the BBC. Once the birds begin drilling holes, they often return to make more, sometimes rearing young there. UK Power Networks, which supplies electricity for the area, began filling the holes with a wood filler that includes a bird repellent. One theory why the birds are targeting power poles rather than trees is that the poles vibrate at the same frequency as trees containing mites. Since woodpeckers are a protected species in the United Kingdom, power companies cannot harass or remove them from the poles.

British badger culling expanded

To control bovine tuberculosis (TB), the British government expanded areas where European badgers (*Meles meles*) could be culled in 2017,



Figure 2. Peacock (*Pavo* sp.; photo by Mike W. Matthews)

according to *The Guardian*. Bovine TB, for which badgers are the primary wildlife reservoir in Britain, caused an estimated 26,000 cattle to be slaughtered in 2016, costing around £100 million. While many farmers and some ministers support the expansion, other officials and scientists say that culls would have little impact on controlling the disease. Critics of the expansion view restricting cattle movements, biosecurity, and vaccinating badgers as keys to controlling bovine TB. The British government reinstated its badger vaccination program for 2017 to create a barrier between highly infected areas and those with few bovine TB cases, as well as issued restrictions on transporting cattle in high-disease areas.

Neighborhood peacocks ruffle feathers

According to the *Miami Herald*, overabundant peafowl (*Pavo* sp.; Figure 2) are ruffling the feathers of residents of Miami-Dade County in southern Florida. The birds were likely released as yard decorations, but the population has expanded rapidly. Not all residents view the exotic peafowl as beautiful additions to neighborhoods. Destroyed gardens, loud calls, and copious amounts of feces are just a few complaints from less enthusiastic homeowners. While community leaders have discussed removing the peafowl, county law prohibits capturing or killing the birds, since Miami is a bird sanctuary. Even if residents could capture the birds, state law prohibits releasing exotic species into the wild. For now, officials have issued a ban on feeding the birds and are looking for humane solutions to the problem.

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