

In the News

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Bison escape in Hawaii floodwaters

As flooding covered the island of Kauai, Hawaii in April 2018, residents weren't the only ones trying to escape the rising waters. The island's herd of around 100 bison (*Bison bison*; Figure 1) were seen swimming in flood waters and roaming beaches and neighborhoods on the island. Residents, unaccustomed to seeing half-ton mammals roaming the streets, had several close calls with bison while driving or walking near their houses. Local paniolo (cowboys) eventually managed to collect most of the herd on a flooded beach and transport them back to a local ranch.



Figure 1. Bison (*Bison bison*; photo by Mike W. Matthews)

Feral cats, cold-blooded killers

A study published in *Wildlife Research* provides evidence that feral cat (*Felis catus*) populations in Australia are wreaking havoc on native reptiles. In total, researchers estimate Australia's several million feral cats eat >1 million reptiles per day. *The Sydney Morning Herald* previously reported that the Australian government initiated a program in 2015 to cull 2 million feral cats by 2020. In the meantime, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy built 27 miles of electric fencing to create a 23,000-acre preserve without feral cats. Around the globe, responses to feral cats vary. For instance, New Zealand began a program in 2016 to eliminate all nonnative, mammal predators,

including feral cats, by 2050. In the United States, however, PBS reported that animal-rights activists have largely limited the lethal removal of feral cats, advocating for trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs over more intensive management. The city of Honolulu, Hawaii passed a budget in June 2018 that added US\$300,000 to support TNR on the island of Oahu, according to the *Honolulu Civil Beat*. Officials with Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources testified against the budget resolution promoting TNR, citing their responsibility to protect endangered species and comply with the Endangered Species Act.

Wildlife crossings proposed in North Dakota

The North Dakota Department of Transportation is including wildlife crossings in its plan for an expansion of Highway 85 in the western part of the state, the *West Fargo Pioneer* reported. Human population growth due to oil booms has wildlife and transportation officials working together to provide safe roadways and habitat connectivity. Currently, 2 wildlife underpasses are planned for bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), respectively. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD) is also promoting the creation of additional wildlife overpasses, since bighorn sheep and pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) are more receptive to using overpasses. Recently, another highway expansion in the state included an underpass for moose (*Alces alces*), but evaluation of its effectiveness is ongoing by NDGFD.

Wisconsin city culls turkeys

Wildlife officials in Madison, Wisconsin culled nearly a dozen wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*; Figure 2) from a local park in December 2017, according to the *Wisconsin State Journal*. The birds were captured with a rocket net and processed by a butcher who donated the meat to needy residents. By removing turkeys, park officials

hope to reduce vegetation damage caused by the birds. Now park officials are monitoring the park's habitat to determine if more turkeys need to be removed this year. The Madison wild turkeys had their 15 minutes of fame when residents created a Facebook group and short film about the birds.



Figure 2. Wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*; photo by Mike W. Matthews)

WS begins feral swine bait tests

According to AgNet West Radio Network, Wildlife Services (WS) recently began field testing toxic bait stations for controlling feral swine (*Sus scrofa*) in Texas. An Environmental Protection Agency Experimental Use Permit allows WS to use sodium nitrate baits, a preservative commonly used to cure meat, which is toxic to feral swine in high doses. Most animals die within a few hours of ingesting the toxin in a manner similar to carbon monoxide poisoning. During the trials, WS is evaluating the efficacy of the bait and bait stations, as well as assessing the risks to nontarget species that may encounter the bait. After the conclusion of the first trial, Dr. Kurt VerCauteren with WS confirmed that the “bait was lethal to 70 percent of feral swine in the vicinity of the bait stations.” In regard to nontargets, none accessed the bait directly from the bait stations, but 171 birds (Aves) and 8 raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were found dead near bait sites after coming into contact with crumbs dropped by feral swine. Ongoing modifications to the bait formula may reduce bait spillage by feral swine and lessen risks to nontarget species.

Monkeying around on power lines

Electrical power lines can be deadly for animals that use them to traverse human-dominated landscapes. According to *The Tico Times*, howler monkeys (*Alouatta* spp.) are

increasingly becoming victims to power lines in Costa Rica. As habitat shrinks from human encroachment, the monkeys are using the power lines as bridges between forests. During summer 2018, Costa Rica's Ministry of Environment and Energy created a “Guide for the Prevention and Mitigation of Electrocution of Wildlife in Power Lines.” However, critics of the guide state the document does not mandate a solution to the problem or provide enforcement to ensure compliance. Yet, some power companies are creating solutions on their own. The Costa Rican Electricity Institute is taking measures to protect wildlife by insulating some power lines, a step applauded by local conservationists.

Beachgoers bothered by bear

In early July 2018, vacationers spending time at a beach in Vancouver, British Columbia were forced to give up their picnic baskets and coolers when a black bear (*Ursus americanus*; Figure 3) interrupted and began eating from the containers. According to *Coast Mountain News*, the bear seemed unimpressed by the people yelling as it calmly picked through people's items. Local conservation officers set traps to catch the bear and relocate it away from humans. Until the problem is resolved, beachgoers are asked not to bring food when they visit the beach.



Figure 3. Black bear (*Ursus americanus*); photo by Mike W. Matthews)

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