

In the News

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Turkey in Rhode Island town

A community in Rhode Island originally welcomed its newest neighbors in May 2018: 3 turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*; Figure 1) who took up residence in the town square. Despite their warm welcome, however, the turkeys began to act aggressively toward residents trying to conduct business in the town hall. *The Guardian* reported that in response, the mayor called in animal control officers who captured 2 of the birds. The third is still on the loose >6 months later. Now a local celebrity, residents feed the bird from nearby fast-food restaurants and created a Facebook profile for the bird. Multiple attempts to catch the bird have failed. The turkey has even learned to recognize animal control officers' trucks, further complicating the matter. As of early 2019, the turkey's Facebook page reports that he is still alive and free.



Figure 1. Eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

Dropped fish delays college baseball

During the top of the eighth inning, an osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) dropped a fish in centerfield after being pursued by a nearby bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), delaying a college baseball game in Florida. According to *USA Today*, the eagle circled the field, attempting to retrieve its prize, but the fish was fielded by a home-team player and removed from the ball field.

Colorado man attacked by cougar

While jogging in a popular natural area, a Colorado man was mauled by a mountain lion (*Puma concolor*), *The Washington Post* reported. After hearing a noise behind him, the man turned in time to see the mountain lion lunging at him, but despite his attempts to scare the cat away, he ended up in a fight for his life. In the end, the man was able to choke the lion to death with his bare hands, walk to his car, and drive himself to the hospital. The incident is under a routine investigation. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, mountain lion–human interactions are increasing, as populations push into mountain lion habitats and more frequently use trails in these areas.

Bird feeders attract hawks

A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison shows that the past 2 decades have seen an increased prevalence of avian predators, such as Cooper's hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) and sharp-shinned hawks (*Accipiter striatus*) at backyard feeders in the Chicago, Illinois area. The study was based on data collected from Project FeederWatch, a citizen-science project hosted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. According to the study, accipiters occupied only about a quarter of the sites around Chicago in the years before the turn of the twenty-first century. Now, accipiters occupy approximately two-thirds of sites and have increasingly colonized urban areas. One of the researchers, Jennifer McCabe, told the *Star Tribune* that it was "food availability, meaning backyard birds, that was the single most important factor" in determining abundance of accipiter populations within urban environments near Chicago. Like coyotes (*Canis latrans*) and other mammalian predators, it seems some avian predators are capitalizing on the novel habitats created by expanding urban areas.



Figure 2. River otter (*Lonta canadensis*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

Rabid otter attacks

Several river otter (*Lonta canadensis*; Figure 2) attacks in Maitland, Florida prompted officials to post signs and issue warning to residents. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, at least 3 people were injured in encounters with an aggressive otter, including a woman who was chased down by the animal while walking her dog on a bridge. Several days after the incident, a local police officer shot a sick-looking otter in a resident's backyard in the same area where the attacks occurred. That otter was later confirmed to have rabies. While it is unknown if the animal the officer shot was the same one that attacked residents, all victims are undergoing post-exposure rabies treatments as a precaution. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is currently investigating the attacks.

Vultures congregate in D.C.

In a small community on the outskirts of Washington D.C., black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) are proving to be a nuisance for residents and businesses. According to the Prince George County Animal Services, the birds are drawn to a nearby feral cat (*Felis catus*) colony where residents supply cat food. The local NBC news station uploaded a video showing vultures eating from dishes in which residents had placed cat food. Meanwhile, some residents are avoiding businesses in the area because the vultures often roost on the buildings in the hundreds. Black vultures are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and unless the birds instigate trouble in the area, residents will have to learn to live with their new neighbors.

of Moscow experienced a state of emergency due to increased polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) encounters from December 2018 until February 2019, according to Russian News Agency TASS. Officials estimated 6–10 polar bears were consistently within the settlement, while >50 were in the area. Some of the bears showed aggression toward humans and broke into residences. Russian environmental authorities sent a delegation to investigate the problem. However, no permits were issued to cull aggressive bears, despite the fact that nonlethal deterrents were largely ignored by the bears. The Russian defense ministry even reported the destruction of hundreds of abandoned military buildings in which bears had taken up residence. The sharp increase of polar bear–human conflicts is likely a result of climate change; melting sea ice forces polar bears to the mainland where they are more likely to encounter human settlements.

Wildlife conflicts in Africa

Prolonged drought conditions in many African countries are exacerbating human–wildlife conflicts, as wildlife search for water and food resources. The Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation reported that the Kenyan Wildlife Services (KWS) issued a warning and guidance to the public in an effort to mitigate conflicts. Additionally, KWS is conducting ground and aerial patrols to thwart potential conflicts before they occur. In Namibia, rural farmers are struggling to cope with elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) that raid crops and villages in search of food and water. According to the Xinhua News Agency, tolerance for these encounters is low, and some farmers have even petitioned the government to use lethal control of the elephants. In a speech, Namibia's Minister of Environment and Tourism reinforced the agency's commitment to solving human–wildlife conflicts, citing stability in water resources as a key component of the solution. Government projects to create dams and reservoirs may help, but for a long-term solution, the communities need rain.

Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Polar bears invade Russian town

Members of a Russian community northeast

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