

In the News

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Rock-dropping birds break windows

Security staff at a hospital in Soldotna, Alaska, USA were troubled to learn about multiple incidents of broken windows in vehicles that were parked in the hospital's parking lot. The *Anchorage Daily News* reports that the culprits could be black birds, likely ravens (*Corvus* sp.) or crows (*Corvus* sp.), who have anecdotally been observed dropping rocks in the parking lot. Others attribute the broken windows to human vandals. One woman claims to have been in her car when a bird dropped a rock that cracked the sunroof. Corvids have long been revered for their intelligence, even taking the form of a trickster in some Native American cultures. In modern times, these sometimes troublesome birds are subjects of myriad stories of annoyances and damage to personal property.

Locomotive warning for wildlife

A popular tourist attraction, Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, supports approximately 60 grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*; Figure 1) within its boundaries. Over the last 2 decades, approximately 20 bears have been killed on railroads that cross through the park. Now, researchers at the University of Alberta are testing devices that would give advanced warning of an approaching train to animals utilizing train tracks.



Figure 1. Grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

The *Gateway* reports that the device is similar to warning systems for humans, emitting flashing lights and a loud sound half a minute before a train arrives. The hope is that animals will learn to recognize the warning and adapt their behavior to avoid trains. The devices are currently installed at 4 high-risk sites. Analysis of the device's effectiveness is ongoing, but according to researchers, the results look promising.

Wolves in the Golan Heights

Unlikely residents have made the conflict zone within the Golan Heights their home: Indian wolves (*Canis lupus pallipes*), a small subspecies of the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*). *National Geographic* reported that 8–9 packs, totaling approximately 80 wolves, live within the disputed territory. Besides the frequent military skirmishes, ranching practices make up the majority of activities in the Golan Heights. Ranchers in the Golan Heights are rewarded with bounties on wolfhides by the Israeli government in an effort to mitigate predation on livestock. Traditionally, shooting and poisoning predators has been the main technique for limiting livestock predation in the Golan Heights. Recently, however, conservationists in the region are promoting emerging, nonlethal deterrents to reduce conflicts between ranchers and wolves. Changing predator management strategies in the region is tricky, however, because political tensions mean that some parties are not coming to the table. Ideally, those leading the efforts to bring resolution to the conflicts between wolves and ranchers hope to foster relationships to resolve political conflict as well.

Connecticut coyotes target of feeding ban

After several attacks on dogs by coyotes (*Canis latrans*; Figure 2), residents in a small Connecticut, USA town urged their town board of selectmen to address issues with wildlife feeding in their community. The *Hartford Courant* reports that the complaint surfaced after a local woman



Figure 2. Coyote (*Canis latrans*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

whose dog was attacked by coyotes learned her neighbor was putting out food for coyotes, among other wildlife. According to petitioners, safety of residents and pets was the primary concern of the request for action. In response, the board of selectmen issued a non-binding resolution during the summer of 2019 against wildlife feeding. Officials worried that a formal ban on wildlife feeding would be unenforceable. While wildlife feeding is a popular pastime, it often leads to problems when wild animals associate humans with food.

Urban wildlife in Oregon

A city council in Oregon, USA took up discussion of wildlife issues during a fall (2019) meeting, including a perceived overpopulation of deer (*Odocoileus* sp.) within city limits, as well as bear (*Ursus* sp.) and cougar (*Puma concolor*) sightings. According to the *Siuslaw News*, the council contracted the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to conduct a population assessment of deer and present possible solutions. Several residents voiced opposition to culling deer if the ODFW determines too many deer are in the city. Other residents voiced concern over individuals feeding deer, which they believed exacerbated the problems of overabundant deer populations. The council deferred making any decisions until at least December (2019) when ODFW will have concluded their assessments of wildlife in the city.

Red fox attacks

A string of attacks by a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*; Figure 3) in New Jersey, USA prompted local police officers to euthanize the animal, according

to *Newsweek*. Five people were victims of aggressive behavior by the fox, with 3 people seeking treatment for bite-related injuries, according to the local police department. Police officers turned the fox over to the New Jersey State Fish, Game, and Wildlife Commission, who will test the fox for rabies.

Wildlife Services lawsuit

A lawsuit filed in federal court in Missoula, Montana, USA in November 2019 alleges that Wildlife Services (WS) under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is violating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). According to Montana Public Radio, the plaintiff, WildEarth Guardians, wants WS to conduct an updated NEPA analysis of the agency's human-wildlife conflict mitigation in Montana, claiming that the current NEPA review is outdated. Further, the plaintiff seeks to halt all WS program activities that would kill wildlife until a new NEPA analysis is complete. Nationally, WS is the government agency foremost responsible for mitigating human-wildlife conflicts to protect resources and human health. In Montana, WS primarily provides assistance to protect agricultural resources, such as cattle and sheep; other activities include protecting natural resources and human health and safety.



Figure 3. Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

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