

In the News

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Rock iguana population declines

A recent population survey of Sister Islands rock iguanas (*Cyclura nubila caymanensis*) conducted by the Cayman Islands Department of Environment (DoE) showed a significant decline since 2015, according to the *Cayman Compass*. The approximate 39% decline is attributed to iguana–vehicle collisions, which have claimed an average of 40 iguanas per year, as well as human development and feral cats (*Felis catus*). Nonnative feral cats are known to predate on young rock iguanas, which has created an unbalanced age structure among the iguana population. The Cayman News Service reported that feral cat management among the Cayman Islands was put on hold in 2018 when the Cayman Islands Humane Society and Feline Friends fought for and obtained an injunction on a proposed feral cat cull. Sister Islands rock iguanas are found only on Little Cayman and its sister island, Cayman Brac. The DoE has plans to complete a population survey of rock iguanas on Cayman Brac later this year (2020).

Woman lures deer into home

After videos surfaced of a Colorado, USA woman luring a mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) buck into her home with food (view videos at https://twitter.com/CPW_NE/status/1226999802849722369?s=20), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) issued a reminder to residents to refrain from feeding wildlife. The CPW press release

reiterated that feeding wildlife was illegal and punishable by a fine. According to the local Fox News station in Denver, the woman was issued a citation for the unlawful feeding of big game wildlife, the conduct shown in the videos. Feeding wildlife in urban areas can disrupt animals' natural behaviors, spread disease, and can attract predators to residential areas.

Peregrine falcons to be removed from Boeing factory

The grounding of all Boeing 737 MAX airplanes after crashes in late 2018 and early 2019 forced the closing of the company's assembly plant just outside of Seattle, Washington, USA. However, for the past 4 years, a pair of peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*; Figure 1) has nested in the plant, taking advantage of birds flying in through the open hangar doors. The pair has reared young over the years, but many fledglings had to be taken to rehabilitation centers after falling from rafters and wandering around the factory floor. According to the *Seattle Times*, with the factory doors shut until mid-2020, Boeing contracted with Wildlife Services to remove the pair. It is common to see peregrine falcons utilizing urban environments; tall buildings mimic cliffy nesting sites, and falcons hunt synanthropic birds, such as pigeons (*Columba livia*).

Otter attacks Florida family

A brief, vicious encounter between a river otter (*Lontra canadensis*; Figure 2) and a family's French bulldog led to an indoor scuffle between humans and the otter. *USA Today* reported that shortly after a teenage girl in Lakeland, Florida, USA let the family dog out, she heard barking and yelping outside. When she let the dog back into the house, an otter chased the dog inside and bit the girl on the leg. The commotion awakened the girl's mother, who rushed into the room, grabbed the otter by the tail, and threw the agitated animal outside. The daughter was taken to a local medical facility and treated for rabies; the family dog was quarantined.



Figure 1. Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).



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

Human–elephant conflicts

In Bangladesh, elephants (*Elephas maximus*) and humans increasingly come into conflict as human developments spread into remaining travel corridors and habitats elephants use. According to the *Dhaka Tribune*, elephants regularly venture into human-dominated landscapes in search of food and other resources. The displacement of elephants is largely based on anthropogenic causes. Destruction of forested areas, settlements of the displaced Rohingya peoples within elephant travel corridors, and changing patterns in forestry reduce the available resources for elephants and bring them into villages. At least 14 people have died in elephant attacks in late 2019 and early 2020. In response, elephants are often killed after deadly encounters with humans. Asian elephants are listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and the IUCN lists the species as critically endangered. Open travel corridors, plentiful resources, and conflict mitigation between humans and elephants will be required to maintain genetic diversity and healthy populations so elephants can coexist with humans in perpetuity.

Wild hogs in urban environments

Wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*; Figure 3) have been an increasing problem in Texas, USA, but residents in the suburbs of Houston now report wild hogs expanding into urban areas, according to Houston Public Media. A nonnative, invasive species, wild hogs have been linked to habitat destruction, crop damage, and predation on native species throughout the United States. As hogs move into urban environments, property owners are finding lawns, flower beds, and golf courses rooted up by feeding pigs. Worries of wild hogs in urban areas isn't limited to the United States. In Europe and Asia, where wild hogs are native, *The Guardian* reports that wild hogs are making their homes within urban areas including Barcelona, Rome, and Hong Kong.

In these cities, wild hogs tear through trash bins, cause traffic accidents, destroy lawns and property, and prove a general nuisance. Human-health professionals also worry about diseases carried by wild hogs that can be transmitted to humans or domestic pork farms. While management strategies and opinions vary around the world, many city leaders agree that wild hogs are a problem that needs to be addressed.



Figure 3. Wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

Hooded vultures inadvertently poisoned

A mass die-off of nearly 1,000 hooded vultures (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) in Guinea-Bissau is attributed to accidental ingestion of the poison strychnine, according to *The Guardian*. While strychnine use is banned or regulated in many places worldwide, it was likely applied in this instance to control feral dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) feeding around garbage dumps. Recently, vulture populations in Africa faced steep declines due to poisoning and poaching. While many instances of poisoning are accidental, vultures are often a target of “sentinel poisoning” when poachers of protected species, such as elephants (Elephantidae) and rhinoceroses (Rhinocerotidae), poison the birds to conceal illegally taken carcasses. Other countries have seen similar declines: Mongabay reported that India saw drastic reductions in vulture populations after the birds ingested diclofenac, a veterinary drug lethal to vultures that is used to treat inflammation in cattle.

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