



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Week of Friday, June 14th through July 26th 2013

Check out the chapter on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Wildlife-Society-New-Mexico-Chapter/122478411098284>

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1. Increased human-coyote conflicts in Metro Denver prompts study

Staff Report | Thu., June 13, 2013 @ 8:42 am

After an increase in reports of negative encounters with coyotes in metro Denver, scientists from Colorado State University's Warner College of Natural Resources are conducting research to understand how human thoughts and behavior affect coyote conflict in urban areas. The study is being led by researchers from CSU's Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and is part of a comprehensive research initiative that is integrating biological and social science information, including data on reported encounters, coyote behavior and habitat monitoring, management response and public perceptions, to help develop more effective strategies for minimizing conflicts between people and coyotes.

The researchers have collected online and mail-back surveys from more than 4,000 metro Denver residents since December 2012. The surveys were designed to assess public attitudes and experiences related to coyotes in selected neighborhoods that have seen varying levels of human-coyote conflict. A separate survey of more than 30 coyote managers was also conducted to provide details on how reports of human-coyote conflict are being handled by various jurisdictions in the area. Findings from both survey efforts are being analyzed and mapped to better understand underlying factors and patterns that may contribute to incidents such as coyote attacks on pets and aggression toward people.

"The goal is to provide a more complete picture of the on-the-ground reality of coyote management in metro Denver. When, where, and how people interact with wildlife such as coyotes in urban environments is driven by both ecological and social factors," says Andrew Don Carlos, a research associate in the Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources at CSU. "Habitat and prey are important determinants of how coyotes use the landscape. We have a lot of both in metro Denver, so it's no surprise that they've taken up residence in our parks, open spaces, and sometimes even backyards. People's actions, especially those related to outdoor food attractants and pets, can increase the potential for problems to occur."

Preliminary results from Adams County, one of the primary sponsors of the project, suggest that a large portion of residents are experiencing regular interactions with coyotes in their neighborhoods. More than 80 percent of survey respondents in the western part of the county and within the cities of Westminster, Thornton, and Northglenn said that they had observed a coyote near their home in the past three years.

However, proximity of people and coyotes doesn't always lead to conflict. Fewer than 10 percent of respondents said that they had been approached by a coyote, and fewer than 5 percent reported problems between coyotes and pets. No human attacks were reported.

Attitudes toward coyotes were generally mixed in the Adams County survey areas. About half of survey respondents thought having coyotes around was a good thing, while a third expressed negative reactions toward coyotes. The rest were somewhere in the middle. Overall, public interest was very high, with nearly 90 percent of those surveyed in Adams County indicating that they were at least somewhat interested in the issue of coyotes near their home.

"Coyotes are the largest predatory mammal that most urban residents will encounter, and their presence in the neighborhood tends to get a lot of attention. In these types of situations, a solid understanding of public attitudes and behaviors becomes an important piece of the puzzle," said Tara Teel, an associate professor in CSU's Department of Human Dimensions of Natural

Resources and one of the study's principal investigators. "Effective urban coyote management will always involve the public to some degree, and getting a sense for where residents are at on the issue is an important first step for managers."

The survey findings will also help determine the effectiveness of current public outreach and education campaigns aimed at reducing human-coyote conflict, and will help develop more targeted education initiatives in the future. Results of the coyote manager survey indicated that providing educational information to the public was the most common component of coyote management across metro Denver jurisdictions. Ensuring that residents are getting the right messages about how to remove coyote attractants, protect their pets, and keep coyotes from losing their natural wariness of humans is critical for long-term management success.

The CSU researchers plan to have complete survey results for the entire Denver metro area prepared by the end of summer 2013. The findings will be incorporated with other data from the larger project, including information on coyote incident reports, coyote behavior, coyote habitat, and urban development, to create a model aimed at enhancing scientific knowledge about urban coyote management issues and trends.

In addition to CSU's Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources, primary partners on the comprehensive coyote conflict research initiative include the City of Aurora's Urban Coyote Safety and Awareness Program spearheaded by Mary Ann Bonnell, the USDA National Wildlife Research Center represented by Research Wildlife Biologist Stewart Breck, and CSU's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology represented by Professor Kevin Crooks.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, along with several metro Denver city and county offices, have also assisted the project by providing coyote incident reports, funding, and other logistical support. In 2012 the initiative was recognized through an award for excellence in community outreach and public education by the Denver Regional Council of Governments.

"This is truly a collaborative project that approaches human-coyote conflict management in a very comprehensive way," said City of Aurora Senior Natural Resource Specialist, Mary Ann Bonnell. "By working across jurisdictions and combining scientific research and citizen engagement, we can develop more targeted, informed and effective campaigns that can reduce and/or avoid urban coyote conflict in most cases. That is our goal."

Article link: <http://www.denverjournal.com/article.php?id=8793>

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2. Chimpanzees to be retired from medical research in U.S.

The Canadian Press

Posted: Jun 26, 2013 5:45 PM ET Last Updated: Jun 26, 2013 5:43 PM ET

Decision to retire chimpanzees ushers 'compassionate era'

It's official: The U.S. National Institutes of Health plans to end most use of chimpanzees in government medical research, saying humans' closest relatives "deserve special respect."

The NIH announced Wednesday that it will retire about 310 government-owned chimpanzees from research over the next few years, and keep only 50 others essentially on retainer — available if needed for crucial medical studies that could be performed no other way.

"These amazing animals have taught us a great deal already," said NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins. He said the decision helps usher in "a compassionate era."

The NIH's decision was long expected, after the prestigious Institute of Medicine declared in 2011 that nearly all use of chimps for invasive medical research no longer can be justified. Much of the rest of the world already had ended such research with this species that is so like us.

Any future biomedical research funded by the NIH with chimps, government-owned or not, would be allowed only under strict conditions after review by a special advisory board. In five years, the NIH will reassess if even that group of 50 government-owned apes still is needed for science.

"This is an historic moment and major turning point for chimpanzees in laboratories, some who have been languishing in concrete housing for over 50 years," said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States. "It is crucial now to ensure that the release of hundreds of chimpanzees to sanctuary becomes a reality."

What's unclear is exactly where the retiring chimps, which have spent their lives in research facilities around the country, now will spend their final years. NIH said they could eventually join more than 150 other chimps already in the national sanctuary system operated by Chimp Haven in northwest Louisiana. In that habitat, the chimps can socialize at will, climb trees and explore different play areas.

But NIH officials said currently there's not enough space to handle all of the 310 destined for retirement. They're exploring additional locations, and noted that

some research facilities that currently house government-owned chimps have habitats similar to the sanctuary system.

The other hurdle is money: Congress limited how much the NIH can spend on caring for chimps in the sanctuary system. Negotiations are under way to shift money the agency has spent housing the animals in research facilities toward supporting their retirement.

"Everybody should understand this is not something that is going to happen quickly," Collins cautioned.

One chimp centre, the Texas Biomedical Research Institute, said keeping just 50 of the animals for ongoing research isn't enough and could hamper efforts to fight not just human illnesses but diseases that kill apes, too.

Moreover, moving retired chimpanzees to the federal sanctuary "would take them away from their caregivers, many of whom they have known all of their lives," said an institute statement that argued the animals would fare better if they stayed put.

The NIH's decision came two weeks after the Fish and Wildlife Service called for protection of all chimpanzees as endangered. Until now there was a "split listing" that labeled wild chimps as endangered but those in captivity as threatened, a status that offers less protection.

That move also would affect any future use of chimps in medical research, and NIH said it would work with its government counterpart to ensure compliance.

Chimps rarely have been used for drug testing or other invasive research in recent years; studies of chimp behaviour or genetics are a bit more common. Of nine biomedical projects under way, the NIH said six would be ended early. Of another 13 behavioural or genetic studies involving chimps, five would be ended early. NIH would not identify the projects, but Collins said potential future need for chimps could be in creating a vaccine against hepatitis C.

Article link: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/story/2013/06/26/chimpanzees-medical-research.html>

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3. President Announces Climate Change Plan

June 27, 2013

By Megan Berman

On Tuesday June 25, 2013, President Obama gave his much anticipated speech on the national action plan for climate change at Georgetown University. He outlined the issues the country is facing due to climate change, including carbon pollution in the atmosphere, Arctic ice melting, ocean warming, and sea level rise. He said that 2012 was the warmest year in history, and saw numerous and severe wildfires, warming in Alaska, higher food prices because of crop drought, and severe storms such as super-storm Sandy. High levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that result when fossil fuels are burned, cause temperatures to rise and result in profound and unprecedented changes to weather patterns. "The question is not whether we need to act; the question is whether we have the courage to act now before it's too late," Obama said.

Obama's Climate Action Plan outlines multiple steps to reduce the amount of carbon pollution produced. First and foremost, the Environmental Protection Agency will begin limiting pollution from power plants, which is currently unregulated and accounts for 40 percent of carbon emissions. This step would contribute to the goal of reducing carbon pollution by at least 3 billion metric tons by 2030. The plan also calls for doubling the amount of energy produced from wind and sun, which would also create more jobs in wind turbine manufacturing and solar panel installation. Obama also called for strengthening the U.S.'s position as a top natural gas producer, which would create even more jobs and lower heat and energy bills. In addition, he pledged that the federal government will work toward increasing its use of power from renewable energy sources to 20 percent within seven years.

A primary goal of the Climate Action Plan is to waste less energy from cars, homes, and businesses. Emissions standards need to be set for heavy duty trucks and vans because heavy duty vehicles are currently the second largest source of greenhouse gas pollution in the transportation sector. The final step in Obama's plan is for the U.S. to lead international efforts to combat climate change. The U.S. will need to take "bold action to reduce carbon emissions and it will take businesses, scientists, farmers, builders and workers to achieve this goal," Obama said. He called for global free trade in environmental goods and services, but said that the U.S. would end support for financing new coal-fired power plants overseas.

Just days before Obama's speech, Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) introduced their climate adaption bill, the Safeguarding America's Future and Environment Act (SAFE; S. 1202), which would require federal agencies that manage natural resources to adopt climate change plans. The SAFE Act would also provide communities with better tools to prepare for

extreme weather events while safeguarding tourism and recreation jobs that economies depend on.

Sources: White House Climate Action Plan (June 25, 2013), Senator Baucus and Senator Whitehouse Press Release (June 20, 2013), video of Obama's Speech.

Article link: <http://news.wildlife.org/featured/president-announces-climate-change-plan/>

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4. Obama to launch major initiative to curb wildlife trafficking

Suzanne Goldenberg US environment correspondent
guardian.co.uk, Monday 1 July 2013 16.50 EDT

President used second executive order this week to launch task force which will draft strategy to curb \$10bn illegal trade

Barack Obama launched a new initiative against wildlife trafficking on Monday, using his executive authority to take action against an illegal trade that is fuelling rebel wars and now threatens the survival of elephants and rhinoceroses.

The initiative, announced as the president visited Tanzania on the final stop of his African tour, was the second time in a week Obama has used an executive order to advance environmental policy, after announcing a sweeping new climate change plan.

Monday's executive order would set up a presidential task force to draw up a new strategy for cracking down on the criminal gangs behind the explosion in trafficking, as well as choke off demand for elephant ivory, rhino tusk and other animal parts.

Estimates by conservation groups suggest the illegal trade in wildlife is worth up to \$10bn a year.

The executive order called for \$10m to train police officers and park rangers.

The measures outlined in the executive order issued on Monday expands on existing American efforts to help countries in Africa fight off organised criminal gangs behind the poaching networks.

Within the last few months, the State Department and the United Nations have both declared wildlife trafficking as a security threat. "As we see criminal

networks getting increasingly involved - you see poachers with night vision goggles and high-powered rifles - you also see some rebel militias trading in ivory and rhinoceros horn as source of currency and value," Grant Harris, the state department's Africa director, told reporters travelling with Obama.

"It's degrading good governance, because this is fuelling corruption and money laundering."

Obama's involvement further raises the global profile of trafficking from narrow environmental interest to a broader security concern, officials travelling with Obama said.

The \$10m announced on Monday would provide training for police and park rangers in Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya and other countries, the officials on Obama's plane said.

The executive order signed by Obama also established a presidential task force charged with drafting a new strategy for cracking down on poachers, and choking off demand for their products.

America is a major market for trafficked wildlife, after China and Vietnam.

White House officials said the task force would also be looking at how to use existing organised crime laws to fight poachers.

The executive order said wildlife trafficking had reached crisis proportions in recent years, driven by the involvement of organised crime gangs, and now presented a direct threat to the stability and security of countries in the region.

"Poaching operations have expanded beyond small-scale, opportunistic actions to coordinated slaughter commissioned by armed and organized criminal syndicates," the order said.

"The survival of protected wildlife species such as elephants, rhinos, great apes, tigers, sharks, tuna and turtles has beneficial economic, social, and environmental impacts that are important to all nations. Wildlife trafficking reduces those benefits while generating billions of dollars in illicit revenues each year, contributing to the illegal economy, fueling instability, and undermining security."

The United Nations in a finding earlier this year said that profits from the illegal ivory trade were funding rebel groups in Central Africa.

The initiative won praise from conservation groups who have despaired at the explosion of wildlife trafficking over the last decade.

Carter Roberts, president of the World Wildlife Fund, said the move by Obama would provide a "critical boost" to efforts to stop the traffickers.

Article link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jul/01/obama-wildlife-trafficking-executive-order>

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5. The Native Plant Society of New Mexico 2013 Annual Conference Announcement

Website last updated July 8th, 2013

The 2013 Annual Conference will be held in Albuquerque from August 8 to 11, 2013.

Please read the downloadable PDF, or consult the NPSNM Newsletter, to learn more about the annual conference.

We look forward to seeing you at this wonderful event!

June 13th UPDATE: Venue Change for 2013 Annual Meeting

Due to space restraints at the MCM Elegante, the locations for the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico have been changed. See details below.

New Meeting Location: The Thursday board meeting, registration, Friday and Saturday presentations will be at State Bar of New Mexico Center, 5121 Masthead St NE, in the Albuquerque Journal Center, Albuquerque, NM 87109. The Center is located on Masthead, east off Jefferson St between Paseo del Norte and Ellison St. The Friday evening reception remains at Plants of the Southwest.

New Time and Place for Early Registration: Early registration will now be at the State Bar Center from 3pm-5pm.

New Banquet Location: Nativo Lodge, 6000 Pan American NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109

New Location for Accommodations: Rooms have been set aside at Nativo Lodge, 6000 Pan American NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, 505-798-4300. Rate for attendees is \$65.00 per night, plus tax. Call the hotel directly before July 10 to make your reservation. After July 10 rooms and rate will only be on space and

rate available basis. Be sure to mention you are with the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. The hotel is about a mile from the Bar Center.

Other nearby accommodations:

Baymont Inn and Suites-5101 Ellison NE, 505-344-1555

La Quinta Inn Albuquerque NW-5241 San Antonio Drive NE, 505-821-9000

Clarion Hotel-7620 Pan American Freeway NE, 505-823-1300

Quality Suites-5251 San Antonio Drive NE, 505-797-0850

Call these hotels directly to make a reservation. No special rates have been negotiated.

All speakers, workshops and field trips remain the same, but those scheduled at the Elegante will now be at the State Bar Center.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause, but the space originally allotted to us was drastically reduced.

Silent Auction: Be sure to bring items for the Silent Auction. Contact Beth Herschman at herschman9@aol.com, for more information.

For more information, please visit the Native Plant Society of New Mexico website: <http://www.npsnm.org/events/2013-annual-conference/>

6. State of the Birds 2013 Report Released

July 10, 2013 By Danica Zupic

Last week, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced the release of The State of the Birds 2013: Report on Private Lands, United States of America. This is the fourth State of the Birds report, and it focuses on the importance of the 60 percent of U.S. land area that is privately held. Using several spatial programs and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's citizen-science program e-bird, 1.5 million bird checklists from more than 220,000 unique locations were used to determine distributions of 219 breeding and 65 wintering bird species. In the report, particular attention is paid to conservation programs that are supported by the farm bill. Major findings included:

- Over half of the home range of more than 100 American bird species is on private lands;
- Privately owned arid lands host 40 percent of arid land bird distributions during breeding season;
- 83 percent of coastal habitats are privately owned and host 25 percent of North American bird species at some point during the year;

- 82 percent of the distribution of 29 grassland bird species is on privately owned grasslands;
- Ricelands support 45percent of the North American wintering duck population.

The report also highlights the success of some farm bill conservation programs. For example, lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program in the prairie pothole region have yielded a net increase of 2 million waterfowl per year in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Also noteworthy is the Wetlands Reserve Program, which has restored 2.6 million acres of private wetland habitat (three fourths of all remaining wetlands are on private lands).

Specific programs are also highlighted as conservation success stories:

- Rice Farm Habitat for Waterbirds (for wetlands conservation)
- Farmers Make Room for Mountain Plovers (grassland conservation)
- Sage Grouse Initiative (arid lands)
- Bird Habitat on Timberlands (forests)
- Conservation Reserve Program (for game bird conservation)

Sources: State of the Birds 2013; E & E news Daily (July 5, 2013).

Article link: <http://news.wildlife.org/featured/state-of-the-birds-2013-report-released/>

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7. Minn. wolf population falls; lower quota planned

July 10, 2013 Associated Press By STEVE KAROWSKI

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minnesota's midwinter wolf population has fallen by about 710 animals over the past five years to around 2,211, wildlife managers announced Tuesday, attributing the decline to fewer deer for wolves to prey upon and the resumption of sport hunting and trapping of wolves last fall.

Officials with the Department of Natural Resources stressed that wolves are resilient and the decline is no reason to fear for the species' survival in Minnesota. They pointed out that the new estimate remains well above the state's minimum goal of at least 1,600 wolves, and higher than the federal government's recovery goal range of 1,251 to 1,400. Researchers also estimate the state has 438 packs with an average litter size of six.

"We still have a robust wolf population here in Minnesota, and we can managed a regulated hunting and trapping season without having a long-term negative

influence on the overall population," Dan Stark, the DNR's large carnivore specialist, told reporters on a conference call.

But Stark said the maximum harvest quota will likely be proportionately lower than last fall and winter, when hunters and trappers killed 413 wolves during the state's first wolf season since the animals came off the endangered list in the region. He said the DNR will likely announce the actual target and other details about the season later this month.

Wolf hunting opponents said they were surprised and dismayed by the size of the decline from the 2008 estimate of 2,921, and called on the DNR to cancel the upcoming season. They said they found the decline in the average pack size from 4.9 in 2008 to 4.3 this winter particularly alarming, saying the loss of breeding wolves reduces pups' chances of surviving because there are fewer adults in the packs to raise them.

"This is one big huge guessing game that is taking unnecessary risks with an animal that we spent tax dollars bringing back, and now we're going to spend tax dollars making sure we don't kill too many. It's totally nuts," said Maureen Hackett, founder of Howling for Wolves.

Howard Goldman, the state director for the Humane Society of the United States, said the decline "came out of the blue. Everything I've heard thus far and everything the department has published indicated the population was stable and perhaps increasing slightly."

"This survey shows there's no need to hunt Minnesota's wolves," said Collette Adkins Giese, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The population is on the decline and Minnesota's wolves really are too important to the ecosystem to be killed off for sport."

The DNR conducts comprehensive wolf population surveys every five winters, when the animals are at the natural low point of their population cycle and the snow cover and lack of leaves on the trees makes it easier to count them. So the new estimate reflects deaths from the hunting and trapping season, natural mortality and the nearly 300 wolves killed for predator control last year, but not the 2,600 pups the DNR estimates were born this spring.

The survey also found that Minnesota's wolf range, which generally overlaps the state's forested regions, has stayed about the same over the past five years, expanding slightly in some areas along its southern and western boundaries.

DNR research biologist John Erb said the figure of 2,211 wolves is just the agency's best estimate, and the margin of error is roughly plus or minus 500, which means Minnesota's wolf population could be anywhere between 1,652 and

2,641. The agency's critics said the low end of that range is too close to the state's target minimum of 1,600.

Since deer are wolves' main source of food, the 25 percent decline in the deer population in the state's forested areas over the past five years was likely the greatest factor behind the lower wolf numbers, the DNR officials said. The agency deliberately took the deer population down in many areas as part of its long-term management plan, and now seeks to hold those populations steady or let them rise in some areas, said Paul Telander, the DNR's wildlife section chief.

Online: The survey report is available at: <http://www.mndnr.gov/wolves> Copyright 2013 The Associated Press.

Article link:

<http://www.faribaultcountyregister.com/page/content.detail/id/338482/Minn--wolf-population-falls--lower-quota-planned.html?isap=1&nav=5050>

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8. Mexican gray wolf shot, killed in New Mexico

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

Posted: 07/13/2013 09:31:15 AM MDT

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—The effort to return the endangered Mexican gray wolf to the American Southwest has hit another stumbling block.

Federal and state wildlife officials confirmed Friday that a female wolf that was released into the wild in early May was found dead just one month later in southwestern New Mexico.

The animal, dubbed F1108, had been shot. Authorities released no other details and said the investigation was ongoing.

Top officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have long pointed to illegal shootings as one of the challenges to reintroducing Mexican gray wolves in New Mexico and Arizona. Since reintroduction efforts began in 1998, there have been 50 illegal killings documented, with four occurring just last year.

Environmental groups called the latest wolf death a tragedy.

"The Mexican gray wolf population cannot afford the loss of another individual, let alone a breeding female with pups," said Nancy Gloman, vice president of field conservation for Defenders of Wildlife. "This wolf and her pups were another critical step toward the promise of recovery."

A survey at the beginning of the year indicated there were at least 75 wolves in the wild in the two states, marking the largest population since the reintroduction program began. Environmentalists have been pushing the federal government to release more captive animals to boost those numbers.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has cited genetic concerns for moving cautiously with any releases, while ranchers and some rural community leaders have voiced concerns about their safety and livelihoods being compromised by more wolves on the landscape.

Ranchers have blamed the predators for numerous cattle deaths over the years. In June, officials investigated the deaths of three calves in Arizona. Two of the deaths were found to have been caused by wolves.

The wolf found shot in late June was one of four captive animals that the Fish and Wildlife Service had hand-picked for release this spring with the hope of bolstering the wild population. The wolves were to be released in pairs—one in the Gila Wilderness and the other in southeastern Arizona.

After weeks of waiting, the agency pulled the plug on the Arizona release and returned that pair to captivity. The pair in New Mexico fared no better with the male being captured for roaming outside of the recovery area just days after his release.

Soon afterward the pair's pups were presumed dead, and the female started roaming. She was last located in the northeastern corner of the Gila forest near Kline Mountain.

Article link: http://www.alamogordonews.com/ci_23655001/mexican-gray-wolf-shot-killed-nm

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9. Three snow leopard cubs revealed at Marwell Zoo

17 July 2013 Last updated at 07:03 ET

Three rare snow leopard cubs born at a Hampshire zoo have taken their first steps outside their den as they went on show to the public earlier.

They were born at Marwell Zoo, near Winchester, 12 weeks ago.

Having had their vaccinations, the female and two male cubs have now been allowed to venture outside for the first time.

The snow leopard is an endangered species with possibly as few as 4,000 animals remaining in the world.

The cubs parents, Irina and Indeever, arrived at the park in 2010 as part of the European endangered species breeding programme (EEP).

Keepers have named the female cub Animesh, which means "bright" and "to stare open eyed" in Nepalese, because she opened her eyes particularly early.

Hunted for medicines

One of the male cubs was named Ariun, meaning "pure" in Mongolian, and the keepers are asking the public to help them name the second male cub.

Marc Fox, team leader of carnivores, said they had "already developed their own personalities".

"It will be interesting to see if they come out of their shell more now they have a larger space," he added.

"To have three cubs is really rare as leopard cats would normally only have one or maybe two cubs.

"This is Irina's second litter and she is an excellent mum.

"We are really looking forward to watching these cubs explore their new home - it's great fun watching them play together."

Heidi Mitchell, conservation biologist at the park, said: "Snow leopards, like all big cat species, are threatened in the wild.

"This means that maintaining a healthy captive population of snow leopards is of vital importance to the global conservation strategy for the species."

Estimates by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Snow Leopard Conservancy and the Snow Leopard Trust have put the number of animal left on the planet at between 4,000 and 7,000.

They are hunted for their fur and bones, which are used in traditional far east medicines.

Snow leopards live at high altitudes in steep terrain, broken by cliffs, rocky outcrops and ravines, usually above 3,000m (9,800ft) in central Asia and the Himalayas.

But the animals are gradually being pushed out of their natural habitat due to destruction, livestock grazing, their prey being hunted by humans and other conflicts with people.

Some also fall victims to landmines in northern Afghanistan.

Article link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-23332564>

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10. BIOLOGISTS FIND OLDEST ENDANGERED JEMEZ MOUNTAINS SALAMANDER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, JULY 19, 2013

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

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LOS ALAMOS – Wildlife biologists made a startling discovery this week in the Jemez Mountains when they found what is believed to be the longest living endangered Jemez Mountains Salamander.

Mark Watson, a Department of Game and Fish biologist and a member of the New Mexico Endemic Salamander Team, said the salamander found just east of the Valles Caldera National Preserve is estimated to be 17 to 18 years old. It was identified as a salamander captured and tagged in 1998 by Department Herpetologist Charlie Painter.

“This was a very exciting and surprising find,” Watson said. “Experts had believed this species to be long-lived, but we never knew just how long-lived these salamanders could be.”

The Jemez Mountains Salamander (*Plethodon neomexicanus*) of the family Plethodontidae, is lungless and breathes through its skin. It spends nine months of the year underground, coming out only during the summer monsoon rains. It is found only in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico. It is listed as endangered under the state Wildlife Conservation Act and is a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The salamander found under a small branch Wednesday was about five inches long. It was discovered during a salamander training workshop for about 25 biologists and naturalists representing Jemez Pueblo, The Nature Conservancy, Bandelier National Monument, the Valles Caldera National Preserve, and private consultants. The workshop was conducted by the New Mexico Endemic Salamander Team, which consists of members from the Department of Game and Fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

Article link:

http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/publications/press_releases/documents/2013/07213salamander.html

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11. Texas losing war on feral hogs

By Shannon Tompkins | July 24, 2013 | Updated: July 24, 2013 9:48pm

More than two decades into Texas' ever escalating war against feral hogs, the wild swine continue gaining ground while Texas and the state's native wildlife, plants and ecosystems lose it.

Despite taking millions of casualties - an estimated 750,000-plus feral hogs have been killed each of the past few years in Texas - the non-native pigs have continued their economically and environmentally destructive march across the state, with an estimated 2.6 million of them spread across at least 240 of Texas' 254 counties.

"It's just getting worse and worse; no matter what we've tried, the hogs just overwhelm us," said Stuart Marcus, manager of the 25,000-acre Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge. "They certainly are having a negative impact on native wildlife and habitat - directly and indirectly."

Texas holds, by some estimates, as many as 10 times the number of feral hogs it did barely three decades ago.

"The first year this agency began removing feral hogs was 1982. They took 86 pigs that year," said Michael Bodenchuk, state director of the Texas offices of Wildlife Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture branch designated to address human/wildlife conflicts. "In 2011, we removed 24,746. That pretty much tells you how the problem has grown."

And it continues growing.

"The estimates I've seen are that between 2006 and 2010, Texas' feral hog population grew about 21 percent a year," Bodenchuk said. And that's with Texans taking an estimated 29 percent of the pig population each year.

Texas law designates the non-native feral hogs as unprotected, non-game animals and imposes almost no restrictions on when, how or how many of the hogs can be taken. They can be hunted and killed year-round, day or night; shot from aircraft; trapped in pens; attracted by bait; taken in any number. And Texans have responded to the opportunity. Recreational hunters take an estimated 600,000 feral hogs a year, finding the wild swine a challenging hunting quarry and wonderful on the table. Commercial trappers using live-catch pens annually take and sell to wild game processors another 70,000 or so of the pigs. Another 50,000 or more are killed by Texas Wildlife Services and private firms hired by landowners to knock back pig populations damaging crops or property.

Losing a numbers game

Even against this onslaught, wild hogs are more than holding their own.

"There has been some success with reducing feral hog populations in fairly small areas," said Donnie Frels, manager of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Kerr Wildlife Management Area, a premier wildlife research site that is involved in feral hog research. "But so far, we haven't come up with any control mechanism that works for a long period of time over a large area."

Feral hogs are perfectly equipped to survive and thrive, even under intense prosecution.

The progeny of domestic hogs that quickly turned feral or hybrids between domestic feral pigs and European wild hogs, feral hogs are omnivores with a nondiscriminatory palate. Mostly traveling in social groups - sounders - holding 10-40 or more adults and their young, feral hogs use their strong snouts and necks to root for food that they consume almost nonstop.

And they will eat almost anything - tubers, acorns, insects, agricultural crops (they annually cause more than \$50 million in damage to Texas agriculture) and all manner of plants (even young trees) - and are opportunist predators on reptiles, amphibians, ground-nesting birds and small mammals. Feral hogs have been documented preying on turkey and quail nests and, in some areas, are major predators on turtle nests.

Their prodigious reproductive capability is another key to their success. Sows begin reproducing at eight months and produce three litters every two years, with an average litter of almost six piglets.

"The populations just explode," Bodenchuk said.

The expanding populations inflict considerable damage to Texas native wildlife and ecosystems. Feral hogs compete directly with white-tailed deer for forage, especially acorns and other mast. They also "hog" the tens of thousands of corn- and protein-dispensing feeders placed by hunters as supplemental feed for deer; research shows feeders frequented by feral hogs are avoided by deer and other native wildlife.

Threat to vegetation

Feral hogs also can greatly reduce availability of vegetation crucial to deer, quail, turkey and other native wildlife.

A research project by Rice and Texas A&M universities conducted in the Big Thicket of southeast Texas used fenced and unfenced plots of land to gauge impacts of feral hogs. The plots used by hogs saw plant diversity reduced, fewer forbs, fewer large-seed (mast producing) trees, loss of leaf-litter ground cover resulting in a reduction in the abundance of invertebrates and small vertebrates, and changes in soil chemistry that changed plant communities.

The research also indicated plots disturbed by feral hogs grew twice as many Chinese tallow trees as the hog-free areas. Tallow trees are one of the most problematic non-native, invasive plants threatening Texas, as the tallows grow in dense monocultures, shade out native trees and grasses, are of almost no value to wildlife, and are almost impossible to control.

Stuart Marcus witnesses this on the Trinity River refuge.

"I call feral hogs 'walking tallow trees,'" he said. "They are just as bad as tallow trees, and wherever they root up the ground, tallow trees seem to sprout by the hundreds."

Feral hogs' rooting behavior causes severe damage to environmentally sensitive and hugely important areas along waterways, particularly in central, south and western Texas where such waterways are limited.

"They definitely impact plant communities and really do serious damage to riparian areas, especially the western half of the state," Frels said.

These impacts on native wildlife and the habitat on which they depend is behind the state wildlife agency's involvement in research aimed at reducing feral hog populations.

"We're not in the animal control business," Frels said. "But we do have a keen interest in our native wildlife and the things affecting them. That's what got us into feral hog research."

Sodium nitrite

A big part of that research is a cooperative effort with other government agencies in developing a potentially significant new method of reducing feral hog populations: poison, an option currently not available because of federal prohibitions.

For the past three years, research at the Kerr wildlife area has focused on sodium nitrite, a toxicant that has been used to great effect against feral hogs in Australia.

Sodium nitrite kills by disrupting blood's ability to carry oxygen to the brain. Pigs are highly susceptible to sodium nitrite because, unlike humans and other mammals, they lack the ability to produce an enzyme that reverses the effects. A feral hog ingesting a lethal dose of sodium nitrite quickly becomes lethargic, then unconscious. Death occurs within 90 minutes.

Research indicates the poisoned pigs pose little or no threat to scavengers or predators.

Developing bait/sodium nitrite mixtures that feral hogs will eat and that deliver a lethal dose of the substance and a "delivery system" - a feeder - that feral hogs can access but can't be used by deer, raccoons and other non-target wildlife are the focus of research at the Kerr.

"It's showing some promise," Frels said of sodium nitrite's potential as another tool to use against feral hogs. "But there's still a long way to go before it could become an option."

If it does, it could help turn the tide in the battle against feral hogs. In Australia, use of sodium nitrite has reduced feral hog populations in large areas by as much as 89 percent.

Just to stabilize Texas' feral hog population would require removing about 70 percent of the population over a single year and continuing that level of population reduction for multiple years, Bodenchuk said.

"Right now," he said, "we're not even taking half that number."

Article link: <http://www.chron.com/sports/outdoors/article/Texas-losing-war-on-feral-hogs-4685490.php>