

# Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Fall 2009

## THE HABITAT CONNECTION

### HABITAT IN AUTUMN

**D**o you know what habitat is? Habitat is the food, water, shelter and space an animal needs to survive. For example, a moose needs habitat with a lot of willows to eat, water to drink, open spaces to roam and a dense forest nearby where he can hide and sleep. A white-breasted nuthatch is found in open woods with mature trees where you can see it climbing upside down looking for insects. A pronghorn antelope uses the prairie as habitat because a pronghorn needs lots of open space, grass and sagebrush to eat and water to drink. What is your habitat?

**E**ach season, changes occur to wildlife habitat. In the fall, or autumn, the days start getting shorter, the leaves begin to change colors and animals everywhere begin getting ready for winter. Some migrate or move to different areas, others change the color of their fur from brown to white in anticipation of winter snows. You can find wildlife



scurrying around putting food in caches, which are places they store food. All of these things happen because habitat is changing.

**A**ll of the behaviors you see in wildlife preparing for winter are due to the changes that will occur in the habitat. Something as simple as leaves falling from a tree will cause changes to wildlife habitat. Birds no longer have cover from predators, and the leaves on the ground may affect habitat used by the tiniest mouse.

**W**hat other things can you think of that change in the fall?





# FIELD Wildlife Journal

## Justin Binfet WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Autumn is a very busy time for wildlife biologists in the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Justin Binfet, the Casper Region wildlife biologist, is just one of many biologists around the state working extra hard to manage wildlife.

An average day in the fall usually means talking with hunters from 12 to 16 hours a day. “It makes for long days, but talking with the people who are seeing the wildlife first-hand is exciting,” says biologist Binfet. “We also classify wildlife herds in the fall, which means we count the numbers of animals in the herds. We fly in an airplane so we can see and count the animals.

This helps us determine how many animals we have, how many fawns or

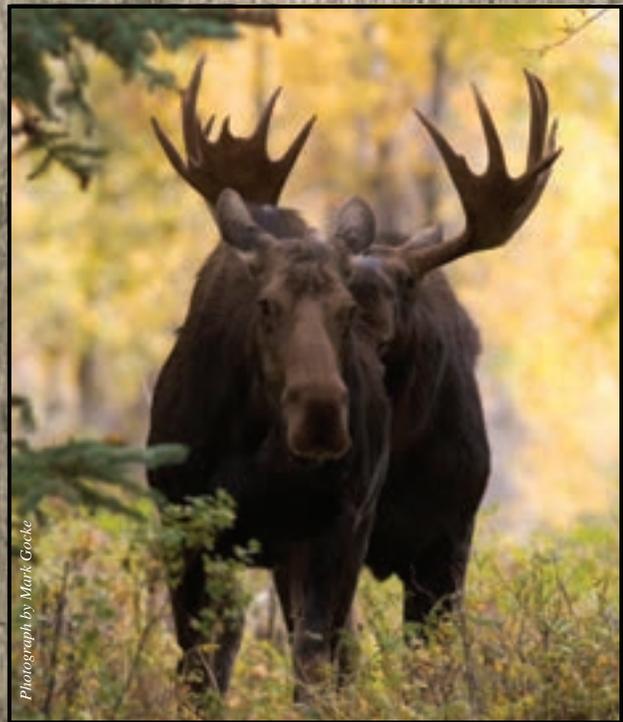
calves there are and how many hunters we should allow to keep a healthy wildlife population.”

This is also the time of year biologists collect disease samples. “We are always very concerned about the health of Wyoming’s wildlife,” says biologist Binfet. “Knowing the condition of the animals helps us gauge the condition of the habitat, or the food, water and shelter in the areas the animals are living.” Depending on what wildlife biologists find, they may need to make changes to improve habitat for our wildlife.

“What interests me most about my job is being close to the wildlife. When I was growing up in Wyoming, I wanted to be a host for a wildlife/nature TV show so I could learn about the animals and interact with them. When I learned about being a wildlife biologist, I thought it would be an even better job, and here I am.”



# WILDLIFE PROFILES



# WILDLIFE PROFILES

## Long-eared Owl

**Size:** Averages around 13.4 inches (male) to 14.6 inches (female) with a wingspan (or the length of its wings from tip to tip when spread out) close to 39 inches

**Eats:** Mainly mammals like deer mice, squirrels and chipmunks, but also some birds, insects, frogs and snakes

**Lives In:** Open forests, forest edges, anareas along rivers. They like open spaces for hunting and dense forests for nesting.

The long-eared owl gets its name from the long feather tufts found on its ears. They are nocturnal, meaning they are active at night. Did you know that long-eared owls are good flyers and can even hover while looking for prey? They can also fly through dense brush and forests without making a noise. Sometimes when these owls are perched in a tree, they will stretch out to make their bodies look like a tree branch. This helps them hide from predators like other owls who might try to eat them. Long-eared owls also watch closely for raccoons, who like to eat eggs out of owl nests.

## Blue Grouse

**Size:** Up to 20 inches tall with a wingspan of 26 inches; weighing around 2.3 pounds

**Eats:** In the summer it eats insects, seeds and berries, but eats pine needles in the winter

**Lives In:** uplands, open coniferous (or pine tree) forests as well as mixed forests with brush nearby

While some birds like to fly high, blue grouse are well adapted to live on land. When flying, blue grouse are able to turn and dodge sharply in flight to avoid predators, but often return quickly to the ground. They have a crop located at the base of their neck. A crop is an area they store uneaten food in while they are feeding. But when a blue grouse returns to its roost, or nest, the food starts moving toward its stomach for digestion. Did you know in the fall blue grouse are hunted? People with bird dogs like retrievers and pointers often hunt these birds.

## Moose

**Size:** 6 to 7 feet tall and weighs as much as 1,400 pounds

**Eats:** Willows, twigs, and bark from trees

**Lives In:** areas near water with aspens and willows

Did you know moose are good swimmers? They can swim up to 10 miles! During the summer and fall you might see a moose taking a dip in the water to help keep off the flies and mosquitoes. Moose hang around water mostly because that is where willows grow. Willows are shrubs that are their primary food source. In fact, willows are so important to moose that is where they got their name. The word "moose" comes from the Algonquin Indians who lived throughout the northern regions of Canada. The Algonquins called this animal mooswa, which means "twig-eater," or "the animal that strips bark off of trees." Early explorers heard this word and through the years, it was eventually changed into "moose."

## Long-tailed weasel

**Size:** Long, slender body measuring 11 to 22 inches long, with short legs, weighing only 3 to 9 ounces

**Eats:** Mice and voles, also eats shrews, baby rabbits, birds, frogs, lizards, snakes, many kinds of insects and earthworms

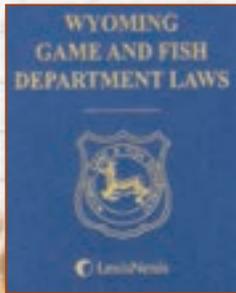
**Lives In:** open woodlands, brushy areas, grasslands, often near water or wetlands

A long-tailed weasel den usually has several entrances. They often use burrows from other animals like chipmunks who have abandoned their holes. Their den may be found in or beneath a log, stump, root, brush pile or stacked rocks. Inside their den, long-tailed weasels make a nest mixed with hair and feathers from their prey. The long-tailed weasel is the most widespread carnivore in the Western Hemisphere. A carnivore is an animal that eats only meat. Not only do animals have to watch out for the weasel, but the weasel has to watch out for other animals. It has many predators like owls, house cats and hawks just to name a few.

# Our Wildlife Heritage

**DID YOU KNOW:** Without hunters and hunting, Wyoming would not have the abundance of wildlife that it has today!

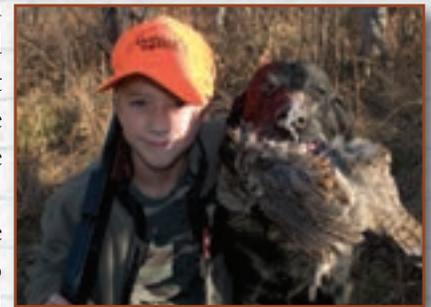
Wyoming has created many wildlife laws and has hired people to protect these laws. In 1869, Wyoming's first game laws were passed to protect the game animals and fish in the Wyoming Territory. Then in 1899, Wyoming's first game warden was hired to uphold these and other wildlife laws that were created.



**Why would Wyoming want to protect wildlife and fish?** It is because Wyoming's wildlife belongs to the people. Our wildlife belongs not just to hunters and anglers but also to those who enjoy seeing pronghorn antelope and deer as they drive down the road, or those who hike to look for different types of birds. Every Wyoming citizen has the right to enjoy our wildlife.



Today, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department issues hunting licenses to those who wish to hunt. Hunting licenses are issued for different species. The numbers of hunting licenses and the length of the season is based on the available habitat and what is best for the animal population in the different hunting areas.



All proceeds from the sale of licenses goes to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to pay for managing wildlife and habitat. Two national programs, the Pittman-Robertson and Dingle-Johnson Acts, require that a portion of the money from sales of hunting, fishing or shooting equipment go to fund wildlife projects in Wyoming as well. So each time a hunter buys a license or pays for hunting or shooting equipment, he is helping Wyoming pay for managing our wildlife.

Over the past two hundred years, responsible and ethical hunters have helped restore many healthy wildlife populations.

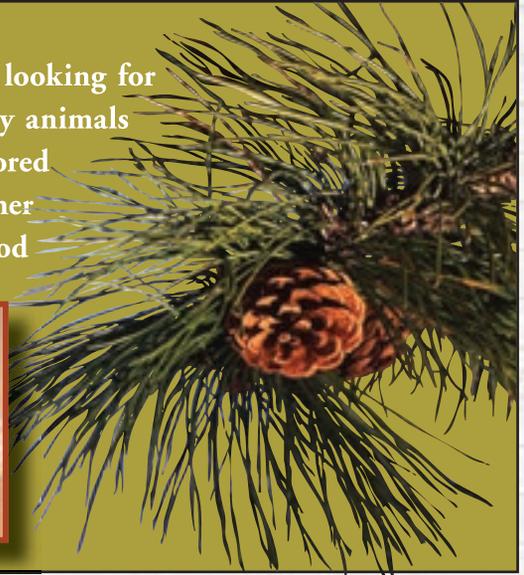
-- By Tristanna  
Bickford



# AROUND WYOMING

## **A**nimals preparing for winter

Have you ever watched a squirrel in the fall as it scurries around looking for food? Chances are that squirrel was getting ready for winter. Many animals spend the summer and fall making caches, or food stashes. Food stored in these caches help animals eat all winter long when there is no other food available. Animals have to be very secretive when hiding food because if other animals are watching, they will take it! Some squirrels have even learned to pretend to hide food to throw other animals off the trail. Now that is a smart squirrel!



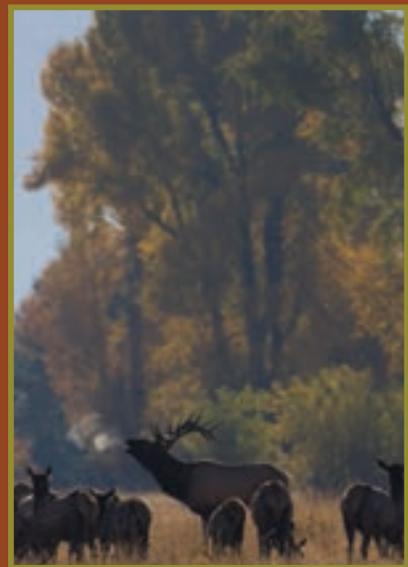
## **C**hanging Colors

Why do some trees have leaves that change color? These trees are like many animals and are getting ready for winter. Trees make their own food in a process called photosynthesis. When days start getting shorter the chlorophyll, or green pigment in leaves used in photosynthesis, goes away. That is when we can see the orange and yellow colors. Leaves always have these colors, but the green chlorophyll just covers it up! How many different colors can you find in leaves this fall?



## **M**oving out

Fall is also a time of year when many animals are moving to a new habitat for the winter. You will see wildlife migrating, or moving, from high mountain areas that may get large amounts of snow, to lower areas of Wyoming. This will make it easier on them to find food in snow cover. But some of Wyoming's wildlife moves even farther... the Wyoming State Bird, the western meadowlark, travels as far south as Mexico. That is a long trip to get ready for the winter!

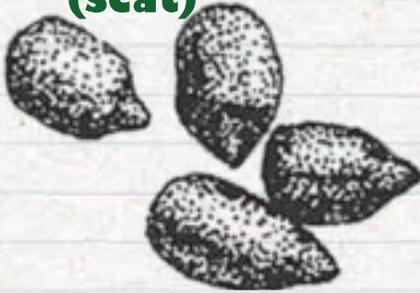


# OUTDOOR Classroom

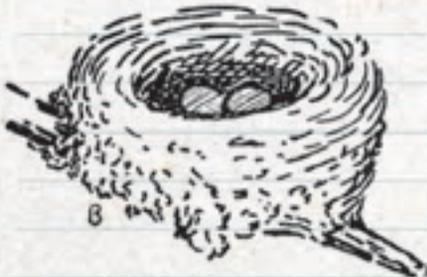
**THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO LOOK FOR EVIDENCE THAT WILDLIFE HAS BEEN IN AN AREA.**

**You can search for:**

**Droppings  
(scat)**



**Nests**



**But one of the best ways** is to look for tracks left by wildlife. Animal tracks can tell you many things about an area and even about the animal. For example, you can learn what animals live close to your school that you may not ever see. You can also learn how many elk passed near a creek while you were sleeping overnight or even if a tiny mouse lives under the bush. Have you ever thought of studying tracks?



**RED CREEK SCHOOL WENT OUTSIDE TO DISCOVER WHAT ANIMALS THEY COULD FIND!**

Cash Good



Kylie Sullivan



Kearra Brown



Delilah Baedke



About 30 miles southeast of Casper, at Red Creek School, tracks were just what they were looking for. Teacher Hazel Scharosch took students outside to discover what animals lived near their school and guess what they found? Tracks! They even made plaster casts of the track to see if they could identify what animal was visiting their playground. They learned it was a raccoon. You can learn how to make plaster casts by doing a simple search on the Internet or by asking your teacher to use the Project WILD Tracks! Activity...happy track hunting!

# ▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

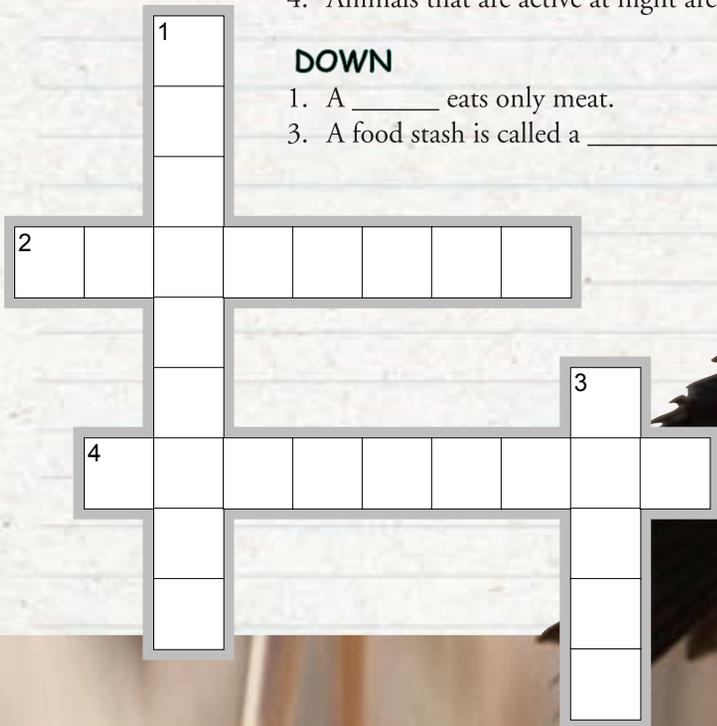
## Crossword Puzzle

### ACROSS

- \_\_\_\_\_ is the measure of a birds wings from tip to tip when stretched out for flying.
- Animals that are active at night are called \_\_\_\_\_.

### DOWN

- A \_\_\_\_\_ eats only meat.
- A food stash is called a \_\_\_\_\_.



ACROSS  
1. Wingspan  
2. Nocturnal  
3. Carnivore  
4. Cache

DOWN  
1. Carnivore  
2. Wingspan  
3. Cache  
4. Nocturnal



# ▶ MATCHING ◀

Can you match the tracks to the animal?



Answers: 1. Black Bear 2. Deer 3. Raccoon 4. Squirrel



Volume 8, No. 1  
Fall 2009  
Editor: Janet Milek  
Assistant Editor: Al Langston  
Contributors: Mark Gocke, Tristanna Bickford, Lucy Diggins-Wold  
Graphic Design: Jaimel Blakeney

Wyoming Wildlife's Wild Times is published four times during the school year (October, December, February and April). Please direct inquiries and changes of address to Wild Times, Education Branch, 5400 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82006; (307) 777-4538.

Printed in the USA. Copyright 2009 by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. All rights reserved.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department receives financial assistance in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration. Under title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Human Resources, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail stop: 2000, Arlington, Virginia 22203.