

Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Spring 2010

THE HABITAT CONNECTION

Spring is an important time for the habitat of many animals in Wyoming. Trees grow green leaves and the grass peeks through the melting snow. Wildlife that hibernate will start to emerge from their den. Others who have been staying close to areas of protection, like the forest, move out into the open to explore Wyoming in spring. This is a great time for wildlife watching! You might see mule deer, antelope or elk migrating back to the lands they live in for the summer. Watch out for all the birds chirping as they return from the south. How many kinds of birds can you find outside your school?

There are different things you need to consider while watching wildlife. The first and most important is to make sure you never get too close to the wildlife and keep a reasonable distance from the animals. This is easily done by using binoculars or even a spotting scope which will help you see the animals up close. If you see any change in the behavior of the animal, you may be too close for comfort. An animal that looks at you, stops feeding, or runs away, may be telling you that you are too close for comfort.

Wildlife watching can easily be done anywhere in Wyoming. You can see birds out your school window, or travel just outside your town to view anything from grizzly bears to grasshoppers. No matter where you are, you need to make sure you respect the land. Some land is private and you need permission from the owner before entering their lands. Also don't forget to leave the area cleaner than the way you found it. That means don't leave any trash and if you find litter while you are there, pack it out with you. This will help the wildlife and make the area around you beautiful.

Photos by
Mark Gocke





FIELD Wildlife Journal

Beth Bear

FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

WORKING ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES



There is an important issue going on right now in Wyoming. We are concerned about invasive species entering our state. Invasive species are plants and animals that aren't originally from here. They get transported into our state by people bringing equipment, like boats, from other states to Wyoming waters. Aquatic invasive species can cause harm to our plants, animals, lakes and rivers. Specifically, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department is worried about some species of mussels, or clam-like animals, coming into the state, so we have a fish biologist working on aquatic invasive species. Beth Bear is the biologist whose job is to keep our state clean and free from aquatic invasive species by helping start the aquatic invasive species program. She works with different people all over Wyoming to monitor our lakes and

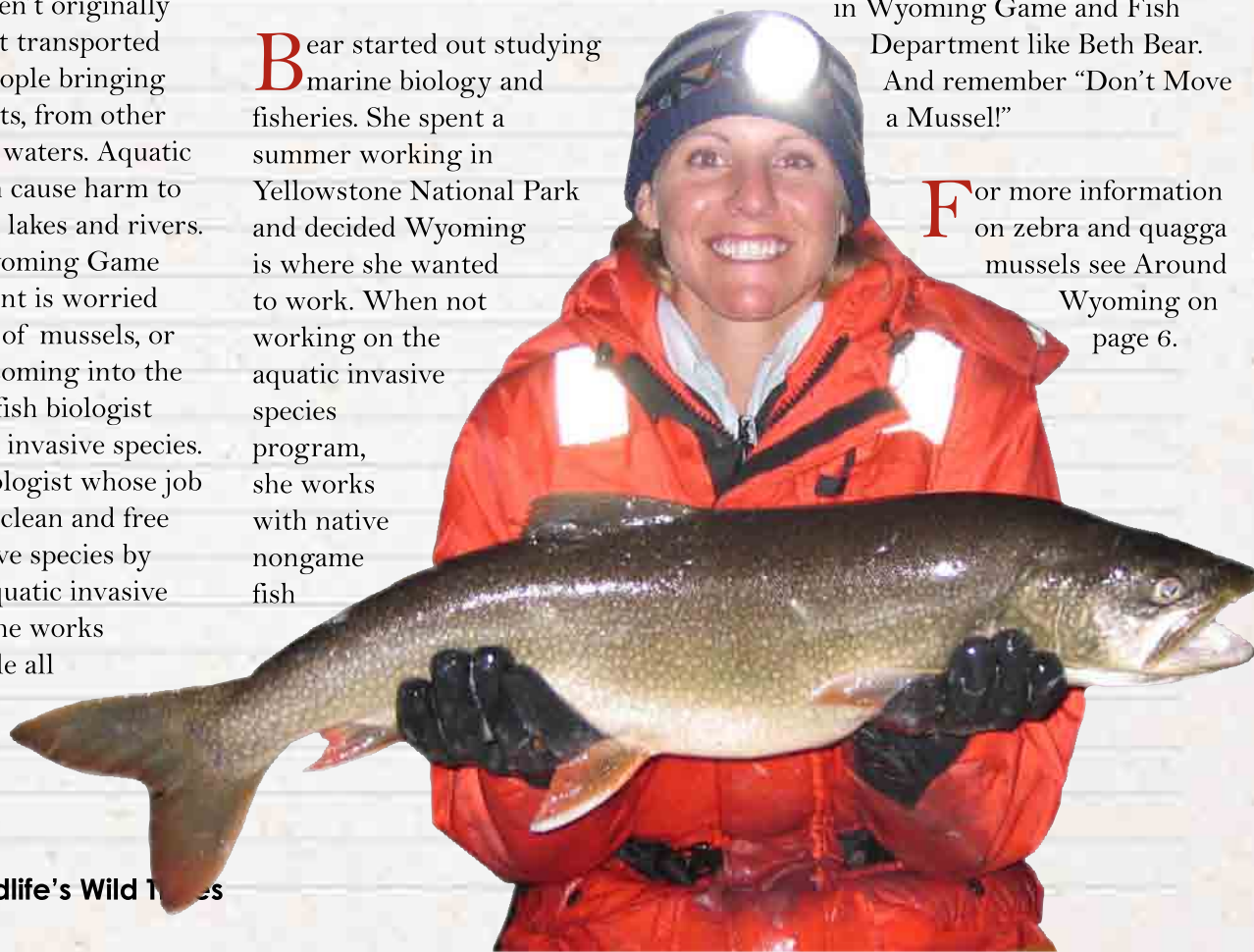
rivers for these species, or kinds of mussels, called zebra and quagga mussels. "It is an important issue in Wyoming right now and we are doing everything we can to help keep our waters clean. This includes teaching people how to properly clean their boats, writing management plans, developing education materials, just to name a few things," says Bear. "I feel like if we can keep these mussels out of Wyoming then we have saved our waters, and that makes my job exciting and very challenging!"

Bear started out studying marine biology and fisheries. She spent a summer working in Yellowstone National Park and decided Wyoming is where she wanted to work. When not working on the aquatic invasive species program, she works with native nongame fish

that live in warm prairie streams in Wyoming. "These fish thrive in some of the most extreme water conditions across the state and it is amazing to me at how they can live. I'd say they are the underdogs of the fish world and I am always cheering for the underdog," she says.

There are many different jobs in the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, but all are important to Wyoming's wildlife. Maybe you could someday help start a new program in Wyoming Game and Fish Department like Beth Bear. And remember "Don't Move a Mussel!"

For more information on zebra and quagga mussels see Around Wyoming on page 6.



WILDLIFE PROFILES



WILDLIFE PROFILES

Zebra and Quagga Mussels

Size: adults can be up to 2-inches long, larvae are microscopic

Eats: food particles it filters from the water

Lives In: Not yet found in Wyoming! Let's keep it that way!

Zebra mussels are exotic small freshwater mussels. They are native to the Black and Caspian Seas, but not to North America. Zebra and quagga mussels are an invasive species in North America, the British Isles, Spain, and Sweden. They can cause entire fisheries to be destroyed. Help us to keep these exotic mussels from coming to our state by draining water from our boats, cleaning all plants, animals and mud from boats and allowing boats to completely dry for 5 days before launching in a new water. Did you know the name quagga mussel comes from the name of an extinct animal related to zebras? Zebra and quagga mussels are filter feeders, meaning they feed by filtering suspended matter and food particles from water.

Beaver

Size: 3 to 4 feet long and weighs 44 to 60 pounds

Eats: bark and small twigs, particularly aspens and willows

Lives In: streams and lakes with trees on the banks

Did you know the beaver is a rodent? It has two large, dark orange incisors, which are its front teeth. Like all other rodents, these teeth never stop growing. Can you imagine having teeth that always grew? Beavers keep their teeth worn down by gnawing on things like twigs and branches. Beaver are very important for the riparian habitat area because their dams hold water that helps vegetation grow. Their dams also help trap dirt that has eroded from stream banks and is traveling through the water. Spring time is when beavers are out fixing their dams after a long winter of snow and ice!

White sucker

Size: Adult fish rarely weigh over two pounds, typically 16 inches or smaller

Eats: insects and small crustaceans

Lives In: prefers clear water in lakes and streams across Wyoming

The white sucker is a bottom-feeding fish that has a unique adaptation. Adaptations are features of an animal that allow it to survive in its habitat. Because white suckers live on the bottom of a lake or stream they have adapted to that habitat and use their sucker-like mouth to vacuum plants, animals, and other organic material from the sandy bottom of their environment. In Lake Hattie Reservoir people have observed the adult fish feeding off the surface of the lake. Although the white sucker lives in streams it avoids rapid current. The white sucker is an import forage fish. This means other fish eat them for food.

Cutthroat trout

Size: average 12 to 14 inches, but may grow bigger!

Eats: insects, small fish, crustaceans, earthworms, and even frogs

Lives In: clear, cool streams, lakes and rivers all across Wyoming

Did you know the cutthroat trout is the only trout that are native to Wyoming? There are four kinds of cutthroat in the Wyoming Game and Fish Department: the Yellowstone, the Bear River or Bonneville, the Colorado River and the Snake River cutthroat trout. The cutthroat gets its name from the red slash marks on each side of its jaws or throats. It looks like the throat has been cut. Biologists are working hard to keep the cutthroat trout populations in Wyoming healthy by creating better habitat in streams and rivers. Since they are native, they are very important to our state.

Our Wildlife Heritage

HISTORIC NAMES

Have you ever thought about how plants and animals get their names? Scientists have special names for wildlife that are often in Latin and Greek languages. Many of these names are long and hard to spell, but they often have a special meaning. Sometimes this special meaning describes what animals look like. Other times it honors someone who was important in history. For example, *Oncorhynchus clarki* is the scientific name of the cutthroat trout. The first name, *Oncorhynchus*, means “hook-shaped nose,” and the second word, *clarki*, refers to a famous explorer named William Clark. Early in the 1800s, Lewis and Clark explored the mountains and rivers of western North America where cutthroat trout live. That is why the cutthroat trout was named after Clark. A river in northwest Wyoming also bears his name, the Clarks Fork.

Can you find it on the Wyoming map? What other plants and animals in Wyoming are named after history? Can you find places named after historical figures?

YELLOWSTONE CUTTHROAT



SNAKE RIVER CUTTHROAT



BONNEVILLE CUTTHROAT



COLORADO RIVER CUTTHROAT



Illustrations by Michelle LaGory

WILLIAM CLARK



Photo from www.emersonkent.com/images/william_clark.jpg

AROUND WYOMING

Don't Move A Mussel

Aquatic invasive species like quagga and zebra mussels are small clam-like mussels that could have huge impacts for Wyoming's waters, boaters and anglers. They can ruin fisheries and even boats! These organisms have not been found in Wyoming, but are in other states around us like Colorado, Utah and Nebraska. These mussels were originally brought to North America from the Black and Caspian Seas in Eurasia on a boat that they were attached to. Can you find these seas on a map? They are a long way from Wyoming! The mussels have hitched rides across North America on boats and boat trailers and have made it into our neighboring states.

We hope to keep these mussels out of Wyoming because they have widespread impacts on powerplants, town water systems, irrigations systems and other water users. They attach themselves to pipes and other equipment and can plug up the equipment so the water cannot pass through. If they have to be removed, then companies will start charging their customers more! And once they are here, we can't get rid of them.



Fisheries are also destroyed by these exotic mussels because they are filter-feeding mussels. That means they remove plankton from the water. Plankton are the primary food source for forage fish and forage fish are the food of sport fish like walleye and trout. For example, the lake trout population in Lake Ontario has declined by 95% in the past 10 years due to a crash in the food chain caused by exotic mussels.



Help keep the zebra and quagga mussels out of Wyoming by following these simple steps:

✓ DRAIN

All water must be drained from your boat. This includes the ballast, bilge, livewell and motor. Leave wet compartments open.

✓ CLEAN

Remove all plants, mud and debris from equipment and boat.

✓ DRY

Dry your boat or equipment 5 days in the summer, 18 days spring/fall or 3 days of freezing.



Don't Move A Mussel



Animal Adaptations

We know that all animals live in habitats. Habitats provide food, water, and shelter which animals need to survive, but animals need more than just good habitat to survive. They must depend on their physical features to help them obtain food, keep safe, build homes, withstand weather, and attract mates. These are called physical adaptations. Physical adaptations take a long time to develop and happen over many generations. Can you think of examples of adaptation? Here are some we think are interesting.



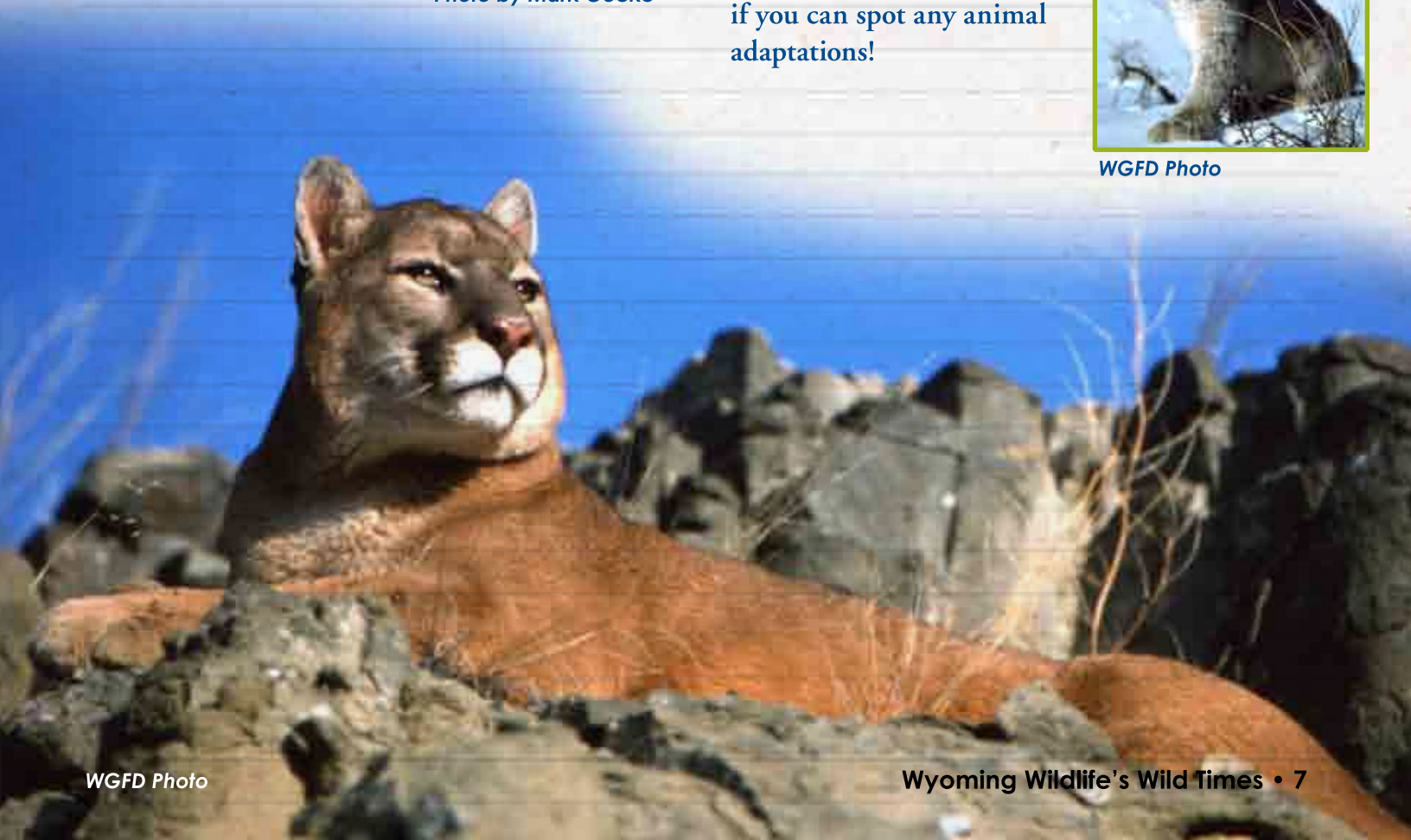
Photo by Mark Gocke

Did you know that a mountain lion has a textured tongue that has little hooks that help them pull meat from bones? Beavers have built-in nose and ear plugs that close when they go underwater to keep the water out...wouldn't that be handy if you were a beaver who works underwater? Beavers also have tails that are long and flat to help steer them while they are swimming. Another example of an adaptation is the feet of the Canada lynx. They are huge and covered with fur, which helps them walk on top of the snow!

Watch the wildlife in Wyoming and see if you can spot any animal adaptations!



WGFD Photo



► TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

Crossword Puzzle

Across

2. Changes to an animal's physical features that help them survive are called _____.
3. Plants or animals that aren't originally from an area, but are introduced there are called _____.

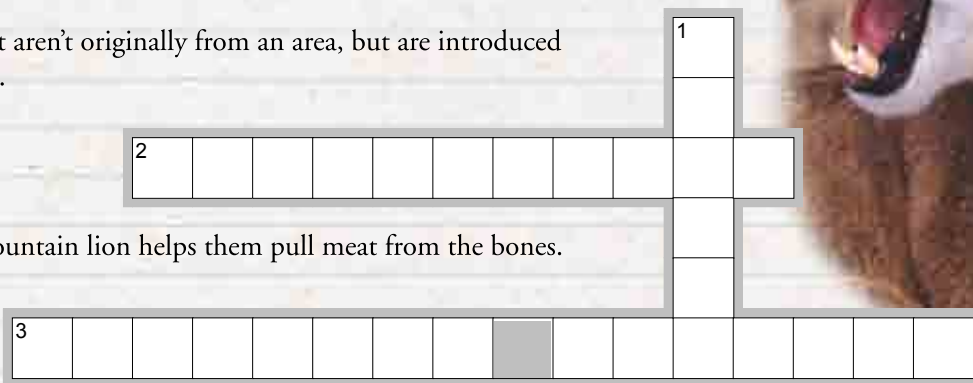
Down

1. The _____ of a mountain lion helps them pull meat from the bones.



Across
2. Adaptations
3. Invasive Species

Down
1. Tongue



► Learning Links ◀

Can you find the zebra and quagga mussels that are hiding on the boat?



Mussel illustrations by Gina Mikel
http://www.scientificillustrator.com

Real size
compared
to a nickel.



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