



Winter 2011

# Wild Times

## The Habitat Connection

### HOME

Habitat is home for wildlife. It is important for wildlife to have healthy habitat. Without food, water, shelter, and space things can get tough for wildlife to survive in Wyoming. That is why the Wyoming Game and Fish Department works hard to improve habitat for wildlife and for fish.

The Game and Fish uses many tools to create healthy habitat. Did you know that we can actually mow different areas of the prairie to help produce more grass growth the next year? We don't use mowers like you do for your backyard, but rather really big machines that cover more area at one time. The next year there

will be new grass. This helps support more wildlife in an area with grasses full of nutrients to keep wildlife strong and healthy.

Sometimes, when shrubs like sagebrush get really old they don't produce much food for wildlife, like mule deer. The Game and Fish can use a technique called chaining to help increase sagebrush regrowth. It takes some time, but after a chain has been drug over the bushes, in a few years there will be new growth on the sagebrush, as well as new grasses in the area. All of these treatments are good things for wildlife.

Habitat biologists also use fire to help manage habitat. During the past 10,000 years, fires have been rejuvenating grasslands, forests, and prairie throughout this region. People have often been told that all fire is

bad, and sometimes it is. But sometimes game mangers actually start fires for what they call prescribed, or controlled, burns. These fires are good for wildlife. Fires help boost the growth of native plants, increase pasture growth, in turn increase wildlife populations. There are many species that benefit from fires, even bluebirds!

In addition to healthy habitat, the Wildlife Division works hard to make sure herds are the appropriate size for the habitat. Did you know there is a maximum number of animals that the habitat can support? This is called the carrying capacity. Game and Fish biologists work hard to make sure wildlife doesn't overpopulate an area. If there are too many animals they won't have adequate food, water, shelter, and space.

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# FIELD Wildlife Journal

## Mark Bruscano

### TROPHY GAME SUPERVISOR



**H**is official title is Large Carnivore Management Supervisor. But unofficially, Mark Bruscano is known as one of the bear guys. Bruscano's main job is to help manage conflicts between humans and trophy game like black bears, grizzly bears, mountain lions, and wolves. Those conflicts might include dealing with a black bear getting into garbage in town, mountain lions killing domestic livestock, or grizzly bears wandering around areas



full of people. Bruscano and the other trophy game biologists work to keep humans and wildlife safe every day.

**B**ruscano has traveled all over Wyoming helping teach people about large predators. He's considered an expert on bear behavior, and has led the Game and Fish's efforts to develop bear-wise communities in Wyoming. He helps community members reduce bear conflicts and deaths by teaching people skills like using bear-resistant garbage containers and grain barrels. He also helps homeowners manage bear attractants like

fruit orchards or bee hives (bears love honey!).

"Some of the challenges in this job are the long hours and the fact that you never know what you'll have to deal with," says Bruscano. "I spend a lot of time working in remote areas with potentially dangerous wildlife."

**B**ruscano has a degree in zoology, which helped give him an educational foundation for working with large predators. But nothing can really substitute for his years of experience.

"It is fascinating working with bears," Bruscano says. "Each animal has its own personality. Some are very shy, but some are very bold and aggressive. I get to learn what motivates bears, from protecting offspring, or looking for food, to why they change habitats."

**H**e says it's taken twenty years of work by wildlife managers, politicians, and the public to help bring species like grizzly bears and wolves back to healthy population levels.

"In this job, I get to help people and wildlife every day," he says. "If we can educate people and help them become more tolerant and aware of wildlife, it helps prevent conflicts and can save lives. I like knowing that I'm helping to contribute to the recovery of threatened species like grizzly bears or wolves and teaching people more about black bears and mountain lions."



# WILDLIFE PROFILES



Photograph by Mark Goecke



Photograph by Mark Goecke

markgoecke.com



Photograph Photo Courtesy Capitol Reef National Park.



Photograph by Jeff Vaniga

# WILDLIFE PROFILES

## Pronghorn Antelope

**Size:** 32-42 inches tall at the shoulder; 79 to 120 pounds

**Eats:** forbs, shrubs, and grasses

**Lives in:** grasslands, brush lands, and deserts

The pronghorn, usually called an antelope, isn't really an antelope at all. The pronghorn we have in Wyoming today are the only surviving member of their family. Pronghorn horns are actually a flattened blade of bone that grows from the skull. The bony cores are covered by a sheath that's shed and regrown every year. Their horns are branched, and each side has one point that points forward. That's why they're called pronghorn.

Pronghorn are the fastest land animal in North America. They can reach speeds up to 60 miles an hour! Pronghorn use their excellent eyesight and speed to escape predators. Also, did you know that pronghorn do not like to jump fences? That is why you see them crawl under fences.

## Black Bear

**Size:** 130-550 pounds, depending on the season

**Eats:** shoots, berries, fruit, grasses, nuts, insects, and some fish and mammals

**Lives in:** forested areas in Canada and the United States

Black bears aren't true hibernators. But, they can go for months without eating or drinking during the winter. Before they den up, black bears may put on 30 pounds of body fat to help get them through the winter. Did you know they den in places like caves, crevices, hollow trees, or logs, and even under the roots of a fallen tree? Black bears are what we call omnivores, which means they eat everything from berries and fruit to insects, mammals, fish, and even honey!

Black bears den in tree cavities, under logs or rocks, in caves, or under banks. Black bears enter their dens in October or November, and spend three to five months there. During this time, their heart rate drops to eight beats per minute.

## Wolverine

**Size:** 26-42 inches in length; 20-55 pounds

**Eats:** mammals like porcupine, squirrel, beaver, mice, and even deer

**Lives in:** boreal forests and alpine tundra

Wolverines are sometimes called skunk bears, but they aren't related to skunks or bears. Wolverines are actually members of the weasel family. They have an anal scent gland used to mark territory and attract mates. This strong smell helped the wolverine get the nicknames skunk bear and nasty cat.

Wolverines are known for their ferocious nature. Armed with powerful jaws, sharp claws, and a thick hide, wolverines are very strong for their size. They may defend their food against larger predators. There's even one published story about a wolverine trying to steal a kill from a black bear!

## Chukar

**Size:** 14 inches in length

**Eats:** seed, insects, and some plants

**Lives in:** dry, rugged, desert areas of western states

Chukars are a kind of partridge. They aren't native to Wyoming. Chukars were brought to the United States from Asia around 1925 as a species to hunt. Each chukar has a wide, black band that runs across its forehead and around its eyes. The band makes them look like a masked outlaw.

Chukars like steep, rugged areas with cliffs they can fly off of to escape predators. A chukar's call is a loud, rapid chuck-chuck-chuck noise. That's how they got their name: chukar. Some people say it sounds as if the birds are laughing! Did you know that chukars thrive in dry areas of Wyoming? They also have nests on the ground and lay around 8 to 15 whitish-colored eggs with brown spots.

# Our Wildlife Heritage

## ELK FEEDGROUNDS

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department began developing elk feedgrounds in northwestern Wyoming. These feedgrounds are in areas where wild elk herds are fed hay in the winter. So many people had moved into the elk's habitat that the elk could no longer find enough to eat or a safe place to stay the winter. Feedgrounds were started to help prevent thousands of elk from dying during severe winters, to protect rancher-stored hay crops, and to prevent elk from camping out on pasture lands ranchers were saving for cattle.

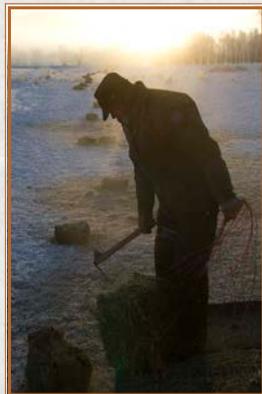
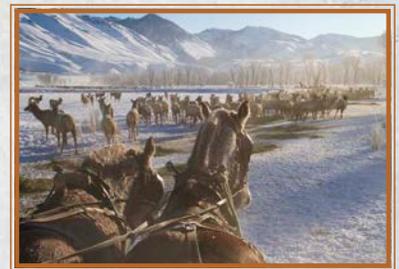
Today, Wyoming has 22 state feedgrounds in Teton, Lincoln, and Sublette counties. Game and Fish personnel feed around 13,000 elk each year, usually with teams of draft horses and a sleigh. Elk are fed grass or alfalfa hay seven days a week, with most feedgrounds starting in late November and ending in mid-April depending on the weather.

Over the years, these feedgrounds have helped prevent thousands of elk from starving. But those early wildlife managers didn't understand the problems feedgrounds could eventually create. Because so many elk are gathered in one area for a long period of time, they are more likely to pass sickness and diseases to

each other. Diseases like brucellosis, or tuberculosis are more easily spread when animals are crowded together. Feedgrounds also cost the Wyoming Game and Fish Department thousands of dollars for hay and other operating costs.

But, fixing the problem isn't as easy as just closing the feedgrounds. There is still a shortage of food to eat and places to winter for elk. Heavy snows could force the elk to eat hay stored in stacks for cattle. The elk could also start moving around the area, increasing their chances of getting tangled in fences, hit by cars on the highway, or mingling with cattle and spreading disease.

Elk feedgrounds are part of our wildlife heritage, but today's wildlife managers are looking for new and better ways to keep the elk healthy without feeding them in the winter. Game and Fish personnel are hard at work to find solutions that keep elk, livestock, and people safe in the winter.



# Around Wyoming

## Wildlife Division

**T**he Wyoming Game and Fish Department has an important job—managing Wyoming’s more than 850 species of wildlife, including mammals, birds, and fish. The Wildlife Division of the Game and Fish is at work all around Wyoming managing the furred and feathered animals, everything from moose and grizzly bears to chipmunks and cranes. You learned about law enforcement efforts of the Game and Fish in the Fall 2011 edition of Wild Times. But, do you know about all the other activities Wildlife Division personnel are doing on behalf of your wildlife?



**S**ometimes fire can be used as a tool to improve habitat. Terrestrial habitat biologists (biologists who focus on land-based projects) use fire to clear an area of old or dead plants. Once the old growth is burned away, new plant life can grow in the nutrient rich soil. New plants can mean better food or improved living spaces for wildlife.



**I**f you look up at the right time of year, you might catch a glimpse of a wildlife biologist flying in a plane above the landscape,

counting the number of antelope or moose they can see. These counts, called population estimates, help biologists understand how healthy the population is or make decisions about how many animals can be harvested during hunting seasons.



**T**rophy Game biologists focus on black bears, grizzly bears, mountain lions, and sometimes even wolves. One of the most important jobs of a trophy game biologist is minimizing conflict between people and trophy game. Bears or mountain lions can move into places where people live. The animals are usually only searching for food, but they can pose a danger to people and pets. When that happens, Game and Fish personnel are called in to trap the animal and relocate it to habitat that’s safer for wildlife and people!



**T**he animals in Wyoming that you don’t hunt or fish for are called nongame species. Nongame biologists work with wildlife like pocket gophers, black-footed ferrets, bats, woodpeckers, or burrowing owls. During just about any season you can find a nongame biologist out in the field conducting surveys. They might be counting populations, observing the condition of the habitat, or even trapping individual animals to check on their size or health.



# Outdoor Classroom

## MIGRATION CORRIDORS

**W**ildlife is always on the move. They move from place to place in search of food, shelter, mates, or water. Some animals don't have to move very far to find their ideal habitat. But other animals face a long and dangerous journey at least twice a year. Have you ever heard the term "Migration Corridor"? That's the term wildlife biologists use to describe tract of land that wildlife travel, or migrate, through to get from one point to the other, usually from their summer habitat to their winter habitat. These corridors can be very small, like a pathway under a highway that allows animals to cross under the road safely. Or the migration corridors can be very long, covering hundreds of miles.

**T**hink about elk that move from high on the mountain in the summer down into the

valley in the winter. The elk change habitats to find food to eat, water to drink, and even room to mate. The area between the two habitats is the elk's migration corridor. What obstacles might the elk encounter that could slow them down or even kill them on this journey?

**D**id you identify obstacles like fences, buildings, or roads? What about predators? Elk could be eaten by wolves or bears or be killed by human hunters. The elk can also encounter changes in vegetation that force them to eat different food.

**C**an you think of any migration corridors for other species? Antelope, wolves, deer, and even birds all have migration corridors. Even people have

migration corridors. We might not use them seasonally, but they are there. Think of Interstate 80 that runs through southern Wyoming. Interstate 80, or I-80, is the second longest interstate highway in the country. It runs from California to New Jersey, and passes through eleven states. People use I-80 every day to move from place to place. What obstacles can people encounter on this journey? Are these obstacles the same as those that an elk faces? Who do you think has the tougher journey, wildlife or people?



# ▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

## Matching Game

Lots of biologists work for the Game and Fish Department. "Ology" comes from the Greek word "logos", meaning the "study of" something. Biology is the study of life, so a wildlife biologist studies the life of wildlife. Do you know what these other "ologists" study?



- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Entomologist   | A. Humans              |
| 2. Herpetologist  | B. Birds               |
| 3. Ichthyologist  | C. Crimes              |
| 4. Mammalogist    | D. Reptiles            |
| 5. Ornithologist  | E. Insects             |
| 6. Ophiologist    | F. Fish                |
| 7. Meteorologist  | G. Earth               |
| 8. Anthropologist | H. Weather and Climate |
| 9. Geologist      | I. Snakes              |
| 10. Criminologist | J. Mammals             |

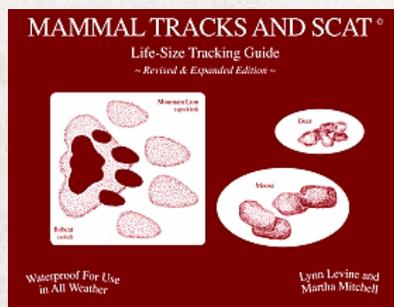


Answers: 1-E; 2-D; 3-F; 4-J; 5-B; 6-I; 7-H; 8-A; 9-G; 10-C

# ▶ LEARNING LINKS ◀

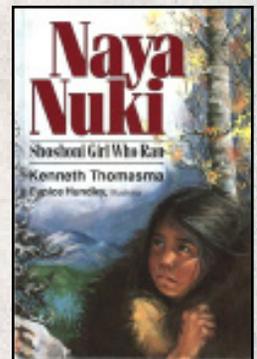
### Mammal Tracks & Scat Lynn Levine and Martha Mitchell

Go on the hunt for the wildlife by what they leave behind... tracks and scat! With this great guide, you'll learn how to identify the tracks of 29 different mammals. You'll begin by determining a movement pattern, then identify the larger group the animal belongs to. And finally, you'll learn how to pinpoint the exact species using clues like scat or other signs like dens, teeth marks, or scrapes. This is a great field guide for anyone who wants to learn more about the wildlife in their life.



### Naya Nuki: Shoshoni Girl Who Ran Kenneth Thomasma

Would you want to be wandering along through the wilderness, mostly at night, with just a buffalo skin for warmth and the river for guidance? That's the journey facing Naya Nuki. She is a bold Native American from the Shoshoni tribe that's captured by a warring tribe. But when she's forced back to her captors' village, she makes her escape. You'll experience bravery, courage, and determination, and learn more about what life was like in the Wyoming frontier before white settlers took over. Will Naya Nuki survive her dangerous journey? You'll have to read the book to find out!



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