WILD TIMES
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INSIDE:
- Find out how cheatgrass “cheats”
- What is the difference between hibernation and sleep?
- Overpasses help migrating wildlife
- Play a fun hibernation game

ACTIVITIES | LESSONS | INFORMATION | FUN
How does cheatgrass cheat?

Did you know some plants can grow through the winter? Cheatgrass is one. It sprouts in late summer or fall when most plants are making seeds and going dormant. Dormant means plants stop growing — kind of like hibernation in animals. Cheatgrass keeps growing its roots through winter and produces leaves as soon as the snow melts. This lets it take water and nutrients from the soil while most plants are still dormant. The cheatgrass is able to grow quickly and make seeds when most plants are just starting to sprout.

This unique way of growing is part of why cheatgrass is a problem in Wyoming. Cheatgrass is not a native plant and certainly lives up to its name. It “cheats” by making seeds before other plants can and takes away resources the native plants need to survive. Cheatgrass also has sharp seeds that keep most animals from eating it. This means that a little cheatgrass can quickly take over an area in a few years. Too much cheatgrass can hurt the Wyoming’s wildlife habitat.

Keeping cheatgrass out of important habitat helps protect the wildlife that makes Wyoming so great. You can help the Wyoming Game and Fish Department control this cheater:

- Learn what cheatgrass looks like so you can identify it.
- If you hike, bike or drive in an area that has cheatgrass, clean off any mud or seeds on your clothes, shoes or tires before you leave. This will make sure you do not accidentally take any seeds with you to a new area.
Hibernation vs. Sleep

Has anyone ever told you hibernation is when animals sleep through the winter? Hibernation and sleep may seem like they are the same, but they are actually very different. Here are some of the differences between sleep and hibernation:

**Hibernation**
- Hibernation lasts for days or months.
- Animals store up fat in their bodies and use it slowly for energy during the hibernation period.
- Some creatures lower their body temperature to just above freezing.
- Breathing slows down by 50% or more — some insects and reptiles actually stop breathing altogether.
- The heart beats only a few times each minute.
- It takes a long time for most animals to become alert and aware when hibernating; first they have to warm their body up and increase their breathing and heart rate.

**Sleep**
- Sleep lasts for hours.
- Animals use only a little less energy than when they are awake.
- Body temperature is close to normal and well-above freezing.
- Breathing and heart rates only slow a small amount.
- Animals can wake up quickly, and are completely aware of their surroundings even while sleeping.

Wyoming is home to several animals that hibernate. Ground squirrels and yellow-bellied marmots spend almost half of the year hibernating. Both black and grizzly bears even give birth while hibernating! Garter snakes, bumble bees and bats hibernate as well. Do you think you would like to hibernate?
Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)

**Range:** Ruffed grouse live in forests from the Appalachian Mountains to the Pacific Coast, from Canada and Alaska south into Utah and Northern California. In Wyoming, they are found in forested areas across most of the state.

**Size:** Ruffed grouse are about 16-20 inches long, and have a 20-25 inch wingspan. They typically weigh between a pound and pound and a half.

**Habitat:** Ruffed grouse prefer to live in mixed forests with aspen and shrubs. They spend most of their time foraging (looking for food) on the ground.

**Young:** Ruffed grouse lay nine to 14 eggs that hatch after 23 days. The young grouse are able to follow their parents and feed themselves within 24 hours of hatching. Ruffed grouse fledge (leave the nest) within 12 days and are completely independent after 16-18 weeks.

**Predators:** Common predators of ruffed grouse are foxes, bobcats, great-horned owls and goshawks.

**Food:** Ruffed grouse mostly eat vegetation such as the leaves, buds and fruits of ferns, shrubs and woody plants. In winter, they eat the buds and twigs of aspen, willow and birch.

**Did you know?** Ruffed grouse will dive into deep snow during the winter and bury themselves to stay warm. Sometimes skiers or snowmobilers will startle them. It is pretty surprising to see one of these birds explode out of the snow by you!
Uinta Ground Squirrel *(Urocitellus armatus)*

**Range:** Uinta ground squirrels are found in northern Utah, southeastern Idaho, southwestern Montana and west of the Green River in Wyoming.

**Size:** Uinta ground squirrels are 11-12 inches long and weigh 7-10 ounces.

**Habitat:** Uinta ground squirrels inhabit pastures, sagebrush, shrubby grasslands and mountain meadows from 4,000 feet to near treeline in elevation.

**Young:** Uinta ground squirrels are born without fur, blind and with their ears closed. After two weeks, they are typically 10 times heavier, have hair and their eyes and ears are open. Uinta ground squirrels become independent and leave their mothers after about 28 weeks. Juvenile Uinta ground squirrels also hibernate almost two weeks later than adult Uinta ground squirrels.

**Predators:** Rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, badgers, foxes, coyotes, weasels, bobcats, owls, hawks and ravens prey on Uinta ground squirrels.

**Food:** Uinta ground squirrels mostly eat flowering plants and grasses, as well as some leaves. They will also occasionally eat invertebrates (insects) and even scavenge roadkill ground squirrels.

**Did you know?** Uinta ground squirrels spend most of their lives hibernating. They hibernate from late July or August to late March or April. In order to build up a layer of fat to sustain them during this time, they feed almost constantly. While hibernating, Uinta ground squirrels’ body temperature drops from over a hundred degrees fahrenheit to a few degrees above freezing!
Many of Wyoming’s big game species are currently on the move, making their way to their historic winter ranges where they can find food and shelter during the long winter. Pronghorn, mule deer and elk have been making seasonal migrations between their winter and summer range for thousands of years. This spot, a few miles west of Pinedale, is called Trapper’s Point and it happens to be a place along the migration route where several thousand pronghorn and mule deer have to cross Wyoming Highway 191. In the past, unfortunately, hundreds would die in collisions with vehicles each year. This overpass, installed in 2012, was designed specifically for pronghorn since they are accustomed to wide-open spaces and are much more reluctant to use underpasses. Today, these pronghorn are provided safe passage and wildlife-vehicle collisions at Trapper’s Point have been reduced by more than 85%.

For more information about wildlife and roadways, including an interactive map, check out the Game and Fish Wildlife Crossing webpage: https://wgfd.wyo.gov/wildlife-in-wyoming/migration/roadways-initiative.
**Time to hibernate!**

Set up a game of musical chairs by placing chairs, carpet squares or pieces of paper on the ground. Put out one less chair, carpet square or piece of paper than the number of people playing. Have someone start playing music while everyone else pretends to be a hibernating animal traveling from spot to spot looking for food. When the music stops, it’s winter time, and you need to find a spot (chair, carpet square or piece of paper) to sleep! The person who doesn’t find a spot to hibernate can swap out with the person playing music for the next round. Try and guess what animal everyone is pretending to be while they search for food and hibernate!
DO YOU KNOW WHICH OF THESE ANIMALS HIBERNATE? LOOK BACK THROUGH THIS ISSUE OF WILD TIMES FOR CLUES AND CIRCLE THE ONES THAT DO!

WHO HIBERNATES?

- Garter snake
- Red tail hawk
- Bumble bee
- Great grey owl
- Little brown bat
- Coyote
- Yellow-bellied marmot
- Black bear
- Cottontail rabbit
- Uinta ground squirrel

LEARNING LINKS

If you enjoyed this issue of Wild Times and would like to see more, visit https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Education/Conservation-Education/Wild-Times

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Books to check out

Hibernation
By Tori Kosara

Readers learn about all the different animals that hibernate and how they prepare for hibernation.

Sleep, Big Bear, Sleep!
By Maureen Wright

Old Man Winter is trying to tell Big Bear “Sleep, Big Bear, sleep” because it is time for him to hibernate but Big Bear doesn’t hear too well. He thinks Old Man Winter has told him to drive a jeep, to sweep and to leap.

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