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2008

In the News

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Caudell, Joe N., "In the News" (2008). *Human–Wildlife Interactions*. 49.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/hwi/49>

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In the News

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Bear bites back

Marc Johnson, a jogger in Kenai, Alaska, survived a bear attack after he disturbed a brown bear sow and her cubs, the *Anchorage Daily News* reported in April 2008. Johnson tried to outrun the bear but was overtaken by the animal, which knocked him down and bit his back. After the attack, the victim managed to get up and run home.

Wildlife officials believe that the bear was one that Johnson spotted in his yard rummaging through his trash earlier that morning. Alaska State Fish and Game Division decided not to fine Johnson for improper trash disposal, stating that he had already paid dearly for violating the trash container ordinance.

Spring awakens bears, and phones start ringing

In Grantsburg, Wisconsin, as in many other places, bears waking up in the spring come



Two frightened bear cubs in a residential tree.

into conflict with their human neighbors. It is not unusual in springtime, said David Ruid, in a *Burnett County Sentinel*. Ruid is assistant district supervisor for USDA/Wildlife Services in Rhineland, Wisconsin. The Grantsburg police and Wildlife Services typically receive between 1,000 and 1,400 bear calls per year, many of them during the spring. Most of the complaint calls have food as the common factor. When bears emerge from hibernation, they are hungry and seek an easy meal; they are attracted to human garbage, bird feeders, pet food, or food set out by hunters to attract deer.

Utah court blames family and U.S. for boy killed by bear

Utah Fourth District court blamed both the parents of an 11-year-old boy killed by a bear while camping in a Utah wilderness in June 2007 (Wolfe 2008) and the U.S. Forest Service for the boy's death, the *Deseret News* (Utah) reported in May 2008. The court responded to a lawsuit by the boy's parents, who claimed it is the responsibility of state and federal officials to warn campers when a bear is in a camping area. However, the Utah court blamed the victim's parents for keeping food attractants at their campsite, causing the bear to enter the site. The court also blamed the U.S. Forest Service for not warning campers that a bear was seen in the area earlier on the day of the tragedy. Utah is exempt from prosecution because of the Utah Government Immunity Act.

Experience no match for grizzly

In November 2007, the *Calgary Herald* reported that Don Allan Peters, a hunter and experienced outdoorsman from Calgary, Canada, was killed by a grizzly bear. The victim's body was discovered hidden in brush after a 3-day search by rescue units, volunteers,



Grizzly bear. (Photo by Corel, used with permission.)

conservation officers, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Wildlife officials attempted to capture the bear, but would not comment on whether or not the animal would be euthanized if it was captured.

Bear attacks up in Kashmir

A bear attacked and injured a 40-year-old man outside his house in the village of Karmulla, Kashmir, the *Sahara Samay* reported in April 2008. After the attack, the bear (probably a Himalayan black bear) fled into the forest. Over the past year, more than 2 dozen fatal attacks by bears and numerous attacks by leopards and other wildlife were reported in the area.

How many bears in Slovakia and who's counting?

Environmental ministry officials in Slovakia are attempting to take a census of the country's brown bear population, the *Associated Foreign Press* (AFP) reported in late April 2008. The purpose of the count is to determine how many bears are ideal for this central European country.

Bears are at the center of a battle between hunters and animal activist organizations, and developing an accurate estimate for the number of bears has been challenging, depending on whom you ask, according to AFP. Ecologists estimate that the population is between 400 and 600 bears and call for a limit on hunting permits. Hunting associations state that the population is probably between 1,200 and 1,400 bears. Managing officials use a middle figure of 700 to 900 bears.

Wildlife researchers in Slovakia will use a combination of GPS collars, remote cameras, visual counts, track plots, scat analysis, and genetic techniques to improve upon their estimate of the bear population size. Meanwhile, animal activists are exploring avenues to limit hunting as a method of population control, arguing that the current method for issuing hunting permits is out-of-step with existing European rules. Robin Riggs, a researcher for over 10 years in Slovakia, argued that non-threatened species should not be off-limits to hunters. To limit human–wildlife conflicts, priority should be given to not feeding bears, according to wildlife officials.

Georgia alligator found to be culprit in killing

In October, 2007 an elderly woman who was recently attacked and killed by an alligator on Skidaway Island, Georgia, while she was visiting relatives at this gated retirement community

surrounded by saltwater lagoons. The victim's body was found with parts of it missing, according to the *Times Colonist* of Victoria, Canada. A trapper shot and killed an alligator in the area, and necropsy tests verified the alligator as the one that had carried out the fatal attack. A biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources said such an attack is extremely rare. From 1980 through October 2001, there had been only 8 reported cases of alligator attacks on humans, and none of those was fatal. Most of the cases were from people stepping on submerged alligators.

Burglary suspect escapes—right into alligator's jaws

A man suspected of burglarizing vehicles in a Miami-Dade County, Florida, parking lot was killed by a 9-foot-long alligator after he attempted to flee police. The man jumped into a retention pond nearby and soon was heard screaming, according to witnesses. The alligator was identified and killed soon after the

Alligator attacks on humans are considered rare occurrences.



incident, which was reported by WPTV News in November 2007. Wildlife officials noted that the attacking alligator was well-known to local residents and had little fear of people, indicating that it was used to being fed.

No way to treat a raccoon

The April 22 (2008) issue of the *Journal and*

Raccoon making itself at home in a residential roof.



Courier in Lafayette, Indiana, provided a classic example of how not to conduct wildlife removal operations in urban areas. A family in a local apartment had their Friday night interrupted with the sounds of a raccoon screaming in pain after being caught in a body-gripping trap. The raccoon screamed for 15 minutes before it slid off the roof, hanging itself and still twitching in front of the family's window. Of the six children in the house, the oldest (aged 17) cried for the longest, stating that she "could still hear it screaming in my head" and that it sounded like a child being beaten to death. The animal carcass hung in front of the family's window from 9:30 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. the next day before it was removed.

Deer sharpshooting program on hold due to concern over orphaned fawns

In April, 2008, the *Bucks County Courier Times* reported that residents in Solebury, Pennsylvania,

A pair of orphaned deer fawns.



were upset over fawns being taken as part of deer culling program. The USDA/APHIS in Pennsylvania has agreed to suspend the culling program during the fawning season. Yearlings had been taken the previous year because there was immediate concern over the population size and its impact on the local agriculture. In the first six months of the culling effort, there was a 15% reduction in deer-vehicle collisions and a 40% increase in crop production in the area. Some area residents also reported a decrease in damaged landscape vegetation.

Monkey gangs threaten to overrun New Delhi, India

Roaming gangs of monkeys have New Delhi, India, officials worried. Monkeys—more than 25,000 of them, according to one estimate—roam public parks, climb on monuments, bathe in sacred fountains, and attack people

throughout the city, the *New York Times* reported in November 2007. Encounters with monkeys could be dangerous. For example, when the deputy mayor was reading the Sunday paper on his balcony, a band of monkeys climbing on the building harrassed him. He used a stick to chase them away, lost his balance, and fell to his death.

With more than a half-million people moving to the city each year, territory that had been monkey habitat is quickly dwindling. People seem to ignore the monkeys because making eye contact with them signals a challenge and invites an attack. While it is a crime to feed them, monkeys hold a special place in Hindu religion, and officials are frustrated because people continue to feed them. Additionally, animal rights activists protest harming the animals. Meanwhile, citizen lawsuits have forced the city to hire an army of monkey catchers. The plan is to capture the monkeys and release them in a former mining area, now a wildlife sanctuary, on the outskirts of the city.

Muskrat causes flooding of Missouri community

A muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) burrowing for food was suspected of causing the failure of a levee that held back the Mississippi River's floodwaters in Winfield, Missouri. The burrow weakened the levee and allowed water to enter and the levee to collapse, according to an Associated Press article in June 2008. One resident was quoted as saying, "With all the guns in this county, couldn't we kill a muskrat?" *

Literature cited

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Information from In the News can be cited as:
Caudell, J. N. 2008. In the news. *Human-Wildlife Conflicts* 2:141–143.

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