

In the News

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Christmas koala

A family in Adelaide, Australia, came home to find a young koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) tangled in the lights on their Christmas tree and trying to munch on the fake leaves. According to *The Guardian*, the family contacted a local koala rescue who came and removed the marsupial from the family's tree and released it outside. In recent decades, *The Guardian* has also reported that koalas are moving into urban and suburban habitats as native forests are cleared. In recent years, koalas have also been found cooling off in air-conditioned cars, sitting on couches, and lounging with family pets.

Murder in Portland

In what appears to be a scene from a Hitchcock movie, a local NBC station's video report shows American crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) circling the skies of downtown Portland, Oregon, USA, preparing to roost for the night. The nightly roosts led to daily cleanups of bird excrement on the surrounding sidewalks and buildings. In 2016, a coalition of local businesses unveiled the "Poopmaster 6000," a street-cleaning machine designed to clean up the large quantities of bird droppings left behind when the crows left each morning. Over the past several years, however, a local falconry company has utilized Harris's hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*; Figure 1) to harass the birds several times each week to discourage the crows from roosting in the downtown area.



Figure 1. Harris's hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*); photo by Mike W. Matthews).

Man tackles, punches bear

When a man in California, USA investigated growling outside his home, he discovered his pit bull being dragged off by an American black bear (*Ursus americanus*; Figure 2). According to *Newsweek*, the man sprang into action, tackling, choking, and punching the bear until it let go of his dog. The man rushed the dog to a veterinarian, and the dog is recovering after a lengthy surgery to repair damage to its head. In an interview, the man told the local CBS station that he has no regrets about his actions to save his dog.



Figure 2. American black bear (*Ursus americanus*); photo by Mike W. Matthews).

Airplane strikes brown bear

A routine Alaskan Airlines flight into Yakutat, Alaska, USA hit a bump when it touched down on the runway: the plane stuck a brown bear (*Ursus arctos*). No injuries were reported. According to *The Aviation Herald*, the runway had been clear of wildlife 10 minutes prior to the plane's arrival during snow removal operations. As the flight descended, the captain felt an impact on the left side of the plane and noticed a dead bear while taxiing off the runway. CNN reports that the airfield is partially fenced and that airport staff are trained to use pyrotechnics and vehicle harassment to discourage wildlife from coming near the airfield. Two bears had previously been seen in the area, though not on the day of the incident.

Highway expansion includes wildlife underpasses

A section of Interstate 25 located south of Denver, Colorado, USA is undergoing a major expansion to be completed by 2022, which officials believe would cause wildlife–vehicle collisions to increase, *The Colorado Sun* reports. The particular stretch of I-25 scheduled for construction runs through an area with a patchwork of public lands and private conservation easements that are home to a myriad of wildlife species. In an effort to reduce risks to drivers and prevent wildlife from attempting to cross the interstate, wildlife biologists and engineers are building mitigation measures into the expansion plan using information gathered from crash data and remote cameras. Exclusion fencing will prevent animals from entering the roadway, while underpasses and escape routes provide safe travel for animals attempting to cross the interstate. Similar mitigation implemented on Colorado Highway 9 in 2016 showed a 90% reduction in wildlife–vehicle collisions, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

German rheas wreak havoc

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, a group of rheas (*Rhea americana*)—large, flightless, ostrich-like birds from South America—escaped a farm in northern Germany and established themselves in the wild. While rhea populations in South America are listed as near threatened by the IUCN, they seem to be thriving in the German countryside. At first, the birds were seen as something of a novelty, according to *Audubon*, but as populations increased, rheas began inflicting damage to local farmers' canola and cereal grain fields. Efforts to control Germany's rhea population now allow for egg destruction and hunting the birds. Yet, while considered "potentially invasive," the birds are protected as a native species under German law—any novel species able to breed in the wild for multiple generations is considered native. Looking to the future, studies are ongoing to determine if the birds should receive the status of "invasive," which would allow for more aggressive control of their populations.

Vandalizing vultures in Pennsylvania

According to *Lancaster Online*, residents in Marietta, Pennsylvania, USA are waking up to

shouting, fireworks, and the clamor of pots and pans being banged together, all efforts by their neighbors to scare away black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*; Figure 3) that have been congregating in the community. The birds pick at rubber seals and plastic items surrounding houses and roost in neighborhood trees and on rooftops, leaving behind coatings of bird droppings for residents to clean up. Persistent harassment usually works to drive vultures away from problem sites, but residents worry that the birds will simply move to another part of town and cause problems there.



Figure 3. Black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*; photo by Mike W. Matthews).

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