

In the News

JOE N. CAUDELL, USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services, 901 W. State Street, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2089, USA Joe.N.Caudell@aphis.usda.gov

1,500 grebes crash in Utah

Approximately 1,500 eared grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*; Figure 1) died when they mistook the Wal-Mart parking lot in Cedar City, Utah, for a body of water (Associated Press 2011). Utah Division of Wildlife Resources personnel rescued about 3,000 surviving birds and relocated them to a nearby pond.

During their winter migration, many grebes stop over and stage on the Great Salt Lake, Utah, to build up energy reserves for the last portion of their migration. In late fall and early winter,



Figure 1. Eared grebe (Photo courtesy J. Caudell)

they migrate southward in large groups. Often, during inclement weather, they are driven to the ground or begin looking for a body of water on which to land. From above, a wet, asphalt parking lot can look like a lake to grebes. If the birds land too fast, they can be killed from the trauma that results from their hitting the pavement. If they do survive, the birds cannot take off again because they cannot walk or take off from a solid surface.

Governor halts wildlife relocation, cites spread of disease

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer has issued an order to prevent the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) from relocating wildlife within Montana or across state lines (Associated Press 2011). Gov. Schweitzer's order reflects concern about the potential spread of diseases, including brucellosis, resulting from wildlife relocation practices by the USFWS.

The USFWS occasionally moves animals



Figure 2. Elk at the National Elk Refuge, Wyoming. (Photo: G. Smart, courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

between refuges to ensure genetic diversity, but does not typically move animals across state lines and has no plans to move any wildlife this year, a USFWS spokesperson said.

Gov. Schweitzer and federal wildlife officials also have disagreed over wildlife management activities, including those involving elk (*Cervus elephus*) feeding in the National Elk Refuge (Figure 2) in Wyoming (*The Montana Standard* 2011). Supplemental elk feeding in the refuge has persisted for decades, even when the practice goes against basic wildlife management principles, and it increases the likelihood for the spread of disease, according to Dr. Bruce Smith, former wildlife manager of the refuge. Currently, the refuge stocks approximately 12,000 elk, which is about double what Dr. Smith estimates that the landscape can sustain.

Colorado highway plan designed to reduce deer collisions

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), along with other state and federal agencies, nongovernment organizations, and private industry, has taken a proactive approach to controlling deer– (*Odocoileus* spp.) vehicle collisions on I-70. *The Engineering News Record* (2011) reported that a new, comprehensive wildlife mitigation plan was completed for the I-70 mountain corridor, which runs from Golden to Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Researchers have determined the best locations for new crossing structures for wildlife and for modification of existing structures to allow wildlife to pass freely. CDOT recently finished new wildlife fences, crossovers, and

escape ramps for wildlife. The agency also is working to design and manage other landscape elements to reduce deer–vehicle collisions.

Agencies identify cause of white-nose syndrome in bats

Recent scientific experiments have confirmed that the fungus *Geomyces destructans* is the causative agent for white-nose syndrome (WNS)



Figure 3. Little brown bat affected by white-nose syndrome hangs at Greeley Mine in Stockbridge, Vermont. (Photo: M. Moriarty, courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

in bats, according to a press release issued by the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC). The disease was the cause of death of hundreds of thousands of bats in the eastern United States in recent years (Figure 3).

The experiments to identify the fungus were conducted by the NWHC, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, University of Tennessee–Knoxville, New York

Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and Bucknell University. The research findings appear in the journal *Nature* (October 2011).

White-nose syndrome continues to be a problem for wildlife managers throughout the eastern United States. It was discovered in 2007 in Howe's Cave near Albany, New York. From there, it spread throughout New York and then into neighboring states. In 2008 and 2009, it spread into states on the east coast (North Carolina and northward) and into midwestern states. During 2010 and 2011, WNS continued to spread, and it now has been found in 16 states and 4 Canadian provinces. There still is no evidence of resistance among bat species that are affected by the disease.

Border fences threaten migrating bears

Fences along the border between the United States and Mexico that were erected to keep out illegal immigrants may threaten black bear (*Ursus*

americanus) migration, the *New York Times* (2011) reported. A study in Arizona monitored bear migration across the border. The findings could help border security agencies take wildlife into consideration in their border control planning, according to Jon Beckmann, coauthor of the study.

Ranchers cry wolf; not so fast, say wildlife officials

Oregon ranchers often are at odds with state wildlife officials and environmentalists about how often livestock are killed by wolves (*Canis lupus*), *The East Oregonian* (2011) reported. When livestock is killed, ranchers are quick to blame wolves. State and federal wildlife managers are left to sort out what really happened. Conclusive proof about the cause of the kill, however, is not easy. While there is no question that wolves

kill livestock, visual identification of bite marks is not an exact science for determining if a wolf (Figure 4) or other predator has killed an animal. One expert may state that it is unclear if a wolf has killed a calf, while another may state that the animal was definitely killed by a wolf. Wildlife specialists often are called in after the



Figure 4. Gray wolf. (Photo: M. Moriarty, courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

animals are in an advanced state of decay or after other scavengers have had access to the carcass.

Political pressure may play a role in identifying the predator when a local sheriff or other official is called in to challenge the judgment of others, according to the *The East Oregonian*.

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