

In the News

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Owl causes crash

During the end of 2015, a police officer in Louisiana was accosted by a barred owl (*Strix varia*) while driving his cruiser, CNN reported. The owl flew in an open window, landed on the officer, and scratched him with its talons. During the scuffle, the officer lost control of his cruiser and drove into a ditch. Fortunately, the officer did not suffer any major injuries. The owl escaped into the night.

Hunting for pythons

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) announced the 2016 Python Challenge to help raise awareness of growing populations of Burmese pythons (*Python molurus*; Figure 1) in the state. The month-long competition offered \$16,000 in prizes for catching the longest python and the most pythons. Prior to the competition, FWC hosted training camps where first-time snake hunters learned to identify and capture the target species and where officials emphasized the need for humane treatment of the snakes. Burmese pythons were first reported in Florida in the 1980s and were likely escaped or released pets, according to the FWC. Now, pythons are established throughout South Florida with the largest population residing in the Florida Everglades. The hunters captured 102 pythons

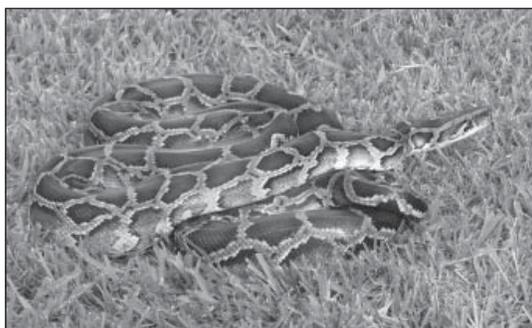


Figure 1. Burmese python (*Python molurus*; photo by Susan Jewell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

out of an estimated population that exceeds 10,000 in Florida. One python hunter was not surprised and told NBC News that it is like looking for a 2-foot needle in a 10-million-acre haystack (NBCnews.com, February 14, 2016).

Vultures eat rubber

Officials from the Army Corps of Engineers at the Bull Shoals Dam in Arkansas experienced problems with black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*)



Figure 2. Vultures on cars. (Photo by Mike W. Matthews)

again during winter 2015, the *Springfield News-Leader* reported. More than 1,000 vultures took up residence at the site, picking at the pliable materials on the dam, parked cars (Figure 2), and nearby rooftops. Thus far, traditional tactics used to deter vultures from roosting, including pyrotechnics, bird spikes, and effigies, have not been effective on the dam. Since the vultures began roosting at the dam in 2012, officials estimate they have caused >\$100,000 in damage. The problem is likely to continue as the dam provides a sheltered roost and sufficient food source for the vultures.

Monkey seeks joy ride

In late December 2015, an unknown species of monkey in northern India commandeered a parked bus while the driver slept in the back,

the *Daily Mail* reported. When the sound of the engine woke the driver, he scared the monkey away, but not before it hit the gear shift and put the bus into gear. As the monkey fled, the driver scrambled to regain control of the vehicle but was unable to stop, hitting 2 parked vehicles. Monkeys are a continual problem in transit terminals throughout India where they seek food and often tamper with unattended vehicles.

EMS hits bear

Wildlife officials were forced to euthanize a black bear (*Ursus americanus*) after a collision with an Emergency Medical Services truck near Naples, Florida, a local news station reported. Prior to the collision, the bear had been seen scrounging through dumpsters in nearby neighborhoods for food. State wildlife officials warn people to be careful when driving at night, as collisions with animals are common throughout South Florida (Figure 3). Animal-vehicle collisions account for the majority of black bear and Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) deaths in the state because roads separate habitat areas. Projects such as panther passages allow animals to cross under roadways, reducing the number of animal-vehicle collisions.



Figure 3. Bear warning sign

Australian government declares war on cats to save native wildlife

In July 2015, *The Guardian* reported that the Australian government planned to cull 2 million cats to preserve native wildlife species in risk of extinction. The plan includes establishing 10 feral-cat-free enclosures in the Northern Territory and removing cats from another 10 million hectares of open landscape. In October 2015, *The Guardian* reported that

native Pintupi hunters, who have hunted cats for years, have joined the effort. Hunters can receive a \$100 bounty for each cat by presenting a part of the tail. They also remove the stomachs of cats for examination by a wildlife biologist who determines the cat's hunting habits and remnants of threatened and endangered species. In the first 18 months of the program, bounties have been claimed for 18 cats—considered a successful number due to the difficulty of capture compared to other native prey. The community applied for \$50,000 to fund a 4-month hunting trip to targeted areas in the 4.2-million hectare Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area. The government of Western Australia also approved a new bait, 1080-laced kangaroo chicken sausages, which can only be used where native hunters are not using the cats for food.

While this plan will help save Australian species, several famous animal activists do not support the plan, calling it animal genocide and recommending a large-scale sterilization campaign, according to *ABC Online*. Likewise, *The Guardian* reported a famous musician calling feral cats a smaller version of Cecil the lion, which made headlines in July 2015 after being shot by a U.S. dentist. It is likely the plan will continue as the target of criticism from the animal activist community.

Alligator apprehends burglary suspect

According to *USA Today* (December 8, 2015), Brevard County deputies in Melbourne, Florida responded on November 13 to a report of two men dressed in black, walking behind homes. The men ran from the deputies and could not be located. Police reported hearing yelling but could not determine its source. Ten days later, a suspect's body was found in an adjacent lake with injuries consistent with an alligator attack. An 11-foot alligator was nearby. It was killed, and an autopsy revealed human remains in the alligator's digestive system. Police speculate that the suspect was attacked while hiding in vegetation along the lake.