

# NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

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MARCH 2017

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND STEWARDSHIP OF LOCAL WILDLIFE AND HABITATS WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE NINEMILE, HUSON, AND ALBERTON REGION.

## ANNUAL (AWESOME) LECTURE SERIES

Both talks will be at the Alberton Senior Center beginning at 7 PM.

“WOLF PREDATION ECOLOGY AND ITS EFFECT ON UNGULATE POPULATIONS IN NORTHERN YELLOWSTONE”  
 APRIL 25 - MATT METZ

Matt Metz is a Research Associate with the Yellowstone Wolf Project, as well as a PhD student in the Wildlife Biology Program at the University of Montana. Matt has participated in wolf research in Yellowstone National Park since 2002. He has primarily focused on evaluating seasonal predation dynamics for wolves in Yellowstone. For his dissertation research, he is evaluating how use of alternative prey and spatial variation in predation risk influence ungulate population dynamics.

“WILDLIFE AND FIRE: WHAT SMOKEY BEAR DIDN'T TELL YOU”  
 MAY 23 – CARLY LEWIS

Using the Ninemile and Petty Creek as examples, you will learn about the effects of fire on local wildlife species, and how wildlife and fire managers are working together to restore fire as an ecological process to improve wildlife habitat. Carly Lewis is a National Forest Service wildlife biologist for the East Zone of the Lolo National Forest (Ninemile, Missoula, and Seeley Lake Ranger Districts), where she has worked for the better part of the past decade. Her current position involves monitoring and evaluating the effects of various land management projects (including timber sales, prescribed fires, recreation, and other activities) on numerous wildlife species and their habitat. Carly holds a Master's Degree in wildlife biology from the University of Montana, where she focused on lynx and snowshoe hare dynamics in forests shaped by fire and logging. She continues to be heavily involved in monitoring forest carnivores, particularly lynx, fisher, and wolverines, in addition to working to improve habitat for big game species such as bighorn sheep and elk.

## OTHER NWW EVENTS

### *Bird Watching*

We will have our annual bird walk this year on May 20th, beginning at 8 AM. Bring your binoculars and bird book if you have them; we can provide some binoculars if you don't have any. No experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. This is an informal affair that we finish by noon yet most years we find about 40 species of birds. Dress appropriately for the weather and bring some snacks and water. Meet at the Nine Mile Ranger Station where we'll walk around a bit before carpooling to other areas. Be prepared to have fun!

### *Adopt-A-Highway*

Our annual roadside pickup is planned for June 24th. Dale and Kandy Chik will once again lead our group in cleaning up our adopted two mile section of Highway 10. Dress appropriately, bring some gloves and get your steps in for the day while visiting with your neighbors and providing a community service. Every year brings surprises; join us to see what this year will bring. We'll meet at Dale and Kandy's place at 9 AM. They live about one mile west of the Nine Mile House at 29221 Old Highway 10 (frontage road).

If you have any questions you can call Pat Sweeney at 626-1610 and visit our website or go to Facebook to get information on these and other events.

Adopt-a-Highway crew



# HEEEWWWW? THE EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

by Pat Sweeney

There's a new bird in the neighborhood. New at least relatively speaking, as the Eurasian collared dove first appeared on our continent in 1974, when it was accidentally introduced into the Bahamas through the pet trade. It spread to Florida in the 1980s and is now common to abundant across much of North America. It was first noted in Montana in 1997 and is now found throughout the state. A few years ago, I may have seen a couple of these recent immigrants in my yard along with the native mourning doves, but last fall I noted at least twelve of them at once. I've had reports from others with similar increases in their local populations.

The collared dove is non-migratory, but has strong dispersal tendencies. It is considered one of the most successful colonizers in the bird world. A little over a century ago it was limited to southern Asia. With human assistance, it since has spread across much of Europe and Asia. After its appearance in Florida four decades ago, it has spread to nearly every state in the USA, as well as to much of Canada and Central America. This rate of expansion can only be described as incredible! Population growth has reduced in areas where they've been established the longest, such as Florida, but is still growing exponentially in areas of more recent introduction.



Mourning dove on the top left, Eurasian collared dove on bottom right. Pat Sweeney.



Eurasian collared dove. Note the black 'collar' on the back of its neck. Pat Sweeney.

The Eurasian collared dove is one of three pigeons or doves that are common in our area, other than rock pigeon (aka rock dove and also non-native) and the native mourning dove. Among the three, the Eurasian collared dove is the middle weight, smaller than the rock pigeon but larger than the mourning dove. At first glance you could mistake it for a mourning dove, except collared doves are a bit larger, have a square tail instead of a pointed one, and a black collar on the back of their neck. If you look at the picture you can note these differences with the mourning dove on top and the Eurasian collared dove closer to the camera. Their calls and songs also differentiate them from other doves. One distinctive sound they make has been described as a harsh, mewling, nasal call or "weeww." A friend calls them zombie doves because of this strange vocalization. If interested, a google search will give you recordings to listen to, much better than any written description.

Eurasian collared doves are extremely successful colonizers and breeders, and some believe that they may compete with native mourning doves, as they have similar habitat needs and diets. Both can be seen on the ground foraging under our feeders. They do carry some diseases and parasites that can spread to native birds via co-mingling at feeders or to avian predators that consume them. These diseases could potentially threaten native biodiversity and domestic fowl. According to Audubon Guide to North American Birds, "Possible interactions with native species not yet well understood, but no obvious negative impacts have been noted so far." In Montana, they are listed as an exotic species which means they are not protected and can be hunted year round.

So next time you see a dove, give it a closer look - it may be that new bird in the neighborhood.



Bighorn sheep. Pat Sweeney.



Red fox. Pat Sweeney.



Turkey-fest! Pat Sweeney.s

## WOLVERINES IN THE WEST

by Kylie Paul

These large members of the weasel family are tough as nails, wandering the wintry wildlands. They are incredible – they can drive grizzly bears and wolves away from carcasses and have been documented climbing 5,000 vertical feet in the middle of winter in less than two hours. And the scientific community and those of us in the public interested in this fearless species are finding out a little more about them each day. There have been several monitoring efforts in recent years to determine their presence across small portions of the Rockies, including several years of intensive monitoring in the Seeley-Swan region (search for Southwest Crown Collaborative or Swan Valley Connections websites for more info).

This year, there is a combined, multi-state effort across wolverine habitat in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and eastern (the mountainous parts) Washington to learn more about wolverine distribution. The effort is run by the Fish and Game departments of those states. There are 186 stations set up this year across the 4 states. In Montana there are 51 stations, plus several more set up by volunteer groups, all within computer-modeled presumed wolverine habitat. Several of these are in the region around Missoula, in the Bitterroots, Sapphires, on the border west of I-90, and on Reservation Divide.



Wolverine in the Bitterroot National Forest, documented in 2015 by a citizen scientist-based monitoring project.



Wolverine in the Bitterroot National Forest, documented in 2016 by a citizen scientist-based monitoring project.

Monitoring sites are baited with a chunk of wild game meat and combined with a (horribly) aromatic scent lure placed on nearby trees, making the sites irresistible to carnivores. Each site also includes a motion-triggered camera mounted nearby and hair-snagging brushes near the bait that can provide invaluable genetic samples from the animals that climb the tree to the bait. These stations are checked every few weeks to collect the hair and check on the camera, from December to end of March. The genetic samples will be sent to a genetics lab to determine what species the hair is from, and if it's a wolverine, they will identify how many individual wolverines were found across the project area. This will give a snapshot of the presence of wolverines in the region, though since it is only for one year, it can't say much about how well the wolverine population is or has been doing over time. We hope this effort can somehow be continued beyond one year so it can have more strength in any conclusions the study can make. We look forward to learning more about wolverines from this and other essential monitoring and research efforts!

*Some wolverine background info:* Wolverines face a lot of pressures. By the nature of their preferred habitat in the Rockies - the snow-covered steep mountains and drainages in between - they do not have an easy life, especially in the winter. They live off scavenged carcasses of avalanche-killed mountain goats or otherwise winter-weakened ungulates that they find relentlessly searching across their vast territories. Meanwhile, they were essentially wiped out from the lower-48 states by 1930 from decades of unregulated trapping and predator control. They have been regaining populations since then, but they face difficulty in moving between mountain ranges as human populations fragment valley bottoms. Climate change is creating major changes in their wintry denning habitat, with reduced snow-pack, earlier snowmelt, and more rain than snow, with likely negative implications on their denning survivability.

In 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service withdrew their previous 2013 proposal to list the wolverine in the contiguous United States as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The initial proposal had cited climate change as a factor in the proposed listing. Then the agency reversed this direction and claimed wolverines did not warrant protection. Organizations sued, and in 2016, a federal district court judge in Montana sided with the environmental groups and invalidated the withdrawal of the proposed listing. That sent the Fish and Wildlife Service back to the drawing board to reconsider the impact of climate change, and a decision on listing the wolverine is now pending.



Mountain cottontail. Pat Sweeney.



Moose near Alberton. Jim Merifield.



Raccoon. Kylie Paul.

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Moose cow and calf. Kristi Hager



It has been nice and quiet in the Ninemile!! Folks did good things in regard to bears this last summer and lions this winter.

But we have had some lion activity in Upper Sixmile Creek recently - related to uncontained hay luring elk and deer into close proximity to home sites. There is a rumor that a dog was killed by a lion but it is our understanding that the dog is safe and sound. Please make sure that all hay storage sites near homes are boarded up nice and tight, with no access for deer or elk. Once elk and deer figure out that there is an easy food source they will come in droves. And when you get a concentration of game trails and big game activity around residential areas the lions and other predators will follow. Same goes for feeding elk and deer!! Don't forget, supplemental feeding and salting for elk and deer is illegal - it is a surefire way of luring in predators. Thanks everyone, and keep up the great work, NWW!

**UPDATE FROM MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
*Jamie Jonkel, Wildlife Management Specialist*



Elk herd in the Ninemile. Jan Pierce.