

NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

WWW.NINEMILEWILDLIFE.ORG
 NINEMILEWILDLIFE@GMAIL.COM
 WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/NINEMILEWILDLIFE

SPRING 2018

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

LECTURE SERIES

Our great lecture series, free and open to all! Both talks at *Alberton Senior Center*, 701 Railroad Ave (1.6 miles W from I90, Exit 77 at Petty Creek)

How might climate change impact the evolution of seasonal camouflage?

Wednesday, April 25 7PM

Matt Jones is a PhD candidate at the University of Montana. His scientific interests are in understanding how populations of animals adapt to environmental change. His research uses emerging genomic techniques to identify the genes that contribute to adaptation and uncover their evolutionary histories. He earned his Master's degree at the University of Wyoming studying co-evolution between malaria parasites and their avian hosts. His current dissertation research focuses on the genetic basis and evolution of seasonal coat color change in snowshoe hares.

Petty Creek Bighorns: Management & Research Wednesday, May 16, 7PM

Liz Bradley has worked for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks for 13 years and is currently the Missoula Area Wildlife Biologist. Her job includes managing big game, including bighorn sheep, from the Missoula Valley west to Lookout Pass. She has a Master's degree in wildlife biology from the University of Montana.



Bighorn sheep lamb. Kylie Paul.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH WOLVES: COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION IN MT

This article was adapted from:

by Rickie Van Berkum, NWW Board Member

Learning to live with wolves: community-based conservation in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana, by Seth M. Wilson (College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana), Elizabeth H. Bradley (Montana Department Fish, Wildlife and Parks), and Gregory A. Neudecker (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program). Winter 2017. *Human-Wildlife Interactions* 11(3): 245-257.

Wolf numbers in the Blackfoot Valley (MT) started rapidly increasing in 2007, raising the concerns of the nearly 50 livestock producers in the area. The Blackfoot Challenge, a non-governmental agency active in the area, had already developed programs to reduce conflicts with the expanding grizzly bear population. The Blackfoot Challenge is led by local landowners in collaboration with local, state, and federal land managers and has been working since the 1970s. Building on their experience with grizzly bears, the stakeholders in the Blackfoot Challenge built a similar program to reduce wolf conflicts.

The Blackfoot Challenge used a range of approaches to reducing wolf conflicts. They made strong efforts to include the community including one-on-one meetings, workshops, field tours, and regular group meetings. Community members also participated in data collection and other projects. The first projects included installing permanent electric fencing around calving areas and livestock carcass removal – these efforts were initially part of the strategy to reduce grizzly conflicts but were also important to reduce wolf conflicts. Next, to reduce encounters between livestock and wolves, they used range riders who monitored wolves and maintained a frequent human presence with the livestock.

These efforts appeared to be effective. Confirmed livestock losses to wolves averaged 2.2 per year from 2006-2015 across nearly 50 ranches on over 800,000 acres that were annually grazed by 16,000-18,000 head of livestock. Fewer than 3 wolves per year have been removed during a time when the wolf population increased from 1 to approximately 12 packs. The Blackfoot Challenge attributes this success to their collaborative approach and prior experience with grizzly bears in a community that was confronted with adjusting to an increasing large carnivore presence over a short time period.

STRANGE BIRD

by Pat Sweeney, NWW Board Member/President



This past summer we spent a couple of days exploring Bannack State Park. One afternoon we took a walk along a little used road and were greeted by a ruffed grouse with very strange behavior. Not only did it come up to us, but it walked with us for probably a half mile, totally unafraid and even seeming to seek our company—not a great survival strategy. While not sure what triggered this odd behavior, one could think about how a precocial bird such as this grouse, is by definition, independent almost from the time it hatches. As a survival strategy, many precocial birds learn to follow their parent within a day, or even the hour of their hatching. This behavior of following something soon after hatching is triggered by a process known as imprinting.

So a possible hypothesis would be that this fearless grouse had imprinted on a human soon after birth rather than on its mother, which would be the normal scheme of things. Konrad Lorenz, an Austrian scientist of the last century, is considered to be one of the founders of ethology, the study of animal behavior. Lorenz experimented with graylag geese and found that they imprinted on a moving object within a critical period shortly after hatching. Lorenz was often depicted with a gaggle of young geese following his wading boots as he walked about,

Ruffed grouse and its new friend. Pat Sweeney.

similar to baby ducks following their mother. Perhaps during this grouse's critical imprint period, a curious and friendly human passed by and caused it to imprint on a human rather than its own species? Perhaps the egg was hatched in the presence of a person who temporarily adopted it? Perhaps you can come up with an alternate idea?

Later that day we talked to the folks at the visitor center who were aware of this grouse's strange behavior but had no explanation for it. So for now, I'll just chalk it up to being another fascinating mystery of the natural world. It's just another example of a wildlife experience that if you're lucky, you'll get to enjoy and wonder about.



"Is my name in there?" Ruffed grouse. Pat Sweeney.

FISH CREEK - PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites public review of its proposal to acquire fee title to approximately 276 acres from a private party, as an addition to FWP's adjacent 35,041-acre Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area (FC-WMA), located south of Tarkio in Mineral County. The proposed acquisition property is composed of two private inholding parcels: the 116-acre Whitehorse parcel (just west of Whitehorse Gulch, off West Fork Fish Creek) and the 160-acre Main Stem Fish Creek parcel. FWP's purpose for purchasing the land is to manage the important habitat (including 1.2 miles of riparian and fisheries habitat along Fish Creek) for deer, elk and other wildlife, and to prevent this habitat from potentially being developed or subdivided. Public access and recreational opportunities would be increased by managing the property as part of FCWMA.

A draft environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared describing this proposal. View it at FWP's Internet website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Public Notices"). Comments may be made on FWP's website or may be directed to Sharon Rose at shrose@mt.gov. Comments must be received by FWP no later than April 13, 2018.



Fledgling great horned owl. Aubree Benson.



Freezout Lake snow geese. Kylie Paul



Bobcat. Byron Robinson.

TURKEY ATTACKS - IS MONTANA NEXT?!

by Pat Sweeney, NWW Board Member/President



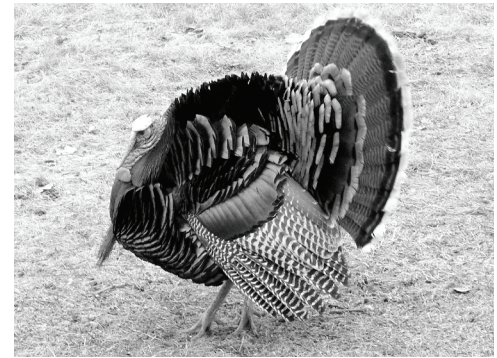
Turkey noggin. Pat Sweeney.

Montana sees its fair share of stories about wildlife intimidating or injuring people, with sometimes tragic results. Less scary, but legitimate news sources around the nation have been sending out alarming reports about turkeys attacking people. Here's an excerpt from a recent Associated Press story: "Postal carriers say a rafter of aggressive wild turkeys have prevented them from delivering mail to more than two dozen homes in a Cleveland suburb. A U.S. Postal Service spokesman says some carriers have been pecked but none have been injured". Another article stated "A neighborhood in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, is being "terrorized" daily by a roving gang of aggressive, malicious wild turkeys". It seems that people's age, size, or physical ability doesn't seem to matter and people's pets and even the police have been cowed by the aggressive birds. Do an internet search on wild turkey attacks to see a rich library on the subject. My personal

favorite: search for Turkey Attack Compilation!!! and view the 4.5-minute YouTube parody on turkey attacks.

It's unlikely that most Montanans will consider wild turkeys a menace, but to be fair, the wild turkey can be an intimidating presence, especially a puffed-up, strutting tom, which could weigh in at 20 pounds. One of these running at you would cause most people to at least pause.

Wild turkeys were probably first introduced to Montana in the early 1900s, and introductions have been made around the state multiple times since then. It appears they have been wildly successful and many residents of the Ninemile Valley have noted a significant increase in the number of turkeys during the last decade. In the spring, I commonly have dozens of the birds adding free 'fertilizer' to my property and drivers have to evade turkeys more often as they drive up and down the valley.



Strutting tom. Pat Sweeney.

Wild turkey populations are increasing in many places in western Montana. A recent article in the Ravalli Republic noted that a number of landowner complaints in Ravalli and Missoula counties have prompted a suggested change in the hunting regulations to reduce the turkey population. Most of the complaints center around the aforementioned abundant 'fertilizer' they produce, but include turkeys destroying haystacks and getting into barns. The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission recently approved new regulations for Ravalli and Missoula counties that will increase the number of beardless (female) turkeys that can be harvested during the fall hunting season from 1 to 4 birds. Spring hunting will still be limited to only bearded (male) turkeys so the females will be spared during the breeding season when they lay about a dozen eggs.



Turkey gang. Pat Sweeney.

There is some controversy about the effectiveness of this strategy due to hunters being denied access to some private lands and the birds knowing to move to where they are safe. Others question what will happen to the population with a hard winter or a disease outbreak. Regardless of those questions, the change has been approved and may result in Montana avoiding the headlines of turkeys attacking humans. Just for the record though, about 45 million turkeys are eaten in the U.S. during Thanksgiving alone. It appears that the turkeys have much more to fear than the humans.

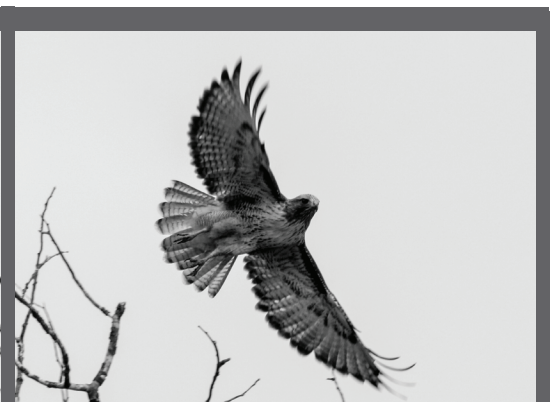
To wrap up, the reputable NOVA science program had a short segment on aggressive turkeys that ended with this sage advice about dealing with aggressive turkeys. "You shouldn't back away from the turkey, or look like you're afraid of them. Stand your ground, flap your arms, and clap your hands, and run at it. They can be generally intimidated without too much problem. And never feed the turkeys." So, just act like a turkey to scare the turkey!



Coyote. Kylie Paul.



White-tailed deer and fawn. Pat Sweeney.



Red-tailed hawk. Kylie Paul.

P.O. Box 183
Frenchtown, MT 59834
ninemilewildlife@gmail.com

Non Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Missoula, MT
Permit NO. 569



ECRWSS
Postal Customer

Please consider supporting our organization so we can continue our mission!
Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup, PO Box 183, Frenchtown, MT 59834



Another opportunity to get together with community members will take place on Saturday, October 13th at the **Nine Mile Community Center**. The Community Center is hosting a **Chili Contest and Cider Pressing**. Don't miss this opportunity for a great local lunch! This is your chance to get rid of your excess apples and turn them into homemade cider as there will be a press or two on hand. Not only will this be fun event, but it could also benefit bears. Bears love apples! If more people clean up their ripe fruit, bears won't be coming around as much and getting into trouble. Details are still being worked out but be on the lookout for information about this autumn event.

For a little more exercise, join us **Saturday, June 30** when we'll brush out the **McCormick Peak Trail** in the Nine Mile Valley. We adopted this trail last year and will try to brush it out every spring. After walking 2 miles and gaining about 1500 feet in elevation you're awarded with a fantastic view from McCormick Peak. From there you can see the Flathead and Clark Fork Rivers, as well as the Mission and Bitterroot Mountains. If you'd like to help out please call Pat Sweeney (626-1610) for more details.

On **Saturday June 2**, join Jeannie Stegler and Pat Sweeney as they lead our seventh **Annual Bird Safari**. Meet at the Ranger Station at **8 am**, with your binoculars (we'll have some to lend) and your field guide and learn about local birds. We'll start with a let-surely walk around the Ranger Station before carpooling and visiting some birding hot spots in the Six Mile and Nine Mile Valleys. Bring water, a snack, and weather-appropriate clothing. We average about 50 species on these spring trips and have seen a total of 95 bird species over the past 6 years. Everybody's welcome, no experience necessary.

Annual Adopt-A-Highway trip on Saturday, June 23. Meet at Dale and Kandy Chic's home at 29221 Old Highway 10 (frontage road) at 9 am. For a morning of camaraderie and a little exercise, help us clean up two miles of Highway 10. Slap on some sunscreen, bring your gloves and join us to help keep our community nice. We'll be done well before lunch so you can enjoy the rest of your day.



Black bear. Genevieve Fix.

SUPER FUN EVENTS!