

Heading: As drought persists, more critters are coming to town

Subheading: What Wheatland residents can do to coexist with wildlife

WHEATLAND — Dry conditions across the state are affecting the landscape for both people and wildlife. Record-low soil moisture, shrinking water sources and limited forage are causing animals to travel farther in search of food and water. As summer progresses, residents may notice more wildlife in agricultural areas, neighborhoods and along roadways.

“This is the driest I have seen in my 30 years in Wheatland,” says Ryan Amundson, Terrestrial Habitat Biologist in Wheatland. “We often talk about the ‘hard winters’ and the loss of animals that can occur with them. Summer droughts can have similar herd-level impacts even when they’re followed by mild winters.”

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Town of Wheatland encourages residents to coexist responsibly with wildlife this summer by understanding why animals may be moving into developed areas and taking simple steps to reduce conflicts and increase critters’ chance of success this summer and beyond.

Why are animals coming into town?

Drought has left much of southeast Wyoming with historically dry conditions. Springs, streams and reservoirs are at some of their lowest levels in decades, while grasses and shrubs that wildlife depend on are producing far less forage than normal.

As natural food and water sources become scarce, wildlife will naturally seek out greener, more productive areas. Irrigated fields, livestock water tanks, watered lawns and backyard gardens can all become attractive to animals looking for food or water.

Lee Knox, Wildlife Management Coordinator for the Laramie region says “Wildlife wandering into towns and urban environments this summer are under severe stress and likely malnourished. Increased tolerance from folks and giving wildlife space will help them as they attempt to survive this extreme weather.”

What you can expect to see

Residents may have already noticed:

- More deer, pronghorn and elk in irrigated fields and residential neighborhoods.
- More unusual wildlife sightings in town like moose and bears
- Wildlife lingering near ponds, stock tanks and other water sources.
- Increased wildlife activity along roads, particularly during dawn and dusk.

These movements are a natural response to challenging environmental conditions.

Helping wildlife out

Never feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife can gather animals in one place, making it easier for diseases like Bluetongue to spread and make wildlife more comfortable around people leading to safety issues.

While it's especially tempting to feed deer, it does more harm than good. Deer spend their lives eating natural forage, and their bodies don't adjust quickly to new foods. Supplemental feeding of corn and bird seed can keep them from getting the nutrition they need. In some cases, deer can starve even though their stomachs are full.

Giving wildlife space is one of the most effective ways to help animals already coping with drought.

Residents can reduce conflicts by:

- Keeping pets under control and giving wildlife plenty of room to move freely.
- Driving cautiously, especially at dawn and dusk when animals are most active.
- Allowing wildlife an escape route if encountered in neighborhoods or agricultural areas.
- Enjoying wildlife from a distance and avoiding actions that cause animals to flee unnecessarily. Every time an animal is forced to run, it expends valuable energy reserves needed to survive the summer and prepare for winter.

Don't give them a reason to hang around

If wildlife begin using your yard or property, simple deterrents are often effective.

Residents should reduce wildlife access to attractants such as gardens or livestock feed, including bird seed and pet food.

- Protect gardens and ornamental plants with temporary fencing or netting.
- Use motion-activated sprinklers or lights where appropriate.
- Install fencing that is suitable for the species causing damage.
- Bring garbage cans into the garage or find a way to lock them up.

Harassing wildlife, chasing animals or intentionally causing them stress is not an appropriate or effective solution. Wildlife are protected by state law, and intentionally disturbing animals can result in a fine and increase their stress during an already difficult time of year.

When to report wildlife to Game and Fish

While many wildlife species are normal to see in town and are best just left alone, there are a few instances when you should call Game and Fish.

- If an animal looks sick, injured or especially distressed.

- If you are having especially heightened animal presence causing damage to property or livestock .
- Animals not typically found in town, like moose, mountain lions and bears (due to safety issues).

Please make all these reports to the [Stop Poaching Hotline](#) (1-877-WGFD-TIP) where they will be routed to local wildlife personnel.

For more information, please contact the Laramie Regional Game and Fish Office at (307) 745-4046

-WGFD-