



Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Jackson Region

December 2014 Newsletter



Elk & Bison Hunters Do Well

After a slow start to the elk and bison seasons, hunter success picked up in November and continued on through December with a lot of animals harvested late this year. The total elk harvest in Grand Teton National Park was a little over 200, which is below average, but harvest on the National Elk Refuge was the highest since 2003 at 268 animals taken. This is well above the ten-year average of 157. Harvest numbers for those hunt areas on national forest won't be available for a few months, but it is safe to say that overall harvest will likely be below average there as most hunt areas closed before the weather set in and before resident elk started migrating.



Bison hunting runs through January 18, but harvest is currently a record high at over 290 animals taken, so far. Bison are typically counted in February and last winter they were estimated at 825. The population objective is 500. It is estimated that there will be approximately 185 calves born into the population this spring. Given that, we will likely still be well above the population objective but the population is slowly moving toward the objective.

(Top) North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens and Wildlife Disease Technician Carl Brown visit with a successful elk hunter. (Right) A game retrieval service brings in a successful hunter's cow elk. (Left) Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat Biologist Ben Wise extracts teeth from a successful hunter's bison.





Buck Deer Dons Christmas Lights

As the snow piles up at the higher elevations, big game animals make their way down to the valley floor and tend to show up in town and other developed areas. Unfortunately, there are any number of potential conflicts these animals can, and do, get into and the Game and Fish Department is the agency that is typically called to come deal with it. One of the calls the Jackson office received in December was regarding a buck mule deer that had gotten Christmas lights entangled in its antlers in east Jackson. A few regional personnel

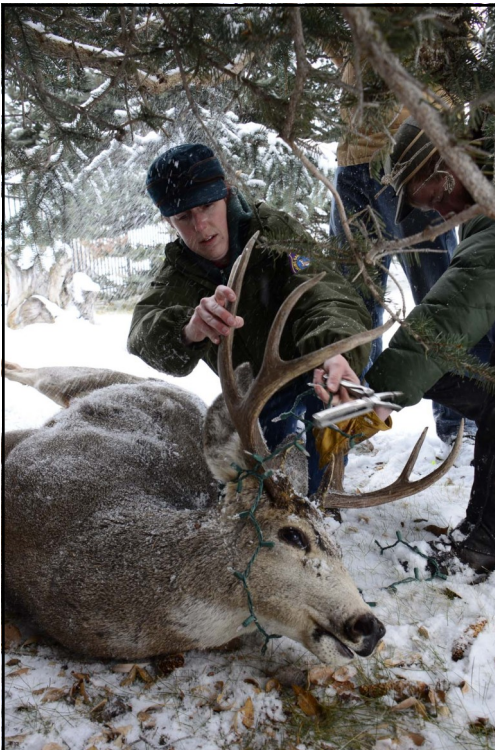
were on hand to respond and found the deer was indeed trailing a long string of Christmas lights. After closer inspection, it was clear the lights were going to be there for a while if not physically removed, so the decision was made to tranquilize the buck and remove the Christmas lights to prevent future injury to the animal.

While darting an animal may seem like an easy, straight-forward practice, there are a number of factors that must be considered. There are always risks involved in immobilizing an animal and wildlife managers have to weigh those risks to the situation the animal is already in.

Like people, not all animals react to the drug the same, while one animal may go down easily with a prescribed dose, another may not. If an animal is already stressed, it may not go down easily, or

conversely, it may cause it's vital functions to shut down completely and it could die. If an animal does not go down, it could become aggressive or could run into other potential hazards such as a fence, traffic or into a stream and drown. Above all, one needs to consider the safety of the people and the safety of the animal before darting.

In this case the deer went down as planned , the lights were removed, the deer was given a reversal drug and he went on his way, less one set of Christmas lights.



(left) Aly Courtemanch removes the Christmas lights from the tranquilized buck deer. (Right) A still-groggy mule deer slowly walks away after being tranquilized.



Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch (right) takes aim with a tranquilizer gun, while Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat Biologist Ben Wise uses a range finder to calculate the distance of the shot.





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Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

Patla Receives Craighead Award

Jackson Nongame Biologist Susan Patla was named as recipient of the 2014 Craighead Conservation award. Patla was honored at the Jackson Hole Wildlife Symposium hosted by the Teton Research Institute and the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative in December.

Patla began her career with the Game and Fish in 1998 and she has been actively working with trumpeter swans, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, harlequin ducks and other species of conservation concern.

During the past ten years she has been instrumental with trumpeter swan research and wetland conservation efforts.

She has also completed a wetland conservation plan for wetland pond projects and conservation easements in the Green River Drainage. Patla currently serves as a board member for the Meg and Bert Raynes Wildlife Fund, and is on advisory boards for Nature Mapping-Jackson Hole and the Jackson Hole Bird and Nature Club.

Game and Fish supervisor of biological services Bob Lanka said while Susan may be best known for her work on trumpeter swans, that is only part of what she does. "She has been a tireless ambassador for nongame wildlife and the Game and Fish for more than 15 years," Lanka said. "Without the unique partnerships Susan has been able to forge, the work the Department has done for nongame wildlife in northwest Wyoming would not have been possible."

The Craighead Conservation Award was established in 2003 to honor the legacy of Frank and John Craighead for their extraordinary dedication to wildlife conservation in Jackson Hole.



Jackson nongame biologist Susan Patla shares a laugh with the crowd after being presented with the Craighead Conservation Award by Lance and Charlie Craihead.

Christmas Bird Count

Jackson nongame Biologist, Susan Patla, again organized the annual Christmas Bird Counts in Jackson Hole and Teton Valley, including Alta, WY. The volunteer cadre of birders in Teton Valley recorded 53 species on count day and two more on count week: great gray owl and ring-necked pheasant. The most numerous birds: cedar waxwing, 978; house sparrow, 711; Bohemian waxwing, 486; black-billed magpie, 436; mallard, 206; trumpeter swan, 151. The most unusual bird was a rusty blackbird (below), which typically spends its winters in more of the south-eastern U.S.

The Jackson Hole count yielded 49 species on count day with three additional during count week: Golden-crowned kinglet, sharp-shinned hawk and a great-horned owl. The most numerous birds were common raven 466; mallard, 425; black-capped chickadee, 158 and mountain chickadee 154.

In contrast to Teton Valley, there were no Bohemian or cedar waxwings reported in Jackson Hole. However, there were 100 snow buntings in Jackson Hole with none reported in Teton Valley.





A recaptured mule deer doe is brought in to researchers near LaBarge.

Wyoming Range Deer Project

The Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and Wyoming Game and Fish Department, along with many other partners, initiated the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Project during the winter of 2012-2013. The overarching goal of the project is to investigate the nutritional relationships between mule deer populations, energy development, habitat conditions, and climate.

The first helicopter capture occurred in March 2013 with the capture of 70 adult females, 35 in the northern (Big Piney / La Barge) and 35 in the southern (Kemmerer / Evanston) winter ranges. Each deer has been fitted with a GPS collar to be worn for two years. Ultrasonography is also performed at each capture to determine percent body fat and pregnancy. Animals are recaptured each December and March to evaluate change in body condition between seasons. This March marked the completion of the first year of research including three successful captures and recaptures of collared deer so far.

Additionally, the deer are monitored each autumn to determine fawn production and survival. Productivity of individual animals combined with their body condition and forage production data will be used to determine the habitat's "nutritional carrying capacity". Ultimately, this information will allow wildlife managers to assess whether the Wyoming Range deer herd is reaching its reproductive capacity based on current available habitat. This research addresses primary components outlined in the WY Range Mule Deer Initiative.



Wildlife researchers prepare to release a mule deer doe.



Warden Calls

South Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash responded to two separate reports of dead animals. The first, a moose behind an apartment complex in the Aspens off Hwy 390. Lash had to get creative and build a pulley system to winch out the moose over 300 feet. It took over an hour, with some help from local residents. The cause of death was undetermined at the site, but with other recent dead moose in the area, the whole moose was sent down to the State Vet Lab in Laramie for further evaluation.



The second report involved a mountain goat up the Wolf Creek drainage in the Snake River canyon. Lash skied in and found the goat at the base of a cliff. It was determined the goat likely had been caught in an avalanche and tumbled over the cliff.