

Bighorn sheep

As a kid in the late 60s, my Father and I would fish the Poudre River, along Highway 14 out of Fort Collins. In the early evening we would continue down the road to Chambers Pass, to a cut-off near the summit. From this vantage point we would look for the sheep clinging to the cliff walls across the canyon.

Even with binoculars, the sheep were difficult to see. From the distance they appeared as brownish-white patches. With the poor quality of glass my father had, you were almost better off viewing them with the naked eye. Nevertheless, we would stand there watching these magnificent creatures until nightfall.

It is difficult to imagine another animal that defines Colorado better than the bighorn sheep. That is probably why the bighorn was designated the official state animal of Colorado in 1961.

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, known scientifically as *Ovis Canadensis*, is one of four native sheep species found in North America, but the only one who lives in Colorado.

Bighorn earned their named from the massive curling horns that can reach over 50 inches in length. Once a male, called a ram, reaches 7 or 8 years of age, the horns make a complete curl.

Unlike the antlers of deer and elk, their horns are not shed annually. The horns grow throughout the sheep's lifetime, growing in circumference and length. At maturity, a set of horns can weigh upwards of 30 pounds. That is a lot of head-gear for an animal to carry around.

Bighorn sheep are a relatively social animal. Mature rams stay in bachelor groups for most of the year. Ewes, lambs, and young rams usually stay in another group, dubbed the nursery group. The rams leave this group around 3 years of age to head off with the older rams.

The rut brings the groups together,



Tips
from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

beginning in mid November, and continuing until the end of December. This is also when the annual migration takes place. During this time of year herds of up to 100 sheep can be seen together.

The ewe's pregnancy will last 180 days, leading to the birth of one lamb. The lambs are born in May. It is during this time that sheep are the most vulnerable to humans and predators.

The bighorn are herbivores, gaining most of their energy from eating plants. During the summer months, sheep feed on the grass at elevations up to 14,000 feet. During the winter months the sheep will move to mountain pastures at much lower elevations and dine on woody shrubs and forbs to survive.

Bands of rams have a set social hierarchy that is determined by body and horn size. A fully mature ram will exceed 300 pounds in body weight. Dramatic head butting occurs between mature rams to determine leadership and dominance. Rams will charge each other at speeds exceeding 20 mph, crashing their heavy horned heads into each other.

Once the hierarchy is established, rams live in the same bachelor group with very little future conflict. The normal lifespan is 10 to 12 years but some rams as old as 15 have been documented.

Sheep come in many different shades of brown, depending on their home range. All sheep have a white underbelly, rump patch, and muzzle and eye patch. This white patch is what helps us locate them at a distance. Sheep have a very thick coat to keep them warm in the winter, but shed the coat during the summer months.

Sheep have a remarkable climbing ability. They can scale cliffs and canyon walls that we could only scale with the assistance of ropes and climbing gear. Because of the area they live, their natural predators, which include coyotes, wolves, bobcats, mountain lions and eagles, have a difficult time reaching them.

At the beginning of the 19th century, it was estimated there were somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million bighorn sheep across western North America. By the 1920's, bighorns were eliminated from Washington, Oregon, Texas, North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Mexico.

During the 19th century, as Colorado was



A Bighorn Sheep stands sentry on a hillside. The width and length of the curl in the horns indicate this is a very old warrior. (Submitted Photo/David Hannigan, Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

rapidly expanding it's industrial development, our sheep populations began to suffer. Human encroachment, habitat loss and hunting all took a toll on the herd but new diseases had the greatest effect.

The domesticated sheep herds brought on the introduction of new diseases. Since domestic and bighorn sheep are in the same genus, diseases are easily transmitted between the two species. These diseases include scabies, foot rot, blue tongue and a score of others.

By the late 1800s, scabies and pneumophilic bacteria had killed hundreds of Colorado's bighorn. In 1950, it was estimated that only 2200 bighorns still remained in Colorado, being the lowest population ever recorded.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), formerly Division of Wildlife got involved in the mid 1950's. CPW began reintroducing large herds into the mountains of central Colorado and adopted new management practices.

Because of the management efforts, the population of bighorns has rebounded and is doing well. Colorado now has 79 separate breeding herds and an estimated population of 7,040 sheep.

Colorado has the largest population of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in the United States. It was also estimated that half of the

herds within the state were native, meaning that they were completely composed of sheep born in Colorado.

During the late spring and early summer, sheep can be seen near Blue Mesa Reservoir. We usually see them in the early morning hours, around sunrise, slipping to the water's edge for a drink, before heading back up to the high country.

Let's hope we don't suffer any more drought conditions and keep plenty of water for the sheep in Blue Mesa. I enjoy watching the sheep, no matter how hard they are to spot. I hope their population does well and the mountain dweller won't fall off the precipice. Besides, I have better binoculars now to watch them with, compared to the junk I had as a kid.

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What's bugging you?



Gardening
A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

to check for the insects. What you may find is an insect that looks like a very small tan line moving about.

If you cut a flower and bring it in the house for an arrangement you may find "tan lines" scurrying across the counter. These are actually the little thrips. They feed by piercing the plant and sucking the sap from it. It's kind of like the action of a kid drinking from a juice box. Because thrips are capable of transmitting some bad diseases to your tomatoes and can damage your flowers, you'll want to control them.

Yellow or blue sticky traps will give some results. Spinosad or pyriproxifen (growth regulator) will also give satisfactory results.

People have been calling me about geranium or tobacco budworms on the buds and petals of their geraniums and petunias, as well as a few other flowers.

To check for the caterpillars look for small holes in the buds or on the leaves. If the worms are present they can be pulled off of the plant and dropped into soapy water. You'll be most likely to spot them at dusk when they're most active. During daylight hours, they usually hide around the base of the plant. They're resistant to most garden insecticides, however Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) insecticides can provide good control. Synthetic pyrethrins, also known as pyrethroid insecticides, can also provide control. They're developing varieties of bedding plants that are resistant to the budworms, which is good news if you've been battling them.

Earwigs are considered both beneficial and yet a bit of a problem. You may not notice them because they're more active at night and will hide under the bark of a tree or under debris in the garden. They feed on a wide variety of plants and occasionally cause injury



This Robber fly may look creepy but he's one of the good guys in the garden. Don't hurt him! (Submitted Photo/Linda Corwine McIntosh)

to leafy plants such as lettuce and some flower blossoms. You may also find them hiding in the tip of an ear of corn. They will feed on pests such as aphids, mites and insect eggs, which is a good thing. But, if you choose to control earwigs, a trap baited with wheat bran or wheat germ placed inside a rolled up dampened newspaper works well. Just be sure to toss the trap into a sealed bag every 2-3 days and throw it in the trash. Another trap would be to place vegetable oil in a small cup or shallow can like a tuna fish can. Sink it into the ground keeping the level of the oil at least an inch below the surface. The idea is, the earwigs will crawl into the can and not be able to crawl out. Check and dispose of the traps regularly.

Spider mites love drought stressed plants, especially if they're growing in a sunny, hot location. If your plant is looking a little crispy or needles on your evergreen look more gray than green, you might have spider mites. Look closer for webbing or black dots that are smaller than a pinhead. You might want to hold a piece of white paper under the leaf or needles and tap the plant. If a small black dot drops off and begins crawling, you probably have spider mites. Often times, simply spraying the underside of the leaves or needles of a tree with a strong stream

of water every few days for a couple of weeks, and increasing the irrigation a bit, will take care of the problem. A miticide insecticide can be very effective for control. Just be sure the product that you spray with is labeled for spider mites. Using the wrong product can actually increase the mite populations.

Aphids have caused some curled, distorted leaves on trees. If you can unroll the leaf and see small insects living there, they're probably aphids. If there are no insects in the leaf it could be herbicide drift damage. If you find the damage was caused by aphids rather than herbicide, consider spraying the tree with dormant oil next spring. This will kill the eggs of these difficult to control aphids or any adults that may have over-wintered on the tree.

Remember, a few insects on your plants is normal. However, if they're doing damage it's time to identify them and perhaps do something about it. And, make sure you're going after the true pests, not the good guys! If you're not sure what your insect is, put it in a sealed container or baggie and bring it to the CSU Extension office for some help.

Linda Corwine McIntosh is a commercial pesticide applicator, ISA certified arborist, and an advanced master gardener.

Longtime GMUG employee retires

STAFF REPORT

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests' Grand Valley Ranger District has announced the retirement of Fire and Fuels Management Specialist Craig Warren after 28 years of federal service.

Warren began his career in natural resource management working as a fire management officer for the South Dakota Division of Forestry in the Black Hills region. Along with being the fire management officer, he was also in charge of the Timber Stand Improvement programs for private landowners within the two districts. Warren made the move to the Forest Service in 1991 working at the GMUG's former Collbran Ranger District eventually moving to the Paonia Ranger District where he remained until 1994.

In 1994 Warren joined the Grand Valley Ranger District as a fire and fuels technician. Over the next several years he also served as the fire management officer for the Grand Valley and Collbran Ranger Districts and the assistant fire management officer for the West Zone of the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management Unit. In 1999 he was converted to the fire and fuels management specialist for the Grand Valley Ranger District and was successful in implementing a mechanical fuels treatment program on the Grand Valley Ranger District. Warren also found acclaim working for several regional and national incident management programs, including the Rocky Mountain Incident Management Team.

"Craig is concluding a remarkable 45 year career in natural resource management – 17 years with the State of South Dakota, followed by 28 years with the US Forest Service which was characterized in 3 elements," said Grand Valley District Ranger Bill Edwards. "First and foremost was his dedication to the wise and sustainable management of the natural resources for current and future generations. Second was his commitment to serving the American people nationwide through his service with numerous incident management teams. Third was his loyalty to his coworkers and friends. His contributions will reap benefits for generations to come as he left every acre he touched better than he found it."

Warren looks forward to spending his retirement between Grand Junction and his family ranch in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and skiing until his knees give out.

