



Even though the grizzly bear has not been seen in Colorado for several decades, he is still listed as “endangered.” Maybe it is time to bring him back. (Courtesy/ US Fish and Wildlife Service.)

Rare wildlife In Colorado — and some at risk

hen people talk about rare or endangered species, I assumed they were talking about the deer and elk that were not around last hunting season. As hard as we all hunted the woods last year, the game animals did not make much of an appearance. I blame it on the drought, and not poor hunting techniques, and I am sticking with that story.

Colorado is home to quite a few actual threatened and endangered species. As of a survey in July of 2016, Colorado had 33 species; 15 endangered species and 18 threatened species, listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Of these, 17 were animal species and 16 were plant species.

Endangered species are those plants and animals that have pretty much gone south to the happy hunting grounds. They have become so rare they are in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a portion of their normal range.

Threatened on the other hand, means a species is in serious peril of becoming endangered within the foreseeable future. Once a specie is endangered, swift action must be taken before they are gone.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Some of the animals on the endangered and threatened list we all know about. The grizzly bear, for example, has not been seen in Colorado for decades. While old *Ursus arctos horribilis* is doing well in other parts of the country, he is all but extinct in Colorado. Not that I am complaining mind you, but I would just as soon not share my mountain hikes with him.

Other species of mammals you are not likely to encounter on your morning hike would include the gray wolf. He has been pretty much gone from our landscape for a long time, despite intentions of some groups that want him back.

The wolverine, one of my favorite animals, is listed as state-endangered by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. I know I have never seen one in Colo-

rado but have seen a few in Canada over the years. There are no active talks about helping them along here, but I would welcome the wolverine in our state.

The tallest bird in North America, the whooping crane, named for the whoop sound they make, are in desperate shape in Colorado. Whooping cranes are one of only two species of cranes found in North America. These amazing birds stand over 5 feet tall and have very identifiable red marks on their heads.

The whooping crane call can travel for miles. The loss of habitat and over-hunting has gutted their populations so deeply, that a hurricane in 1940 wiped out half the birds living in Louisiana and left the survivors unable to mate.

Whooping cranes are extremely rare in Colorado, and in 1998, conservationists were devastated to discover that one of only five remaining birds perished by flying into some power lines in the San Luis Valley. I guess that Murphy, of Murphy’s Law fame goes after animals too. These birds have not been seen on Colorado for over a decade, but we hold out hope they will some-

day make a comeback.

The black-footed ferret has been on the verge of extinction several times, but recently is making a comeback. This is the only ferret species that is native to the United States. The ferrets’ existence is linked very closely with the black-tailed prairie dog, which is another vulnerable specie in Colorado.

The prairie dog populations started to drop because of the sylvatic plague during the 20th century, and the ferret numbers fell along with them. Human diseases and poisoning of the prairie dog populations greatly impact the ferrets as well and both species remain a concern in Colorado.

One of the strangest and most fascinating birds would have to be the greater sage grouse. They have a unique physical appearance and mating ritual that causes the two yellow sacks on their chest to inflate during courtship. The males make a strange sound that must be heard to fully appreciate.

A hundred years ago, there were an estimated 16 million greater sage grouse. Researchers today estimate their numbers are less than

500,000. Oil drilling and mining operations threaten the habitat for the greater sage grouse.

Another little critter you have probably never seen is the Preble’s meadow jumping mouse. These tiny rodents are found nowhere else in the world other than the foothills of Colorado and Wyoming. The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge once had a stable population of them but a flood in 2013 devastated the area and none are believed to have survived in that area.

These mice have very long tails and dark stripes along their backs. These are not the mice that move into your homes as these little mice hibernate from early fall until the late spring.

There are other animals on the list of endangered and threatened, but not all are doing poorly. The river otter, for example, was reintroduced in Colorado during the 1990s by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife. CPW released 120 back into the wild, and by all accounts, the reintroduction was a complete success as their numbers are in the hundreds and they are living

throughout the state.

A similar success story is that of the Canada lynx. CPW reintroduced the lynx in the Colorado high country and they are doing very well as their numbers continue to increase.

The major enemy to all the animals threatened and endangered continues to be man. As we continue to grow, expand, and build, habitat for these animals continues to vanish. Most of these animals don’t need man in order to prosper and survive; they just need a place to live where “progress” does not interfere with them. As a matter of fact, so do I but I have not found such a place yet.

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