



A rarely seen albino elk. (Courtesy photo/Bill and Mick Kendall/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

All about albinism

I was working in my office, sometimes called the guest bedroom, when my wife bounded through the door. “Are you going to do anything around here today other than play games on the computer?” she bellowed.

“I am working. I am doing research for an article, or at least I was until you disturbed me,” was my shabby retort.

Actually, I was reading an article about a rare white moose that was illegally killed by poachers in Ontario. The white moose is protected by law and is a sacred animal among the tribes of the First Nations in Canada.

What was most sickening to me was the bodies of two cow moose were found discarded along a service road in Timmins, Ontario, and one of them was a sacred white spirit moose. The other moose was of a natural color.

According to The Guardian the white moose, which are not albino, get the rare coloring from a recessive gene and are legally protected from being poached. There are signs all around the area where the moose live warning against the killing of these animals.

Albinism is the result of cells that are unable to produce melanin, the pigment necessary to color skin, eyes and hair. The condition is passed to offspring when both parents carry the recessive gene. When Albinism is present, the animal can appear white or pink.

Every animal makes melanin, including human beings, so any animal can have albinism. Albino animals are beautiful, but their unique appearance makes their survival in the wild nearly impossible. Many animals survive, and avoid predators, through the use of their natural colorings as a camouflage. Obviously, a white or pink animal will stand out.

Another problem facing the albino animal is the poacher. Since albinism is a rare occurrence, the pelts and hides are prized by hunters when legal to take, and priceless to illegal poachers who sell the illegally taken hides for profit.

Albinism is rare in animals, occurring about 1 in 10,000. According to the National Organization for Albinism, about 1 in 18,000 people in the United States have a form of albinism.

Almost all Native American tribes had some manner of



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

spiritual belief regarding albino animals. The albino was protected by most Native American customs and were not to be hunted or killed. The killing of an albino animal carried various curses.

If an albino squirrel was hunted and killed, the hunter would suffer loss of his hunting abilities. When an albino deer was killed, the hunter might later loose his life in a freak accident often involving his hunting or survival skills.

One of the strongest spirit connections with an albino animal was among the Plains tribe and the white buffalo, which stood as a definite omen of great wisdom and the most sacred animal on earth. The National Bison Association has estimated that an albino calf occurs in about 1 in every 10 million births.

Albino animals can have a wide variety of health issues because of their lack of melanin. Most common is poor eyesight and an inability to focus their eyes. Albinism causes a shortage of rods in the eye, affecting their vision.

Add to this, albino animals are prone to contracting skin cancer and are prone to sun damage to the skin. Melanin, which albinos are lacking, blocks the sun’s ultraviolet rays. Some research has also shown that albinism also causes hearing impairments, especially in cats, rats, mice and guinea pigs.

Albinism occurs in birds more often than in mammals, averaging 1 in every 1800 births. The most common albino birds are the house martin and the American Robin. One study found that 8.22 percent of all albino birds found in North America were robins, even though only about 1 robin in 30,000 is an albino or partial albino.

Fish are also subject to albinism. According to Pat Ward, retired Wildlife Technician, specialized in fish management

for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, albino trout were a regular occurrence at the fish hatchery.

“Statistically, it seemed to be around 1 in 10,000 trout would have the albino traits. We separated the albinos from the normal fish because they were so interesting, and the visitors always wanted to see them.

When there were enough albino trout, we would stock them mixed in with the normal fish so anglers would have a chance to catch one,” said Ward.

The State of Utah has been stocking Albino Trout for many years. A state record Albino was caught in 1989 in Joe’s Valley Reservoir and weighed 9 pounds and 2 ounces. There are many places in Utah to catch these unique fish and the state stocks 7 to 10 thousand albinos each year. Most of the stocked fish are in the 8-to-10-inch range.

I spoke with Joe Lewandowski, a now-retired Colorado Parks and Wildlife public information officer for the Southwest region, to ask if there were any restrictions on hunters taking an albino animal during the legal hunting seasons, and he had this comment:

“There are no prohibitions on taking albino game during the lawful season. I might point out that true albinos, those characterized by pink eyes, don’t do well in the wild and probably don’t survive very long. What is more common, and often mistaken for albinos, are called leucistic, which is a genetic anomaly that causes animals to be colored differently. The color might be mottled or much lighter than the typical coloring. Overall, they are very rare, and I have never seen one in the wild.”

I have never seen an albino animal in the wild during my half century in the woods, but I sure hope to someday. In the meantime, I better look busy because I hear my wife coming down the hall.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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Be wise about beetle activity, not panicked



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

If your piñon or spruce died last summer, it may have been the result of beetle attacks. We hear a lot about the beetle damage in areas all around us, but there’s no need to panic if you have pinyon or spruce trees; but you should be smart when it comes to beetle control.

IPS beetles (Ips confusus), which attack piñon trees, may be a problem again this summer. Trees that are under stress from drought, nearby construction, or other factors, become favorite targets for attacks. Trees in forested areas are usually more subject to attacks than those growing in town.

Fortunately, a healthy tree will usually be able to push the beetle out of the tree, making the attack unsuccessful.

If your tree is dying or has died, look closely at the trunk or larger branches of the tree. If the tree has been attacked, you will see whitish or rusty colored popcorn looking pitch tubes containing small amounts of sawdust coming from the boring that has occurred within the tree.

Ips and Turpentine beetles can attack the tree a little below the soil line so also check the trunk below the soil line when looking for beetles.

If you discover pitch tubes and suspect the tree has died because of ips beetles but want to be sure that was the problem, you can cut away about a 5-inch-by-5-inch section of the outer bark and pulling the bark away from the trunk near one of the pitch tubes. (A small, sharp, hatchet works well for this.) You will probably notice the galleries of the beetles if they have tunneled under the bark.

You may also find live adult ips beetles approximately 1/8 inch long ranging in color from black to tan. You may even discover rice-looking larva in these galleries.

As a general rule, ips generally begin to emerge from these galleries when daytime temperatures consistently reach about 60 degrees. Removing trees that are harboring beetles will help reduce the spread of the insects. Be aware though, cutting piñons while the beetles are active will encourage them to the area because they are attracted to the terpenes, or “smell” of the cut wood.

Fresh pruning cuts or slash piles will also attract beetles. So if the beetles are in the tree, cut the tree down and get rid of it as soon as possible if other pin-yons are in the area! Covering the stump with dirt will help eliminate the aroma of the cut.

Because ips have multiple generations during the summer months, attacks can happen throughout the growing season. You may want to remove dying trees this fall when the beetle activity settles down. If there are no live beetles or larva in the tree because they have already flown, you may want to leave the dead tree for wildlife if the tree isn’t a hazard to people or structures.

Spraying the trees with Permethrin, Bifenthrin, or Carbaryl before the beetles fly and attack the trees may be the only effective way of protecting the trees. While spraying the entire forest is not practical, it certainly can be an effective method to protect key trees.

See BEETLE page AX



Damage from a piñon ips beetle infestation. (Linda Corwine McIntosh)



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