

Behold, the fisher cat — that doesn't fish and is not a cat.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

What's in a name? Apparently, not much. Most animals are given a common name that bears the name of the discoverer, or something about the animal. For example, the water buffalo, is called such because he is, in fact, a buffalo, and lives primarily in water slogged swamps. The Burchell zebra, is named after the naturalist William John Burchell.

This brings us to the star animal of this column, the fisher cat. His Latin name because you just knew I would mention it, is *Pekania pennanti*, but around the world, he is known as fisher cat.

The fisher cat is not a cat, doesn't resemble a cat, and probably does not like the reference. He is a proud member of the weasel family. To top it off, the fisher cat does not fish, nor do any of the members of the weasel family.

It is true that the fisher cat can occasionally be seen feasting on a dead

fish found on the edge of a pond, but rest assured the fisher did not catch it. If you ever see a fisher cat in the wild lugging a fly rod, let me know, because this guy doesn't fish.

"Fisher" is thought to be derived from early European settlers likening the animal to the European polecat, called a *fitch*. As for "cat," the fisher is about the size of a large housecat, with dark brown to black, close-cropped glossy fur coat and a very long bushy tail. It will hold its tail upright when it runs, perhaps making it resemble a cat to some.

Although they don't climb trees very often, possibly they are afraid of heights, they are pretty fair climbers. The fisher has very sharp, retractable claws, similar to those of a cat. This further leads to a potential name including cat.

The male and female fisher are very similar in appearance, although the male is substantially larger, reaching up to 4 feet in length, and tipping the scale at 14 pounds if he is not using Deal-A-Meal cards. The female will only stretch out to 3 feet and will rarely exceed 6 pounds.

The fisher is classified as an omnivore, but he is primarily a carnivore, and a pretty darn good hunter. Since he is a solitary animal, he is limited to hunting and picking on critters his own size, targeting wood rats,



Even though they are afraid of heights, the fisher cat is a pretty good climber. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia commons/Douglas H. Domedion)

rabbits, squirrels, hares, and birds.

He is willing to feast on carrion, such as deer carcasses, but prefers lizards, nuts, and berries, when larger prey is not available. In fact, the fisher is one of the few animals who will willingly take on a porcupine, whose long quills can ward off much larger predators.

There are many stories around about how a fisher will attack and kill a porcupine by rolling him over and attacking his soft, quill-less underbody, but that really is not the case. The fisher will attack the unprotected face, repeatedly, until the

porcupine is finished, and the fight may go on for 30 minutes.

To further show the tenacity of a hungry fisher cat, there are several reports of one attacking both bobcat and lynx in the same frontal assault method used on the porcupine, but it is a rare event. In fact, the bobcat and lynx, as well as the mountain lion, are among the animals that will prey upon the fisher. Like the bobcat and lynx, the fisher is crepuscular, being most active hunting during twilight and dawn.

Interestingly, the fisher's reproductive cycle lasts

nearly a year. Fishers usually mate late February to late April, but delayed implantation after successful mating leads to litter production approximately 10 months later. Litters are between one and four kits, which are dependent on their mother until the autumn and usually disperse to find their own territories at 10-12 months of age. Male fishers do not aid in the rearing of young, and sometimes the male may kill young in order to trigger breeding opportunities with the female.

Fishers are found in mixed coniferous forests with heavy tree canopy cover in Canada and the USA. In Canada, they range from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, and up to Alaska. In the USA, populations are found all around New England and as far south as Tennessee, as well as in the Northern Great Lake states and in the northern Rocky Mountains. There are several small West Coast populations in southwestern Oregon and the Sierra Nevada in California. Fishers have been successfully reintroduced on the Olympic Peninsula and North Cascades in Washington State.

It's thought that more than 100,000 fishers remain in North America, but they are a rare sight in Colorado. For starters, they prefer heavily forested areas, where a canopy of tree-cover exceeds

50 percent. In the entire rocky mountain region of the U.S., it is estimated that only 300 fishers remain.

Loss of forest habitat due to unsustainable logging, severe wildfires, poisoning by rodenticide, or rat poison, disease, and vehicle strikes all contribute to the decline of the fisher cat.

Colorado's broad diversity of wildlife is composed of 473 bird species, 130 mammal species, 49 reptile species, 69 fish species, and 18 amphibian species. In over 60 years of padding around in the woods, I have never seen a fisher cat, but hope too someday. He is not a cat, and does not go fishing, but he is a hunter, and that's good enough for me. Maybe we should rename him the weasel hunter.

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife warns of potentially aggressive cow moose following three attacks

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

After responding to three recent attacks, Colorado Parks and Wildlife reminds the public to be aware of potentially aggressive cow moose while recreating outdoors during calving season. The moose conflicts in Park, Grand and Routt counties highlight their innate aggression toward dogs and the need for awareness while hiking, especially near water with thick vegetation where moose are often found and can be difficult to see.

Cow moose give birth to calves in late spring and early summer. During this time, they can become more aggressive toward perceived threats to their young. Cows will hide their calves to protect them from predators but will stay nearby. Turn around or leave an area if a calf is spotted. If a moose begins to charge, get behind objects like trees or boulders to put obstacles in its path. Respect posted signs warning of aggressive moose behavior or calf activity on trails. Choose a trail with good visibility and make

noise when recreating through thick vegetation.

Most moose conflicts involve dogs. When recreating near riparian or willow habitats, keep dogs on-leash to avoid startling moose near a trail. Off-leash dogs can venture off-trail, surprising hidden moose calves or cows. Cows will, in turn, chase retreating dogs, which can bring the moose in contact with humans.

Three recent attacks:

- On Fri., May 30, two women walking four dogs off-leash encountered a cow moose along Fourmile Creek Road in Fairplay. The moose charged and trampled the women multiple times. Eventually, they were able to climb onto a nearby roof to escape. A neighbor hazed the moose away with a fire extinguisher. Neither woman sought medical treatment. CPW officers responded to the scene and found two cow moose. Unable to definitively identify which moose was involved in the attack, no further action was taken.
- On Sat., May 31, a couple was returning home from a walk with their dog near Columbine

Lake in Grand Lake when a cow moose charged at them, knocking the woman to the ground. The woman managed to crawl under a small storage area next to their house, but the moose continued to charge and attempt to stomp her. When the moose continued to show aggression towards the woman and showed no signs of leaving, the boyfriend shot and killed the moose.

The woman was treated on scene with injuries to her face, shoulder and arms. CPW officers did not cite the man, as the investigation determined the moose was shot in self-defense while actively posing a threat to human health and safety.

The dog was on a leash at the time of the attack, and officers believed the cow was protecting a calf, which was bedded out of sight from the victim and her boyfriend at the time. CPW officers searched the area and located the calf moose. The calf was humanely euthanized by CPW.

"The decision to euthanize the calf was not easy to make," said Hot Sulphur Springs Area Wildlife Man-

ager Jeromy Huntington. "While rehabilitation can be successful in some cases, it's not a guaranteed solution. In the case of this moose calf, taking it to a rehab at such a young age would not be in the best interest of the animal's long-term survival in the wild."

According to CPW's wildlife regulations, wildlife taken to a rehabilitation facility is primarily intended for the purpose of returning the wildlife to the wild, and no wildlife may be held for more than one year.

"At this age, the only thing this moose will know is human interaction for survival. If rehabilitation in a facility is successful, we believe the moose would already be habituated to humans which can lead to increased potential of threat to human health and safety," said Huntington.

- On the evening of Sun., June 1, a woman was walking her two dogs at River Creek Park in Steamboat Springs when she was attacked by a cow moose. A man on a paddleboard passing by found her on the ground near the river. As he helped her toward the park-

ing lot, the moose returned and kicked him.

The woman was transported to the hospital by EMS with serious injuries. After evaluation, she was flown to a facility on the Front Range. The man was evaluated at the scene and released.

CPW officers observed a cow moose and her two calves in the same area after the incident and believed the cow was protecting her young. Both dogs were on a leash at the time of the attack. For the safety of the public and wildlife, CPW and the City of Steamboat Springs have implemented a closure at River Creek Park, effective through Wed., June 4. CPW officers will continue to assess the area over the next 48 hours.

While moose encounters with people are quite common, conflicts with moose are low. Since 2019, CPW has responded to 22 injuries from moose attacks. However, conflicts can occur even when following best practices for living in moose habitat. Please report any moose conflicts to a local CPW office.

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