



Q: "How can I connect with Game and Fish on social media?"
A: The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is on four different social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. The Facebook page is typically the quickest way to receive a response to your comments and questions. Photos of how people get out to enjoy wildlife in Wyoming can be posted on Instagram. Tag @wygameandfish in the caption and use #WyGFD to share photos with Game and Fish. Twitter (@WGFD) features news and important updates, as well as videos and photos from biologists in the field. Those who love watching wildlife can subscribe to the YouTube channel.

EQUINE

Roaming the Red Desert

UW study to track wild horses

By **EVE NEWMAN**
 even@laramieboomerang.com

University of Wyoming scientists are embarking on a new study to track the movements of wild horses in the Red Desert. The study involves the use of radio collars — a first for wild horses in Wyoming. The first horses were collared last week, and up to 30 mares are expected to be part of the two-year project.

Derek Scasta and Jeff Beck from the UW Department of Ecosystem Science and Management, along with Ph.D. student Jake Hennig, are leading the research.

The aim of the study, which has funding from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Land Management, is to gather vital information for wild horse management in particular and rangeland management in general, Scasta said.

"There's a lot of unanswered questions about where they come from and where they go," he said. "And really the only way to answer those questions is to track them."

Scientists estimate about 67,000 wild horses and burros live on rangeland in 10 Western states — including 6,500 in Wyoming — plus tens of thousands more living in sanctuaries.

The BLM has federal authority to manage and protect the horses as part of its multiple-use mandate. According to its own estimates, a population of no more 26,000 horses is appropriate for the habitat they occupy.



Wild horses living in the Red Desert were fitted with radio collars last week. The horses will be tracked for two years as part of a study conducted by scientists at the University of Wyoming. Courtesy photo

See Horse study, B3

IN THE FIELD



AMBER TRAVSKY
 CONTRIBUTING OUTDOORS COLUMNIST

Nordic Rocks program gets grade school student on skis

The 15 fifth-graders took off down the trail at the Happy Jack Recreation Area. Some zipped ahead while others took a more leisurely pace. Most were on skis with the words "Nordic Rocks!" emblazoned across the top. In addition to the students, four Linford Elementary School instructors and Linford physical education teacher,

Molly Garson, herded the students and made sure everyone was able to move down the trail on their own power.

Thanks to a grant proposal submitted by Laramie High School Nordic skiing head coach and Spring Creek Elementary art teacher Rebecca Watson, two sets of 30 skis each were provided to Albany County School

District No.1 through the Nordic Rocks program. In addition, the school district also purchased two additional sets of 30 skis.

"They now have four sets of 30 skis available for the grade schools," Watson said.

"The goal is to introduce youngsters to a life-long outdoor sport with gear

that is simple and easy to use."

Jesse Martin, physical education teacher at Spring Creek Elementary, has taken his class of fifth graders up to Happy Jack Recreation Area for two half days of skiing.

See In the Field, B4

Out and about



Ski races set for Happy Jack

The 2017 editions of the Cowboy Chase Classic 7.5km and Laramie Loppett 21km Nordic ski races are scheduled for today and Sunday at the Tie City Trailhead. Today's races are set to start at 10:30 a.m., and Sunday races at 10 a.m. Those who register for the Laramie Loppett can participate in the Cowboy Chase for free. Go to www.medicinebownordic.org for more information.

Fossil Fish Festival to celebrate state fossil

The Fossil Fish Festival is set for 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday at the University of Wyoming Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center. The festival is being hosted to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the designation of the extinct fish Knightia as the Wyoming state fossil. The event includes face painting, raffle prizes, tours of the UW Geological Museum and UW Museum of Vertebrates wet collection, presentations and fossil fish preparation. All activities are free. Go to www.wyomingbiodiversity.org for more information.

Audubon Society plans outing

Laramie Audubon Society is planning a winter bird walk in the Snowy Range this weekend. Participants are planning to meet at 8 a.m. today at Coal Creek Coffee Co.'s downtown location, 110 Grand Ave., to carpool. Bring binoculars and field guides and dress for the weather. Birders of all levels are welcome, and all trips are free and open to the public. The trip will coincide with the Great Backyard Bird Count, an effort to count birds during President's Day weekend. Go to www.laramieaudubon.blogspot.com for more information.



Horse study

Continued from B1

“It’s a big, big challenge, and the issue is the potential degrading of the rangeland resource these horses have to have,” Scasta said.

Horses share that habitat with a number of other animals, which affects management of those species. For example, scientists know there’s a substantial overlap between sage grouse core areas and wild horse areas, but no research has been done to learn more about what that means for either species.

“We want to try to pull some of that apart some more,” Scasta said. “If we try to manage all these other species, but we’re unable to manage horses, that’s a potential problem.”

Radio collars haven’t been used on wild horses very often because of problems with projects several decades ago that resulted in injuries and mortality among some horses. Scasta and Beck said researchers have learned from previous mistakes and the technology has improved.

Using a bait-trap method, horses from the Adobe Town herd management area are being gathered into temporary corrals. The 500,000-acre study area sits between Interstate 80 and the Colorado border, with Wyoming Highway 789 on the east and Wyoming Highway 430 on the west.

From there, personnel transport healthy older mares to a holding facility



Wild horses living in the Red Desert were fitted with radio collars last week. The horses will be tracked for two years as part of a study conducted by scientists at the University of Wyoming. Courtesy photo

where they are fitted with collars with GPS tracking devices. They’re observed for 48 hours before being returned to the wild from at same location.

The collared mares are all at least 5 years old, so they’re done growing. Stallions aren’t used because their behavior is more aggressive and could cause problems with the collars. A third-party veterinarian on site ensures that elected mares are healthy and mobile.

The collars will record the horses’ locations every

two hours for the next two years, and scientists have real-time access to the data via satellite.

Hennig said he plans to check on the horses once a month to assess how the collars are fitting. In the meantime, he’ll receive a daily update about each horse, and he’ll be notified if a horse hasn’t moved for six hours.

“I’ll get a text and an email to let me know, and I can go check on them,” Hennig said.

If he needs to, he can even remove the collar

remotely by entering a code.

“It will fall off immediately,” he said.

The scientists are hoping to learn where the herd spends its time as it roams the checkerboard Red Desert, a mixture of public and private land used by ranchers and wildlife alike and fraught with potential conflicts. They also want to know if the herd migrates or spends any time in Colorado.

Beck said the amount of data will be remarkable, and far beyond anything

researchers could gather by other methods. Plus, it will reveal horse behavior while free from a human presence.

In the rangeland habitat, riparian areas are highly prized by ranchers and wildlife alike, and Beck is looking forward to learning more about how horses use those areas.

“We can learn the time of day they use them, how long they’re there, and relative amount of time they spend there,” he said.

A similar GPS-tracking project conducted several

years ago, also in the Red Desert, revealed a previously unknown mule deer migration. That discovery sparked the development of the Wyoming Migration Initiative and efforts to protect the 150-mile migration corridor from further development.

Scasta said he’s hoping this study advances the field of horse ecology and leads to better management.

“This is a frontier of large, free-roaming animal research,” he said.

TOYOTA OF LARAMIE IS SHOWING YOU THE

LOVE

HUGE DISCOUNTS

UP TO 0% **72 mos** * UP TO \$7,000 **

BIG SAVINGS ON ALL REMAINING 2016 MODELS

2017 RAV4 LE AWD

\$199 mo
w/\$3199 Down
36 mos***



\$1500 Rebate or 0% x 72 mos

2017 CAMRY SE

\$199 mo
w/\$2499 Down
36 mos***



\$2250 Rebate or 0% x 72 mos

SIMPLE. STRAIGHTFORWARD.

23RD & GRAND, LARAMIE
307.742.7423 • ToyotaOfLaramie.com

TOYOTA of LARAMIE

*0% for up to 72 months on select New 2017 models. \$13.89 per \$1000 borrowed. With approved credit. **\$7,000 discount on 2016 Land Cruiser st#168508. Plus \$489 Dealer & Handling. Offers good thru 2/28/2017. See Dealer for Complete Details.*** St#176094, 2017 Rav4 LE, MSRP \$27499, Cap cost \$26,987, \$2,515 down + \$199 1st pmt + \$489 d&h, total due at signing \$3,203 plus taxes, 0% for 72 mos at \$13.89 per \$1000 borrowed. st#10d296, 2017 Camry SE, MSRP \$24,974, Cap cost \$24,065, \$1845 down + \$199 1st pmt + \$489 d&h, total due at signing \$2,533 plus taxes, 0% for 72 mos at \$13.89 per \$1000 borrowed