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## In the News

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## *In the News*

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### Deer hunters may shoot feral hogs

The *Daily Journal* of New Jersey reported in early December 2008 that for the first time in Gloucester County, New Jersey, deer hunters will be able to shoot feral hogs that have been causing damage in that county. The hogs cause damage to crops and fields, compete with wildlife for food, and destroy wildlife habitat. The New Jersey Division of Environmental Protection is attempting to eradicate feral hogs before they become a more serious problem. Hunters must bring their feral hog kills into check stations where they will be sampled for swine-borne diseases.

### Exotic species threaten Texas horned lizard

An Associated Press story appearing in the *New York Times* reported on the plight of the horned lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*) in Texas. The decline of the reptile population in Texas, where it is traditionally known as a horned toad, is thought to be largely due to invasive species. Fire ants, for example, displace native ants that are an important food source for the horned lizard. Additionally, other exotic insects, wildlife, and plant species are altering the horned lizard's habitat, making it less attractive. The article stated that the economic cost of invasive species in general is about \$137 billion per year in the United States.

### Several servals on the loose

Exotic species of wildlife kept as pets can become problems when they escape or are released into the wild. The *Sentinel* of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, reported that a farmer near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, recently killed a serval (*Leptailurus serval*), a small cat from Africa resembling a cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*). The serval had been killing the farmer's chickens. A Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, conservation officer began an investigation to locate the owner of the predator, so far without success. Several servals have been captured or killed recently

in other parts of the United States, including Atlanta, Georgia; Seattle, Washington; Battle Creek, Michigan; and Kansas City, Missouri. Authorities also seized a serval from a woman in Illinois and another one that escaped from a wildlife sanctuary in Muskegon, Michigan. In both instances, the servals were a wildlife gift.

### More than a routine paper jam

In December, the *Gold Coast Bulletin* (Australia) reported that a New South Wales couple was having problems with a computer printer.



Brown tree snake in the wild. (Photo courtesy U.S. Geological Survey)

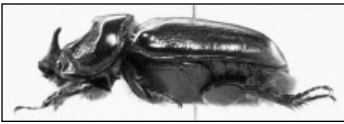
Opening the machine to check on the cause of the paper jam, the couple found a meter-long brown tree snake (*Bioga irrogularis*) curled up inside. Brown tree snakes are native to Australia and are relatively innocuous. But in Guam, where they are an invasive species, brown tree snakes are a source of great consternation for the residents, birds, and biologists alike. The snakes have caused native species there to go extinct, impacted tourism, caused damage to power grids, and caused the government to expend its resources in an attempt to eradicate them and stop their spread to other Pacific Islands.

### Guam ravaged by variety of invasive species

The *Pacific Daily News* in Guam reported that the government must adequately fund agencies to halt the introduction and spread of invasive species. The ecology on Guam has been ravaged for years by a number of invasive species, the

brown tree snake (*Bioga irrogularis*) being the most famous (see related article). The brown tree snake's population has long been supported by an introduced lizard that has allowed each new crop of brown tree snake to survive to adulthood. However, there are a plethora of other invasive species on the island including insects, plants, and other wildlife.

One of the lesser-known, recent additions to the list of invasive species in Guam is the rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes rhinoceros*), aka rhino beetle and coconut rhinoceros beetle. This insect bores into palm trees to eat the sap and reproduce, eventually killing the tree. A University of Guam entomologist said that half of the islands palm



Rhinoceros beetle.

tree is the “tree of life” for Guam. Authorities have called a state of emergency on the island to try to secure funds to eradicate the insect. But, so far, the beetle is winning the war.

Recently, 2 additional species, a salamander (*Eurycea* sp.) and a garter snake (*Thamnophis* sp.), were discovered in an imported Christmas tree. It is still too early to tell what their impact will be. The *Pacific Daily News* reported that full governmental support to the proper agencies is critical to stop the spread of invasive species.

## Humans stand up for themselves during bear attacks

When a bear (*Ursus* spp.) suddenly rushed Devon Reese and knocked him to the ground about 50 yards from his home early 1 morning near Eagle River, Alaska, he fought back. Reese was walking home in the dark in August 2008 and took a short cut through Chugach State Park adjacent to his home when the bear attacked. Wildlife officials said he must have startled the bear, which swatted, clawed, and bit its victim. But Reese did not give up.

“I wasn’t going to lay down and take it,” Reese



Grizzly bear. (Photo by Corel, used with permission)

trees may be wiped out in the next 5 years. One official noted that the palm

said, according to an Associated Press report. The 18-year-old Reese started punching the bear in the head and kicking it. Then, suddenly the bear let go and returned to the forest. After being treated at an Anchorage hospital and released, Reese returned home safely.

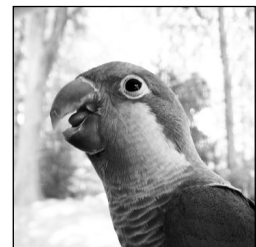
In another incident earlier in the summer, a bystander came to the rescue of a woman who was attacked by a bear at Cooper Landing, Alaska. The 21-year-old woman, Abigail Sisk, of Logan, Utah, was returning from a walk near the resort lodge where she worked. She was about 15 yards from the lodge when the bear attacked her, according to a report in the *Herald Journal* of Logan.

A bystander, identified as Robert Van Zant, heard the woman’s screams as the 8-foot-tall grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) stood over her, mauling her. Van Zant rushed toward the bear screaming and waving his arms and managed to scare the animal off. Sisk was treated for her wounds and returned home to recover.

Wildlife officials have mixed opinions about how to respond when a predator attacks (Brown and Conover 2008). In these instances, fighting back seemed to work.

## Monk parakeets: bane or good for business?

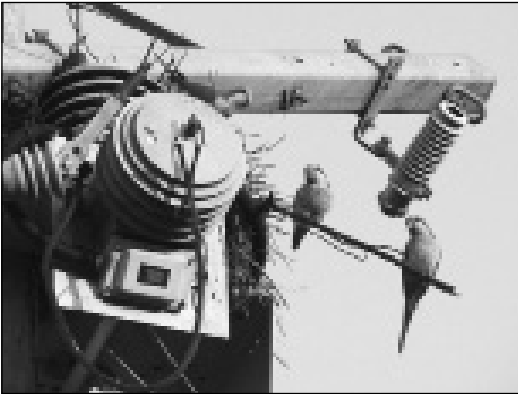
The invasive monk parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) is causing problems in Edgewater, New Jersey. There are an estimated 200 to 230 monk parakeets in Edgewater, up from about 190 birds in the past 3 years. The parakeets pose a threat to native species, damage agricultural crops, and their habit of nesting in electrical transformers has made them a menace in some quarters. The Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G) cracked down on the birds by tearing down their nests, even during the breeding season. PSE&G maintained that the nests were a potential fire hazard. Any fight to remove the colorful birds, however, will be a tough battle.



Monk parakeet. (Photo courtesy Stephen Pruett-Jones)

The *New York Times* reported that Edgewater’s residents and business owners are working to

protect the parakeet, stating that “they give the community its flavor.” Residents care for injured parakeets and defend the birds’ honor from detractors who may not like the screeching noise



Two monk parakeets hang out at their nest site in an electrical array. (Photo courtesy Stephen Pruett-Jones)

they make or who call them a nuisance. A local restaurant owner, George Prifti, for example, keeps a careful eye on the parrots. “People love the parrots,” he said. “I love them.” On weekends his customers like to watch the birds from the restaurant, and some customers take pictures of them. “It’s something positive,” he said. “The birds are good for business.”

Recently, PSE&G and parakeet advocates have reached a truce; the utility company has agreed not to knock down nests during the breeding season. Because of the birds’ popularity, legislation is pending in the New Jersey Senate to remove them from the state’s list of potentially dangerous species.

### What do Indianapolis and the Vatican have in common?

The answer is starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Reuters news agency reported that starlings plague the Vatican, causing damage and being a nuisance to residents and tourists alike. The feces from starlings covers many of the Vatican’s historic buildings and statues. The population of starlings can reach >5 million, incurring costs of >\$150,000 annually in wildlife management and clean-up charges. Meanwhile, Channel 13 *Eyewitness News* of Indianapolis, Indiana, reported in October that the annual war with the starlings had begun. Both cities are aggressively meeting the challenge. Thirteen years ago,

Rome’s leaders decided that the best course of action was not to kill the birds, but rather to harass them. To address the problem, the League for Protection of Birds was hired to harass the starlings in Rome and around the Vatican. The group uses loudspeakers to broadcast recorded starling distress calls and other calls directed toward the birds at their roost each night. Similarly, in the United States, a group of concerned business owners has contracted with USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services to harass starlings in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana. A combination of pyrotechnics and lasers are used to scare birds from their winter perch. The project to scare off the birds costs downtown



Starlings flying at dusk in front of Chase Tower in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana. (Photo courtesy USDA Wildlife Services)

businesses approximately \$160,000 annually. In both cities, as long as the harassment is kept up, the problem appears to be contained.

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