

The problems with free-roaming cats

One animal out there in the great outdoors really concerns me, and it is not a native species, it's a domestic animal. Now I like all animals, even this one, but humans have created a drastic problem with this creature and I can't figure where our heads are.

Cats make great pets, just like dogs, only "Mr. Purr" is a lot more independent. One problem with the cat is he's one helluva hunter and killer, often killing apparently just for fun. This is not a problem when the cat is kept indoors, but what happens when he is outside and allowed to roam free? A lot that our eyes don't often see.

Cats are great mouse and rat hunters but they kill a lot of birds, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and flying squirrels too. In fact, the tally goes into the millions for birds each year and there are more casualties that go unnoticed, such as when adult birds abandon their nests because a cat is harassing them, or a bird not caught but injured dies later.

Other problems related to free-roaming cats are diseases, fleas, ticks and neighborhood disturbances.

So why don't cats have to be licensed and the owners held account-



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GREAT OUTDOORS

able for their damage or problems as dogs and their owners are? I have no answer except we are pretty stupid and have created our own problems by not having done so. If a dog is not under the control of his owner and he bites someone or is doing damage around the neighborhood or kills the neighbor's pet or is just being a pain (tipping over garbage cans or doing his business in someone else's lawn) the owner is held responsible.

Abandonment of cats is a huge problem. Irresponsible people get sick of their cat so they pack it up and dump it in some other neighborhood or, worse, "return it to the wild." In recent years I have seen this played out so many times on our local Wildlife Management areas and the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. This summer alone, I have already seen



DOUGLAS H. DOMEDION / CONTRIBUTOR

There's no factual basis for the notion of "returning" a cat to the wild. Cats are domesticated animals and they don't fare well trying to survive amongst foxes, coyotes and various diseases that may maim and ultimately kill them.

six different cats dumped along Sour Springs Road in the refuge. Those cats are trying to live off the

wildlife.

If a dog is dumped, roaming care-free or destroying wildlife, we

get right on the problem, so why not with cats? The absence of action is not only bad for wildlife, it's bad for the cats — they don't adapt well at all to surviving in the wild amongst foxes, coyotes, diseases and a host of other things out there, thus often they suffer, a lot, until they perish.

What has become a popular "solution" in recent years is the practice of TNR (Trap, Neuter and Release) in which feral cats — those that are roaming free and have no human connections, community cats if you will — are trapped, neutered and then released back to the area they came from.

In theory the cats can't reproduce and when they are released they become good citizens: no more bird killing, no more fleas, rabies, ticks or falling prey to diseases. They just sit around all day and do tricks for food ... right! These "treated" cat colonies turn out to be great places to abandon cats, so eventually the colony grows; the "residents" aren't all neutered after all.

If this is such a good program for feral cats, why don't wildlife managers use it to control overpopulations of deer and other wildlife? Oh, that's right, besides being expensive and difficult, it doesn't

work very well.

Cats need to be regulated like other pets and it is beyond me why we don't. I have a Jack Russell dog and if I let her run loose there wouldn't be any wildlife around my homestead (Jack Russells are another killing machine that often kill just for sport). Some of my good friends have cats and they either put the animal on a leash or in a fenced-in area while they're outdoors — or they don't let their cats out. They are responsible pet owners.

Folks who let their cats run loose apparently don't care much about the cats, or other family members, as the cats could easily bring home rabies, fleas, ticks or disease. People tell me how cute it is that their free-roaming cats bring dead mice and other small creatures to show what good hunters they are. Yep, they'll bring that stuff right to your back door for you, and that's OK — as long as those mice and other creatures have had their shots and been treated for fleas and ticks.

We really need to get serious about this feral cat problem. The solution is with people, not the cats.

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A protea shrub growing amongst reeds and dozens of other plant species in South Africa's Greater Cape Floristic Region. (Adam Wilson photo)

UB scientists joining NASA in S. African biodiversity project

PROJECT: Field biologists, with help of NASA planes, to map biodiversity in Greater Cape Floristic Region.

STAFF REPORTS

BUFFALO — Scientists from the U.S. and South Africa are launching a campaign to map marine, freshwater, and terrestrial species and ecosystems in one of Earth's biodiversity hotspots: the Greater Cape Floristic Region at the southwestern edge of South Africa.

NASA will fly planes over the area for six weeks in 2023 to measure the height and structure of vegetation and collect ultraviolet, visual, thermal, and other imagery across terrestrial

and aquatic ecosystems. Satellites will gather additional data. Teams on the ground will make observations at locations of particular interest, logging plants and, possibly, animals they detect.

Using this data, the team will map the region's biodiversity, providing estimates of the distribution and abundance of species, and the boundaries of ecosystems, and researching how biodiversity impacts the physical environment and vice versa. In other words, the campaign will help scientists understand the structure, function and composition of ecosystems in the study area.

"This is a broad collaboration between several organizations," says Adam Wilson, PhD, principal investigator and a biogeographer at the University at Buffalo. "The Greater

Cape Floristic Region is a really fascinating place — it has extremely high plant diversity, and there's been dramatic environmental change over the last 50 years, due to both climate and land use change.

"Our data will capture this region's biodiversity in greater detail than ever before from a plane or satellite. In combination with the field observations, these new data will help us understand this dynamic region and improve our ability to monitor biodiversity from space globally."

The project — titled, "Marine, Freshwater, and Terrestrial Biodiversity Survey of the Cape (BioSCAPE)" — is funded by NASA, with UB researchers receiving \$873,000 in NASA funding to complete their share of the work.

FOR MORE, VISIT OUR WEBSITE.

Bug experts seeking new name for gypsy moths

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
The Associated Press

Bug experts are dropping the common name of a destructive insect because it's considered an ethnic slur: the gypsy moth.

The Entomological Society of America, which oversees the common names of bugs, is getting rid of the common name of that critter and the lesser-known gypsy ant. The group this week announced that for the first time it changed a common name of an insect because it was offensive. In the past they've only re-signed names that weren't scientifically accurate.

"It's an ethnic slur to begin with that's been rejected by the Romani people a long time ago," said society president Michelle S. Smith. "Second, nobody wants to be associated with a harmful invasive pest."

The society is taking a hard look at some of the more than 2,000 common insect names to remove derogatory and geographically inaccurate names. About 20 years ago, a committee of fish experts renamed the jewfish into the goliath grouper.

The moths are invasive and destructive critters in the caterpillar stage. They have a voracious appetite that can denude entire forests of leaves, said University of Illinois entomologist May Berenbaum, a past society president.

The moths likely got



A *Lymantria dispar* moth caterpillar crawls along a leaf. (Contributed photo)

their name because as larvae they have hair with small air pockets that act like balloons allowing them to float for miles, wandering like the group of people they were named after, Berenbaum

said. Another theory is that male adult moths have a tan color that could be similar to Romani people.

The Entomological Society is now on the hunt for a new common name, a process that will take months, Smith said. Until then, even though it's a mouthful, Smith said the moths should be called by their scientific name, *Lymantria dispar* or *L. dispar*.

Berenbaum — who has written about weirdly named plants, animals and gene mutations — said given the moths' destructiveness, she and other would have some ideas for a descriptive new name.

"You're not allowed to use obscenities," she said, "so that's out."



Feasibility Study and Proposed Plan Available for Public Comment
July 12, 2021, to September 10, 2021

Guterl Specialty Steel Site Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program Virtual Public Meeting
Thursday, July 29, 2021, at 7 p.m.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District, completed the feasibility study and proposed plan for the Guterl Specialty Steel Site under the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program. The Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency for the program, which is conducted in accordance with the governing federal law — the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended, and the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan. The 70-acre site is in Lockport, New York. The reports and supporting CERCLA documents are available at: <https://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/Missions/HTRW/FUSRAP/Guterl-Steel-Site/> in the Reports section.

You are encouraged to review and provide comments on the proposed plan, which is available for public review and comment from July 12, 2021, to September 10, 2021. The proposed plan identifies the Corps of Engineers' preferred alternative to address contaminated buildings, soil, and groundwater at the Guterl Site: Site-Wide Alternative 3. The alternative includes: dismantlement and off-site disposal of buildings that were involved in Atomic Energy Commission activities during the 1940s and 1950s; complete soil removal to the soil preliminary remediation goal for groundwater protection and off-site disposal; and uranium groundwater plume recovery using extraction wells and an in situ rubble trench with ex situ treatment, and environmental monitoring of groundwater plume attenuation (enhanced and natural).

The feasibility study is a supporting document to the proposed plan. The report identifies, develops and evaluates remedial alternatives to address FUSRAP-related constituents of concern (thorium-232 and uranium in soil and buildings, and uranium in groundwater) at the site.

A virtual public meeting will be conducted on Thursday, July 29, 2021, beginning at 7 p.m. Space is limited, so please email fusrap@usace.army.mil by 4 p.m. Wednesday, July 28, 2021, to register for the meeting, and to let us know if you will be providing comments. The public meeting presentation is available on the website in the Public Presentations section. The virtual public meeting will be recorded so that oral comments received can be captured.

The public is encouraged to email comments to fusrap@usace.army.mil before close of business September 10, 2021. Written comments may be mailed to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District, Attention: Environmental Project Management Section, 1776 Niagara Street, Buffalo, New York 14207, by the close of the comment period.

The administrative record file for the site is available on-line at the website address above. For further information please e-mail fusrap@usace.army.mil, or call (800) 833-6390.

FOREST RANGER REPORTS

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Forest Rangers respond to search and rescue incidents statewide. Here's a compilation of recent reports:

• **Wilderness Rescue** (Ulster County): On June 29 at 1 p.m., Forest Ranger Slade overheard a 911 call regarding a missing 70-year-old man at VernooyKill Falls. Ranger Slade responded to the location along with Forest Rangers Stratton, Franceschina, Lieutenant Morse, Ulster County Sheriff's Deputies, the Accord Fire Department, and the Kerhonkson/Accord First Aid Squad. The hiker had been dropped off at the Upper Cherrytown Road lot by his wife at approximately 9 a.m. When the subject had not returned by 1 p.m., the caller became concerned and flagged down a passing motorist to call 911.

Once on scene, Ranger Slade set up a command post at the trailhead on Upper Cherrytown Road, while Rangers Stratton and Franceschina searched the area. At 2:40 p.m., Rangers located the missing man from Harpursville and transported him back to the trailhead by ATV where EMS evaluated and released him. The hiker became disoriented when he attempted to return from the falls and ended up 2.5 miles from the falls when search crews reached him. All units were clear of the scene at 3:30 p.m.

• **Wilderness Search** (St. Lawrence County): On June 30 at 10:30 a.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from the husband of a hiker who became lost while bushwhacking between the Cranberry Lake 50 trail and the Conifer Emporium Easement. Forest Rangers

Benzel and Shea responded and located the 65-year-old woman from Gouverneur who made her way back to a logging access road. The hiker was in good health and Rangers gave her a ride back to her residence at 12:55 p.m.

• **Wilderness Rescue** (Hamilton County): On June 30 at 10:24 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from the International Emergency Response Coordination Center (IERCC) reporting receipt of a Garmin inReach device activation at Woods Lake in the Silver Lake Wilderness Area. IERCC received the message from a 30-year-old woman from Winooski, Vermont, who was experiencing chest pain, increased heart rate, dizziness, and nausea. Forest Rangers Thompson and Kerr responded along with the Northville Fire

Department and the Greater Amsterdam Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Forest Rangers reached the subject at 11:51 p.m. She was able to walk back out to the trailhead with EMS assistance. Once at the trailhead, the hiker was loaded into an ambulance and transported to a nearby hospital for medical treatment.

• **Wilderness Rescue** (Lewis County): On July 1 at 4:24 p.m., Forest Ranger Hanno advised DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch via radio that he and Forest Ranger Evans would be on the Erie Canal Road in Watson assisting with a rescue of an individual injured while horseback riding. At 4:46 p.m., Ranger Hanno notified Dispatch that the 52-year-old woman from Cheektowaga was brought out of the woods to an ambulance for transport to a local hospital for medical treatment.