



April 2015

the wyoming game & fish department

CASPER REGION newsletter

April Hunting

2015 Final Hunting Seasons Set

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission held their annual April meeting in Casper to hear season setting recommendations for the 2015 hunting seasons. All season dates and license allocations were finalized and can be found on the website at <http://wyo.wgdf.gov>. The application deadline to apply is June 1. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at 307-473-3401.

April Fishing

Gray Reef Boating Checks

Game Warden Cody Bish worked the Platte River closure just below Gray Reef and found 21 violations of fishing in closed waters. Anglers are reminded the portion of the North Platte between the "Closed Area" signs at the gauge cable crossings is closed to fishing from



April 1 to April 30. Anglers are also reminded that in Wyoming, if you are floating through private land you must stay in your boat at all times. Wading or anchoring without permission is trespassing. In addition to fishing the closures, the North Platte River below Grey Reef dam was incredibly busy in April. It would not be uncommon for 50-plus drift boats to go down the river on a Friday or Saturday. Unfortunately, game wardens detected 48 violations on the river, over half were fishing without a license.

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On the Ground Sage-Grouse Surveys

Casper Game and Fish personnel, BLM, wildlife consultants for energy, local ranchers and other volunteers have been busy surveying sage-grouse leks this spring. These data are some of the most important we collect, given the precarious status of these birds for potential listing under the Endangered Species Act. Sage-grouse populations have declined dramatically throughout the Casper Region since 2006. However, there is some very good news to report this year, as sage-grouse appear to be back on the upswing of their population cycle. Across much of the Casper Region, lek counts (the number of breeding males attending each lek) were substantially higher in 2015 compared to the past few years. Some leks even recorded the highest lek attendance on record. This significant increase was a direct result of the excellent chick production in 2014, which was a product of favorable weather conditions, improved grass / nesting cover, and an increase in other prey species such as cottontail rabbits. While this population increase is welcome news, sage-grouse numbers remain depressed in some portions of the Region, especially in northeast Wyoming, or in areas experiencing heavy human-caused disturbance.



Behind the Badge White-tail Deer



The Sundance Port of Entry called dispatch to report a commercial truck with a deer strapped to it. The driver was eastbound on Interstate 90 and wasn't even required to stop. Earlier that morning, he struck a white-tail fawn near Sundance. A trooper investigated the crash and specifically told the driver to leave the deer where it was. He decided to load it up whole and take it back to Florida where his plan was to eat it. The white-tail fawn had gone through the grill of his truck at 75 miles per hour. The deer was properly disposed.



In the Water

Largemouth Bass

Fishery biologists collected and transplanted 216 largemouth bass from Healy Reservoir near Buffalo and stocked them in J Bar U Reservoir near Kaycee. The bass averaged about a pound and ranged from 10 to 14 inches. We greatly appreciate the assistance from the Sheridan Fisheries Management Crew the project could not have happened without them. J Bar U is a popular Walk-In fishing location but dam repairs last season required the reservoir to be drained. The bass were the first of many planned fish to be stocked in the reservoir to rebuild the fishery this season.



Of Interest

Rattlesnakes and Pale Milk Snakes

Lusk Game Warden Brady Vandenberg discovered a rattlesnake hibernacula in the Hat Creek Breaks near Lusk. Hibernacula are a place where the snakes have chosen to overwinter. Rattlesnakes often gather in large numbers in these dens and return to these site year after year. They are also used birthing sites.



Newcastle Wildlife Biologist Joe Sandrini spotted a pale milksnake near Newcastle in April. Pale milksnakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum multistrata*) are arguably the most strikingly beautiful reptile in the Cowboy State. These brilliantly colored snakes can be readily distinguished from other species in Wyoming by their unique orange-red, yellow and black rings, with adults running about three feet or less in length. At first glance the pale milksnake might remind you of a brightly colored poisonous snake, but these shy creatures are generally very docile and definitely not venomous – even if one might shake its tail when confronted in imitation of a rattler!

Wyoming's pale milksnakes are normally found below 6,000 feet in elevation, and in the woodlands of our plains and foothills, especially in riparian corridors, but not normally in grassland communities. If you are searching their habitat in hopes of spying one, they can be tough to find during the day. Normally during daylight hours, they prefer to hide under rocks and logs unless they are out sunning themselves on a warm surface. This is because they favor slithering about at night in search of small mammals, other reptiles, insects, amphibians, birds and their eggs for prey.

Milksnakes were named by early settlers who believed they would latch on to a cow's udder and suck milk. Of course this is not possible because snakes have no lips. However, this tale persists today, likely because milksnakes frequent barns searching for mice and rats.



Milksnakes typically breed for the first time at about three or four years of age in the late spring, with females laying a clutch of four to 13 oval white eggs near the start of summer in burrows they find, or under forest litter.

Sometimes several females will lay eggs in the same nest, and their precocial hatchlings emerge after about six to nine weeks. As they grow up, milksnakes are believed to generally live about six to 10 years in the wild, as they have few natural predators. Perhaps in part due to their coloration that resembles more dangerous prey.



While milksnakes are not necessarily rare throughout their range, they are considered a "species of concern" in Wyoming, mainly because biologists do not have much information on their abundance, range, exact habitat requirements, and foraging behavior in Wyoming.

Information from: Parker, Josh and Anderson, Stan. 2001. Identification Guide to the Herptiles of Wyoming and <http://fwp.mt.gov/>

