

“Manic” Behavior Threatens Animals

Stray dogs chased the elk herd in Kerr Gulch last week; more than 200 were fleeing up and down the hills in the meadow; the bulls in the herd trying in vain to catch the dogs off guard to ram them with their antlers. The young calves mewed and squealed running to stay with their mothers as they fled the pursuers nipping at their heels.

Later, I noticed the elk were hiding in the trees, and I passed the animal control officer driving slowly down the road.

Pioneer Kerr Gulch rancher, the late Al Hager had a quick solution for stray dogs. Any dogs chasing his cattle met a quick fate and were dispatched down the 100 ft. dry well on his land. “They’re no good, he’d say, once a dog starts chasing a wild animal it will go after anything and that includes young children. Best thing is to shoot them.”

Twenty years ago, few elk as well as people populated the Evergreen area. Looking to the future, I wonder will the impact of predators such as stray dogs, coyotes, mountain lions and man put elk on the endangered species list.

Because of the large herds of elk, and to shift the impact on the Mount Evans herd to this area rather than the high country, game control units will be changed next year. This year, the units which designate geographical areas for hunting were split. As of this hunting season, Unit 39 which covers the area from Mt. Evans to Hwy. 470 will become two areas —39 and 391. The new Unit 391 will cover the area from Hwy. 73 and 74 to Hwy. 470.

Animals do play havoc with civilization. In Kittredge, according to last week’s report by Sandy Nadeau, a mountain lion was sighted several times in neighborhood back yards. People were warned to keep watch on their kids and dogs, not letting them roam at night.

Further down the hill in Highlands Ranch, parents are asked to accompany their children while walking the Greenbelt to neighborhood schools. In a note sent home from the schools, reports of people being chased by coyotes prompted the cautions.

Unfortunately abnormal behavior by animal species is often accompanied by mutations or destruction of the species. When I was growing up in northern Wisconsin, I would stroll along the streams and listen to the inevitable plunk of frogs jumping into the water. Now if you see them at all, it will often be a mutation, extra legs or a skewed head; the ribbet symphony is on perennial leave. And I noticed, even the fireflies don’t shine as bright as usual. But no matter, as we shut down the lights and sounds of nature, the lights of houses and sounds of cars will make a new symphony—the “manic” symphony.

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