

# OUTDOORS

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## FLORA AND FAUNA

Get to know the  
horned lark

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# LIFE ON THE ROCKS



BEN PIERCE/CHRONICLE

A mountain goat stands on a ridge below The Spires in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

## Bruce Smith to discuss natural history of mountain goats

*EDITOR'S NOTE: When the Chronicle last year asked our readers for help transforming our approach to content, we wanted to know about your passions and concerns and how you view the community. What makes it special? Why do you live here?*

*As you might imagine, the answers varied greatly. Readers, however, predominantly mentioned one topic: the outdoors. With that, we're expanding that coverage.*

*Each Thursday, beginning today, we'll devote a section front to showcase our outdoors coverage. An additional outdoors page — featuring places and activities we love and think you may, too — is being added to the sports section in each Sunday's edition. We hope you enjoy the changes.*

— Nick Ehli, Chronicle managing editor

By **BEN PIERCE**

Chronicle Outdoors Editor

Bruce Smith's fascination with mountain goats began in the 1970s when his University of Montana roommate Chuck Johns invited him to his family's home in Great Falls for Thanksgiving dinner.

Johns came from a family of hunters, Smith from the Midwest. The Johns home had mounts of animals taken in the nearby Bob Marshall Wilderness.

"They had bighorn sheep and elk and all the big game animals," Smith said recently. "The mountain goat was the most magnificent animal I could imagine."

Smith would go on to study the winter ecology of mountain goats in Montana's Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and then to a 30-year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the Wind River Indian Reservation and the National Elk Refuge in Wyoming. On Friday, Smith will discuss his new book, "Life on the Rocks: A Portrait of the American Mountain Goat," at 7 p.m. at the Lindley Center.



Bruce Smith

Mountain goats hold a special place among North America's big game species — only bighorn sheep are more rare among hoofed mammals — yet relatively little is known about them. Reverence for the goat is often associated with its rugged habitat and surroundings, the very characteristics that make it so difficult to study.

Smith's book is the first written for a general audience to appear since his UM contemporary Doug Chadwick published "A Beast the Color of Winter: The Mountain Goat Observed" in 1983.

"There was a need to update the natural history and status of the goat in the 14 states and providences where they occur," Smith said. "It is a continental perspective on the species, but to make it reader friendly I do have a lot of my own experiences."

In the 1970s, Smith would spend as long as a week backpacking into the wilderness to observe the goats.

"When you work in these areas on your own — before cellphones and

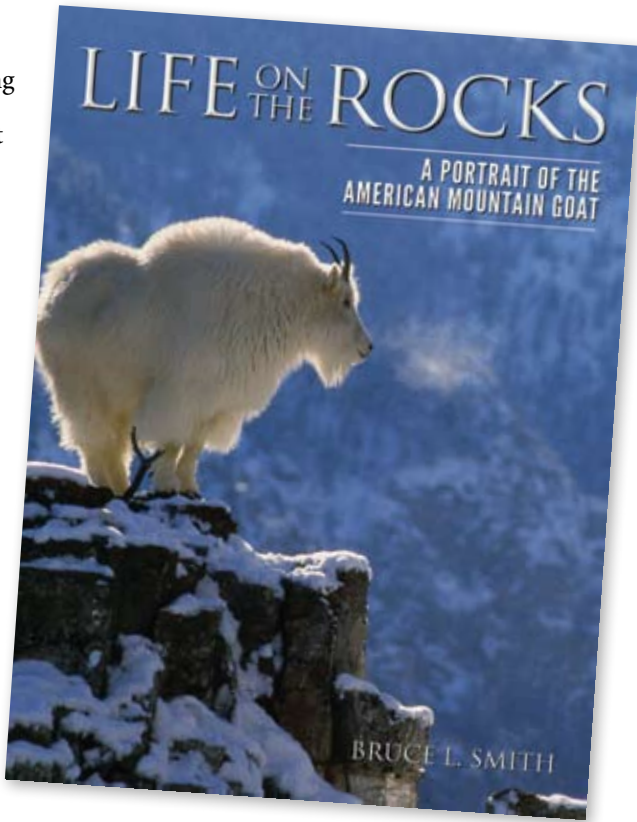
radios — you rely on your own bush craft and skill," Smith said. "Gravity happens and it happens fast.

I slipped one time and broke a bone. Another time I was swept down with an avalanche. It brought home how amazing these goats are to live in this environment and how difficult it must be."

Smith said that on countless occasions he observed incredible feats of athleticism by goats, particularly during the winter months.

On the most precipitous terrain, Smith's seen goats do pull-ups to reach the ledge above them. He's also seen goats — apparently stranded on the edge of a cliff — lurch their upper body skyward and walk their front legs across the rock face to turn back the way they had come.

Yet for all their prowess in the high coun-



try, Smith said mountain goats are in trouble. Persistent human encroachment into their environment and global warming has resulted in a declining population. Smith estimates there are around 100,000 mountain goats remaining, compared to some 27 million white-tailed deer.

Mountain goats, like wolverines and hoary marmots, are cold adapted species. They have evolved to thrive in cold alpine environments.

"Goats have become increasingly sequestered in those islands in the sky," Smith said. "Development has limited their ability to disperse. Climate change has caused rising temperatures in these alpine environments at a rate 2 to 3 degrees faster than at lower elevations."

Mountain goats don't have many options as their habitat shrinks. They can move to higher elevations, but they can't come down.

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*"Goats have become increasingly sequestered in those islands in the sky. Development has limited their ability to disperse. Climate change has caused rising temperatures in these alpine environments."*

Bruce Smith



# Goats/from C1

As glaciers recede and alpine snowfields melt, so too does mountain goat habitat. And it is happening fast. Smith said one of his goals in writing "Life on the Rocks" was to bring attention to the mountain goat. For the most part, Smith said goats are a species that live out of sight and out of mind.

"Even if you poll people in Montana, unless they have been to Glacier (National Park), they probably have never seen a mountain goat in the wild," Smith said. "It has always been assumed that because they live in wilderness and alpine areas that they are fine. They are a species that has suffered from conservation neglect."

Smith said the majority of research currently being conducted on mountain goats is taking place in British Columbia and Alberta. There, scientists are studying the effects of disturbance on goats. Helicopter over flights have proven particularly stressful.

In the 1980s, retired Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist Gayle Joslyn conducted a study on helicopter over flights. Joslyn's work was undertaken in response to a boom in seismic oil and gas exploration along the Rocky Mountain Front.

"I marked 23 goats (with radios) and had one goat from a previous study," Joslyn said Monday. "We watched how they used the landscape and how they reproduced and when they were recruited into the population. We were trying to see whether the helicopter seismic exploration was affecting the mountain goats."

Between 1981 and 1986, Joslyn and her crew monitored the goats weekly, recording their movements and behavior.

"(The helicopter over flights) were very disruptive," Joslyn said. "We saw a huge decline in the ability of goats to recruit young, especially yearlings. Never mind the helicopters and explosions in the air. It was hard enough to live where they were."

"Life on the Rocks" features more than 100 color photographs of mountain goats. The photographs include images from Montana, Washington, Idaho, South Dakota, British Columbia and Alberta.

Smith said he hopes his photos and images will foster a greater appreciation for the mountain goat.

"Getting more people to know about mountain goats, what they are, their habitat — people will hopefully develop more of an appreciation for them," Smith said. "People are only concerned about conserving things that they love. I hope people understand how neat these goats are, to go out and experience them and the places they live and become advocates for their conservation."

"Life on the Rocks: A Portrait of the American Mountain Goat" will be available at local booksellers for \$34.95 in June.

Ben Pierce can be reached at [bpierce@dailychronicle.com](mailto:bpierce@dailychronicle.com) and 582-2625.

## FLORA AND FAUNA

*EDITOR'S NOTE: As part of the Chronicle's expanded outdoors coverage, the section will now include a series of occasional features. These features — Flora and Fauna, Gear to Go, Outdoors Q&A and Where am I? — will focus on the people, places and things that make the Gallatin Valley and western Montana a dynamic place to live.*

— Ben Pierce, Chronicle outdoors editor

The **HORNED LARK** is the most common lark in Montana. It is frequently found in expansive, open areas with sparse vegetation such as sagebrush steppe and grasslands. Horned larks are often seen in tilled agricultural lands around Bozeman, sometimes in large flocks, where they feed on seeds and insects.

Horned larks can be found in Montana year-round, but their summer range extends north to the Arctic tundra. They are often spotted in flocks with longspurs and snow buntings.

The horned lark is 12 inches in length, has a 7.25-inch wingspan and weighs 1.1 ounces.

To identify a horned lark in the field, look for a



BEN PIERCE/CHRONICLE

A horned lark forages in a wheat field in Liberty County.

dark mask around the face, a dark breast band, white belly and small black "horns." Horned larks have a generally pale-brown plumage with yellow feathers on the breast and face that vary regionally. To identify the horned lark in flight, look for a short, square tail with narrow white feathers on the edge, long wings and smooth, flowing flight pattern.

—Ben Pierce

## Face to face with nature's mosquito killer

My wife and I own an old building we use as an office. It's a brick and block structure that was built in 1915 as the Malta telephone building. After the phone company moved on, it was used as a church and later a flower shop.

When we bought the place there were inspirational phrases written on the walls inside, and two wooden signs, advertising flowers, were affixed to the outside of the building.

We long ago repainted the inside and I'd been meaning to remove the signs on the outside for years. I started to take them down two summers ago, but stopped when a guy who works next door told me there were bats behind the signs.

It was as good an excuse as any to put off until later what I didn't really want to do that day.

The bats here are part of a colony that summers in Malta and winters in caves in the Little Rocky Mountains.

If I waited until fall to remove the signs, the bats would be gone.

I put off the job for the time being



**PARKER HEINLEIN**

Chronicle Columnist

and forgot about it for a year and a half until last week when Barb reminded me it remained on my list of chores.

I couldn't think of a good excuse to put the job off any longer and it was too early for the bats to have returned to town. Or so I thought.

With tools in hand, I climbed an extension ladder up to the sign on the south side of the building and removed the four screws that held it in place.

When it swung free I heard a scream. Barb, watching from below hollered "Look out!"

My view was blocked by the sign I was balancing on the ladder, but as I descended, I could see a wad of bats clinging to the

side of the building. A few of them lost their grip and fell past me to the ground.

Since moving to Malta eight years ago I've become accustomed to bats. They still get into the house, though less often now than when we first arrived.

They still creep me out a bit, but I've become a fan of little brown myotis. A single bat can eat 1,200 mosquito-sized insects in an hour.

The bats that had fallen to the ground were apparently too cold to fly so I found a small cardboard box to put them in and took them down to the park and released them on a cottonwood tree. Three of them scrambled up the trunk. The fourth, warmed by the sun, took flight and quickly disappeared.

By the time I got back to the office the wad of bats was gone and there were none behind the other sign.

There a good chance, however, that I'll see them again this summer. I just hope it's not in the house.

Parker Heinlein is at [pman@mtintouch.net](mailto:pman@mtintouch.net).

## Rails-to-Trails routes becoming multi-use meccas

WALLACE, Idaho (AP) — In many parts of the country, abandoned train tracks have been repurposed into multi-use exercise trails. The best of them — a little more than two dozen routes in all — are in the Rail-to-Trails Conservancy Hall of Fame, and several of those are located in the Northwest region of the United States, in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

Some routes are within earshot of an interstate or overrun with tumbleweeds. Others take you outside of city limits, perhaps following a river around a mountain pass, offering an opportunity to see and hear birds in remote marshlands or spot wildlife in an open meadow. And since the original tracks had gradient limits for locomotives, the trails are relatively flat, making for an easy bike ride, hike or run.

The Hall of Fame trails, selected between 2007 and 2011, were chosen

for reasons of "scenic value, high use, trail and trailside amenities, historical significance, excellence in management and maintenance of facility, community connections and geographic distribution."

The 72-mile (116-kilometer) Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes features beautiful views of the south end of Lake Coeur d'Alene, the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and the peaks of the Bitterroot Mountains.

The track, formerly occupied by Union Pacific Railroad, goes from Plummer, Idaho, to Mullan, Idaho. Parts go through protected marshlands near the chain lakes region (east of the lake), giving trail users a chance to see blue heron, swans, bald eagles, moose, elk and other wildlife. In the fall, the trail comes alive with colorful autumn foliage from the aspen and larch trees.

Less than 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the trailhead for

the Coeur d'Alenes trail is the trailhead for the Route of the Hiawatha, located just across the Montana border.

The Hiawatha trail, where the Milwaukee Railroad once ran trains, offers 10 tunnels and seven high trestles with views of mountains in Idaho and Montana. The Taft Tunnel is the main starting point for the trail and, for many, the highlight of the trip, but bring a headlamp because the pin-sized hole at the end of the tunnel doesn't provide enough light for safe riding.

The 15-mile (24-kilometer) track is advertised for bicycle travel and the non-paved, packed gravel surface can be ridden on hybrid bike tires. Mountain bikes can be rented at Lookout Pass Ski Area, 7 miles (11 kilometers) from the trailhead. Visitors must purchase a trail pass for \$10 (\$6 for children) and have the option to pay for a one-way return trip on a bus (\$6-\$9).

## OUTDOORS NEWS BRIEFS

### YNP offers update on winter use

Yellowstone National Park invites the public to a meeting to discuss progress made on the park's winter use adaptive management program on June 4 in Jackson, Wyo., at the Center for the Arts from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The adaptive management program is a collaborative process between park managers, scientists, and the public, which the park will use to evaluate the implementation of the park's new winter use management plan. The program is designed to allow the National Park Service (NPS) to gather more information about the impacts of winter use on park resource conditions through scientific monitoring and to seek additional public input. Managers will consider this additional information to assess and improve the management of winter use in Yellowstone National Park in a manner that reduces impacts on park resources or improves visitor experience.

Interested parties should RSVP to confirm their attendance or remote participation before May 23, 2014 by contacting Alicia Murphy, Yellowstone's Adaptive Management Coordinator, at (307) 344-2627 or [alicia\\_murphy@nps.gov](mailto:alicia_murphy@nps.gov).

### FWP welcomes new faces to Townsend

The Townsend area will now be home base to FWP Area Wildlife Biologist Adam Grove and new Field Warden Justin Feddes.

Grove spent the past 11 years as the FWP area wildlife biologist in the White Sulphur Springs area. Grove's new area of responsibility includes the Elkhorn Mountains, Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area, and the western side of the Big Belts.

Enforcement's newest hire, Warden Justin Feddes, grew up on the family ranch in Gallatin County and served in the Navy as a Master in Arms (Military Police). He recently graduated from Montana State University with a degree in Biology.

"Justin brings a Montana ranch background and a tremendous amount of energy and dedication to his role in the protection of Montana's resources" said Warden Captain Sam Sheppard.

Warden Feddes will primarily be responsible for the Elkhorns and Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management area.

From Chronicle news sources

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