

October
2020



UINTA COUNTY Connection



UCCD interested in Great horned owl and Barn owl sightings in Uinta County

The Great horned owl and the Barn owl are two of the fifteen owl species found in Wyoming at various times of the year. Both excellent nocturnal hunters, Great horned owls and Barn owls are easily distinguished from one another by physical characteristics and distinctive calls.

While Great horned owls are fairly common, we are unsure how many Barn owls actually nest in Uinta County or if most are only frequent visitors. If you sight a Barn owl, or know where one has been seen nesting or roosting in the past, please let us know by emailing klott.uccd@gmail.com.



The **Great horned owl** (*Bubo virginianus*) is the most common and widely distributed owl species in North America. It is extremely adaptable and able to occupy a diverse range of habitats. The Great horned owl is generally camouflaged with horizontal barring on its underside and complex brown

mottling markings on its upperside, both of which help it blend in with the bark of many tree species in which they nest and roost. Great horned owls can also be found roosting on barns or in abandoned buildings. The characteristic horn-like tufts of feathers, which are neither horns nor ears, may add to their camouflage but are also thought to serve as visual cues during territorial and mating interactions. The Great horned owl is the largest owl in Wyoming, sitting almost 2 feet high, weighing from 2.5 to 5 pounds, with a wingspan of over 4 feet. The stereotypical 'hoot' is the most common territorial call, but other common sounds of a Great horned owl include shrieks, barks, cat-like meows, coos, and beak snapping.

Barn owls are widespread and common across North America. Although less common in North America than the Great horned owl, the Barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is the most widely distributed owl species in the world. They are found in moderate climates on all continents of the world except Antarctica. The Barn owl is considered a medium sized owl species, weighing from 0.88 to 1.5 pounds, standing 12.5 to 16 inches, with a wingspan of 4 feet. Barn owls have heart shaped faces. Their golden-brown uppersides blend in with dry grassland habitats, and their whitish undersides are thought to serve the purpose of an anti-silhouette when in flight so they are less visible to the prey below. Dark spots speckle both the upper and undersides of a Barn owl. Barn owls are cavity dwellers, nesting and roosting in tree cavities, crevices along cliffs and riverbanks, and in buildings or barns. Instead of a 'hoot', Barn owls communicate with high pitched screams including a 'K-r-r-r-ick' sound, a longer more forceful shrieking when in distress, or raspy hissing sounds.



Photo courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology

To see fun videos of Great horned owls visit our website or Facebook page!

It is illegal to shoot or otherwise harm Great horned owls and Barn owls as they are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

In subsequent newsletters we will tell you more about the lifestyles of these species, adaptations for hunting, and other interesting facts!

Tech & Careers Class Builds Owl Boxes

The Lyman Intermediate School 8th grade Tech & Careers class recently built four barn owl boxes for the Uinta County Conservation District. Mr. Lupher was eager to have his students take on the project, turning it into a real-life employment scenario. Not only did students learn the importance of working together in groups to follow building plans accurately, they also experienced the pressure of a foreman watching over their shoulders; students were placed on the unemployment list if they were caught rushing through their work or standing around with their hands in their pockets. Along with learning the pressures of a real job, the students were satisfied with their completed work as they presented their boxes to UCCD. The barn owl boxes will be hung at locations around the county in hopes of getting a nesting pair for further educational experiences.



2021 Seedling Tree & Shrub Order Form Now Available

The Uinta County Conservation District is gearing up for its annual seedling tree and shrub sales! The order forms are ready and we will start taking orders at any time. Although final seedling counts from the Colorado State Forestry Nursery are not quite ready yet, its looking like species selection will be a little bit better this year. However, we would strongly encourage you to get your orders in early, before January would be ideal, but if that isn't possible, you can always check our website or call for the latest availability.

With the beautiful fall weather sticking around, now is a great time to prepare for that spring planting. Give us a call if you would like help putting a planting plan together. We can help with suggestions for site prep, design, species selection, spacing, water requirements and more. Southwest Wyoming is a tough place to grow trees, making sure you have the right tree for the right place will give them that extra boost they need to survive and thrive.

Tree order forms for 2021 spring delivery are available for download on our website at www.uintacountycd.com. You can also stop by the office to pick one up, or request that one be mailed or emailed to you.

Annual Bridger Lake Field Trip A Success

UCCD wrapped up September 2020 by hosting the annual Bridger Lake Field Trip for the Lyman Intermediate School 5th Graders. Located in the Uinta Mountains just south of Bridger Valley, Bridger Lake provides the perfect backdrop for students to enhance their learning through hands-on outdoor experiences.

The fall weather could not have been more perfect as the LIS 5th grade students rotated through four educational stations. John Walrath, Fisheries Biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish talked with the students about the importance of adaptations in fish species as the students 'Fashioned a Fish' of their own with adaptations to fit a specific habitat. The students went on a bike ride and learned about coniferous forests and tree anatomy with Ben McDaniel and Sarah Smith of the U.S. Forest Service. LIS teacher Lance Perkins guided the students in finding and examining macroinvertebrate species from the rocks and moss on the edge of Bridger Lake. The students also learned about predator/prey interactions between Wyoming wildlife species as they played a game of 'Quick Frozen Critters' and examined fur specimens of Wyoming mammals with UCCD Education Coordinator, Katie Lott.

This field trip would not be possible without the support of the LIS teachers, bus drivers, and Principal Smith as well as the help of volunteers from the U.S. Forest Service and Wyoming Game and Fish. We hope to continue providing this great outdoor experience to the students at LIS for many years to come!

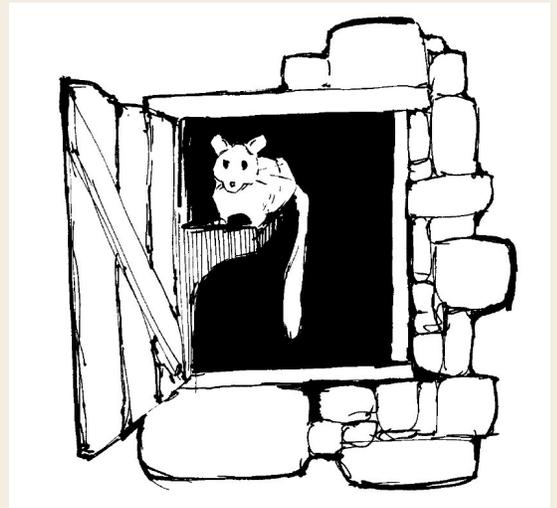


The Bushy-Tailed Woodrat

Article by Grant Redden, Natural Resource Specialist UCCD

Commonly found on the inside of old, abandoned buildings are broken floorboards, peeling wallpaper, and thick nests of sticks protruding from crevices in the walls and ceilings. Similar gnarls of sticks can be found between rock ledges and in the corners of the occasional cave. These are most likely evidence of a long-time resident of western North America: *Neotoma cinerea*. Common names include the **Bushy-tailed woodrat**, **packrat**, and **trade rat**.

While its nests are certainly noticeable, the Bushy-tailed woodrat is rarely seen due to its nocturnal nature. Below are some facts about this illusive rodent.



Appearance

The Bushy-tailed woodrat can weigh from 300-600 grams for males and 250-350 grams for females. This wide range of weight reflects its large geographical distribution, with the larger woodrats living in the far north. Males and females are sexually dimorphic; meaning that they differ strongly in appearance. In the case of Bushy-tailed woodrats, the males are 8-10% larger than females (pestcontrolcanada.com).

Bushy-tailed woodrats have large black eyes, round furless ears, grey and brown fur on the back and sides and white or buff fur on the undersides and feet. The male woodrat's body length can reach over 8 inches, not including the tail. The tail is slightly shorter than the body and is covered in bushy long fur.

Behavior

The Bushy-tailed woodrat is nocturnal and active year-round. It is solitary, with male and female territories overlapping. While the actual rodent is rarely seen, its presence is usually noticed by the large nests the woodrat builds out of sticks, foliage, bones, and any number of human items. It is sometimes called a trade rat because of its habit of dropping whatever it is carrying in exchange for a new, perceivably better item. These nests can be found in rock ledges, boulder fields, and very noticeably in the interiors of abandoned buildings.

Food Habits

Bushy-tailed woodrats are considered herbivores, with a flexible diet that includes leaves, seeds, and shrubs. They will dry their food on a rock before storing it in middens found within the nest. The same woodrat homes are used by succeeding generations, and over time much of the forage stored in the middens has been preserved by the crystalized urine from the woodrats. Scientists have been able to analyze some of these middens and found that the contents can be thousands of years old; this provides a strong picture into the past conditions and vegetation.

Life history

The breeding season for Bushy-tailed woodrats runs from January to August, with the peak occurring somewhere between March and June. Gestation lasts 27 to 32 days, and litter sizes range from 1 to 6. Young are weaned between 26 to 30 days and dispersal occurs at 2 months. Sexual maturity occurs around 11 months. While female young may stay closer to where they were born, males tend to disperse further in search of their own territory to defend.

Interspecific Interactions

Bushy-tailed woodrats are rarely a problem with humans unless they build unwanted nests in manmade structures. While they have been known to carry parasites responsible for disease (such as fleas and ticks responsible for bubonic plague or spotted fever), these are rarely transferred to humans because of the low frequency of contact between people and Bushy-tailed woodrats.

Some of the bushy-tailed woodrat's predators include weasels, bobcats, coyotes, great horned owls, and red tailed hawks.

Visit our website to see
trail-cam footage of a
local Woodrat!

www.uintacountycd.com



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“The Nation that destroys its soil, destroys itself.”

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1182-1945)

Tree Spotlight: Thinleaf Alder

Thinleaf Alder (*Alnus incana* ssp. *tenuifolia*) is a native shrub or small tree commonly found on wet to moist sites and is frequently a component of streamside vegetation. Thinleaf alder tolerates a wide range of soil types and although it prefers heavy moist soils, it has also been found growing well on sandbars, and in cobble and gravel. Thinleaf alder typically establishes on poor, skeletal soils, but usually enriches in soils where it grows. Generally, Thinleaf alder is an indicator of productive sites.

Thinleaf alder populations apparently do not have exacting elevational requirements as cuttings have been successfully transplanted onto sites that vary greatly in elevational range.

Identifying the Thinleaf Alder



Alder has distinctive woody "cones" that resemble miniature pine cones, about ½ inch (12 mm) long. These little "cones," which of course are not the same as pine cones, are a sure sign of alder. The cones stay green through most of the new years growth and turn dark brown when mature and the next year. Some stay on all year. Male catkins and female cones (with seeds) grow on separate plants, so some alders have no cones. Typically alder has many stems starting together at ground level. Alder may reach 40 feet high,

though usually it is about 10 to 15 feet high; the trunk diameter grows to 7 inches.

Leaves: 1 to 4 inches (2.5 to 10 cm) long; doubly toothed; to 2.5 inches (6 cm) wide and wrinkled. Leaves alternate but so close together as to appear opposite, and often in clumps of 2 or 3 at end of twigs. Six to nine parallel veins are noticeable. Leaf size is usually about twice water birch leaf size, often near 2 inches long. Stems and twigs soft reddish brown; pith with a triangular cross-section. Thicker than birch twigs. Buds reddish on a short stalk, with two scales. Flowers from April to August.

Bark: smooth and thin; usually pale gray, and paler than water birch bark. Whitish or gray horizontal ridges or marks on branches (lenticels or breathing pores) are often common or obvious. The lenticels may form warty bumps on the bark. The bark may have a silvery, greenish, or grayish cast over brown, or can be pale brown or even dark brown, but not so dark as water birch bark.

Information for this article taken from the following websites:
<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/alninc/all.html>
<http://www.westernexplorers.us/ThinleafAlder.pdf>



The 2021 "Red Books" are in!

Stop by our office to pick up your red book today!

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DISTRICT STAFF

Kerri Sabey
District Manager
Email: ksabey.uccd@gmail.com

Katie Lott
Education Coordinator
Email: klott.uccd@gmail.com

Grant Redden
Natural Resource Specialist
Email: gredden.uccd@gmail.com

Office phone: 787-3070
Website: www.uintacountycd.com

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff

Jeff Lewis; District Conservationist
Kevin Fackrell; Soil Conservation Technician
NRCS phone: (307) 787-3211