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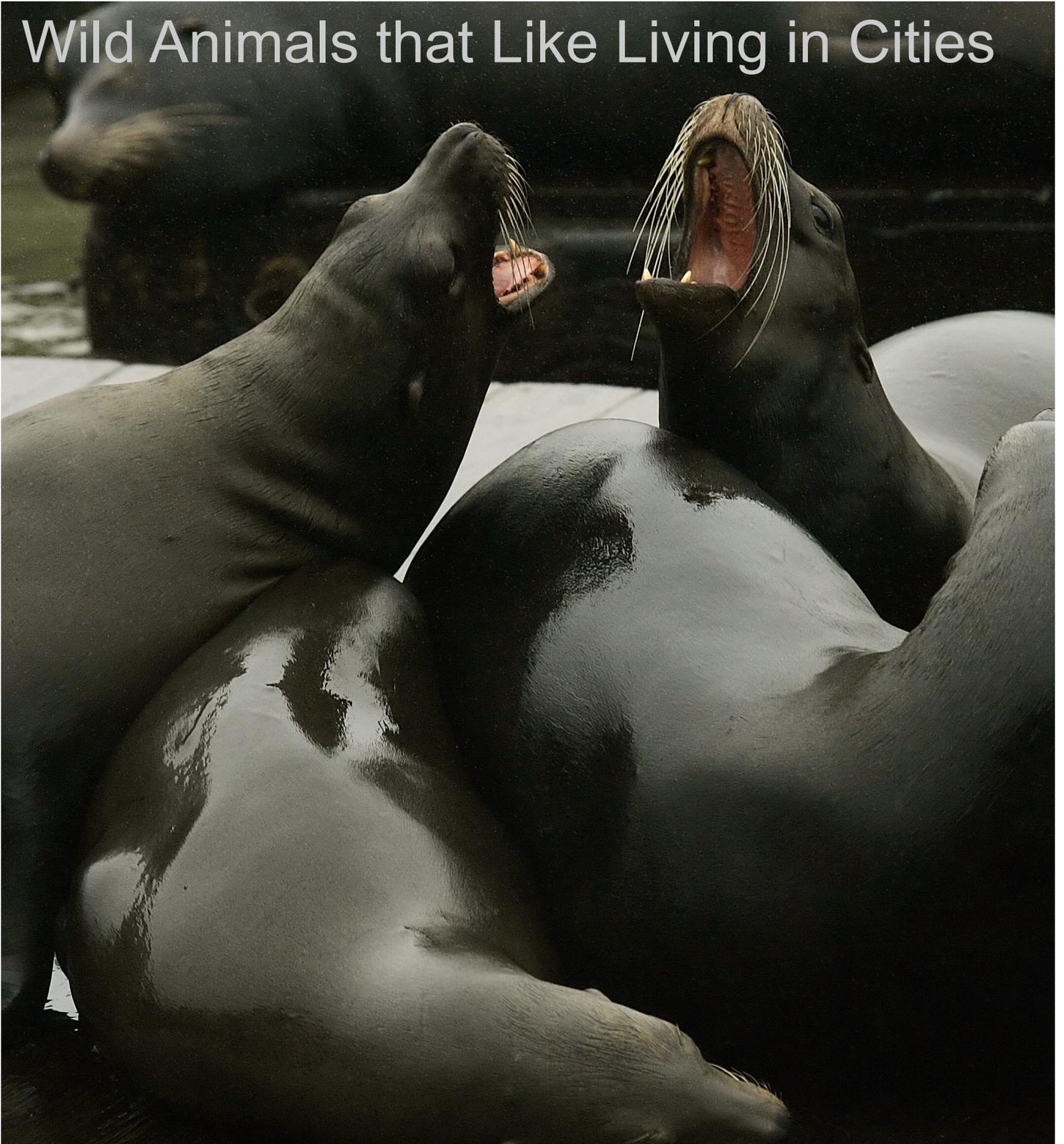
ZOOM

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

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Wild Animals that Like Living in Cities



Seals compete for dock space on Pier 39. Photo AP

In this issue: Wild Animals that Live in Cities

Zoom in on America

Residents of Pier 39, San Francisco, USA

Visible from all sides of Pier 39 is a big sign:

Harassment of the Sea Lions is a Violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. No docking, Approaching, Feeding or Throwing Objects Allowed.

Surrounding the sign are wooden floats on which 400 kilogram sea lions lie basking in the California sun. Tourists gaze transfixed at the animals that spend much of their time sleeping and occasionally engage in little fights or play with each other. No one seems to mind the seals' characteristic smell or loud roars. It is amazing to find these beautiful wild animals right in one of America's largest cities.

At first California sea lions visited the San Francisco Bay during winter. The bay offered them safety from predators such as orcas and white sharks. It also provided them a plentiful food supply: herring that spawned in the bay. These favorable conditions must have influenced the sea lions' decision to make San Francisco Bay their home. Their decision to pick Pier 39 rather than other piers available along San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, however, remains a mystery. The floating docks move up and down as the tide goes in and seem to provide a comfortable

couch on which the sea lions like to take their long, 8-hour naps. Maybe sea lions cherish idleness and comfort just as much as humans do.

Pier 39 did not always full of sea lions. It was just a regular dock full of boats. That all changed in September 1989. At the time, the dock was undergoing maintenance. While being repaired, the dock was emptied of boats. One day, sea lions started pulling themselves onto the dock. There was confusion at first. Boat owners wanted to restore normal boat traffic and filed complaints with the Marine Mammal Center. Surprisingly, the Marine Mammal Center ruled that the sea lions could stay and that it was boat owners who would have to find a new home for their craft.

The sea lion population is monitored every day. The number of animals that stay in Pier 39 marina varies throughout the year. The highest number of sea lions ever recorded was more than 1,700—in November 2009. Usually, however, the population is much smaller and numbers between 150 and 600. In June and July, most of the sea lions leave San Francisco Bay and head south to their breeding grounds on the Channel Islands.



Hundreds of California sea lions sunbathe on docks in San Francisco (January 23, 2005). Photo AP.

Raccoon Cherish City Life

Raccoons are nocturnal mammals with grayish fur, dexterous front paws and a characteristic black facial mask. They measure up to 70 centimeters in length and weigh between 3.5 and 9 kilograms. The original habitat of raccoons was deciduous and mixed forests. Due to their adaptability, they have extended their range to mountainous regions, coastal marshes, and urban areas, where they are sometimes considered to be pests.

Raccoons have a reputation for being very intelligent animals; more intelligent, in fact, than our pets such as dogs and cats. They learn quickly; remember solutions to tasks and problems; and do not repeat the same mistake twice. These characteristics may explain why raccoons are so successful in adapting to urban environments.

It is not uncommon at night to see groups of 3 - 4 raccoons setting out to explore trash containers and other potential food sources in neighborhoods. The resourcefulness and problem solving skills of raccoons is well known to city authorities and residents who have to de-

vised more and more complicated latches on doors, trash bins, and dumpsters in order to keep raccoons out.

Raccoons, for instance, usually start their quest for food by knocking over a trash bin and then playing with the latch until it opens. They can be very patient and if they come across a latch particularly difficult to open, they may work on opening it for several nights. More often than not their perseverance wins. Some raccoons seem to have developed the skill of prying open garage doors with their paws.

It may well be that the application of more elaborate latches is a challenge that only helps raccoons develop their intelligence and skills by learning new, more complicated things. In this way, the gap between the city raccoon and its rural cousin becomes even deeper.

City life seems to agree with raccoons: they grow fatter, live longer and have more idle time. Well, as they say, when in Rome, do as the Romans do...



A wildlife rehabilitator feeds a young raccoon (June 25, 2005). Photo AP.

Attention: Moose Crossing

Alaska's largest city, Anchorage is situated on the edge of the wilderness and in a harsh climate. It has become an attractive destination for wild animals that face food scarcities in their natural environment, especially during the winter.

Moose in particular seem open to exploring city life. The picture of this large animal walking slowly down the street, proudly displaying its antlers, has become a landmark of Anchorage.

It is estimated that more than 1,500 moose spend their winter in Anchorage, showing up in neighborhoods and yards and sometimes even in the downtown area. While in lesser numbers, moose can also be found in the city during other parts of the year.

Moose are attracted to the city mostly by food; they nibble on the branches of trees and bushes in people's yards, as well as Halloween pumpkins and other garden treats. Moose wander down city streets; in yards, and on trails. They sleep in deep snowbanks and in parking lots. On rare occasions moose are bold enough to enter

buildings—including one moose that entered the emergency ward of a hospital through automatic sliding doors.

Not all moose encounters have a happy ending. The presence of moose on streets can cause traffic jams and collisions that can be fatal for both moose and people. The moose also can destroy trees and shrubs and sometimes get themselves tangled up in outdoor Christmas lights. Although moose have gotten accustomed to being close to humans, they also can attack if they feel threatened.

While moose are a big tourist attraction, tourists need to be aware that for their own safety as well as for the safety of the moose, they must not approach the animals too closely or feed the animals. A moose that becomes too familiar with humans and relies on them too much for food may be proclaimed dangerous and killed.



Three moose take a break from feeding outside the windows of the Anchorage Daily News newsroom in Anchorage, Alaska. Photo AP.

See You Later, Alligator

“See you later, alligator,” an informal way of saying goodbye to a friend, may be more literal in Florida than elsewhere in the United States. Alligators live in all 67 counties of Florida and are an important part of Florida’s landscape. They play a vital role in the state’s wetlands ecology.

Sometimes these wild animals cross paths with humans when they want to migrate between various wetlands or are simply attracted to explore nearby human dwellings.

It is not unusual for Floridians, especially those who have waterfront houses or live near lakes, to find an uninvited “guest” in their backyard pond, garage, or swimming pool. Other places in which alligators have been spotted include canals, ditches, streams and golf course ponds.

Unwanted alligator visits have become so common that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission initiated the Nuisance Alligator Program. Florida residents can call a hotline number if they are concerned about their own safety because of an alligator’s presence.

The mere presence of an alligator does not constitute a nuisance situation. If left alone, the alligator will eventually move away from the human presence. A nuisance alligator is one that exhibits aggressive behavior toward humans, shows symptoms of some ill-

ness or injury, or inhabits recreational waters. Such animals are captured and re-located or killed if necessary.

Educational campaigns aim to teach Floridians how they can avoid situations which might be dangerous to them as well as the animal. The most important precaution is not to approach, touch or feed an alligator. An alligator fed by humans learns to associate people with food and loses its natural apprehension toward people. This seals the animal’s fate as it is treated as potentially dangerous and is hunted and killed.

Swimmers and bathers are advised to watch out for warning signs posted in areas known to be inhabited by large numbers of alligators. It is also not advisable to swim at night as alligators are most active between dusk and dawn.

Florida is not the only state in the U.S. with alligators. Warning signs may look like this one from South Carolina:

No swimming! Don’t feed the alligators. Gators cannot be tamed. Feeding them can result in their mistaking a hand for a handout! South Carolina Law Prohibits the Feeding or Harassing of Alligators. Up to \$300.00 fines for feeding alligators.

Alligators are also found in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.



An upclose look at a baby alligator during a field trip to the Tallahassee Museum of History and Natural Science (December 27, 2007). Photo AP.

Urban Sprawl and Wildlife Response

Urban sprawl has no doubt reduced the size of wildlife habitat. But it is also true that some wild animals seem to thrive in cities. Wild animals have a natural fear of humans and generally avoid people or show caution when close to them. Most wild animals are non-confrontational but may be curious and experimental. In addition to the animals highlighted on previous pages, chipmunks, squirrels, coyotes, foxes, ducks, skunks, and rabbits are among the many other species that have adapted well to life in or on the outskirts of cities. In so doing, these animals have also become a part of our natural environment.

There are advantages and risks involved in this situation. Advantages include enriching our environment

and the sheer pleasure of seeing wild animals in our neighborhoods. On the other hand there are risks of being bitten or attacked by animals that are sick or feel threatened. Many wild animals carry rabies, though some species, like foxes, are more susceptible to this disease than others.

Sometimes what we think of as “helping” wild animals may actually cause them harm. Leaving trash in uncovered containers, food and water for pets outside the house or leaving dirty grills in the yard is an unintentional invitation to wild animals roaming that are around and looking for food.



Three young raccoons peer out of their nest. Photo AP.

Activity Page

Exercise 1 VOCABULARY

What are the babies of these animals called? Match 1-10 with a-i below:

1. alligator
 2. bear
 3. cat
 4. deer
 5. duck
 6. frog
 7. horse
 8. moose
 9. seal
 10. raccoon
-
- a. fawn
 - b. foal
 - c. tadpole
 - d. kitten
 - e. calf
 - f. hatchling
 - g. pup
 - h. cub (2x)
 - i. duckling

Exercise 2 READING COMPREHENSION

Read the texts on pp. 2-6 and answer the questions below:

1. Why is it not allowed to feed alligators?
2. What traps await a moose wandering the city streets?
3. How do raccoons open unfamiliar latches on trash bins?
4. Why did sea lions choose K dock on Pier 39 as their habitat?
5. What is the average population of sea lions in the San Francisco Bay?



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