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Section: Sports

Are mountain lions making a comeback? WOODS AND WATERS

Gene Chague

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In case you haven't heard, last month a **mountain lion** was killed in a collision with a motor vehicle in Milford, Conn. This followed several **mountain lions** sightings in Greenwich, Conn., near the New York border, approximately 50 miles away.

What is especially interesting is that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has declared the **mountain lion** to be extinct in Connecticut, and the closest confirmed population of them is in Missouri.

Based upon information sent to Bill Balan - publisher of New Hampshire outdoor sports publication Hawkeye Hunting and Fishing News - by wildlife officials in Conn., "The cat was transported to a DEP protective evidence locker by environmental conservation officers. A cursory examination later that morning revealed the cat to be a mature female, 140 [pounds], in apparently good health. Claws were still intact. No PIT tags were detected following a screening of the carcass and no other obvious outward signs of being held in captivity were noted.

The animal appeared to be in remarkably good condition."

"The investigation continues in an effort to determine the origins of the animal and whether there is any physical evidence to tie that cat

killed in Milford to the one reported in Greenwich." There have been many unconfirmed sightings of mountain lions here in the Berkshires over the years, and many were reported to the DFW Western District. However, according to Andrew Madden, District Manager, there has been no reliable physical evidence turned in yet. When calls are received, they discuss the incident with the callers and many times, the sightings turn out to be bobcats or other animals and are ruled out. On the rest, they do follow up if there is some physical evidence. However, most of the reports fall into a category somewhere in between where people are convinced of what they saw but there is nothing further to investigate. In these cases they log in the report. "With the thousands of trail cameras, cell phones capable of taking pictures and the high density of roads in Massachusetts," says Madden, "you would think that one would be substantiated by a photograph or hit on the roads."

He mentioned a night trail camera picture of a **mountain lion** which many of us received by email last year. That picture was supposedly taken in Connecticut, but it turned out to be a hoax. It was a doctored-up picture of a **mountain lion** photographed in Texas.

We will just have to wait and see what the investigators conclude with that Connecticut **mountain lion**. Hopefully, they will be able to determine if it was raised in captivity, moved in from another area or was indeed home grown.

MassWildlife recently reported the 2010 deer harvest final numbers, and they vary slightly from the preliminary numbers reported Jan. 16. A total of 10,813 whitetailed deer were harvested during the combined seasons.

The total breaks down to five deer taken during the special deer season for paraplegic sportsmen; 3,778 taken in the archery season; 4,846 taken during the shotgun season; 2,068 taken during the muzzleloading season; and 116 deer harvested during the Quabbin Reservation hunt.

"2010 was the highest deer harvest on record for the archery season. Archery is a vital management tool particularly in suburban areas where deer densities are higher due to limited hunting access."

said Deer Project Leader Sonja Christensen.

The 2011 Antlerless Deer Permit Drawing is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Aug. 1 at the Hubbardston Rod and Gun Club, 55 Williamsville Road. The event will also include a deer management talk by Christensen.

MassWildlife reminds us that now that warm weather is here, lakes and ponds will be warming up and summer fish kills may be discovered in some bodies of water. Fish do act as the "canary in the coal mine," so it's natural to think a fish kill is an indicator of a problem with human pollution. However, the vast majority of summer fish kills reported are natural events.

Natural fish kills are generally the result of low oxygen levels, fish diseases or spawning stress. Depletion of dissolved oxygen (DO) is one of the most common causes of natural fish kills. The warmer the water, the less DO.

In addition to reduced oxygen levels, late spring and early summer is when many warm-water fish (sunfish, bass) begin to spawn. Large numbers of these species crowd into the shallow waters along the shore, vying for the best spawning sites. These densely crowded areas become susceptible to disease outbreaks and the result is an unavoidable natural fish kill, usually consisting of one or two species. When a caller reports a fish kill, a DFW fisheries biologist determines if the kill is due to pollution or a natural event.

Generally, pollution impacts all kinds of aquatic life. Therefore, the most important piece of evidence for the biologists is knowing the number of species associated with the fish kill.

Fish kills in which only one or two species are involved are almost always natural events.

When it is likely a fish kill is due to pollution, DFW notifies the Department of Environmental Protection.

The DEP takes the lead on a formal investigation, which includes analysis of water and fish samples to determine the source of the pollution.

To report a fish kill Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., contact Richard Hartley at (508) 389-6330.

After normal business hours or on holidays and weekends, call the Fish Kill Pager at (508) 722-9811, or contact the Environmental Police Radio Room at (800) 632-8075.

To reach Gene Chague: Berkwoodsandwaters@roadrunner.com, (413) 637-1818.

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