

Fact or Fiction?



Jack W. Dini
1537 Desoto Way
Livermore, CA 94550
E-mail: jdini@attbi.com

Expensive Animals

The California condor, once on the brink of extinction, is making a comeback. There are 183 condors alive today. However, it's been an expensive program. The cost of the project to save the California condors stands at \$40 million so far, about \$220,000 per bird.¹ Other examples of what the Fish & Wildlife Service has spent to preserve and recover endangered and threatened species are listed in Table 1.

Mike Davis reports the following in *Ecology of Fear*: "Mountain lions, who wildlife experts call 'the Rolls Royce of North American predators, have their share of defenders. After 40-year-old Barbara Schoener was killed, and partially devoured, by a female mountain lion while hiking in a Sierra recreation area, 45 miles north of Sacramento, there was an extraordinary outpouring of empathy for the animal (subsequently killed by trackers). Sympathizers reportedly donated twice as much to a fund for the lion's orphan cubs than to the fund for Schoener's two small children."³

Many places build pathways or tunnels to try to prevent animals from contact with automobiles. Kafka describes some activities: "Worried that we are losing too many frogs, toads, and other amphibians under the wheels of cars, environmentalists from Texas to Germany have hit upon a dubious solution—building express tunnels that let the crossing critters crawl underneath the highway."⁴ Kafka also discusses a \$40,000 project aimed at finding out how to design a tunnel that will bisect a stretch of U.S. Highway 319 outside of Tallahassee, FL. A problem with this type of approach is figuring out how to guide the gopher frog and striped newt through the portal.⁴ As of March 2002, the underpass had not been built, but the number of amphibians and reptiles that will be affected is now 27. The underpass must be wide enough and tall enough, with a grate so the animals can see the sky.⁵

Canada has constructed tunnels for elk under its Trans-Canada highway in the vicinity of Banff National Park. Florida has passageways under roads in the Everglades for alligators (alligator alleys?), and also has built miles of fences in the Everglades to keep the Florida panther from darting in front of automobiles. Do these precautions work? In Florida, I've seen many alligators hanging out around the passageways and never saw an alligator road kill. But the fences for panthers raise a question. Lorna Lewis, who has spent 60 years in the area where the fences were built, has never seen a panther in the region.⁶

Once again, from Kafka: "Best to plan ahead with this sort of thing. The city of Davis, CA, spent \$12,000 on a toad tunnel in 1996, but no one seems to know if it has worked.

"I don't really know, and I don't know if anybody's gone over there to check, admits Davis Mayor Pro Tem Julie Partansky, who first advocated the tunnel when she was on the city council."⁴

Good Intentions Can Backfire

Here's an interesting item about oryx gazelles. These are majestic animals from the Kalahari region of Africa. They weigh from 400 to 500 pounds, with straight black horns 30 to 40 inches long. You don't have to go to Africa to see oryx gazelles, just travel to New Mexico. As Rowley points out:

"In 1969, the New Mexico Game and Fish Department released oryx as part of its exotic animal introduction program on the White Sands Missile Range. Between 1969 and 1973, 93 oryx were released onto the

Table 1

**Dollars Spent to Preserve & Recover
Endangered & Threatened Species***

Species	Cost
Northern Spotted Owl	\$9.7 million
Least Bell's Vireo (bird)	\$9.2 million
Grizzly Bear	\$5.9 million
Red Cockaded Woodpecker	\$5.2 million
Florida Panther	\$4.1 million
Mojave Desert Tortoise	\$4.1 million
Bald Eagle	\$3.5 million
Ocelot	\$3.0 million
Jaguarundi (type of wildcat)	\$2.9 million
American Peregrine Falcon	\$2.9 million

*From reference 2, Ray & Guzzo.

missile range, and quickly began to reproduce. Researchers predicted that the population would never grow beyond 500 to 600 and would remain within the Tularosa Basin. However, the animals have reached a population of 5,000 or more, and have been spotted from 60 miles south of Albuquerque all the way down to West Texas. Because they breed year-round and don't have African lions to prey on them, they are thriving."⁷

In 1996, because of overgrazing and other problems with the oryx, the Park Service spent \$1,040,000 on 67.6 miles of fencing to completely enclose the 225 miles of the national monument.⁷ However, Murphy's Law was in effect and some 200 animals were inadvertently fenced in. The Park Service then let it be known that it was considering shooting the remaining animals. This alerted animal rights activists and forced the agency to resort to live trapping. Another \$400,000 was spent to successfully live trap and remove 228 ani-

imals. So, despite the success of this effort, some 12 to 20 animals still remain on the national monument.

Rowley concludes: "Debate continues on how to remove them before they breed and create the same problem that started all of this." Says missile range biologist Patrick Morrow: "In my professional opinion, this species should never have been introduced in the first place." Counters Frank Hibben who was responsible for bringing the oryx into this area: "We have more oryx in New Mexico than all of the Kalahari. I'm thrilled that they're doing so well."⁷

Calipatria, a "level 4" maximum security state prison in California, currently houses some 4,000 inmates.³ There is a noticeable absence of surveillance, however. Ten of its 12 perimeter gun towers are unmanned, as is the guard booth at the main gate. Don't worry about convicts escaping, though. The facility is surrounded by a 13 foot electric fence, sandwiched between two ordinary chain link fences. Each of the 145 individual strands, which are part of the electric fence, bristle with 5,000 volts—about 10 times the recognized lethal dosage.³ When the fence was activated in 1993, prison system folks were pleased, but, they had neglected to factor the animal-rights people into the equation. As Davis records: "The prison is just east of the Salton Sea, a major wintering habitat for waterfowl, and the gently purring high voltage fence immediately became an erotic beacon to passing birds. Local bird watchers soon found out about the body count (a gull, two owls, a finch and a scissor-tailed flycatcher) and alerted the Audubon Society. By January, Calipatria's 'death fence' was an international environmental scandal. When a CNN crew pulled into the prison parking lot, the Department of Corrections threw in the towel and hired an ornithologist to help them redesign the fence."³

Davis further points out that the result is the world's only birdproof, ecologically responsible death fence. The innovations include a warning wire for curious rodents, anti-perching deflectors for wildfowl, and tiny passageways for burrowing owls, all at a cost of \$140,000.³

Another item relates to oil spills. When these occur we often see and hear about oil-soaked birds. Here's what Holloway says about cleaning up these creatures, "Ultimately, it is the frame of the television set and the mind-set of the media about oiled animals. The public wants the animals saved—at \$80,000 per otter and \$10,000 per eagle—even if the stress of their salvation kills them."⁸

High on the current list of most expensive animals has to be the Canada lynx, which is currently receiving much atten-

tion. As reported by R. Dalton in *Nature*: "A study of the habitat of the threatened Canada lynx in U.S. forests is embroiled in fierce controversy, after it emerged that wildlife biologists sent fur samples from captive lynx to a laboratory that was supposed to be monitoring the whereabouts of the animals in the wild."⁹ Five U.S. Federal and two Washington State Fish and Wildlife researchers were caught planting hair samples from a threatened Canada lynx in an American national forest. The researchers were conducting a four-year study of 57 forests in 16 states to determine the extent of lynx habitat. This has led to "political rhetoric flying like fur at a feline fracas."¹⁰

Most reports are strongly critical of the biologists.^{9, 11-13} With statements such as "The public has a right to know who attempted this huge economic sabotage," Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise Executive Vice President Ron Arnold added: "We need to know their names so we can trace any direct links to agenda-driven environmental groups. There are many environmental groups in Washington State and elsewhere that have worked for years to shut down resource industries and motorized recreation, and they know the Canada lynx is the perfect surrogate for their political goals. Rural areas across America could have been stripped of virtually all economic and recreational use, costing millions of dollars in lost jobs, goods, and services."¹¹

Although a report¹⁰ in *Nature* says the "lynching is undeserved," we will undoubtedly hear more about this issue. This isn't the first time lynx have made national headlines.

Dan Whipple reported in 1999: "The future of lynx and the Vail resort in Colorado was intertwined in a tangled tale of skiing, politics, and the costliest act of terrorism in history. On October 19, 1998, members of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) allegedly set fires on two ridgetops at Vail, causing an estimated \$12 million in damage to two restaurants and four ski lifts. The fires blazed just two days after Vail Associates, owner of the ski resort, began clearing trees for a 900-acre expansion in the area where lynx were last seen. An e-mail from the ELF said the fires were set on behalf of the lynx."¹⁴ Makes one wonder if there is a connection between all this.

One more item—the Wall Street Journal recently reported the following: "Hot on the heels of environmental scandals over lynx data, sucker fish and salmon habitats, comes news that Forest Service officials knowingly used false data about spotted owls to block logging in a California forest. Federal Judge Lawrence S. Margolis ruled the agency's action was 'arbitrary, capri-

cious and without rational basis, and that the officials knew their data was faulty even as they ordered the sales cancelled. The federal government recently agreed to pay the logging company, Wetsel-Oviatt, \$9.5 million for four canceled sales."¹⁵

Conclusion

All too often we spend more money to save animals than to help people in need. No debate animals are important, but are they really more important than human lives? Mark Dowie¹⁶ quotes Dorceta Taylor,¹⁷ a professor of sociology in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan: "If it is discovered that birds have lost their nesting sites, environmentalists go to great extremes to erect nesting boxes and find alternative breeding sites for them. When whales are stranded, enormous sums are spent to provide them food. When forests are threatened, large numbers of people are mobilized to prevent damage. But we have yet to see an environmental group champion human homelessness or joblessness as issues on which they will spend vast resources. It is a strange paradox that a movement that exhorts the harmonious coexistence of people and nature worries about the continued survival of nature (particularly loss of habitat problems) but somehow forgets about the survival of humans, especially those who have lost their habitats or food sources. If this trend continues a vital piece of the web of survival will be missing."

Lastly, from Dowie who reported the following about the 1992 United Conference on Economic Development in Rio De Janeiro:

"There were demonstrations every day in Rio, organized and conducted by northern hemisphere enviros. One *Journal do Brasil* headline was telling: "Americans and Europeans March in Defense of Animals, Forests, and Ecology." The subhead completed the story. "Brazilians Protest Hunger, Poverty and Oppression."¹⁶ *P&SF*

References

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