Living with Wildlife in BC

UNGULATES #7

"Living with Wildlife" is a series of nine wildlife management guides for the agricultural and natural resource sectors, as well as rural land owners. Options for wildlife management, worker safety, and animal deterrents are provided for each species. Many guides suggest completing wildlife conflict management plans. Web links to the guides and other resources are on the back page. Consult the "Conflict Reduction Guide" for wildlife deterrent management options.

Ungulates have traits and requirements that can place them in conflict with many types of agriculture and large land holder operations. Crop damage to tree fruits and forage crops by deer and elk can be significant and is increasing along with damage to fencing and property. Conflict reduction techniques are required to both minimize wildlife damage and reduce the need to kill problem wildlife.

Deer: *Cervus*

- Are generally a tawny to light brown in color, camouflage for their surroundings.
- Can stand up to 2.28 m /7.5 ft. tall and weigh in at between 50-68 kg/110-150 lbs.
- In May or June female does, give birth to one to three fawns. Fawns are a reddish brown color with white spots, helping them blend in with their hiding places while they are very small.
- They are herbivores, although have an extremely diverse diet, consuming leaves, fruit, nuts, seeds, other plant material and even small dead birds or rodents they come across.
- Deer prefer to feed at dawn and dusk, although it is not uncommon for them to wander out during the day

California Bighorn Mountain Sheep: *Ovis canadensis*

- Males have large curved horns and can weigh in between 59-140 kg/127-316 lbs. and stand between 1m/36–41" tall. Females are smaller, between 35-85kg/75-188 lbs. and stand just under 1m/30-36" tall. Females have smaller pointed horns
- Rutting season (mating) peaks in November, and in May 1 or 2 lambs are born to a female ewe.
- Live in low-elevation hillsides with grassy slopes and open forests.
- Sheep live near rocky slopes where they can climb to evade predators

Elk: *Cervus Canadensis*

- Male elk weigh in at between 322-326kg/710-730 lbs. and stand an average of 1.5 m/4.5 ft. hoof to shoulder. Females are smaller, at between 235-240/500-530 lbs. and stand at the shoulder about 1.3 m/4 ft.
- Males have large antlers that are shed each winter and begin growing again in spring. Antlers can grow up to 2.5 cm/1" a day.
- Rut in the fall and give birth in the spring. Calves are spotted until late summer when they lose their spots.

On the Land

Deer, bighorn mountain sheep and elk are widespread throughout British Columbia and provide excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. Unfortunately, as the agricultural sector has increased in size, pressure on BC's ungulate species has also increased and conflict has followed suit.

Farms, vineyards and orchards provide an ideal habitat, particularly for deer and elk, protecting them from predators and providing ample food sources. In the case of the California Bighorn sheep, habitat fragmentation has put enormous pressure on populations, leading them to be designated as a species at risk. Using conflict reduction techniques to discourage damage to property and use of unnatural food sources, as well as taking responsibility as landowners and stewards of the environment will help take the pressure off these species.

Damage done by ungulates includes damage to crops and gardens, aggressive behaviour towards humans and encouraging predators such as cougars to follow ungulates onto farms, orchards, vineyards or residential areas. Ungulate conflict management should focus on reducing conflict by discouraging entry onto the property and minimize damage done if entry is obtained, rather than attempting to eliminate problem animals or herds.

Note: Specific no contact fencing is required to reduce the contact of Big Horn Sheep with domestic sheep. Domestic sheep carry strains of pneumonia causing bacteria called Pasteurella and other virulent diseases that ravage the wild bighorns. Even fleeting contact can pass these diseases on to the wild sheep.

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan can reduce the incidence of damage or trespass from wildlife. A management plan includes:

- an on-site evaluation to assess past and current operations by identifying potential conflict sites and safety concerns:
- Property points:
  a. outbuilding, worker shelters, and shed vulnerability
  b. eating, break - time or campsite areas
  c. worker safety
- once the evaluation is complete, conflict reduction options can be explored and a plan can be implemented
- assign a person to implement the plan including worker education

Management Options

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan advises:

- Use a dog, auditory or visual frightening device to discourage ungulates from coming onto the property.
- Keep a brush free buffer around the perimeter of the property, block, or pasture; this removes a safe cover.
- Keep attractants to a minimum i.e. don't leave piles of fruit anywhere on the property; flail fallen fruit, remove or compost unused vegetable or fruit matter, store hay responsibly.
- Fence your property with a high fence or consider installing an electric fence.
- Do not allow domestic sheep nose to nose contact with wild sheep, as it allows transmission of disease.
- Provide a travel corridor to allow safe passage around/through the property.

See Resource and Contacts page for more links to in-depth Conflict Reduction Techniques Guide

On-site evaluations and forms can be accessed by agricultural operators. Contact:

If you encounter aggressive wildlife call the Conservation Officer Hotline: 1-877-952-7277

Worker Safety

Farms, orchards, vineyards and livestock operations are often located in wildlife interface or natural areas where wildlife live. It is important to understand which predators or wildlife conflict situations may occur where you are working and be prepared to keep yourself and others safe.

Having a **Worker Action Plan** is the best defence to avoid encounters.

As part of personal safety, research and ask your employer for information on the on the wildlife you are most likely to encounter. Understand ungulate biology and behaviour traits.

Aggressive Ungulate Behaviour:

Ungulate species have been shown to be aggressive for three reasons:

- females will react to a real or perceived threat to their young
- they respond aggressively to being antagonized or irritated by dogs
- during the rut (mating season) in late fall, male elk and deer can be more aggressive than usual

Aggressive behaviour is usually signified by snorting or stomping, flailing front legs and charging, with or without contact.

Avoiding Conflict

- Keep your distance.
- Never approach any wildlife; aggressive behaviour is often the result of nervousness or feeling threatened.
- Never get between a mother and her young.

In an Encounter

- If aggressive behaviour is exhibited BACK OFF, you are too close. *Ungulates are not inherently aggressive towards people, but will act aggressively out of defense.*
- Back away slowly without making direct eye contact.
- Keep dogs under control unless specifically trained for predator control.
- Talk in a low reassuring voice while backing away.
- Prepare to use your deterrent (bear spray).

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Contacts & Resources

"Living with Wildlife in BC" management guide series:

1 Bear
#2 Cougar
#3 Coyote & Wolf
#4 Rodents
#5 Snakes
#6 Starlings
#7 Ungulates
#8 Conflict Reduction: mitigation options for wildlife safety and control
Mitigation Decision Matrix: calendar of wildlife occurrences and recommended controls

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The "Living with Wildlife" series is available for downloading and distribution (personal, noncommercial use) on the following websites:
www.osca.org "Living With Wildlife" pages
http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/wildsafe-bc-bear-aware/
www.bcwgc.org Health and Safety Section

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for fencing:
Margo Supplies http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html
R&S Power Fence 645 Main St. Penticton, BC V2A 5C9 250-492-7090 http://electricfence.homestead.com/

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for devices and kits:
Margo Supplies http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html
True North Outdoors Store http://trueoutdoors.ca/ Vernon, Kamloops, Kelowna, Penticton
Bear Scare (training courses available as well) http://www.bearscare.ca/

Resources:
WildSafeBC web Site http://learn.wildsafebc.com/index.php
BC Conservation Officer Service http://bit.ly/COServiceHumanWildlifeConflict

Bear Spray is available at most Outdoors Stores, Hunting Outfitters, and Canadian Tire
Deer/Dog Spray is available at Canadian Tire Stores across BC (not restricted)

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