

Windows to Wildlife



Mountain lion © (CC-BY-SA) Angell Williams on Flickr CC.

What Our Experience With Wildlife is Worth

Written by Michael Lucid*

Regional Wildlife Biologist, Idaho Dept. of Fish & Game- Panhandle

It was two days before elk season closed and we were getting desperate. With a foot of October snow on the ground and another storm moving in we knew we had to make something happen today if we were going to avoid a deer meat winter. We were working a group of elk a stones throw from the Canadian border and sign was everywhere. We were close. My partner and I split up for the afternoon. It didn't matter if she made the kill or if I did, our goal was quantifiable, we needed meat.

I spent the afternoon following fresh elk tracks in the snow. Focused solely on the tracks I paused for a moment and looked up to see a mature mountain lion with its nose to the ground. We were following the same elk. Moments passed as the lion crept closer. I was entranced and it didn't see me.

I've seen ten lions in my life. It's such a special experience I remember each one in detail. The first was a flash across a dirt road in Big Bend National Park. Another walked by me as I sat alone on a ridge eating a freeze dried meal in the Selway Wilderness. Most recently a young lion hiding under my north Idaho deck as it ate my still dying laying hen.

My experiences watching lions and other wildlife often come to mind when I'm asked to justify spending money on watchable wildlife and the Wildlife Diversity Program. People want to know how their financial investment benefits us humans. A fair question but it's hard to provide solid numbers that make practical sense.

While it's obvious that biologically diverse wetlands keep our water clean and bees keep our apple trees pollinated, how many of us are truly grateful for bees before we must head to the orchard with a paintbrush to pollinate the trees ourselves? People want to know how nongame wildlife benefits us in

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cold hard cash. The [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#) estimated 558,000 people in Idaho participated in wildlife watching activities in 2011. These wildlife watchers spent over \$432 million in Idaho on wildlife-watching activities and directly created thousands of jobs. In addition, nearly half of Idaho resident sportspeople engaged in wildlife-watching activities.

But are immediately intangible ecosystem services and hard to wrap your head around economic benefits really why people work to conserve wildlife? Of course not. We work for wildlife conservation because we love wildlife. And we love wildlife because of the life enriching experiences it brings us.

We cherish the memory of our mother taking us hunting as a child. We learn patience as we build life species lists and wait for the really good ones. We find peace in watching a heron. We find challenge in keeping squirrels out of our bird feeders and feel jubilant on the rare occasion we are successful.

We volunteer on projects, plant wildlife friendly gardens, donate money, and sometimes even follow careers that benefit wildlife conservation. Our love of wildlife culminates in action which gives our lives meaning which, at our core, is something we all seek.

This leaves us to wonder what seeing that lion was worth to me. For the most part that hunting season is a blur between many other seasons in my memory. I vaguely remember getting skunked in our usual spots, early snow, and the long drive through the storm with no elk.

What I remember in detail is standing still as I watched that lion close in on me. The moment it scented me when it was about 15 feet away. How it immediately switched to pre-pounce position. Locking eyes with it for eternity seeming seconds. Reaching for the bear spray I always carry on my pack. And I remember, as it bounded down the slope away from me, hoping it would have a full belly that night on the elk I had hoped was mine.

A chance encounter with a mountain lion. Photo by Michael Lucid.



Summer Wildlife Events

Boise WaterShed

11818 West Joplin Rd., Boise; (208) 489-1284

www.cityofboise.org/Bee/WaterShed/Home/index.aspx

July 8 - WaterShed Wednesday: Tech Tricks

Visit us from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. to explore science. Discover the power of magnets, create an edible robot, and launch marshmallows using stick catapults. Groups of 10 or more need to register at least two weeks in advance by calling 608-7300. At 10:30, we'll have fun with BLOCKFest activities in the theater. At 11:00, take an outdoor tour of the wastewater treatment plant. Closed-toe shoes required for tour, ages 4 and older, please.

July 15 - WaterShed Wednesday: Music Mania

Join us from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. for a musical celebration with live music! Create origami out of sheet music and make your own musical instruments. Groups of 10 or more need to register at least two weeks in advance by calling 608-7300. At 10:30, we'll play musical chairs in the Theater complete with prizes! At 11:00, take an outdoor tour of the wastewater treatment plant. Closed-toe shoes required for tour, ages 4 and older, please.

July 18 - WaterShed Weekend: River Life- Plants and Animals and Bugs, Oh My!

Join us from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. to explore the complex web of river life that make up the Boise River ecosystem. We'll discover the worlds of vegetation, invertebrates, fish, mammals and birds! Make a food chain collage, build an ecosystem in a bottle that you can take home and watch grow, meet some wiggly worms and visit the Ada County Weed, Pest & Mosquito Education Trailer to learn what part they play in keeping you and the river ecosystem healthy. You can also learn a fun print making technique with artist Jennifer Hoak. A one-hour outdoor wastewater tour is offered from 11:30-12:30. The tour is not recommended for children under the age of four; closed-toe shoes required. FREE admission! No registration required.

July 22 - WaterShed Wednesday: Knights, Castles, and Dragons

Visit us between 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. to travel back in time with medieval activities and crafts! Build a castle and test its strength. Create your own shield and design a castle tower pencil holder. Groups of 10 or more need to register at least two weeks in advance by calling 608-7300. At 10:30, we'll decorate salt sculpture castles in the Theater. At 11:00, take an outdoor tour of the wastewater treatment plant. Closed-toe shoes required for tour, ages 4 and older, please.

July 29 - WaterShed Wednesday: The Wonders of Water

Visit us from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. and explore the many uses of water! Make a water buddy and create a water critter using water and markers. Groups of 10 or more need to register at least two weeks in advance by calling 608-7300. At 10:30, we'll learn about the many uses of water. At 11:00, take an outdoor tour of the wastewater treatment plant. Closed-toe shoes required for tour, ages 4 and older, please.

August 15 - WaterShed Weekend: Water Bugs- Little Critters, Big Deal

Come to the Boise WaterShed from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and learn about amazing macroinvertebrates (Water Bugs) and what they tell us about the health of the Boise River. Join us at 10:30 in our theater for a presentation and introduction to water bugs by USGS Biologist and expert Dorene MacCoy. At 11:00, take a short hike down to the Boise River and catch some bugs for yourself! Create a beautiful print with artist Amy Nack and make some buggy art projects in our exhibit hall. No wastewater tour today. FREE admission! No registration required.

Foothills Learning Center

3188 Sunset Peak Rd., Boise; (208) 514-3755

www.cityofboise.org/Bee/Foothills/index.aspx

July 1 - Birding Series with Terry Rich: Identification

6:00 a.m. Free! Birding at Bogus! We're migrating to Bogus Basin to enjoy the cooler temperatures just like the birds. Meet at the Foothills Learning Center at 6 AM to arrange carpools to Bogus Basin.

July 11 - Second Saturday Series: Caliente Critters- How Foothills Animals and People Survive the HOT Summer

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Free, family friendly, drop in/no pre-registration needed. Please – no pets. When summer temperatures climb, people and animals have to find a way to adapt to the heat. We'll explore some of the clever ways that critters have developed to tolerate extreme temperatures. A guest lecturer will tell us about animal adaptations, and there will be hands-on activities to help you learn how critters beat the heat. Join us and have it "made in the shade." Warning, some of you may get wet!



Binoculars: A Most Valuable Tool

by Terry Thomas*, Regional Habitat Manager, IDFG- Upper Snake Region

At first glance, the sagebrush flat was devoid of life but we focused our attention on an old badger hole about 30 feet away. I asked my friends to take a careful look at the hole in the earth. They couldn't see anything unusual. Then I asked them to look again, this time using binoculars. Within seconds, they both exclaimed, "There it is!" The binoculars revealed the top of the head of a small burrowing owl, just half her beautiful yellow eyes showing above the hole.

Besides nimble feet and a quick and curious mind, sharp eyes are a nature lover's greatest asset. Thankfully, eyeglasses have leveled the playing field for me. For well over 50 years they have kept my world from being less like an impressionist painting and more like a photograph.

A good pair of binoculars though, takes even excellent eyesight into an entirely different realm. My wife confided to me that before she owned her first pair of binoculars and began to use them on a regular basis, she had never realized how much diversity is in our world.



For instance, she had assumed that every small bird was like every other, something naturalists call LBJs, (scientific lingo for Little Brown Job, the technical term naturalists use when they can't identify a critter).

Once she acquired the binoculars though, an orange and black bird wasn't just a robin. It could be a Bullock's oriole, a black-headed grosbeak or any number of other birds. Deer became bucks, does or fawns. Pretty scenes could be dissected into component plants, wildflowers identified and geology could be examined in detail. It was somewhat like someone accustomed to oatmeal three times a day discovering a smorgasbord.

She had realized that the world is full of wonderful surprises only disclosed through the powerful lens of a pair of binoculars. Her world evolved from one of generalities to a kaleidoscope of detail previously hidden in plain sight. Her outdoor experiences have been greatly enriched and nowadays, she is rarely without her binoculars. With them she has learned the difference between looking and seeing.

If there is one outdoor tool I try to always have with me, it is a pair of binoculars. With them, I see things like the burrowing owl that would otherwise be hidden and identify LBJs and other wildlife. They are essential for wildlife surveys, identifying distant wildlife and finding secretive and well camouflaged animals such as American bitterns. I can't think of very many outdoor pleasures that cannot be enhanced by the constant use of binoculars.

My wife didn't use binoculars for very long before she recognized the simile between looking and seeing in the outdoors and in other aspects of our lives. How often are we caught looking at the outside without ever seeing who a person really is? How invaluable would a pair of binoculars be that could look past the surface and into the heart and soul of others and find beauty otherwise missed?

Selecting Binoculars

by Terry Thomas*, Regional Habitat Manager, IDFG- Upper Snake Region

Binoculars are the most important tool available for garnering extra pleasure from just about any outdoor experience. Selecting a proper binocular is important but with the wide variety of choices these days, it can be a daunting and confusing task. With dozens of brands and models, prices that range from under \$50 to almost \$3,000, different shapes and sizes, where do you begin?

As I will soon be in the market for a new pair of binoculars, I checked the Cornell University All About Birds website (www.allaboutbirds.org) for some advice.

With so many excellent choices today, Cornell's first recommendation was to decide on a price range. In general, the more you pay, the better the product will be. However, a binocular made by Swarovski or Zeiss just may not be in the budget. That doesn't mean you can't find a quality set of binoculars for under \$500 or even under \$300. But only you can decide how much you can afford.

Cornell's next recommendation was to select the magnification. But first, a little education on what the numbers, such as, 7x32, 8x42 or 10x50 really mean. The smaller number of the pair is the magnification or power. My current binoculars are a 12x42 meaning they are 12 power, which is more magnification than is generally recommended. More magnification does bring the object closer but the trade-offs include: a narrower field of view, making it harder to find your target, a slightly darker image in low light and increased perceived handshake. Eight power is the most commonly recommended magnification for birding use.

The second, larger number is the diameter of the objective lens. The bigger the number, the more light it gathers, improving performance at dawn and dusk. However, there are tradeoffs here as well. The bigger the objective end, the more expensive, heavier and bulky the binocular. Conversely, going small, such as with pocket-sized 7x21 binoculars, can make them difficult to use in low light. The majority of binoculars recommended for extended use have a 40-42mm objective lens.

Cornell's third recommendation was to test a lot of different models in your price range. With so many choices, you might as well find one that really fits your hands and face. Other features to look for will include: High Definition or Low Dispersion glass (multicoated glass that dramatically improves performance) eyecups, weather proofing, shock protection, warranty and weight.

Cornell recommends that you pay close attention to the color, clarity and brightness of the image, testing binoculars in different light conditions inside the store. Look at colorful objects and determine how true the colors are. See if you can discern detail in backlit subjects and how crisp or sharp the lenses are. This step can be as technical as you want to make it, but be sure that you compare each binocular in the same way.

If you take the time to carefully choose your next pair of binoculars, it is very likely to be a purchase that will add immeasurably to every subsequent outdoor experience.



Whether fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, or simply viewing wildlife from your own backyard, all Idahoans have the opportunity to enjoy Idaho's rich wildlife diversity.

Each purchase or renewal contributes a portion to Idaho's wildlife:

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- Habitat Improvements**
- Education**
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WWW.IDAHOWEEDAWARENESS.COM

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Idaho's nongame wildlife thanks you ALL!

Moose © Mike Morrison

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