

Wildlife Advisory Committee Report to DIRA 2022

4 Pages

Submitted by Peter Karsten November 13, 2023

The purpose of the committee is to deal with wildlife concerns on the island, specifically with the harassment of wildlife by uncontrolled dogs, illegal and unsafe hunting practices, rescuing or dealing with distressed or injured wildlife and the confirmation and reporting of bear and cougar sightings. In addition it acts as a central agency concerning lost or stray dogs.

Committee Members: Peter Karsten (Co-chair), Edi Johnston (Co-chair), Mike Nestor, Kris Christensen (DRT), Dean Heyland (DRT), Peter Janes (DRT), John Isbister (DRT), Daniel Lonsdale (DRT).

(DRT stands for Deer Response Team)

Resource contacts: Chris Danks (dogs), Denis Forsyth (wildlife)

There have been no WAC Committee meetings in 2023. A WAC meeting will be scheduled for November 23rd to discuss the possible implementation of a Bear Smart Community Program.

New Member: Daniel Lonsdale (cell 250 858 6061)

- Committee members attended to injured deer calls. There were 2 road kills in 2023.
- Fawn die-off was low. This occurs mostly in February to March when the fawns have depleted their fat reserves and have a parasite infestation. It is a natural occurrence and not a conservation concern for the Island deer population.
- Island Phone Directory has been advised to exchange Chris Danks with Edi Johnston for Dog Concerns.
- Some calls regarding injured or orphaned birds have been responded to.
- A black bear was seen September 18th followed by reports killing livestock on October 27 and 29 and November 1 to 3. Last reported sighting was sighting on November 8. and repeated sightings.
- Two informative articles have been submitted to the Island Grapevine (September 21 and November 9)
- No confirmed cougar sightings have been reported to the WAC in 2023.
- There was sighting of a young cougar near down town in December 2022. Dogs reportedly scared it off and no further reports were made to the WAC.
- No reports of illegal hunting or trespassing have been received.
- One case of dogs running at large has been addressed.
- The "Be Alert "signs to warn driver of deer suddenly crossing the road were repainted and repaired.

The Deer Response Team (DRT)

PUBLIC NOTICE: the Wildlife Advisory Committee of DIRA (WAC) has a DEER RESPONSE TEAM (DRT) of members who are equipped to deal with injured and road-killed deer. Please call these members directly for immediate assistance. Placing reports on Facebook will not be responded to. The carcasses are taken to a safe place to feed eagles, vulture and ravens.

The WAC member list is found on the inside cover of the Denman Island Phone Directory. Please add Edi Johnston to Dog Concerns. You may want to put this list on your fridge. The future edition of the Phone Directory will have the following:

WILDLIFE ADVISORY (cut it out and put it on your fridge)

DEER injured and killed:

Dean Heyland 250 218 4534 cell,
Peter Janes 250 897 8540 cell,
Kris Christensen 250 335 3225,
Peter Karsten 250 335 1640,
John Isbister 250 335 2565,
Daniel Lonsdale 250 858 6061

DOG CONCERNS:

Edi Johnston 250 335 2689

OTHER WILDLIFE:

Peter Karsten 250 335 1640
Mike Nestor 250 218 0782 cell

Reminder for safe travel on our roads

Be prepared that deer are often crossing roads and are looking for forage along roadways leading to vehicle impact and worse. Collision with deer can easily injure occupants.

Here are some pointers to avoid deer accidents:

1. Use seat belts for that reason alone.
2. Drive close to the centre line as traffic permits to have the extra space and seconds to react to a deer suddenly crossing the road.
3. Always, if you see one deer crossing the road expect another to follow.
4. One or two fawns often follows a doe.
5. A deer sometimes reverses and runs back to cover – give them time.
6. Dim the headlight to reduce confusion to the deer.

If you see injured deer unable to run off, fatally injured or killed call the Deer Response Team for assistance. Try to move the body to the shoulder of the road for pick-up to prevent raptors feeding on it and get hit as well. Mark the spot with white paper or anything you can think of (plant material just at the pavement). Report the road name and closest property house/number when you call for assistance OR stay at the scene if you have the time. This is appreciated to find it quickly and help to load a dead deer is appreciated. Thankfully Islanders stop when waved to help to load deer.

Black Bear Reports

Two articles regarding sightings and interference with livestock were published September 21st and November 7th in the Island Grapevine.

“Bears on Denman” The Island Grapevine September 21st.

A black bear sighting has been reported on Sunday September 17 on a property on Greenhill Road across from the Stanhill Park. The bear was checking out a pear tree and retreated to the

underbrush along the Morrison Marsh. This is not a highly unusual sighting since black bear are able to swim from Vancouver Island to Denman Island. Bears have a very keen sense of smell and can detect food a mile away. Over the last 25 years Wildlife Advisory Committee has reported the visits of black bear on several occasions. A serious conflict involving an attack on livestock or humans has not been reported during that time. Black bears which are capable of swimming across the Baines Sound are considered healthy and not prone for an attack which is more likely to occur with old and starving bears. The males weigh around 300 lbs and female about half that. They are very powerful and dangerous if cornered or defending their cubs. There have been no confirmed reports on black bears denning or females having cubs with her on Denman. We believe that visiting black bears are just that temporary visitors generally attracted to the abundance of ripe apples, pears and plums. Please take extra caution that your dog or dogs are under control to avoid confrontations that could lead to serious injuries and death of your dog. Bears will avoid dogs and humans for that matter, but again will attack if they feel cornered. In the event where a bear does not flee from you make yourself look large by raising your arms, shout, spread your jacket above you and walk slowly back always facing the bear. Do not turn and run. Respect them as potentially dangerous. In some ways it is good to see that humans have not driven bears out of their living space altogether

“Predator Update” The Island Grapevine November 9th.

September 18: The WAC received the first report on bear presence feeding on pears at a residence on Greenhill Road near Stanehill Park. A bear scat (feces) was found on Greenhill Road and examined. It contained only fruit particles and no animal matter.

October 14: At a Stanhill Place residence a wire fence was pushed down and remaining apples disappeared. A branch was broken of the apple tree.

October 19: On Stanehill Place as suet cake was disappeared from a bird feeder. Claw marks damaging the feeder post were seen. Suet feeding was curtailed.

October a number of comments were received about feeding on fruit in the community. The bear apparently roamed over the entire Island.

October 27: An adult sheep was killed and partly consumed at the farm of Dave and Fern Niedermoser. It was reported to the Conservation Officer (CO). The CO advised that they are not taking action at this point. The CO advised that the community should be notified to secure their livestock and to remove attractants (potential bear food).

October 29 and November 1: two Nubian goats were lost at the Landor farm but no carcass found.

November 3: Desperate bleating of a goat was heard in the early morning hours at the Landor farm. 2 goat carcasses were found and examined. Signs suggested bear kill. A bear scat containing animal matter and berries was found near the suite. Clear, fresh foot prints of a black bear were found on the farm in several locations. A detailed report with photos was submitted to the CO Office in Nanaimo.

The WAC highly recommends that Islander read the well-presented information by the Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection (MWLAP) on the coexistence of humans with bears and other predators i.e. “Bear Smart” brochure and Background Report of the MWLAP 2002.

The take-away is that humans share prime habitat with bears of high food productivity for humans and bears. Humans have extensively displaced bears from that environment to less productive habitats with resulting food shortage for bears. Years with a poor berry crop resulted in higher cases of wildlife conflict. Bears must sequester enormous food quantities to build up fat reserves for hibernation this puts additional pressure on searching food in our communities.

Bears are fast learners about where they can safely find food. They are omnivores as we are and our food is perfect bear food.

In the past two decades the WAC had reports of bears visiting Denman Island to feed in fruit, predominately in the fall. Livestock was not taken and the bears left the Island on their own. To protect farm animals, they are best held (at least at night) in solid barns with electric fencing to protect it. One farm had built a large goat corral with 4 heavy electric cables which would keep a bear back but unfortunately the bear spooked the goats and they crashed through the fence to become accessible to the bear. It takes combination of a stock fence that keeps farm animals in with an addition of at least two strands of electric wire on the outside to create a bear-safe barrier. A desperate bear trapped behind it could still break through ignoring the electric wire and scaling the fence, even an 8-foot game fence. Protecting livestock from bears is a challenge. The presence and barking of dogs seem to have deterred the roaming bear. To avoid conflict is in our hands. We can participate in a "Bear Smart Program" to improve public safety, reduce property damage and have fewer bears killed. This is a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach. Several communities have taken the program. The Ministry states that on a ten-year average they received close to 4,000 complaints, followed up on almost 2,000 and destroyed over 600 black bears.

The WAC encourages Islanders to report sightings and conflict with predators to the WAC. Phone numbers are on the inside of the Denman Phone Directory. We will investigate kills and signs to establish the cause and evidence of predators. We also investigate dog incidences. Any loss of animals or property damage due to wild predators should be reported immediately directly by the owner or custodian to the CO phone 1 877 952 7277 (RAPP)