



28

Number, in thousands, of visitors, program participants, and elementary school students who visited FWP's Montana WILD Education Center in 2023.

Have great horned owlets already hatched?

Though it's still winter, some great horned owl hatchlings may already be stirring in their nests. That's because great horned owls are Montana's earliest birds to mate and lay eggs.

Great horned owls may begin courting as early as January, when males hoot vigorously to attract females. Two birds that like each other copulate and the female lays one to four eggs in an abandoned raven or red-tailed hawk nest. In western Montana, this usually occurs in February.

After about five weeks, the eggs hatch, but then it takes another 10 weeks or so before the young owls can take flight and begin hunting on their own.

Great horned owls mate early in the year so that their slow-developing young have enough time during summer and fall to hunt and build strength for the winter ahead. ■



A baby porcupine near Sheridan

NOMENCLATURE

Don't pet the porcupette

It's almost spring, and soon baby animals will be waddling, stumbling, swimming, flapping, and frolicking throughout Montana. Here are the common names of those little cuties. And remember: Leave seemingly orphaned young animals alone. The mother is likely nearby trying to eat and could abandon its baby if you touch it.

fawn: deer, pronghorn

calf: elk, moose

lamb: bighorn sheep

kid: mountain goat

cub: bear

porcupette: porcupine

kitten: mountain lion, bobcat, lynx

pup: wolf, coyote, otter, mouse, vole, shrew, prairie dog, bat, mole, squirrel

kit: fox, beaver, rabbit, weasel

bunny: rabbit

leveret: hare

hatchling: birds that have just hatched

nestling: baby birds still in their nest

fledgling: young birds that have left their nest

chick: most baby birds

squab: rock pigeon

eaglet: eagle

owlet: owl

colt: sandhill crane

cygnet: swan

gosling: goose

duckling: duck

poult: wild turkey

tadpole, pollywog: frog, toad

snakelet: snake

larvae, fry, fingerling: all fish

parr, smolt: trout

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: THOM BRIDGE; JOHN WARNER; THOM BRIDGE; JOHN WARNER

RECREATION

FWP releases new videos on river recreation ethics

Rafting, boating, fishing, and kayaking are among the most popular outdoor activities in Montana. But increasingly, people out on the water are not recreating with what FWP officials have dubbed the "Montana Mindset."

"By that we mean following the traditional Montana way of being safe and being respectful to others and the resource," says Greg Lemon, head of the FWP Communication and Education Division.

To help boaters and others understand and practice the right behaviors, FWP and other agencies and organizations recently created three videos demonstrating what to do when out enjoying Montana's renowned rivers.

FWP partners for the videos include the Flathead National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, Flathead Rivers Alliance, River Management Society, and Montana PBS.

"The videos are the first step of a larger

effort to encourage better behavior by everyone recreating on all public lands and waters," says Lemon. "This and other Montana Mindset messaging emphasizes outdoor recreation ethics and etiquette that we hope will result in better outdoor experiences for everyone. The messages also address public safety and environmental effects on the outdoors, like the spread of aquatic invasive species."

The new river videos are titled "Preparing for a Montana River Float," "Montana River Recreation Safety," and "Montana Overnight River Recreation Tips." All three include stunning footage of the Smith, Blackfoot, South Fork of the Flathead, and other scenic Montana rivers.

◀ View the new videos here.

Look for other Montana Mindset guidelines throughout 2024 on FWP's and partner organizations' websites and social media channels. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MIKE MORAN ILLUSTRATION; BECCA WOOD; SHUTTERSTOCK

FWP game wardens patrol the water downstream from Four Banger Rapids near Big Timber. The rapids are among the largest on the lower Yellowstone River and the epicenter of the annual floating booze fest known as the Yellowstone Boat Float. Unsafe and unethical behavior abounds.



AIS crews find infested boats

FWP's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Program recently released results from the 2023 boating season:

Watercraft inspections

▶ 130,000 watercraft were inspected at AIS inspection stations.

▶ 53 watercraft carrying invasive mussels were intercepted and decontaminated.

▶ 600 boats carrying aquatic weeds were intercepted and decontaminated.



Early detections

▶ AIS crews collected 3,000 samples from lakes, rivers, and reservoirs across Montana.

▶ Analysis of the samples showed no evidence of invasive mussels.

▶ New infestations of New Zealand mudsnails were detected in the upper Clark Fork basin in Silver Bow Creek below Warm Springs Ponds.

▶ Curlyleaf pondweed was detected in the Missoula Kids Pond and in a subdivision pond in Bozeman.

▶ Eurasian watermilfoil was detected in Thompson Park Pond next to Noxon Reservoir.



AIS watercraft inspection stations will reopen in

March 2024, and the surveys and sampling will start again in the spring. ■