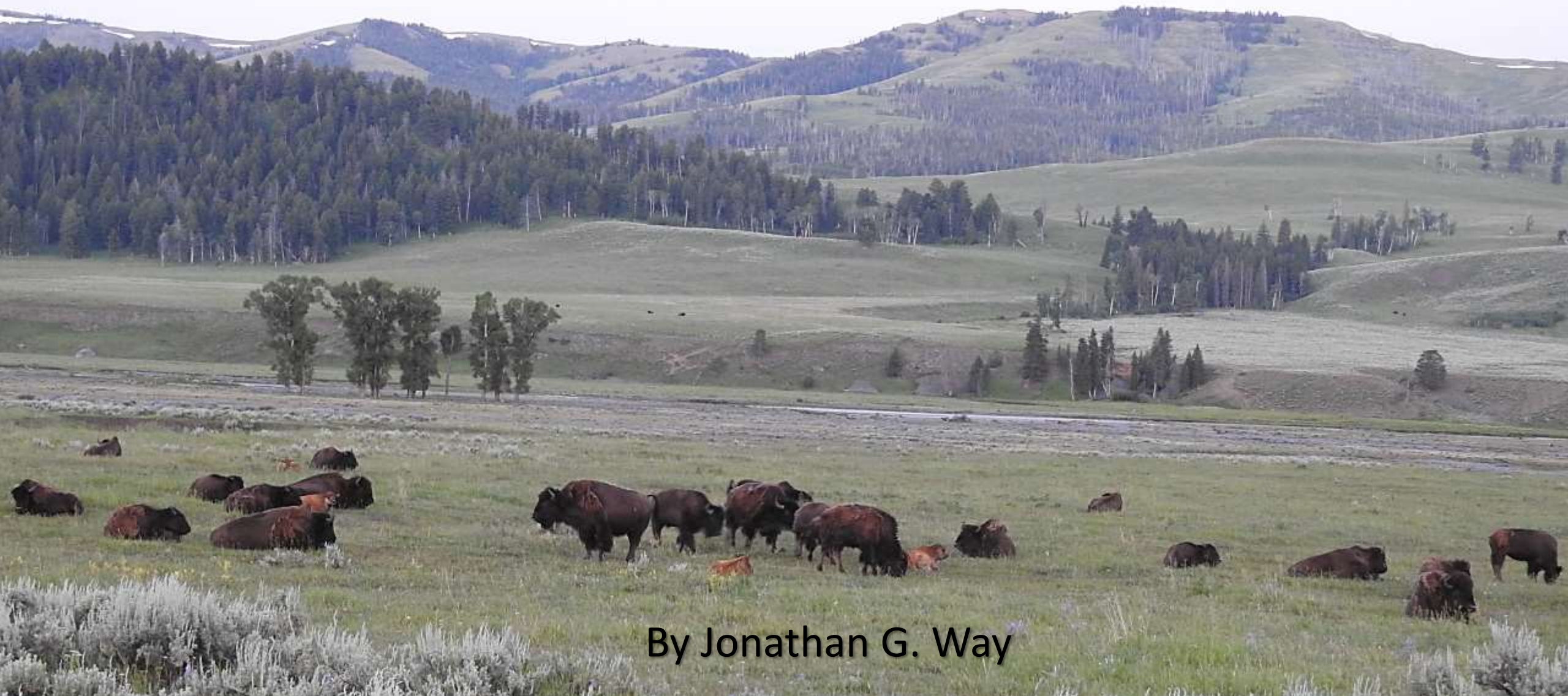


Yellowstone Wildlife during Summer



By Jonathan G. Way

E-book

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 - <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/store> or MyYellowstoneExperience.org
- Previous books by Jonathan Way:
 - Way, J. G. 2007 (2014, revised edition). [Suburban Howls: Tracking the Eastern Coyote in Urban Massachusetts](#). Dog Ear Publishing, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. 340 pages.
 - Way, J. G. 2013. My Yellowstone Experience: A Photographic and Informative Journey to a Week in the Great Park. Eastern Coyote Research, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. 152 pages. URL: <http://www.myyellowstoneexperience.org/bookproject/>
 - Way, J. G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What Is and What Could Be. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 312 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/NortheasternUSNationalParks/>
 - Way, J.G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). The Trip of a Lifetime: A Pictorial Diary of My Journey Out West. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 561 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/TheTripOfALifetime/>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Coywolf: Eastern Coyote Genetics, Ecology, Management, and Politics. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 277 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/CoywolfBook>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Christmas in Yellowstone: A Dream Come True. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 208 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/ChristmasInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone: Nature's Transition from Winter to Spring. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 330 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/MudIMeanAprilInYellowstone>.

Pay it Forward

Dear Reader,

I have a love affair with Yellowstone. It is an amazing place with tremendous scenery, awe inspiring geologic features, and abundant wildlife, along with great people happy to be in the world's first national park. I have been to the park 24 times up through early 2021, for a total of 213 days. I have written four books related to my experiences: [My Yellowstone Experience](#) (2013), [The Trip of a Lifetime](#) (2020), [Christmas in Yellowstone](#) (2021), and [Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone](#) (2021). However, because the majority of people travel to national parks in the summertime, I thought a tome about wildlife in Yellowstone during the busy season would be a unique contribution to the literature, and would be personally meaningful to the many tourists who visit the park during the busy season to seek out the park's famous fauna.

This major project came about, in part, because many of my Facebook friends (including family members) continue to be enchanted with the pictures that I post when I travel. For this pictorial montage, I combed through about 7,000 images from my 7 most recent summertime trips and select files from other trips, and chose my best 661 pictures of wildlife (including some scenery added in) during the summertime.

To increase access for all people, rich or poor, majority or minority, I am offering it for free to anyone in the world who wants to read it. In this e-book, I share with you, the reader, my experience out in the world's first national park during early spring in a photographic journey intended to awe the reader. If you enjoy it, all I ask in return is that you *pay it forward* by sharing and please consider a donation of \$10.00 to support my research and education efforts, as well as supporting the book's Open Access format. That is about the price of one movie ticket and you get to own this book, and all of its pictures, forever. If you do not want to donate from [my website](#), you are welcome to email me and I can provide you with a physical address: jon@easterncoyoterresearch.com or easterncoyoterresearch@yahoo.com.

Thanks in advance!

Jon Way

This picture and cover: Bison in Lamar Valley go hand-and-hand during the summertime. They are the most visible and iconic of Yellowstone's wildlife and why I chose them as the cover image. It is virtually impossible to not see bison in this beautiful valley during the summer, especially in the flats where large herds graze on grass. Picturesque Specimen Ridge frames the background of both pictures.



Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements	7
Maps of Places Visited	16
Ungulates	27
Mountain Goats	28
Pronghorn	34
Deer: White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer	49
Bighorn sheep	63
Elk	76
Moose	98
Bison	105
Horses	176
The Wolf/Wildlife Watchers	181
Canids of Yellowstone	200
Red Fox	200
Coyote	204
Gray Wolf	208
July 2019: Wolves Up Close and at a Bison Carcass	234
Wolves and Grizzly Bears	264
Junction Wolves 2020	292
Bears	315
Black Bear	316
Grizzly Bear	335

Contents continued

Small to Medium-sized Mammals	357
Birds	386
Other Animals	444
Cats: Bobcats, Lynx, and Cougars	445
Reptiles and Amphibians	445
Insects	453
Fish	461
Epilogue	466



Bison in Round Prairie in the far north-eastern part of the park.

Preface and Acknowledgements

I have a great affection for Yellowstone. It is a tremendous place with fabulous scenery, jaw dropping geologic features, and plentiful wildlife. Almost all of the people are cheerful to be there, and are pleasant to interact with. I have been to the park two dozen times for two-thirds of a year, and I have written four books related to my experiences. My first is a color print guide book, [*My Yellowstone Experience*](#) (2013), and was based on my first 14 trips totaling 123 days. [*The Trip of a Lifetime*](#) (2020) is a 561 page e-book based on my 21st journey into the park during July 2019, which lasted 7 days, as well as two additional weeks in other western national parks. [*Christmas in Yellowstone*](#) (2021) is based on a dream 9 day trip I took during the 2020 holiday season. Lastly, [*Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone*](#) (2021) is based on a 9 day trip I took in mid/late April 2021 and it highlights the mud season as nature transitions from winter to spring.

As I have published and reflected upon those books, I came to realize that all of them are a highlight of the many experiences that I have had with lots of scenery, geothermal features, and wildlife. I realized that it was time to take my personal memories out of the limelight and instead summarize the park and its wildlife that I have observed during my many trips. Because the majority of people travel to national parks in the summertime, I thought a book about wildlife in Yellowstone during the busy season would be a unique contribution to the literature, and would be personally meaningful to the many tourists who visit the park during the busy season.

I took numerous trips there during the 2010s, the majority of them being during the summer months. Until now, I have not published the findings from those visits. My son, Nathan, was young during that timeframe, so I spent much time wildlife watching with him during his 6 trips with me. The result of those expeditions along with a few other trips is summarized here. In addition to Nathan traveling with me, Steve Cifuni has been a good friend and frequent travel companion. He has gone on the majority of those trips too and has been instrumental in keeping me motivated to visit all of the places that we have both visited in the park, and elsewhere. We've had the fortune of being able to leave our vehicles at Steve's parents' house just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, and are then driven to Logan Airport by his father, which I greatly appreciate. In addition to Nathan and Steve, there have been other friends and family members who have traveled to the park with me, and I want to thank all of them for their comradery over the years. And thanks to the people who helped me with obligations at home when I was gone, including Tara Way, Robin and Tim Way, Michael Way, C. Alex Wells, and Tom Morgan!



Above: Mt. Washburn hike, July 2013 with Steve (left), Nathan at age 5 (center), and me (right). Right: Bighorn sheep inhabit steep, mountainous areas, such as places along this hike, and are often right on or near this wide hiking trail.

The table below summarizes my trips to Yellowstone, which started on a cross country voyage with my family when I was in high school, and goes through early 2021. The ones denoted in bold are the focus of this book for a few reasons. One, my first book, [*My Yellowstone Experience*](#) (2013), has many of my best images from my first 14 trips and trips 15-20 and 22 are not represented elsewhere besides social media sites (*Note*: Trip 21 has to do with my book [*The Trip of a Lifetime*](#)). Two, those were the majority of my most recent trips to the park and are clustered during the summertime due to work-life situations forcing me to travel then. Three, by that point I had then become very familiar and knowledgeable about Yellowstone's wildlife, and also became adept at organizing my pictures which made them easy to retrieve for this endeavor. Four, and perhaps most importantly, camera technology has improved dramatically from when I first started visiting and taking pictures in the early 2000s. I started with a 6 X zoom point-and-shoot digital camera in 2004 and now have my third generation version, an 83 X optical magnification \$500 device that is nearly as powerful as some of the very best equipment available on the market, especially when I take those images on a tripod to obtain a steady shot.

<u>Trip #</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u># of days</u>		<u>Trip #</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u># of days</u>
1	July 1992	4		13	Mid-Mar. 2012	7
2	May/June 1996	22		14	Early-Mid Oct. 2012	8
3	Mid June 2001	10		15	July 2013	8
4	Feb/March 2004	10		16	Late March 2014	8
5	Early June 2005	10		17	July-Aug. 2014	8
6	Late June 2006	9		18	June 2015	10
7	Mid-April 2007	7		19	Late-July to Mid-Aug 2015	15
8	Late Nov. 2007	7		20	Late June 2016	7
9	Mid/Late April 2009	8		21	Early July 2019	7
10	Mid Oct. 2010	8		22	Mid-July 2020	9
11	Late Jan. 2011	5		23	Christmas 2020	9
12	Mid/Late Oct. 2011	8		24	Mid/Late April 2021	9

***Trips in bold are the focus of this book**

While I've been to Yellowstone many times, it has taken a relatively short period of time to obtain all of the images, especially of wildlife like wolves, that I have gathered for this and my other previous books. This area is one of the best places in the world to see and photograph wildlife, especially when starting the day at pre-dawn and continuing to dusk. There are some important reasons why it is so special for wildlife sightings: 1) Probably most importantly, is that wildlife are protected from human killing in a large 2.2 million acre area, and they seem to understand that compared to outside the park. 2) Much of the northern, and a section of the central part of Yellowstone, is open which makes it is easy to see wildlife from a distance. 3) There are a variety of people, ranging from casual tourists to long-time visitors (who spend from weeks to months a year in the park) to park employees, who all observe wildlife full-time when there. This network of humanity literally puts eyes on the ground throughout the park, especially in the Lamar Valley area, which greatly facilitates wildlife viewing.

I want to thank all of those visitors and employees of the park who have aided with wildlife sightings. Chief among them is Rick McIntyre, wolf watcher extraordinaire and former National Park Service employee, who I have featured in all of my Yellowstone books. Rick has observed over 100,000 wolves in Yellowstone and is widely regarded as the person who has [observed the most wolves by anybody in history](#)! Yes, in history! I always treasure spending time with Rick when there and am proud to call him a friend. I want to also thank Wolf Project technician Jeremy SunderRaj, who is essentially Rick's protégé, along with seasonal park ranger Bill Wengeler, the many park employees who have aided with my wildlife sightings over the years, and dozens of other wolf watchers, especially Kathie Lynch, Dan and Laurie Lyman, Mark and Carol Rickman, Susan and Reve Carberry, and Doug McLaughlin and Melba Coleman of Optics Yellowstone. While many folks, including myself, focus on observing wolves to start each day, in actuality we see many species in our travels either as a result of their interactions with the large canines or because they are in the same general area. Many of the wolves are radio-collared in the park and their signals' facilitate where to look for them and ultimately this allows us to view them.

There is a great website, <https://yellowstonereports.com/index.php>, which details the daily activities of the wolves and other Yellowstone flora and fauna. Laurie Lyman, a retired teacher from California, and a friend of mine, summarizes these happenings with her observations and her friends' reports when she is there. These daily reports are amazing and keep folks like me up-to-date when not in the park. When I am there, I try and do my part by reporting to Laurie what I see to keep others informed of exciting happenings in Yellowstone.



Wolf naturalist Rick McIntyre (right in the picture above and left in the picture below right) and long-time wolf watcher Kathie Lynch (next to Rick in both pictures) scanning for wolves in Lamar Valley.

I greatly appreciate the comments and support – both emotionally and financially – of my many Facebook friends (including family members) over the years. They have given me the motivation to publish many of these manuscripts. I have found that e-books are the easiest and by far cheapest way of producing these pictorial tomes and hope that you enjoy this format.

My most recent books, such as the [Christmas](#) and [April](#) volumes noted on pages 2 and 7, are a direct result of social media posts, which gave me the outline for the storyline. I have taken thousands of images over the years with the vast majority being pictures, along with some videos. For this pictorial montage, I combed through ~7,000 images, comprising the aforementioned 7 summertime trips (including some of Steve's better pictures), as well as select files from other expeditions. I created a folder of 702 of the best wildlife pictures, another with 191 scenery pics for section transitions and context for some of the zoomed in wildlife pictures, and a third with 63 miscellaneous images, such as cabins where we stayed and pictures of us in action. Many of those images have been shared previously on social media when I was in the park, but they have never before been published in an organized volume, aside from the [July 2019 pictures](#). To show off Yellowstone's wildlife during summer, I used the top 661 pictures herein.

My mother, Robin Way, copy-edited the text to make it more professional, as she always does. Her comments and support over the years have been crucial to my ability to publish all the books that I have. I can't thank her enough. Steve also provided useful comments on an earlier version. Lastly, the National Park Service provided helpful maps to direct readers to important locations that I visited in the park. I also cited many of their weblinks when referring to specific species.

My friends Bob Landis, cinematographer extraordinaire; Dr. Bob Crabtree, Founder and Chief Scientist of [Yellowstone Ecological Research Center](#) (YERC); and long-time wolf watchers Mark and Carol Rickman from Colorado have all greatly enhanced my/our ability to visit the park as all have offered housing over the years and stimulating conversations about the park's wildlife. Bob C. has also allowed me to use spare vehicles and his staff at YERC, especially Melissa Todd, who has often facilitated the use of those cars. Due to the generosity of everyone mentioned in this chapter, I truly view this and my other books as collaborative efforts.

I hope you enjoy it and are able to donate to support my research which will help keep these e-books in Open Access format. Please see the *Pay it Forward* page at the beginning of this document if you want to support my work. Thank you!



Places where we have stayed in Cooke City including YERC's A-Frame (top and next page) and camper (bottom).







Beautiful places where we have stayed in Silver Gate.

Maps of Places Visited

During the summer, we spent the majority of our time in the northeastern part of the park, especially in the Tower to Lamar Valley area. We usually lodged in Silver Gate and Cooke City to be close to the action as the most visible wolf packs are in the Lamar Valley area. We visited the other regions of the park more to view scenery (e.g., Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone) or geothermal features (Norris and Old Faithful) with one exception: Hayden Valley between Canyon and Lake Village, which reliably has a visible wolf pack (now called the Wapiti Lake Pack but that has changed over the years) along with bison, elk, and grizzly bears.

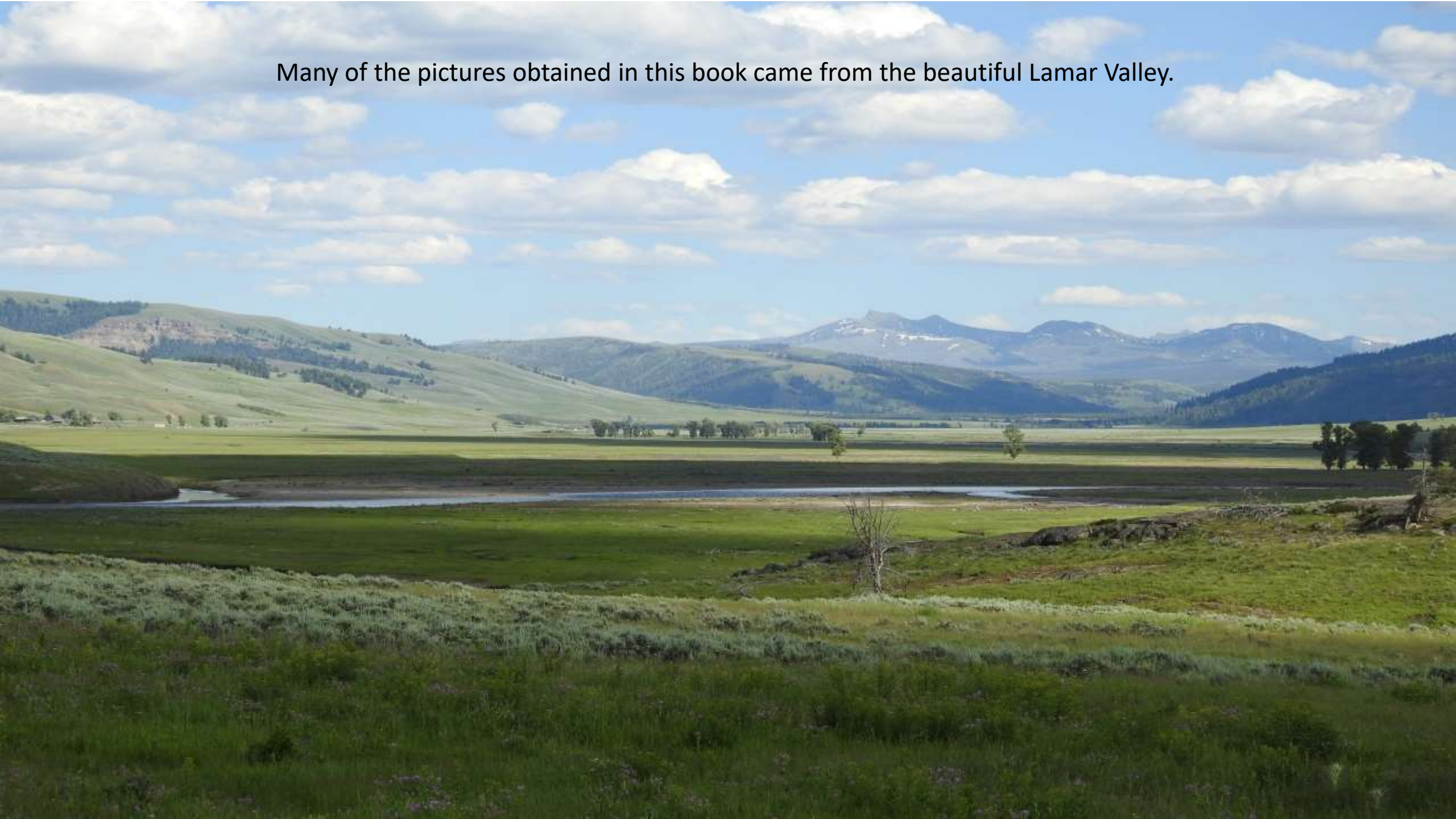


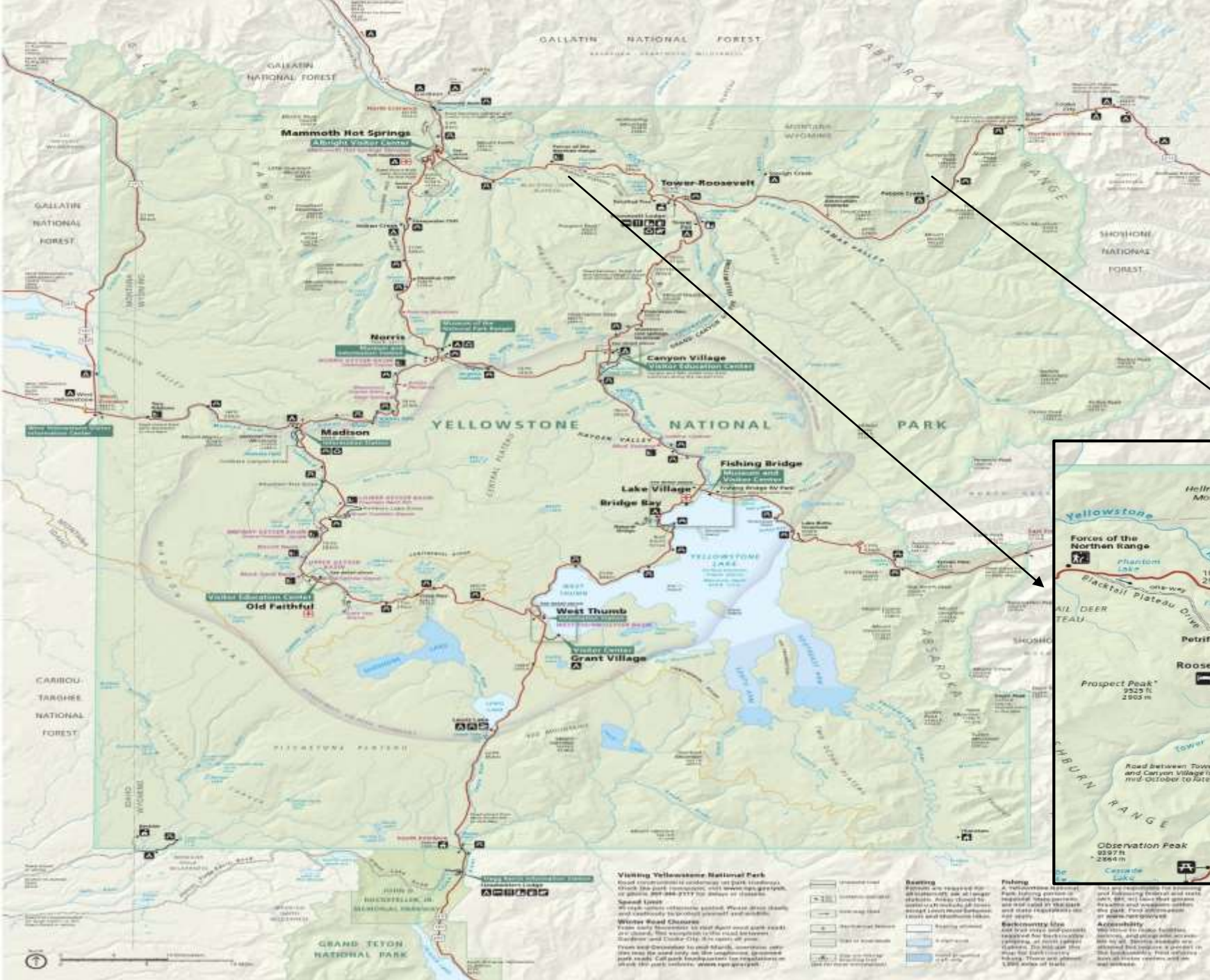


The open nature of Hayden Valley in the central part of the park is a magnet for wildlife watchers during summer.

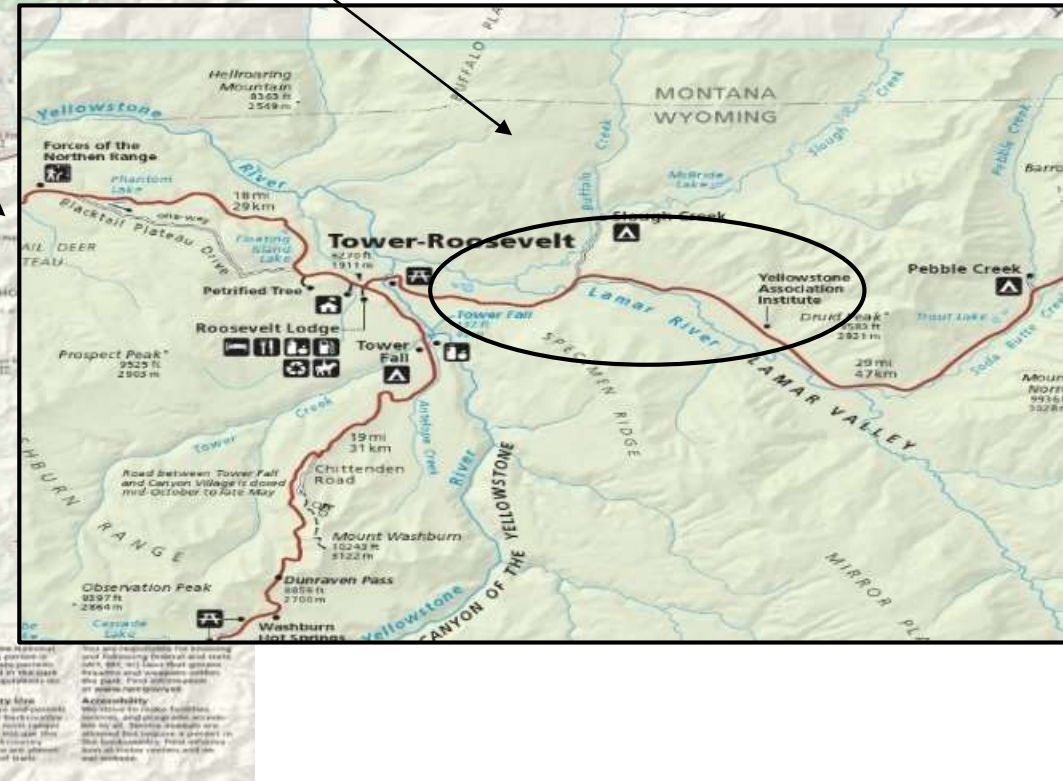


Many of the pictures obtained in this book came from the beautiful Lamar Valley.





A more detailed map of where we spent most of our time while in the park. Due to wolf activity, we typically frequented the Slough Creek to Lamar Valley region (see oval below). Map © of the National Park Service.





Because Hayden Valley is closed to vehicles in the winter, the much larger Lamar Valley area provides year-round wildlife viewing.



Slough Creek flats is just west of Lamar Valley proper but many television documentaries lump this area together as part of Lamar Valley, since it is part of the roughly 30 miles wide (roughly west to east) 'Northern Range'. We have observed many wolves there over the years, including denning packs just to the right of this photo (see next page).



The area between these trees housed two dens used by various packs over the years, including the Junction pack most recently. The view from the Slough Creek campground road provides unprecedented views of wild wolves.





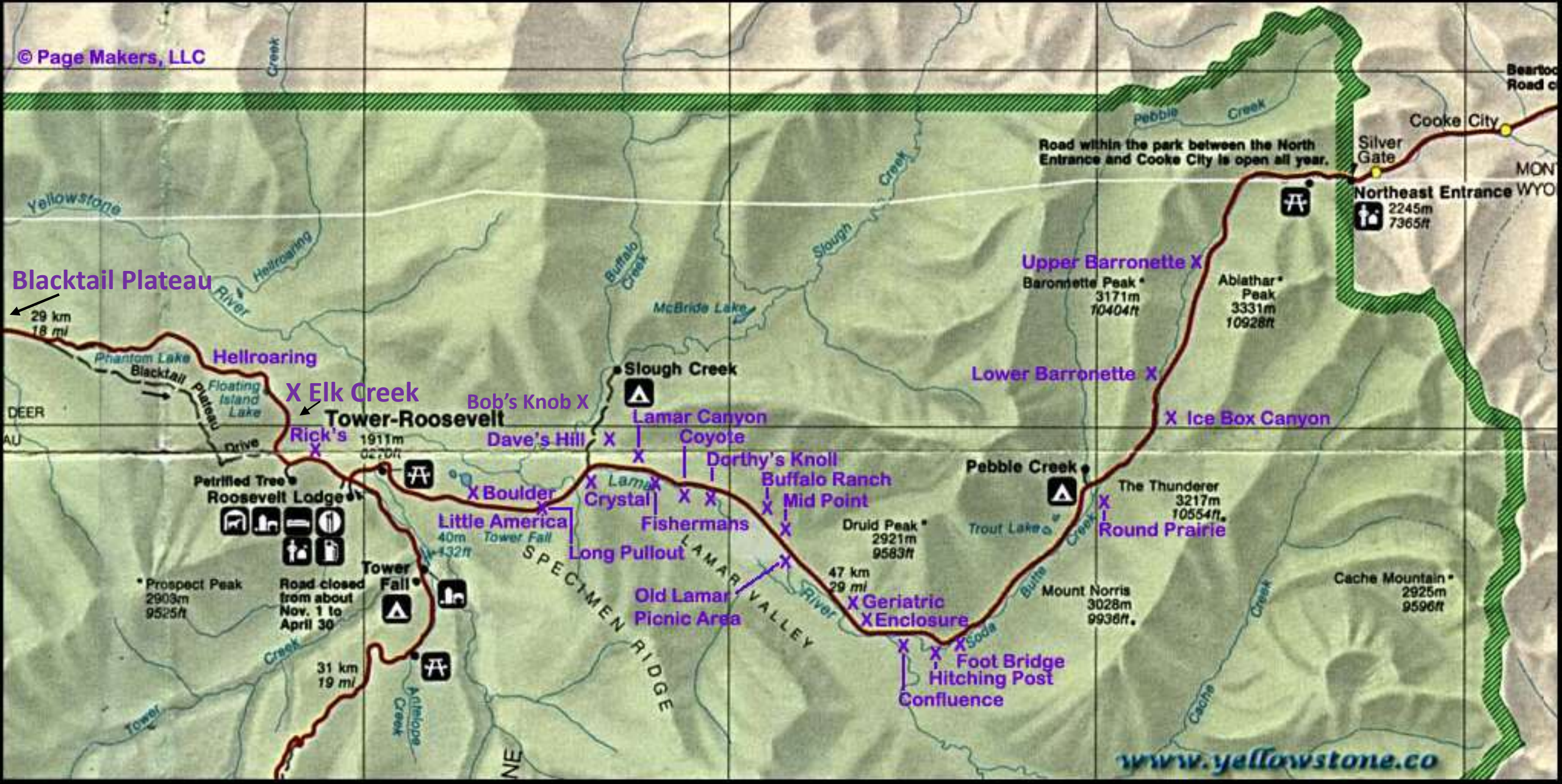
Wolf watchers looking for wildlife at the Slough den and Slough flats areas as shown in the previous pages.



A close-up view of the northern part of Yellowstone where I spent the majority of my time. Map © of the National Park Service.



Names of locations in northern Yellowstone in more detail. Purple names indicates pullouts/overlooks where many people stop to observe wildlife. The Blacktail Plateau is to the immediate west of this map.



The Lamar Canyon den area, in the trees and edge of the grassland below Druid Peak (top left), was used as a homesite by wolves for many years. It was close to the road (see 'Footbridge' parking lot center right) but required a half mile hike to the south to get a view over the hills immediately north of the road. The den area was in the trees in the center of the picture. Wolves, including pups, could be watched when they left the den area and came out into the open hillsides. 'Hitching Post' parking lot is just out of view behind a hill in the middle left of this photograph (see previous page).



Ungulates

Yellowstone National Park is home to 8 species of hoofed animals, known as 'ungulates'. In this chapter, I show pictures from roughly the smallest to largest: mountain goat, pronghorn, white-tailed deer, mule deer, bighorn sheep, elk, moose, and bison. Mountain goats are native to North America but apparently [not the Yellowstone area](#). They colonized high elevation areas of Yellowstone after introduction to mountain ranges outside of the park. Populations have expanded from areas outside of the park in the Beartooth Range to the northeastern section of the park around Mt. Barronette and Round Prairie. There are also some in the northwestern part of the park too. The other 7 ungulates are native species with different habitat needs. I will discuss each one as they appear in this chapter. Lastly, I will conclude with horses, a 9th species of hoofed animal present in the park when humans transport them there during summer.



Mountain goats in alpine vegetation in the Beartooth Range east of the Northeast entrance of Yellowstone. This population eventually expanded down to colonize the park.

Mountain Goats

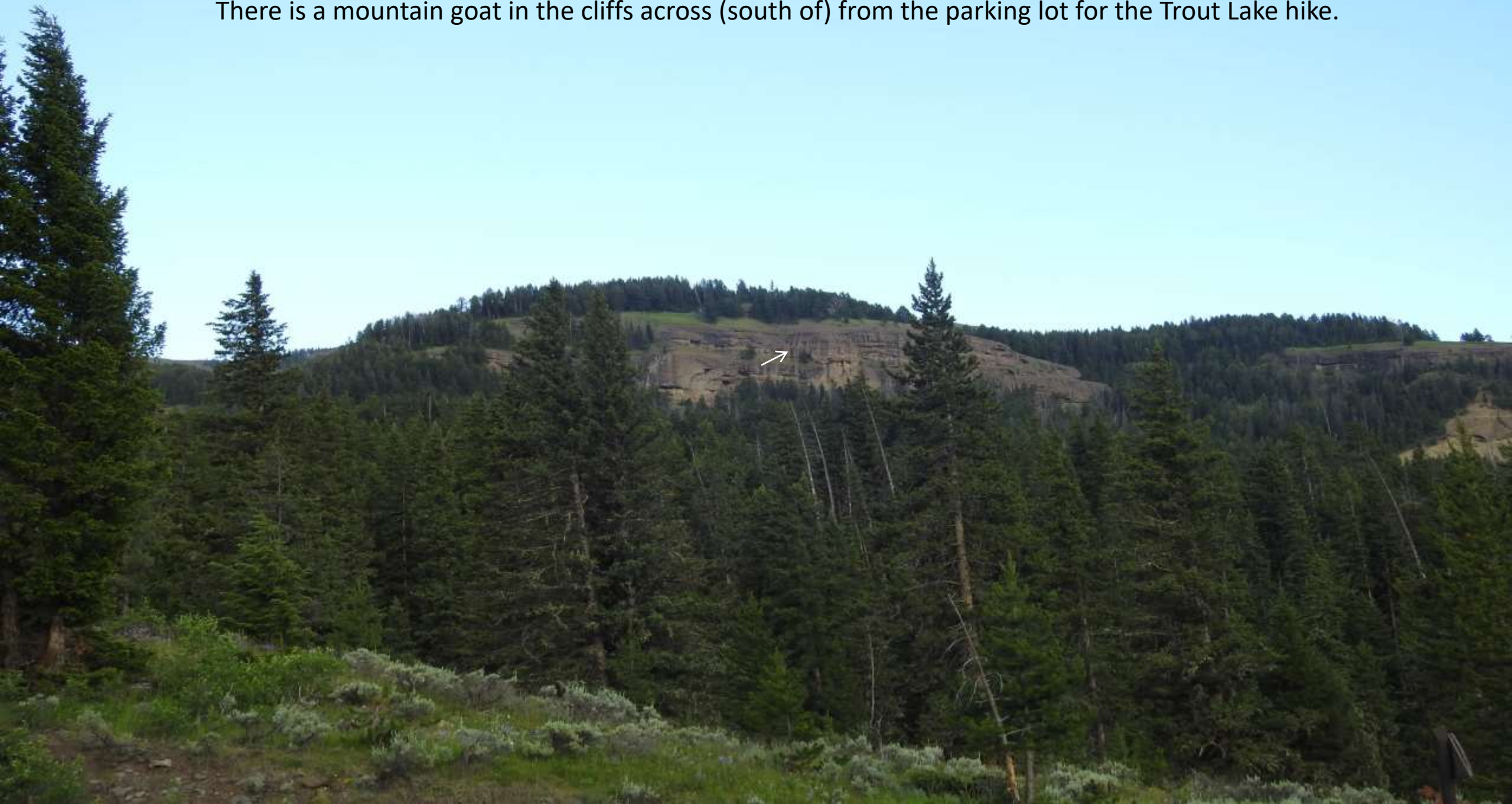




Mountain goats are common in the Beartooth Mountains outside of the park and now inhabit many of the high elevation peaks inside the park, especially in the northeastern region.



There is a mountain goat in the cliffs across (south of) from the parking lot for the Trout Lake hike.



Mountain goats often stand out in the summer as they are white and most snow has melted by then. I spotted this goat with my naked eye and then zoomed in with my camera to verify it (see next page).

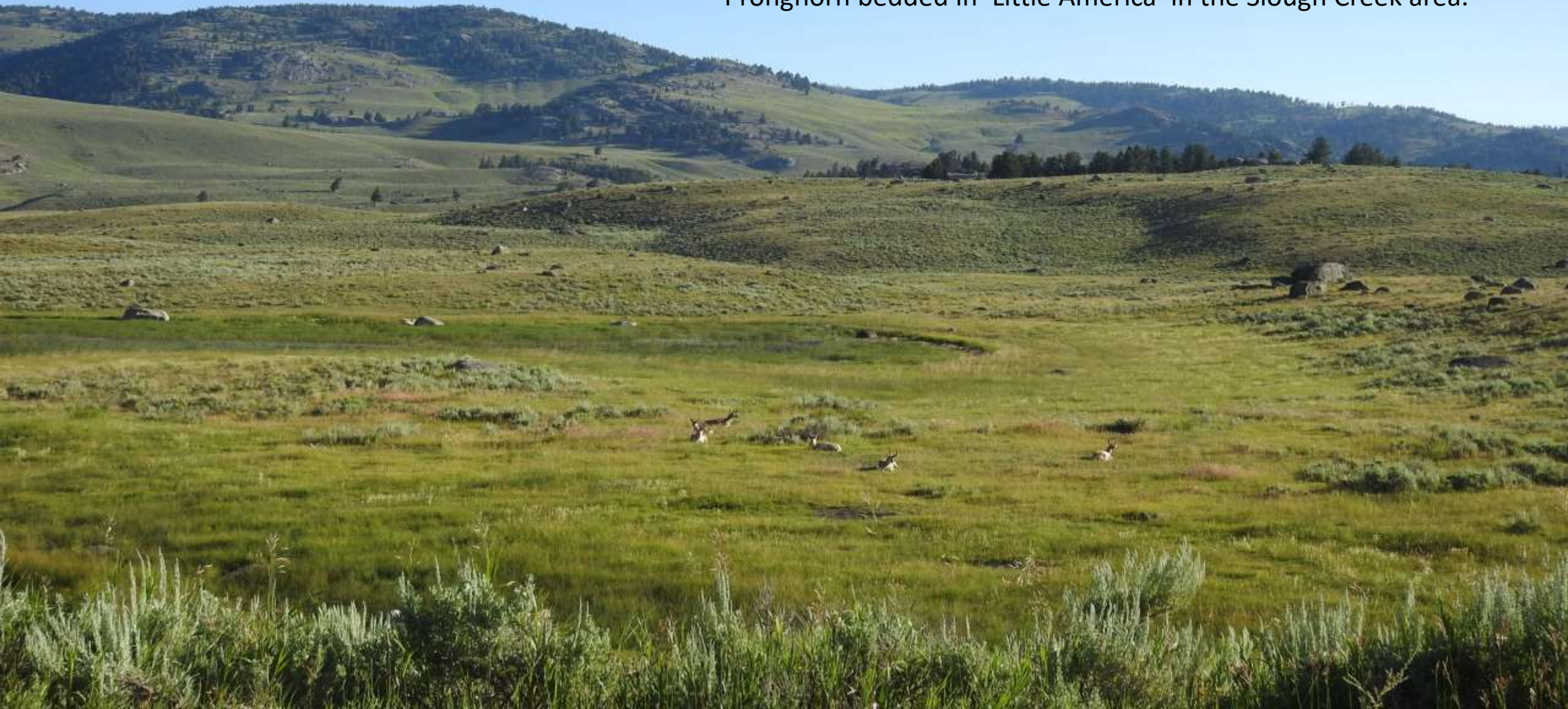






Pronghorn

Pronghorn bedded in 'Little America' in the Slough Creek area.







Previous page: Pronghorn buck. This page and next: Pronghorn does and fawns. Pronghorn are the second fastest land mammal in the world after the cheetah. They live in open areas without much vegetation so they can use this speed to their advantage. They winter outside (north) of the park but are common in Lamar Valley and Little America in the summer.







Left: Pronghorn doe nursing her fawn.

Below: Pronghorn buck surveying his domain in Lamar Valley.

Next page: Bachelor group of pronghorn bucks bedded in Little America.



They are often called 'antelopes' but aren't related to African antelopes and are not true antelopes. The pronghorn's closest living relatives are the [giraffe](#) and [okapi](#).





Pronghorn
bucks.





Pronghorn doe crossing the road in Little America.





Pronghorn doe running in the Slough Creek campground road area.





Pronghorn grazing in Lamar Valley.



Pronghorn bucks sparring in Lamar Valley, with bison grazing in the background.

Iconic scene with a pronghorn buck in the foreground and Specimen Ridge in the background.



Good perspective of a pronghorn crossing the road in the very open Little America.





Rare scene of a pronghorn doe with apparent triplets near the den site of the Lamar Canyon wolves.

Below: Mule deer buck in Lamar Valley.

Deer:
White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer





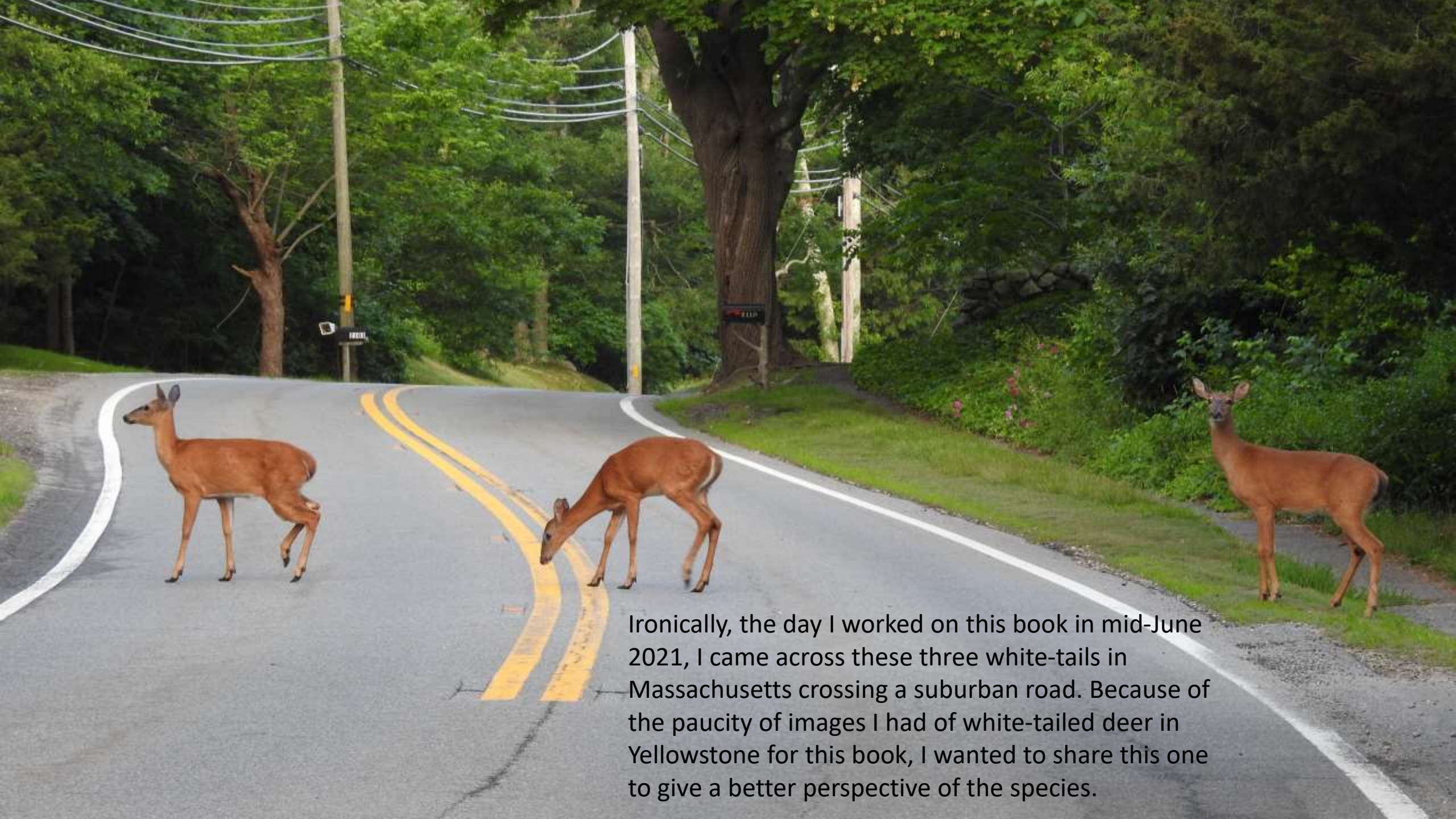
This page: White-tailed deer buck in Round Prairie. There are two species of deer in Yellowstone: white-tailed deer and mule deer. 'White-tails' live throughout most of the U.S. and are the most common ungulate in the country, but are relatively rare in the park. I don't see them too often, especially during the summer. I've had better luck observing them during my winter trips. They have the distinct white-flag of a tail.





This white-tail ran across a hiking trail between Nathan and myself causing both of our heart rates to dramatically increase due to the sudden crash of the deer through the woods.





Ironically, the day I worked on this book in mid-June 2021, I came across these three white-tails in Massachusetts crossing a suburban road. Because of the paucity of images I had of white-tailed deer in Yellowstone for this book, I wanted to share this one to give a better perspective of the species.



Mule deer are much more common than white-tailed deer in Yellowstone. They have a distinct rope-like tail with a black tip and are often called 'black-tailed deer'. They prefer more open country while white-tails like more forested, riverine areas.



Mule deer stotting, a stiff legged running motion with all four feet off the ground simultaneously. White-tails don't run like that; instead, they bound and leap.





Left: Two mule deer crossing the road near Hellroaring Overlook while a small group of 'mulies' are on alert in Lamar Valley (bottom).

Next page: A mule deer doe looks down at me while I'm hiking in the backcountry along Cache Creek about 4.5 miles from the 'Footbridge' parking lot in Lamar Valley





Mule deer bucks in velvet, meaning their antlers are still growing. Antlers stop growing and the velvet will be rubbed off around September. Mule deer are generally bigger than white-tails and have larger, forked antlers.





Mule deer in Round Prairie along the Soda Butte River.

Next page: Mule deer doe in a different section of Round Prairie among wild flowers.





Mule deer in Silver Gate just outside the Northeast entrance of the park.



During July 2020, I had a trail-camera stationed in Silver Gate 1 mile from the park border and was fortunate to obtain this image of a mule deer doe and 2 fawns walking by as well as the image of the young buck on the next page.



Mule deer buck in Silver Gate.



Bighorn Sheep



'Bighorns' typically inhabit steep mountainous areas similar to mountain goats. In Yellowstone, I mostly see them in lower areas than goats, who are often at the very top of mountains. However, both critters live in and around steep, hilly areas to avoid predators (next two pages).





Good perspective of the bighorn sheep from the previous page in Gardner Canyon showing the steep country where this animal lives. Notice the 'Sheep Management' sign (circled) to the lower left which prohibits people from entering this area.



Bighorn lambs play chasing each other in Gardner Canyon.



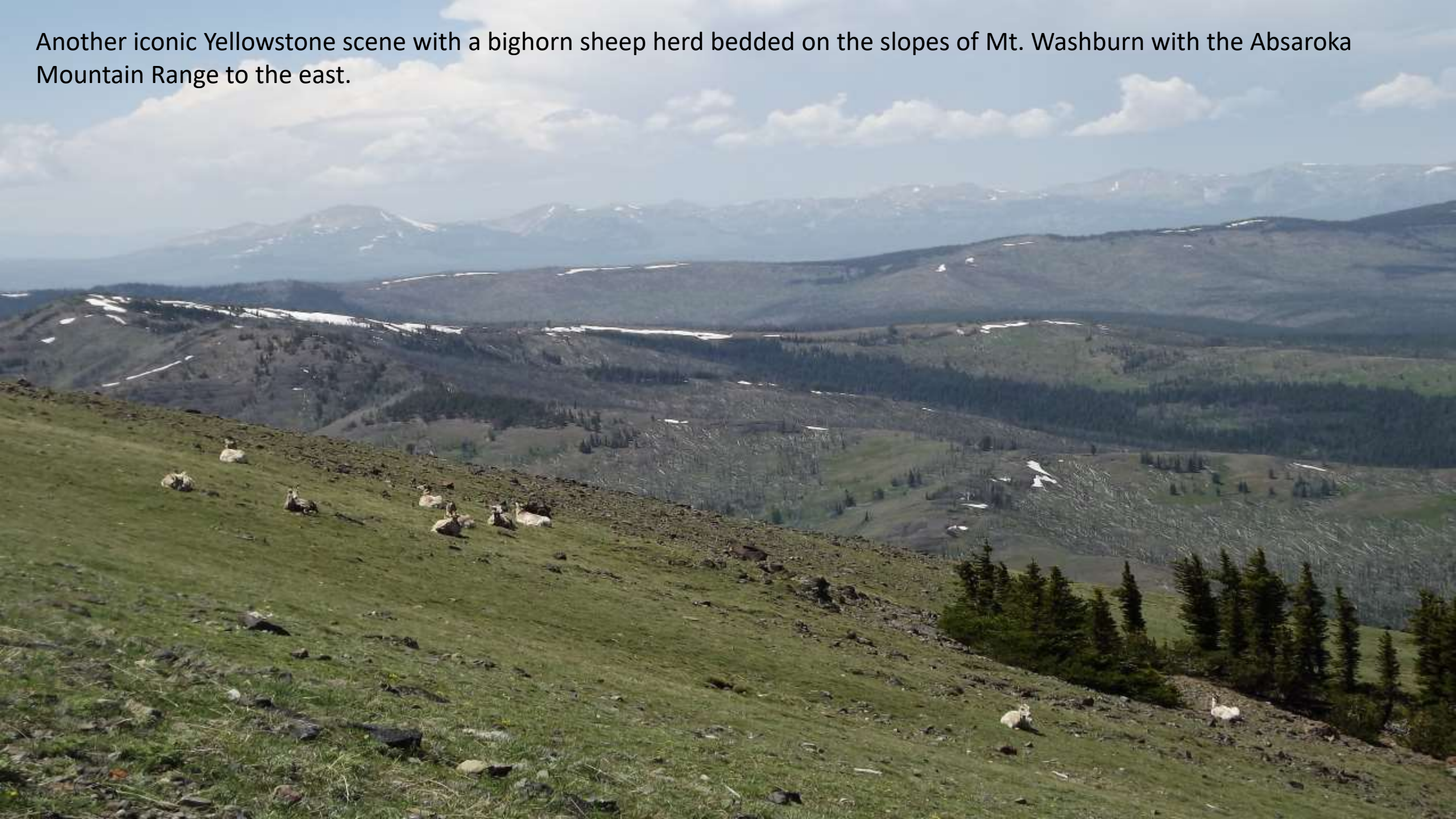
Bighorn sheep ewes in Gardner Canyon (right) with two lambs nearby (below). I often see bighorns here and in the Lamar Valley area in the winter. In the summer, they often move to higher country like those around Mt. Washburn (next 2 pages).







Another iconic Yellowstone scene with a bighorn sheep herd bedded on the slopes of Mt. Washburn with the Absaroka Mountain Range to the east.





Bighorns in some absolutely beautiful country on the Mt. Washburn hiking trail with surrounding mountains in the background.





This page: Another reliable place to see bighorns is around Calcite, on the Yellowstone River, a beautiful geologic formation near Tower Fall. They go to the cliffs around Calcite for protection and come out to the fields to graze. Black bears are also very common in this area.





Most people go to Calcite for the stunning view of the calcium carbonate rocks and the unique geologic features present on the banks of the Yellowstone River. But just above the landmark and around the steep, grassy areas are the ever present bighorn sheep.



This rather large herd is grazing below a snow cornice near the top of Specimen Ridge as viewed from across (and above) Lamar Valley.



Elk



Elk in Mammoth. Despite their large size where females (cows) can reach 500 and males (bulls) 700-800 pounds, elk are the most common ungulate in Yellowstone and are the main prey source for wolves. They are frequently seen in developed areas, where they eat grass on the manicured lawns.





Even with their large size, people frequently get too close to elk trying to take close-up pictures of them (also see next page). As a result of this carelessness, every year tourists are gored by bison and elk.





Elk calves grow quickly and travel with their mothers within their first month and obtain about half their adult size by their first winter.





Elk bulls have impressive antlers, which can span 4 feet wide and weigh up to [40 pounds](#).







Large bull elk approach the size of moose and are an impressive sight when close-up.



An elk cow (left) and two calves (below) in Mammoth. Elk are also called wapiti, which means white-rump in some Native American languages. A resident group of elk stays in Mammoth year-round because of the lush grass in the townsite.



In the winter, elk are often observed in low elevation areas, especially around Gardiner and Mammoth. In the summer, they move to the high country and are often difficult to see in the lower elevation northern part of the park, aside from in Mammoth. However, they are commonly seen in other sections of the park, such as Hayden Valley.

Bull elk.





Elk cow with Mt. Everts in the background.



Very healthy
cow elk.



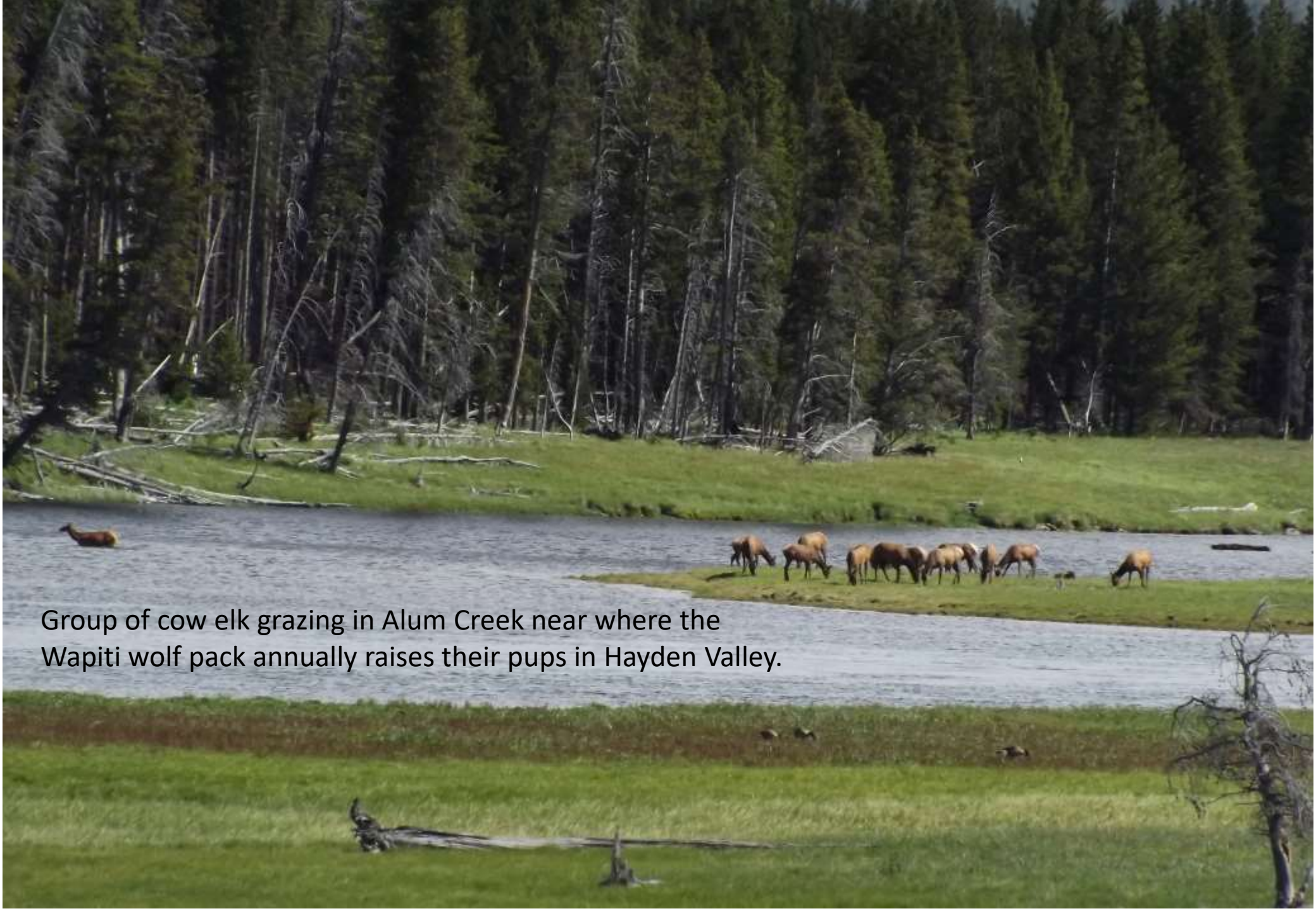


An elk cow grazing in front of the historic Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel.



Panoramas of elk in the town of Mammoth.





Group of cow elk grazing in Alum Creek near where the Wapiti wolf pack annually raises their pups in Hayden Valley.

This and next page: A large herd of elk grazing on Willow Flats down in Grand Teton National Park, summer 2020. These elk are still part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, so I include this impressive group here.





Composite of the Teton Range with elk grazing in Willow Flats at dusk.



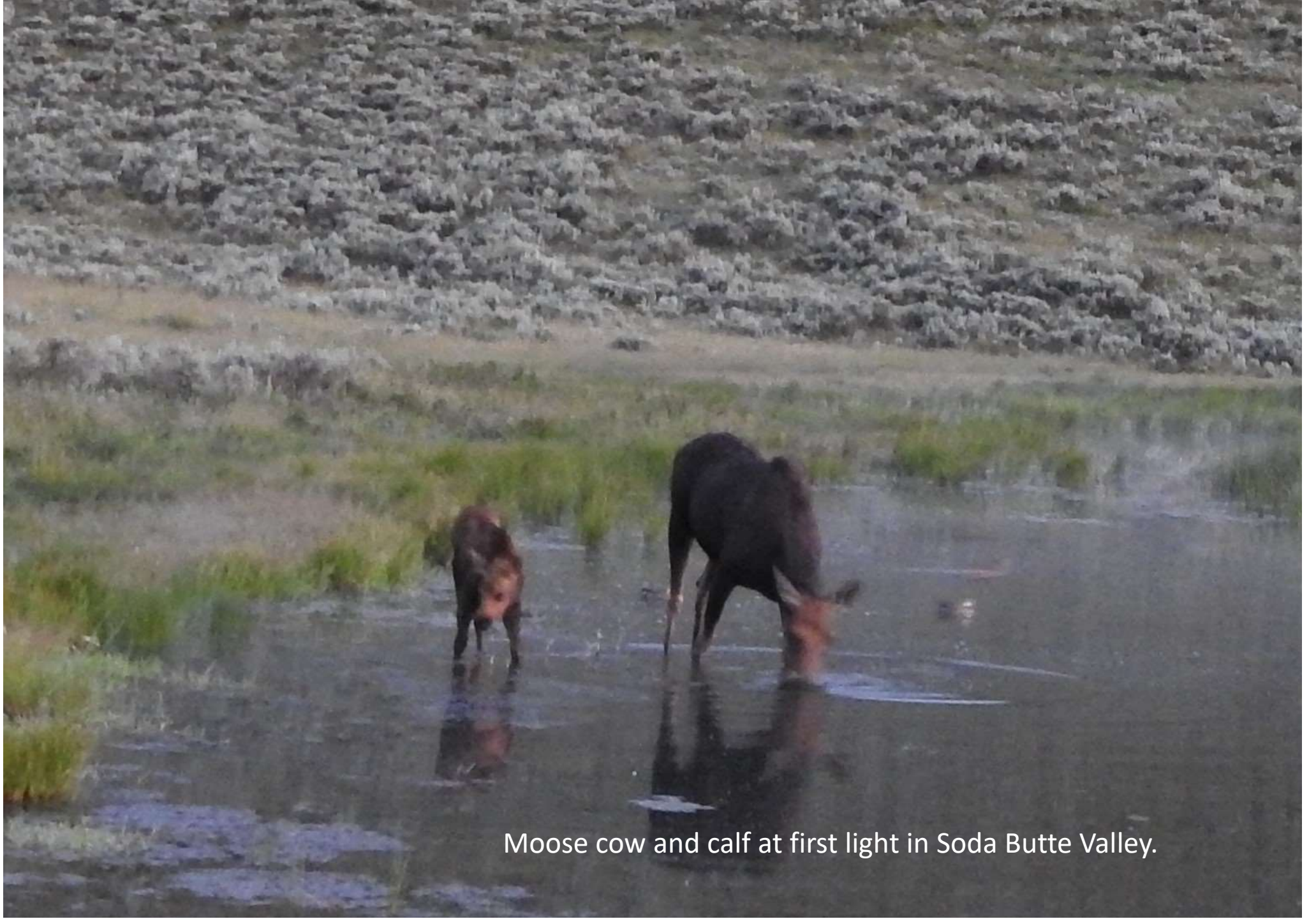


Wapiti, such as these on Swan Lake Flat (above left) and in Mammoth Hot Springs (right), spend considerable time grazing during the summer. This is critical so they can put on a sufficient layer of fat to use as a long-term energy source to survive Yellowstone's formidable winters.



An enormous bull outside the Canyon horse corrals area.

Moose



Moose cow and calf at first light in Soda Butte Valley.

Moose bull in the Lower Barronette Meadow in the far northeast section of the park (see close up of that moose on the next page). While moose aren't that common in the park, I seem to spot them during most trips, especially in the winter when they come out into open wetland meadows to feed on willows. However, I frequently see them in the summertime too!





Moose cow along the Mammoth to Norris Road. Moose are relatively common in the northern part of the Northeast U.S. near where I live but are always a popular sighting for tourists and locals alike in Yellowstone, and beyond.









In an amazing act of similarity, this Douglas fir tree looks just like a bull moose's head and is aptly called the 'Moose Tree'. It is at the base of Druid Peak and near where the Druid and then Lamar Canyon wolf packs dened for years. It is a good frame of reference for people when describing wildlife sightings, most notably grizzly bears, up there.



Bison

Last, but certainly not least, for the ungulates are bison. They are the largest North American mammal, reaching the size of a small car at up to 2,000 pounds. They are the most ubiquitous of all of the ungulates in Yellowstone and can reliably be spotted everyday in the open valleys and meadows. Over the years, I have taken the most images of this species of all of Yellowstone's animals and they have grown to become one of my favorite species. About 5,000 migratory bison live in the park year-round. They are relatively easy to keep track of because they live in open terrain and also because, sadly, the authorities in Montana limit their ability to roam outside the park. They are either pushed back inside the park through hazing, or are killed at the park border for simply being bison. This is a true example of modern day racism in action. Fortunately, groups like the [Buffalo Field Campaign](#) are there to document these ongoing injustices.



Bison grazing on clover and grasses on the flats of Lamar Valley with Jasper Bench (middle of picture) and Specimen Ridge (top) in the background. Bison herds often situate themselves in areas where one also obtains tremendous scenery pictures, as you'll notice throughout this section.



Bison often gather in large herds in the summertime where it is difficult to obtain pictures of the entire group without a wide angle panorama, as seen in these images.



There are hundreds of bison down in the flats of Lamar Valley in this picture.



This is a really cool view of a bison herd near the road and people in Little America. I obtained the image as I was hiking up the unofficial Crystal Trail to look at petrified trees high up Specimen Ridge.





View from near the top of the Crystal Trail with a large petrified tree stump (left) and a commanding view of the surrounding valley (bottom). Notice the park road winding through Little America in both images.



Bison (hundreds) and pronghorn (about 10 in foreground) on the flats of Lamar Valley with Specimen Ridge in the background.



Three bull bison approach a wolf and ravens in the Lamar River feeding on a bison calf that likely drowned. They briefly pushed the wolf off the carcass and caused the ravens to fly away before losing interest and walking away. Bison often have these 'funerals', similar to elephants, as they visit and sniff their fallen kin.



Bison grazing around the Slough Campground Road. We were looking for wolves to the north of this observation point. It is amazing to be able to pause scanning through our spotting scopes and see ~50 bison just below us to the east.



This huge bull passed by me at the western end of Lamar Valley. As this and the previous pictures have shown, Lamar Valley and the adjacent Little America region east of Tower Junction are some of the best places in the park to spot 'American buffalo', the other name for bison even though they aren't true buffalo.





Lamar Valley (below) and Little America (top) always have a lot of bison year-round, but especially during summer.



Many bison in Lamar Valley.



More bison in Lamar Valley.



A closer angle of bison near the river and cottonwood trees in Lamar Valley.





Siesta time in Lamar Valley.



I believe that showing all of these images of bison in Lamar Valley is worth it because they are ever present there in the summertime and these quintessential scenes are etched into my mind forever. It gives the reader a good expectation of what you will encounter during a summer trip to Yellowstone.






Bison in Lamar Valley on and near the road at dawn (top) and dusk (bottom and next page).





An eye-level angle of bison cows and calves walking away from the road in Little America.





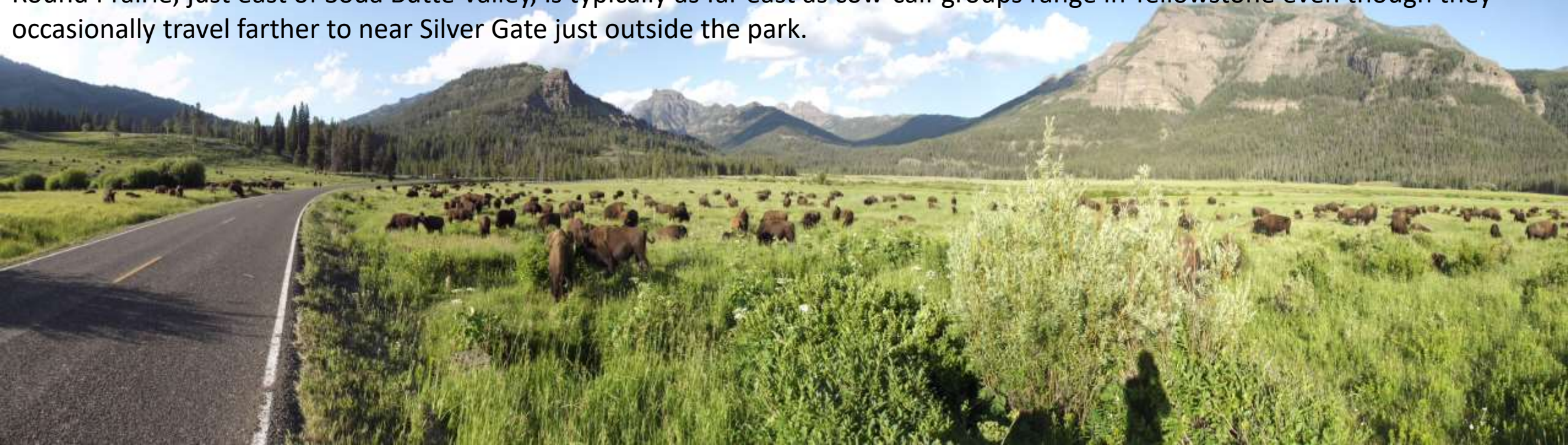
Bison are also common in the Soda Butte Valley, just east of Lamar Valley.

Bison in Soda Butte Valley.





Round Prairie, just east of Soda Butte Valley, is typically as far east as cow-calf groups range in Yellowstone even though they occasionally travel farther to near Silver Gate just outside the park.





Bison in Round Prairie with breathtaking scenery.



Bison on the road in Round Prairie (left) and bison near the Thunderer (below) which is near the Northeast Entrance. Usually only bulls travel this far east but in July 2013 this rather large cow-calf group spent a few days further east than their normal environs.



In addition to Lamar Valley, Little America, and other nearby areas of the northern range, the other major location to spot large herds of bison in the park is down in Hayden Valley in the central part of the park where the open landscapes there facilitate large gatherings of these ungulates (also see next page).







A bull bison enjoying a dust bath in Hayden Valley near the Yellowstone River. Notice the Canada geese in the background.



Whether in Hayden Valley or elsewhere, bison seem to prefer the lowlands of open areas even though they do spend time on the rolling hills in the distance.



This bull bison is a couple of miles from Hayden Valley in the Canyon area.

Bison in Hayden Valley seemingly oblivious to the pending storm. Bison evolved in open areas, like the Great Plains, and either continue grazing or simply bed down to wait out rain events.



Watching and waiting for buffalo to cross roads is a daily part of life in Yellowstone. Sometimes busy summer days and lots of bison in an area can make for sizable traffic jams that rival metropolitan areas, frustrating some drivers, usually regulars, while delighting others.



'Bison Jam'.







Bison, such as these crossing the park road at the Crystal Creek parking lot, shed their winter coats in the early summer. They are perfectly healthy, even though some may think they are ragged or diseased.





Bison cow shedding.



It is difficult to describe the sense of awe and wonder felt in watching, and even smelling, bison families as they travel past you, literally five feet from your car.





Bison cows and many calves at the edge of the road in Lamar Valley at first light.



In addition to road crossings, bison also regularly traverse rivers in their endless, migratory quest for grass.







Only in Yellowstone can these river crossings be observed so easily from just off the park's main road system.





Bison bulls enjoying the view in the western part of Lamar Valley after navigating across the Lamar River.



Rivers, such as the Lamar pictured here, are a safe way to separate bison with tourists who often approach them too closely.



By early August, the grass starts turning from green to golden yellow, giving the landscape an early fall-like appearance. This is the time of the year when bison breed, a testosterone filled couple of weeks called the rut.





Old bull bison often spend the summer alone, such as these bison in Cooke City outside the park (top) and in the middle of the Mud Volcano Geyser Basin (right).

Next page: Two other solitary bulls enjoy the tranquility of July before the late summer rut begins.



Sometimes bulls are not located in wilderness-like, majestic landscapes. This bull spent most of his summer in the heavily visited Mud Volcano area, with hundreds of people per day visiting the geologic area.





Bison bull in Mud Volcano area stirring up dust in a wallow. He rolled and urinated in this area, letting the females know that he means business and is a suitable suitor.



Bison wallows can be observed from the distance when bulls are actively rolling in them creating mini 'tornados' of dust.

Next page: This was especially powerful to see when hiking in the backcountry near Wahb Spring, 5 miles into the wilderness along the Cache Creek Trail











Bulls often rub against sagebrush bushes and wear this sweet-smelling jewelry around until it falls off.



Males begin mating with females in early August and follow receptive cows around incessantly in a behavior called tending.



Males distinctively lift their heads and make a groaning, roar-like grunt that is, interestingly, most closely sounding to a male lion roaring.



Male bison grunting to attract a mate.



This pause of calamity is only temporary during the breeding season as males are constantly looking for receptive females.



Bison bull tending a cow. No doubt the calf is wondering what on earth that large beast is doing to its poor mother.



Regular wildlife watchers in Yellowstone, including myself, get the distinct feeling that cows can't wait for the rut to end so they and their matrilineal-based families can get on with their lives without bulls constantly following them around! Obviously, however, this event is critical for the species to continue their line. Bison populations are able to increase fairly quickly, especially when considering their large body size.

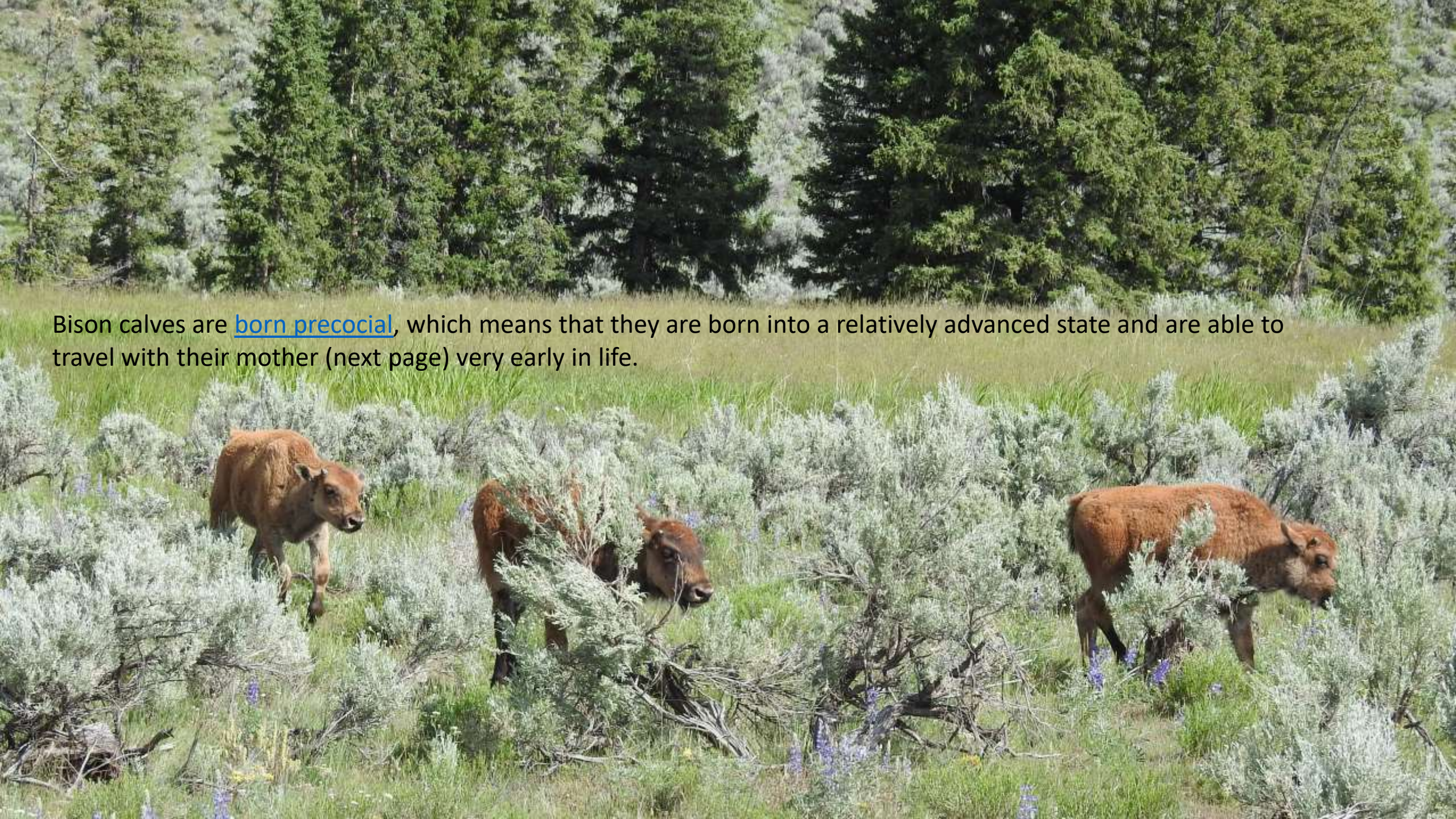






Bison give birth to single offspring starting in mid-April, about 9 months after mating. The calves are unofficially called 'red dogs' for their appearance as newborns.



A photograph showing three young bison calves in a grassy field. The calves are reddish-brown and are standing among low-lying, silvery-green shrubs. In the background, there is a dense forest of tall, dark green evergreen trees. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Bison calves are [born precocial](#), which means that they are born into a relatively advanced state and are able to travel with their mother (next page) very early in life.









An overriding experience during the summer is having the amazing opportunity of watching so many bison cows and calves growing up so close to the park road in direct view of eager wildlife watchers. It is an experience that I never take for granted. In fact, I often have breakfast or lunch near a herd to let the scene truly sink in.



By the middle of the summer, calves are traveling with their mothers and often gather in large herds sometimes numbering over 1,000. These are the seminal settings of bison featured earlier in this chapter.



Exactly 100 pictures into this section on bison, I hope you enjoyed the images and have a better appreciation for this magnificent animal, who was [declared our national mammal in 2016](#). I leave you, the reader, with a grazing bison herd in Lamar Valley with Jasper Bench just above the river. This is one of my favorite places on earth.



Horses





Left: Horses at the aptly named 'Hitching Post' in Lamar Valley.

Bottom and next page: Horses and people going on an excursion at Slough Creek.



Horses can be thought of as Yellowstone's 9th ungulate species during the summer. While there are [wild horses not too far from the park](#), none reside within it. People often take pack horse rides into the backcountry, while I prefer to hike. The smell and appearance of their scat is unmistakable when hiking where horses go.



Horse powered stage coaches at Tower Junction coming from the adjacent Roosevelt Corrals. The effect of horses on native species is largely unknown, but probably minimal.



Bison and their remains, such as this skull (left), are ubiquitous in Yellowstone. So are wildlife watchers, as one of the dominant activities in the park is to look for and watch animals (below, right), especially in the northern section of the park. Wildlife watching is the subject of the next chapter.



The Wolf/Wildlife Watchers

Yellowstone has always been a popular place to observe wildlife. As I mentioned in the *Preface* of the book on page 10, the animals have figured out that they are safe within the boundaries of the 2.2 million acres of protected, nonhunted land. This means that they are less afraid of people than places where they are persecuted. Plus, the open landscapes allow people to see animals from a distance, especially when using spotting scopes (see previous page).

Wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone in 1995-1996 after a ~70 year absence. They were put in acclimation pens (see below) for ~10 weeks and then released. With 31 wolves (14 in 1995 and 17 in 1996) brought in from Canada and 10 pups in 1997 from a litter that was killing cattle in ranchland in Montana, the recovery program has been a smashing success with a stable population hovering around 100-120 in Yellowstone, and many more residing outside the park.

An unexpected development from the wolf recovery project was the visibility of the wolves. [Wolves generate millions of dollars a year in the Yellowstone area](#) as thousands of people come specifically to observe them. This network of *Home sapiens*, including myself, looking for the large canines enables thousands of people to observe wolves each year. With so many eyes on the ground, and knowing where to look for them, wolves are generally seen on a daily basis in the park. Before the reintroduction effort this was virtually unheard of anywhere else in the world, and still is, making Yellowstone hands-down the best place in the world to see wolves!





Wolf watchers go wherever wolves are being seen and the Slough Creek flats area, pictured here, has historically been one of the best places to observe them, especially in recent years.





While wolves and bears are the most sought out species to see, bison and elk are also commonly watched in the park, as evidenced by the pictures throughout this book.



Large bull elk are sought out by wildlife photographers, such as this one at the Gibbon Meadows picnic area.





Hayden Valley (above) and Blacktail Deer Plateau (below) are also good places to spot wolves as both areas have resident packs.



The Blacktail Deer Plateau has been an underappreciated place to observe wolves over the years. It is close to the towns of Mammoth and Gardiner, which makes the area a short drive for many to reach the location. Wolves are often seen from far away (2-3 miles), but the relative lack of people there makes for a more intimate place to wolf watch.



Because of the proximity to Canyon and the closest place to reliably see wolves from Old Faithful, Hayden Valley is a popular and often congested place to watch wildlife during summer.



Popular 'Grizzly Overlook' in Hayden Valley.



First the Canyon (2008-2017) and now the Wapiti Lake wolf packs (2015/16-present) are regularly observed from Grizzly Overlook in Hayden Valley.



View from Grizzly Overlook of the Wapiti wolf pack's summertime denning and rendezvous site where they raise their pups.



A panoramic perspective of Hayden Valley from Grizzly Overlook.



Historically the Lamar Valley has been one of the best places in the park (and the world) to watch wolves. Next page: Close-up of the 'wolf jam' in Lamar Valley.







The Druid Peak Pack and then Lamar Canyon Pack dened in the foothills below Druid Peak in Lamar Valley for years. Hundreds of people would go there to observe them, as shown here.

Spotting scopes are critical to being able to observe wolves from a distance, such as this scene from around a mile away south of 'Footbridge' Lot in Lamar Valley. Visitors that come with only binoculars are often frustrated by how difficult it is to properly see their study subjects from a distance.

Note: The moose-head looking tree referred to in the moose section is at the top left of the ridge in the background of Druid Peak before it slopes down with the conifer trees.





Above: While scanning for wolves in the distance, bison would often travel through the area grazing, sometimes causing the people to have to move. The Lamar Canyon wolves were denning at the time on the left side of this picture. This view is to the southeast toward Mount Norris and the foothills below it. It was almost comical as most wolf watchers would be looking through their spotting scopes, completely ignoring the bison which were sometimes only 100 feet away.



Left: Wolf watchers in the rolling hills south of Hitching Post parking lot with the setting full moon above them in Lamar Valley, with Specimen Ridge in the background.

In recent years, Slough Creek has become the most reliable place to observe wolves as the large Junction Butte pack has denned there. Because of their presence, the Lamar Canyon pack has moved east, out of Lamar Valley, and mostly out of view into the forested, northeastern edge of the park.



Wolf watchers atop 'Dave's Hill' in the distance, as viewed from the Slough Creek campground road.





Many people have noted the importance of engaging our youth in caring about the environment, so they become caretakers of our nation's lands and prized natural assets like the wildlife of Yellowstone National Park.



Canids of Yellowstone

There are 8-10 species of wild dogs in North America depending on how one classifies them (e.g., are red wolves, *Canis rufus*, and eastern wolves, *Canis lycaon*, the same or separate species?). Three of those species inhabit Yellowstone: red fox, western coyote, and gray wolf. I have observed many red foxes over the years, but not many during recent summers. The two images below and the one on the next page are the only fox images I could locate during those 7 trips used for this book. Note the distinct white tip on the tail, which is characteristic of all red foxes no matter the color morph.

Red Fox

Red foxes are big as far as foxes go, but at about 10 pounds they are by far the smallest canid in Yellowstone.





A red fox in the springtime to give the reader a clear image of one in the park.





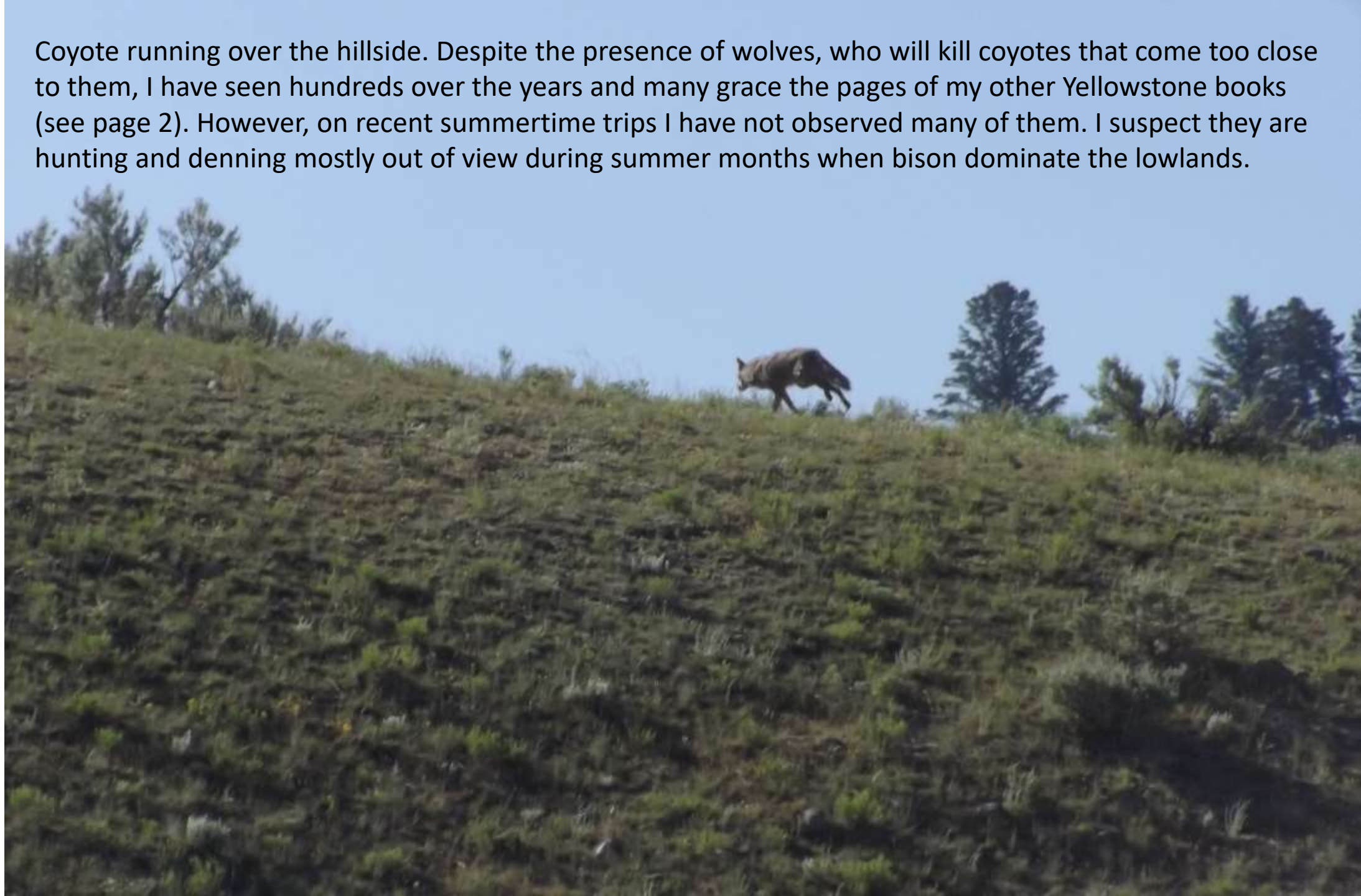
A red fox in Cooke City during a fall trip to Yellowstone. Notice the distinct white-tipped tail.



Coyote

Coyotes are the medium-sized canids in the park, weighing 25-30 pounds. They are often described as a combination of a fox and a wolf since they often prey on rodents like foxes but can live in packs and be social like wolves, sometimes even tackling large prey like deer and elk.

Coyote running over the hillside. Despite the presence of wolves, who will kill coyotes that come too close to them, I have seen hundreds over the years and many grace the pages of my other Yellowstone books (see page 2). However, on recent summertime trips I have not observed many of them. I suspect they are hunting and denning mostly out of view during summer months when bison dominate the lowlands.





Coyotes spend a lot of time
hunting rodents in grassy areas.





Coyotes are swift animals and are often seen running across sagebrush either chasing something or getting chased, often by wolves.



Three coyotes feeding on a carcass from the base of Jasper Bench in Lamar Valley, about a mile away from me with my old camera equipment.

Gray Wolf

Gray wolves are the largest living member of the Canidae family. In Yellowstone, they weigh 90-130 pounds and live in packs averaging 10 members. There are approximately 10 packs that live primarily within Yellowstone and 100-120 wolves in the park, accounting for inter-year variation. As discussed in the previous chapter, thousands of people come to the park specifically to view wild wolves. Yellowstone is one of the only places in the world where wolves can reliably be observed on a daily basis.



Junction Butte yearling wolf at the banks above Slough Creek enroute to the pack's den area.



A turning point in my photography ability occurred during my last 2 trips to the park for this book (July 2019 and July 2020), as I purchased a Nikon Cool Pix P900 camera in Fall 2017. It has an 83 X optical zoom compared to my previous camera's 26 times magnification. This made a dramatic difference that quite literally changed the game for getting clear images of distant wildlife, especially wolves. It also helped that the Junction Butte wolves were very visible shuttling between Lamar Valley and the Little America/Slough Creek area to feed their pups (see previous pages) in July 2019. Compare the pictures on the next 24 pages, when using my old camera, to the one which starts after this section called *July 2019*.

Wolf 890M, formerly of the Junction Butte (until 2016) Pack became the breeding male of the Mollie's Pack, who live in the remote Pelican Valley area. He is observed here crossing the park road in Little America in 2015.



Wolf 970F crossing the road in Little America in nearly the identical location as Wolf 890M in June 2015. She was the breeding female of the pack at the time of this picture.



Wolf 911M in June 2015. Some of my images before the July 2019 trip were 'digi-scoped' with a smaller camera by taking an image through the viewfinder of my spotting scope. With my new, larger point and shoot camera, I simply use it in conjunction with my scope, having a tripod mount on both so I can rapidly shift them back-and-forth depending on if I want a clear view through the scope or pictures of my subjects.



'Wolf 21's crossing'. This is a well known area to wolf watchers below Druid Peak immediately west of 'Hitching Post' pullout. 21 was the long-time alpha male of the Druid Peak Pack in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He used to regularly cross the park road to come to/from the pups at their traditional denning site.

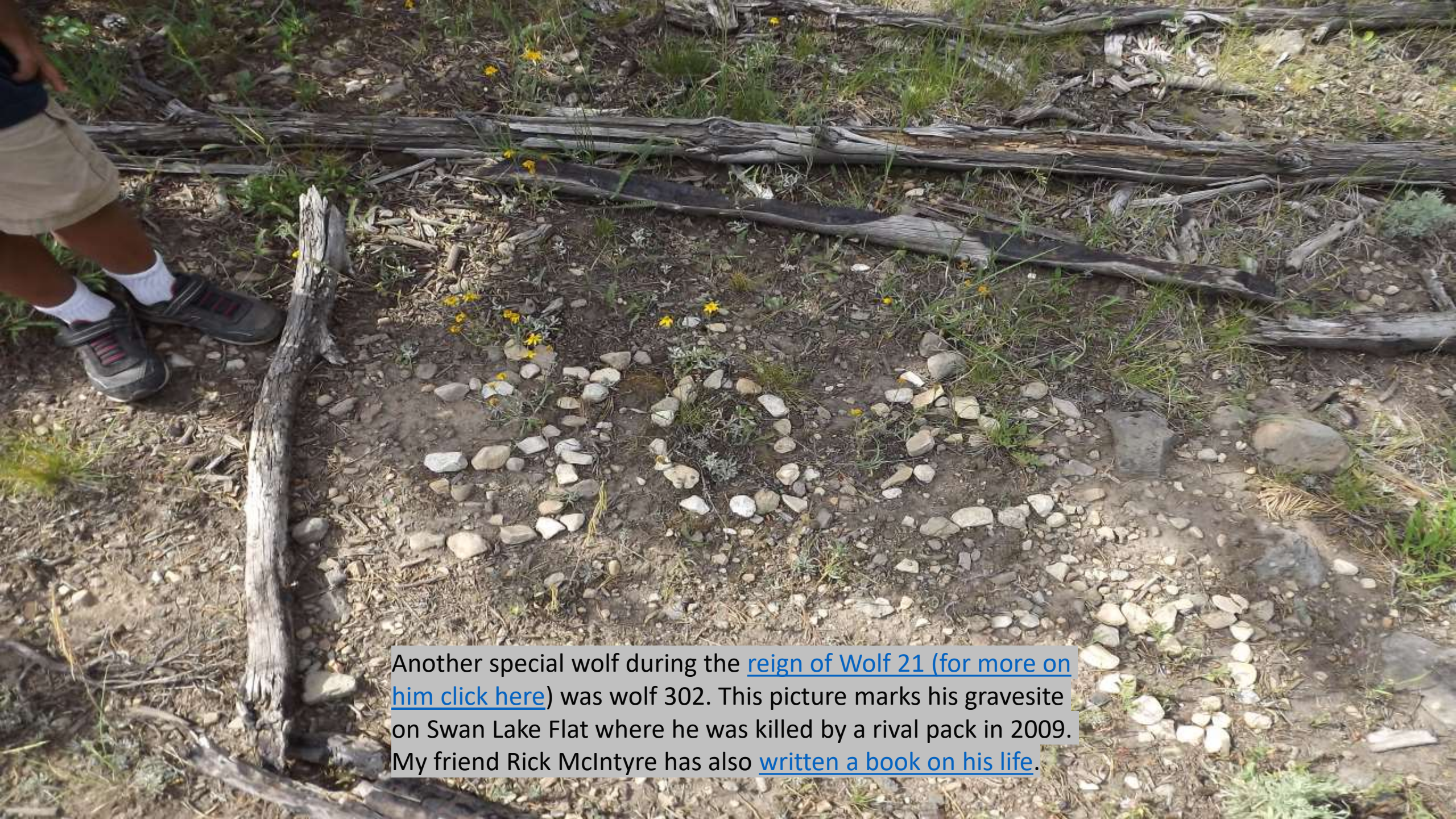


Wolf 926F, bringing food back to her pups, seen here crossing the park road and then climbing up the hill past '21's crossing' in June 2015. 926 was the great-granddaughter of 21 and was the breeding female of the Lamar Canyon pack for years before someone [shot her in Cooke City in the Fall of 2018](#).



Wolf 'Middle Gray', a member of the Lamar Canyon pack, crossing the park road at '21's crossing' to go foraging during July 2013. She was not captured and radio-collared so was given the nickname based on her coloration.





Another special wolf during the [reign of Wolf 21 \(for more on him click here\)](#) was wolf 302. This picture marks his gravesite on Swan Lake Flat where he was killed by a rival pack in 2009. My friend Rick McIntyre has also [written a book on his life](#).

Wolf 859, a yearling male of Lamar Canyon Pack, observed in July 2013 in Lamar Valley. Bottom left: A pronghorn casually ran past him as he looked in a different direction no doubt knowing he couldn't capture the swift 'antelope', which they are often called.



A good perspective of 859M in Lamar Valley. These images are with my old camera so I was not able to zoom in on him as much as I now can.





Wolf 911, June 2015, was the alpha male of the Junction Butte pack until 2016. He was killed by a rival pack and it was [determined that he had a broken lower jaw](#) that was healing upon his death. Life can be tough, and short, for wild wolves, with about 5 years being the average lifespan.




Wolf 965M of the Lamar Canyon pack in June 2015. This attractive wolf eventually left the pack and was killed by a hunter in 2016 just north of the park boundary where hunting is legal.

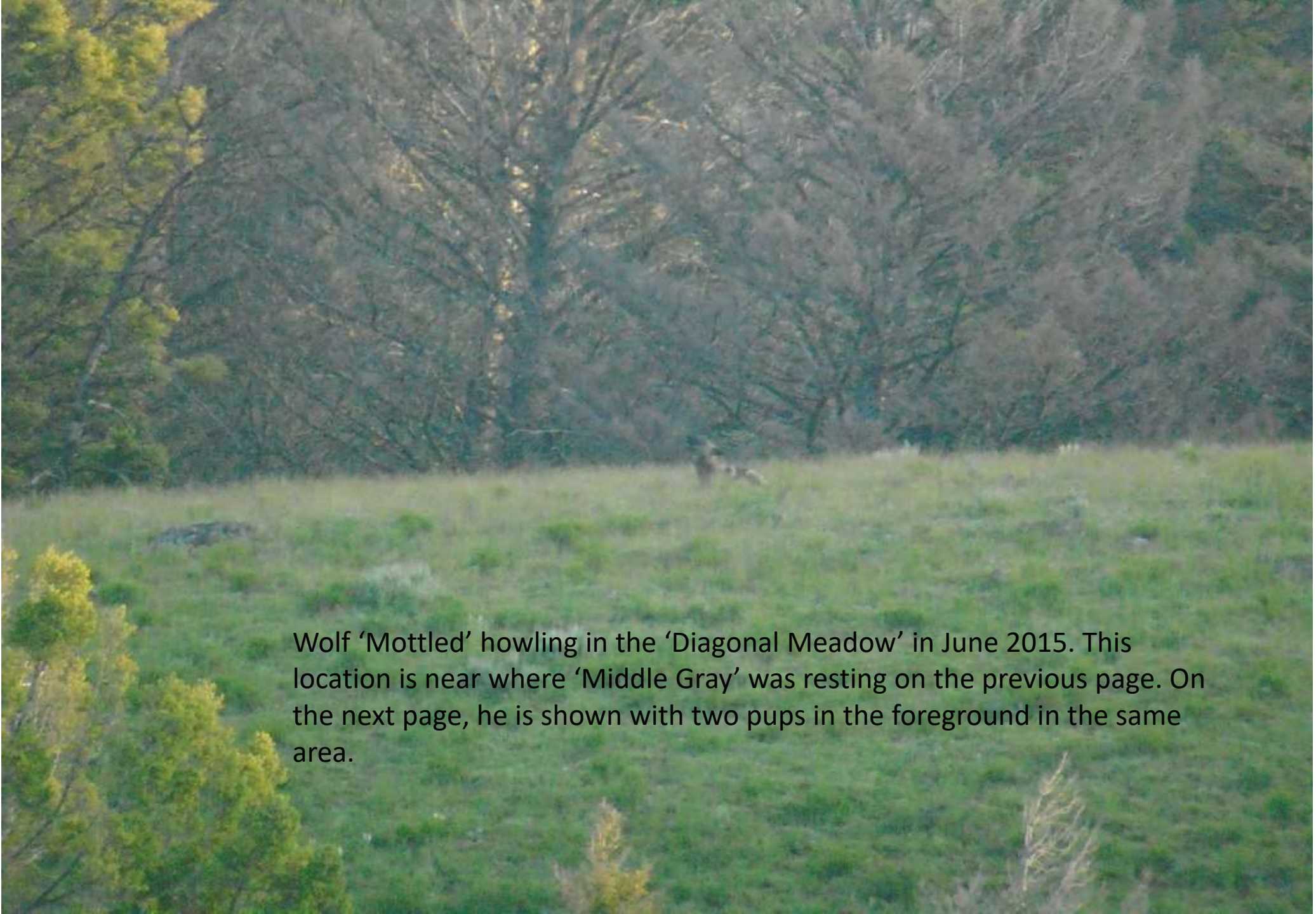




This is a distant but neat perspective of Wolf 869M of the Junction Butte Pack in July 2013 as he traveled the steep hill above the Lamar River and just below Jasper Bench in Lamar Valley.

A photograph showing a wolf sitting on a rocky ridge in a forested area. The wolf is positioned in the middle ground, facing right. The ridge is covered with sparse vegetation and rocks. The background is filled with tall, dark green evergreen trees. The foreground is a grassy slope leading up to the ridge.

Wolf 'Middle Gray' of the Lamar Canyon pack in July 2013 sitting on the 'Eye Brow' rock area where the family often spent time when they denned below Druid Peak.



Wolf 'Mottled' howling in the 'Diagonal Meadow' in June 2015. This location is near where 'Middle Gray' was resting on the previous page. On the next page, he is shown with two pups in the foreground in the same area.





Lamar Canyon pups playing under Douglas fir trees.



Many wolves, especially older ones, have this two-tone coat with black on the top and lighter colors underneath. This wolf, called Twin, was photographed in June 2015 as a member of the Lamar Canyons. He was later killed by the Mollie's Pack.

Wolves 890M and 970F of the Junction Butte Pack, June 2015, on Jasper Bench.



Without good optics, such as my spotting scope pictured here, wildlife can be very difficult to spot in the sagebrush, even in open country. Here wolves were in the open eating an elk calf while its mother looked on. The sagebrush doesn't appear big from a distance, but it can be over 4 feet tall. This can partially or fully obstruct the view of even the biggest wolf.



Here an elk cow watched as Wolf 965M of the Lamar Canyon Pack traveled with food in his mouth. Wolf 926F is out of sight in this frame behind sagebrush as she fed on the small carcass.





Three wolves fed in the open sagebrush while a distressed cow elk looked on.



A case in point of how difficult it can be to observe wolves in the open from a distance without the proper optics.

This and next page: My favorite scenes of the Lamar Canyons (shown here howling). In subsequent pages within this chapter, I show pictures from more most recent summertime trips. As you will notice, the magnification ability of the camera was a game changer, allowing me to get up-close shots, even showing their penetrating eyes on many of the images. Since acquiring that camera, I now take about twice the number of pictures compared to previous expeditions. For example, during my 7 day trip July 2019 I took 1,144 photos and in July 2020 I took 1,046! You might initially think that I would take less images in later years since I know the park so well, but just for that reason, as well as the capabilities of the newer camera, it is the opposite: I now know the park so well, I want to document everything in detail when there.





Lamar Canyon Pack, August 2015, below Druid Peak.

July 2019: Wolves Up Close and at a Bison Carcass



During July 2019, I had unforgettable encounters with members of the Junction Butte Pack like this yearling (above). I also went to Hayden Valley where I spotted this black wolf (right).

That July 2019 was my first year using my Nikon 83 X zoom camera in the park. It was amazing to get such clear shots from half to three-quarters of a mile away. This page shows a female member of the Junction Butte Pack as she traveled along the Lamar River about a half mile away from me.



The July 2019 trip started off with me observing wolf 996M feeding on a bison calf, with many ravens looking on, in the Lamar River.



In a memorable evening during July 2019, 996M wanted to cross the park road but there were too many people. He waited on top of a hill and then finally crossed the road (next two pages) at dusk.



Wolf 996M of the Junction
Butte pack, July 2019.



Wolf 996M was a subordinate male in the Junction Butte pack during my 2019-20 trips, while wolf 1047M (next page) was the breeding male.



Wolf 1047M





Wolf 1047M (left) and an uncollared black wolf at the Lamar River and 1047M (below). Wolves, like bison, regularly cross major rivers in their daily travels.



Next page: Perspective of wolf 1047M in Lamar. My new camera had such good magnification, I sometimes had to remember to pan out in order to capture where the wolves (or other wildlife) were for perspective.



As is probably evident in many of these pictures, wolves regularly travel parallel to rivers, such as beta male 1048M of the Junction Buttes passing by a fisherman in the Lamar River (left). Below: An uncollared black of the 'Junctions' fording the Lamar River a mile or two upstream.





While the 2019 trip was going along perfectly well, with many wolf and other wildlife sightings, a bison cow dying in Lamar Valley only 200 meters from the road (see below) a couple of days into my trip made for an absolutely amazing week. Wolves and bears went to the carcass for 3 days until it was consumed. It took about 24 hours for the wolves to locate it and get comfortable enough to approach from such of a close distance, but once they did it was ‘party time’! Most people were respectful and stayed along the road corridor giving the animals space to come and go. For more on my July 2019 trip, please read [*“The Trip of a Lifetime: A Pictorial Diary of My Journey Out West”*](#).





Here, a black male yearling approaches the bison carcass from the Lamar River area. He was the first wolf observed at the carcass and was initially timid (next page) before going to the carcass.





The black yearling Junction Butte wolf first opened up the rear end of the dead bison with a magpie, a bird in the corvid or crow family, looking on. Wolves have these amazing, yellow, penetrating eyes (next page).





Here are a few more images of the male yearling approaching (above) and then at (right) the bison carcass. Next page: Two bull bison investigated the scene, only temporarily displacing him.





He fed for another five minutes after the bison left the area, then he headed southwest toward the flats on the north side of the Lamar River. It appeared that he was traveling west and back to the pups who were about 10 miles west at the Slough den site.

He looked at the crowd before departing.



A few minutes later, a second yearling wolf – this one a black female with brown highlights on her coat – approached the carcass area, and announced her presence with a spectacular howl.



It is difficult to describe the exhilaration of seeing a wild wolf howling from so close.



Because of the proximity to the road, she would also periodically survey the crowd, especially if there was a loud noise. She fed (see next page) only briefly before moving on to the river area.





The day after the two yearlings were observed at the carcass, the rest of the pack visited it including one of the mothers of the group, gray 907F. She looked at the crowd and decided to swim the river (next page) and come back at last light when it was too dark to photograph her and her packmates.





The yearling female also returned to the area.



The sightings of the yearlings and 907F were exhilarating, but the action really picked up, and the carcass started to be significantly reduced, when the rest of the pack joined the show.





The main part of the Junction pack announced their claim to the area with a loud group howl on our side of the Lamar River. They mainly fed at night when people were not at the site and retreated when it became light out.



They traveled back and forth from the Lamar Valley to Slough Creek for a solid three days going the ~10 miles to their den to provision the pups and then would then return to the carcass area.

Wolves and Grizzly Bears

In early July 2019, it seemed too good to be true to have such close action with the Junction wolves at the bison carcass in Lamar Valley. However, two mornings after the discovery of the carcass, my breath was truly taken away when a grizzly bear sow and her two yearling cubs traveled across the Lamar Valley and went to the carcass. The two yearling wolves shown in the previous section escorted them there, seemingly to keep an eye on their whereabouts.







It seemed pretty obvious that the carnivores knew each other and it almost seemed like the interactions of the yearling bears and yearling wolves was as much about play (notice the tail up with the female wolf on the right) as it was aggression.





Just as if it couldn't get any better, a bald eagle photobombed the wolves and grizzlies for this spectacular image, as the predators approached the carcass area.



The cubs stayed close to their mom with the two yearling wolves always near them. The bear family did make it to the bison carcass and fed for about 5 minutes (see next five pages) before moving off. The sow was clearly nervous about being so close to the road, people, and wolves in the wide open.



The bears rolled on the carcass upon reaching it. The two wolves just stood and watched them.





After rolling on the carcass (previous page), the bear family then fed on it.



One cub is out of view in the sagebrush.





After feeding for only about 5 minutes, mom had enough and left the area with cubs in tow.





The yearlings followed the bears as they left the carcass area and headed south then west along the Lamar River. Meanwhile, some of the adult wolves seemed to get bored watching the bears and the two younger wolves, so they crossed the river to the south, presumably to bed down in the shade of the forest south of the river during the heat of the day (see next two pages).

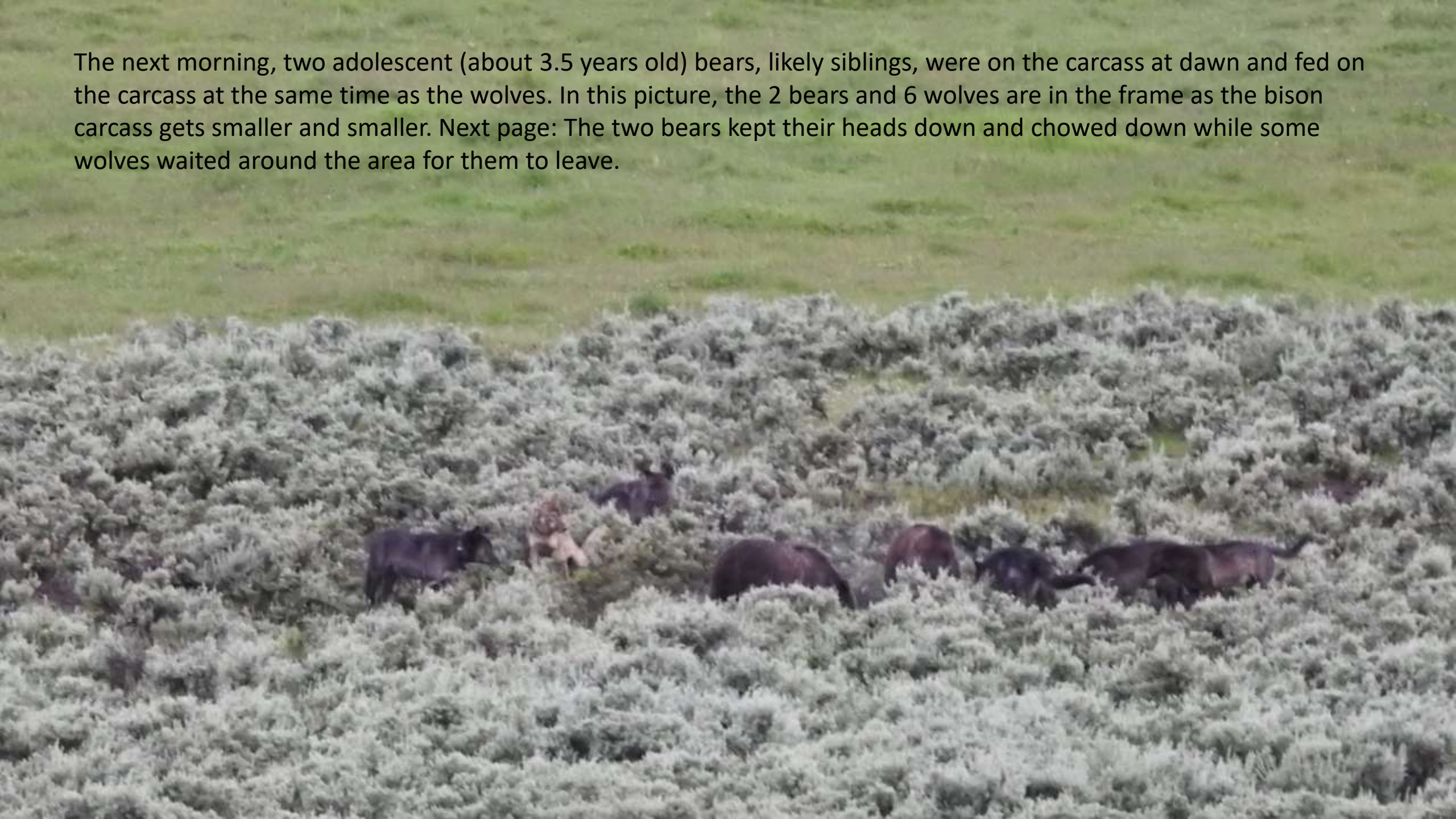






The grizzly family walked off in between two of the channels of the Lamar River.

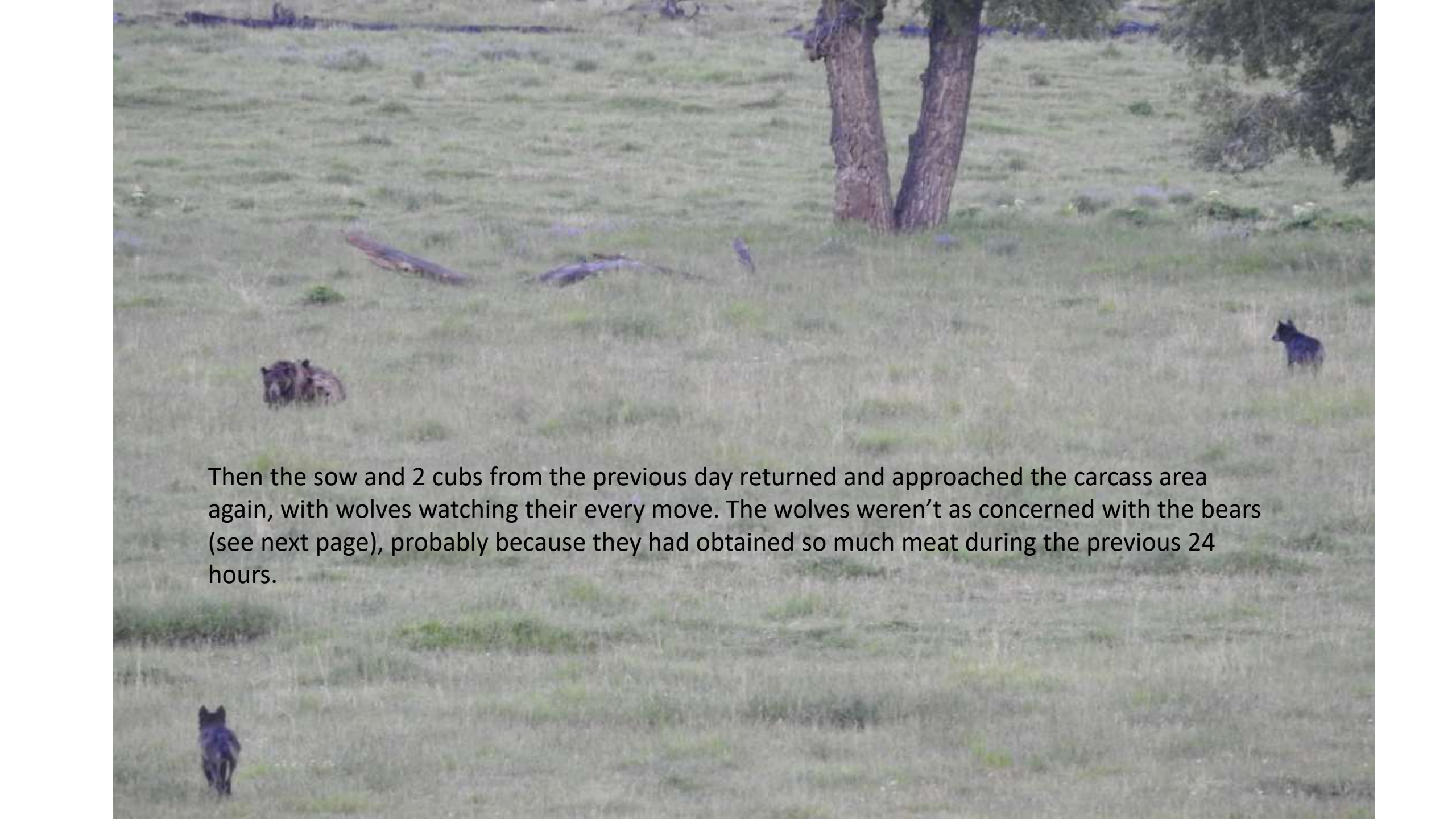
The next morning, two adolescent (about 3.5 years old) bears, likely siblings, were on the carcass at dawn and fed on the carcass at the same time as the wolves. In this picture, the 2 bears and 6 wolves are in the frame as the bison carcass gets smaller and smaller. Next page: The two bears kept their heads down and chowed down while some wolves waited around the area for them to leave.





The two bears left just after first light when people began arriving in numbers. The wolves immediately returned to the carcass area and fed.



A photograph of a grassy field with a tree, a bear, and a wolf. The scene is set in a natural, open environment. A large tree with two trunks stands in the upper right. In the middle ground, a bear is visible on the left, and a wolf is on the right. The foreground shows a wolf walking away from the camera. The text is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image.

Then the sow and 2 cubs from the previous day returned and approached the carcass area again, with wolves watching their every move. The wolves weren't as concerned with the bears (see next page), probably because they had obtained so much meat during the previous 24 hours.



While the wolves weren't as bothered with the grizzlies on this day (this page), the bruins went in for another feeding as the wolves had a rally away from the carcass area (next page).

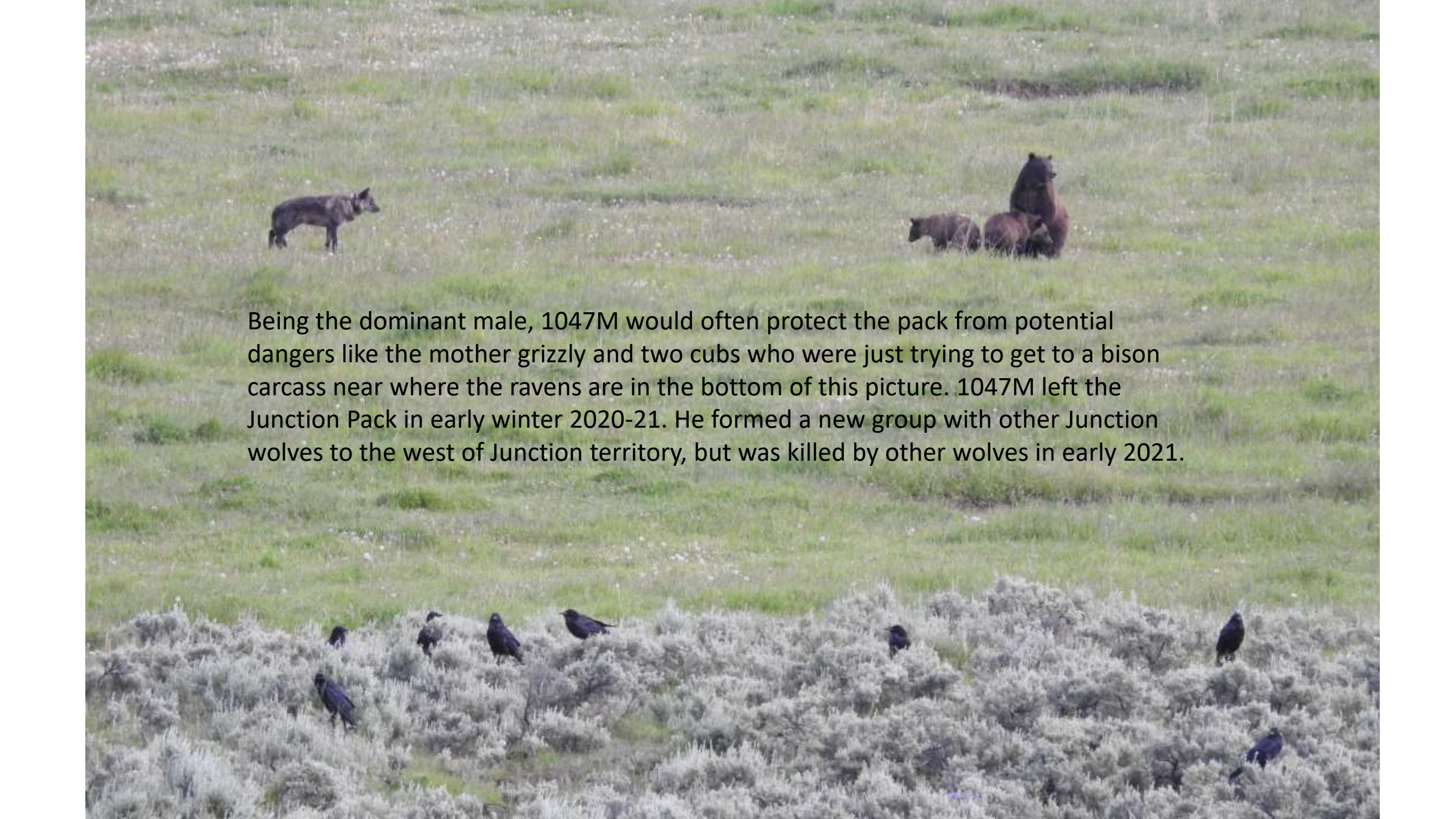






Once the grizzlies left the carcass area, wolves – four this time – began harassing the ursids again.



A wide-angle photograph of a grassy field. In the middle ground, a single wolf stands on the left, facing right. To its right, a mother grizzly bear sits upright, flanked by two cubs. In the foreground, a group of about ten ravens is gathered around a bison carcass, which is partially obscured by low-lying, silvery-grey shrubs. The background is a vast, open field of green and grey grasses under a clear sky.

Being the dominant male, 1047M would often protect the pack from potential dangers like the mother grizzly and two cubs who were just trying to get to a bison carcass near where the ravens are in the bottom of this picture. 1047M left the Junction Pack in early winter 2020-21. He formed a new group with other Junction wolves to the west of Junction territory, but was killed by other wolves in early 2021.



1047M bedded and casually watching the bear family leave the area.



While I saw bears and wolves every day of my trip in 2019, the two days when the sow and two cubs interacted with the wolves was truly special. Here, a yearling ushers the grizzlies away a final time (that I saw) from the carcass area, while ever present ravens (top right) look on.

Junction Wolves 2020

In 2020, the Junction wolves denned above (north of) Slough Creek in the well known homesite that thousands of people have observed from the park road. The pups stayed there until July, so were still there during my trip. While I never had the consistently close appearance of the pack that occurred in 2019, I still obtained many wonderful images.

Shown here: Junction Butte Pack yearling wolf near Slough Creek returning to provision the pups (also see next page).







Summer 2020 could be considered a 'normal' summer. I observed many wolves, but they were typically in small groups (1-6 individuals) from a distance so I didn't have quite the same photo ops as during 2019. Here a Junction Butte yearling is feeding near the Lamar River on an old bison carcass which was mostly eaten before I arrived in the park for my trip. The wolves were really spread out within a 5-10 mile radius of their den site in their continuous search for food.

A different black wolf traveled to the old carcass as the other black fed on scraps. It was curious that this individual scent-trailed to the location given that it surely knew where the food source was by that point since the carcass was mostly consumed.



The two wolves fed alongside each other on the carcass, as the heat waves settled in at 10:30 AM.



Gray yearling 1228F met up with one of the blacks at the carcass area. However, she never stayed in one place and I never obtained a good photograph of her during that trip. But in April 2021, I obtained many pictures of here in my [‘Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone’](#) book.



The black wolf '2 year old (or 'Third') mother' was eventually radio-collared as 1276F. She is part of the Junction Butte pack and is seen here in Lamar Valley traveling along the Lamar River near a bull bison (also see her standing alert on the next page).





A special scene was when two younger wolves, probably yearlings, played on a bench above the Lamar River, while a herd of bison with calves ignored them nearby (also see next 2 pages).





Chasing (left) often led to wrestling with the wolves (below right and next page). Both of these activities are classic behaviors observed during play.








'Riding up' is a form of play in which one stands on the other. In aggressive interactions, which this was not, this would be considered a form of dominance.



Chasing each other is a frequent game of play for wolves of all ages, but especially for pups and yearlings.

I saw this great rally during my first morning in the park in 2020. A group of the Junction Butte wolves came together and howled (below and also see next page) before traveling west back to where their pups were located.



A wide-angle photograph of a grassy field. In the foreground, there is a dense patch of light green, scrubby vegetation. In the middle ground, a herd of bison is scattered across the field. One bison is on the far left, another is in the center, and a group of four is on the right. In the background, a large, dark, rounded rock sits on a slight rise. The rest of the background is a vast, green field with some darker patches of vegetation.

The heat waves were bad as they enthusiastically greeted each before traveling back to Slough Creek.



Junction Butte wolves traveling across the Lamar Valley on their way to the den area above Slough Creek. Just like in 2019, in 2020 they daily traveled the 10 miles each way back and forth between the two areas.







In 2020, the Junction Buttes again had their pups above Slough Creek. Here, gray mother 907F can be seen with 6 young ones on a sage knoll above Slough Creek west of the den area. They were about 1.25 miles away from me here and during the week were often 2+ miles away which is the maximum capabilities of my (and most peoples') camera.



907F howling. In 2020, she was one of 3 mothers in this pack to have pups in their traditional denning area, plus a fourth wolf (1109F) denned over Specimen Ridge to the south.



Pups piling up around mom (or auntie).



The wolves spent most of their time during July 2020 in this 'Aspen' drainage west of their actual den site. I had some great sightings of the pack through my spotting scope but even this adult was difficult to photograph at about 2-2.5 miles away.



Wolf sign was abundant throughout summer 2020. The Junction pack had 17 adults and 18 pups, all of who survived to winter. In the fall, the pack numbered 34 consistently. One adult, 1109F, was usually not with them but had ~3 pups that were hers. The pups joined the pack in the fall. This is one of the largest packs ever recorded. They eventually subdivided into a second pack literally the week I went out there for [Christmas](#) 2020.



This is the area where many of the pictures from the *Gray Wolf* section took place. Above: The transition from Lamar Canyon to the western part of Lamar Valley. Bottom: Lamar Valley with Jasper Bench and Specimen Ridge in the background. Many of the wolves were photographed in the flats near the river just below the Jasper Bench area.



Bears

There are 8 species in the Ursidae family, of which 3 live in North America: black bear, brown or grizzly bear (also called 'Kodiac' bear in coastal Alaska), and polar bear. Yellowstone has two of those species: 1) The more timid forest dwelling black bear, who lives throughout much of the United States from the west to the east coast; and 2) The grizzly bear, a threatened species in the Lower 48 states. Grizzly bears have two main population cores in the Lower 48: 1) the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, with Yellowstone National Park as the core, protected population; and 2) the Northern Continental Divide in Northwestern Montana, with Glacier National Park serving as its primary area. Grizzlies evolved in open areas, so are generally more aggressive than black bears. However, it is important to realize that encounters with humans are relatively low even in areas where their population is increasing.

A black bear in open, more typical grizzly habitat near Chittenden Road below Mt. Washburn.



Black Bear



A black bear at Antelope Creek (left). Tourists often inappropriately walk right up to bears and park on the roads to see them, creating major traffic or 'bear jams' in the process. Luckily, they are very timid creatures, preferring to be left alone in the shelter of a forest. The lack of a shoulder hump and straight-faced profile is a clear indicator of a black bear versus a grizzly, even for brown colored individuals (below and next page).



All bears belong to the Ursidae family. An ursid is a plantigrade (i.e., walks on soles of its feet like humans) carnivore, comprising the spectacled bear, the black, brown, polar, and sun bears, and various extinct species that also gave rise to the giant panda of the family Ailuropodidae.



Black bears are not always black and can be brown or cinnamon in color, like grizzly bears, especially out west. However, the lack of a shoulder hump, a straight head profile versus a dished one, and a less massive body distinguishes them from their larger grizzly cousins.

Black bear near Petrified Tree. I commonly see black bears in the Tower Junction area, including Petrified Tree (this picture), Elk Creek (previous page, left), Junction Butte (previous page, right), and Calcite (next page, right).





A handsome black bear near Junction Butte between Tower and Little America (left). Below right: A small bear near Calcite. This is an area of tall grasses and many deadfall trees, which makes bears difficult to observe when there. Next page: Radio-collars are attached to some black bears, such as this one at Elk Creek, to monitor their movements, similar to other species in the park.



The average black bear is 100-200 pounds, about the size of a typical human. But some bears, especially males, can weigh 500+ pounds. The eastern U.S. actually has some of the biggest bears in the country.



Cinnamon-phased black bear adult in Lamar Canyon. The pad of its left rear foot shows its human-like plantigrade walking motion.





This young cinnamon colored black bear has all of the characteristics of a black bear, and not a grizzly, including straight head profile and no shoulder hump. Next page: Ditto with this brownish colored black bear north of Canyon.



Black bears sometimes show up in more open country than you might expect, such as these bruins near Blacktail Ponds. They are typically males (right) or a mating/courting pair (below), while females with cubs prefer protective tree cover.



Next page: Black bear with an ear tag. Sometimes bears, and other wildlife, are given tags to mark them, even if more expensive radio-collars are not put on to track them. This frequently happens with bears that may be causing a problem, such as closely approaching people or searching for human food sources.





Black bears spend much of their time foraging on grasses and flowers during the summertime, including this one at Lower Barronette in the far northeastern section of the park.



I have also had good luck over the years seeing bears in the Round Prairie (this page) and nearby Soda Butte picnic (next page) areas.



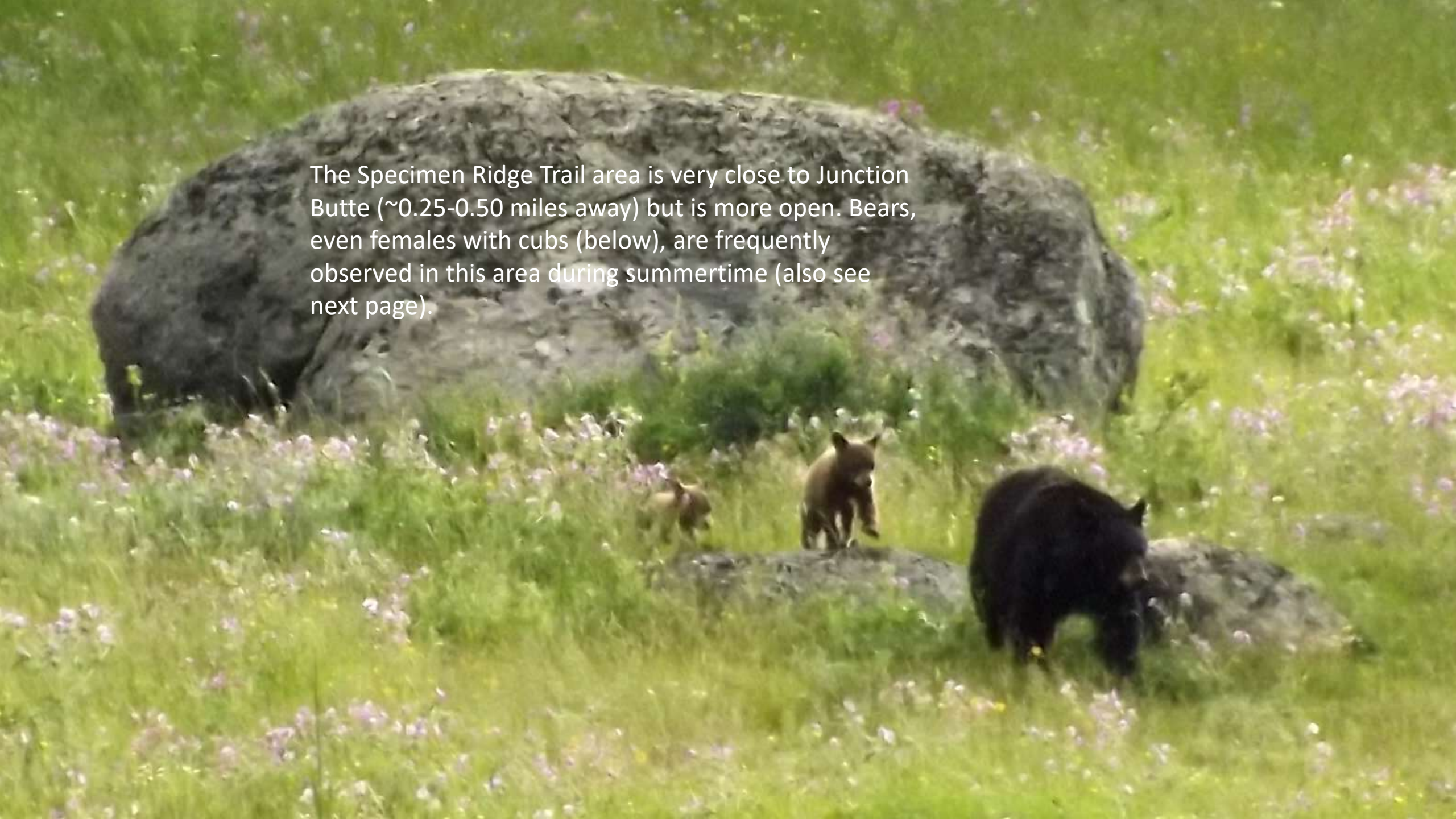




Despite the regular presence of wolves and grizzly bears, I often see black bears (this and next page) in the Slough Creek area as well.



The Specimen Ridge Trail area is very close to Junction Butte (~0.25-0.50 miles away) but is more open. Bears, even females with cubs (below), are frequently observed in this area during summertime (also see next page).





When bears are behaving naturally, such as when foraging, their heads are often down. While this does not make for great pictures and can frustrate photographers, beware that this is the best for the bear(s). Summer is a critical time for ursids to pack on fat stores to get them through their winter hibernation. Bears with their heads up scanning for danger or looking at humans means less time spent eating.



Next page: Black bear tracks near Geode Creek just east of the Blacktail Plateau.



Grizzly Bear



Grizzly boar



Sow and cubs



Grizzly bears once ranged throughout the western United States, but their current southern stronghold is in the Yellowstone area where about [150 bruins live in the park and about 800 range throughout the ecosystem](#). They can be [identified](#) by their pronounced shoulder hump, dished face profile, short ears, and generally larger size. Males in the park weigh up to 600-700 pounds, which is impressive but not as large as some of their Alaskan brown bear kin (e.g., Kodiak bears) who can tip the scales at 1,500 lbs.

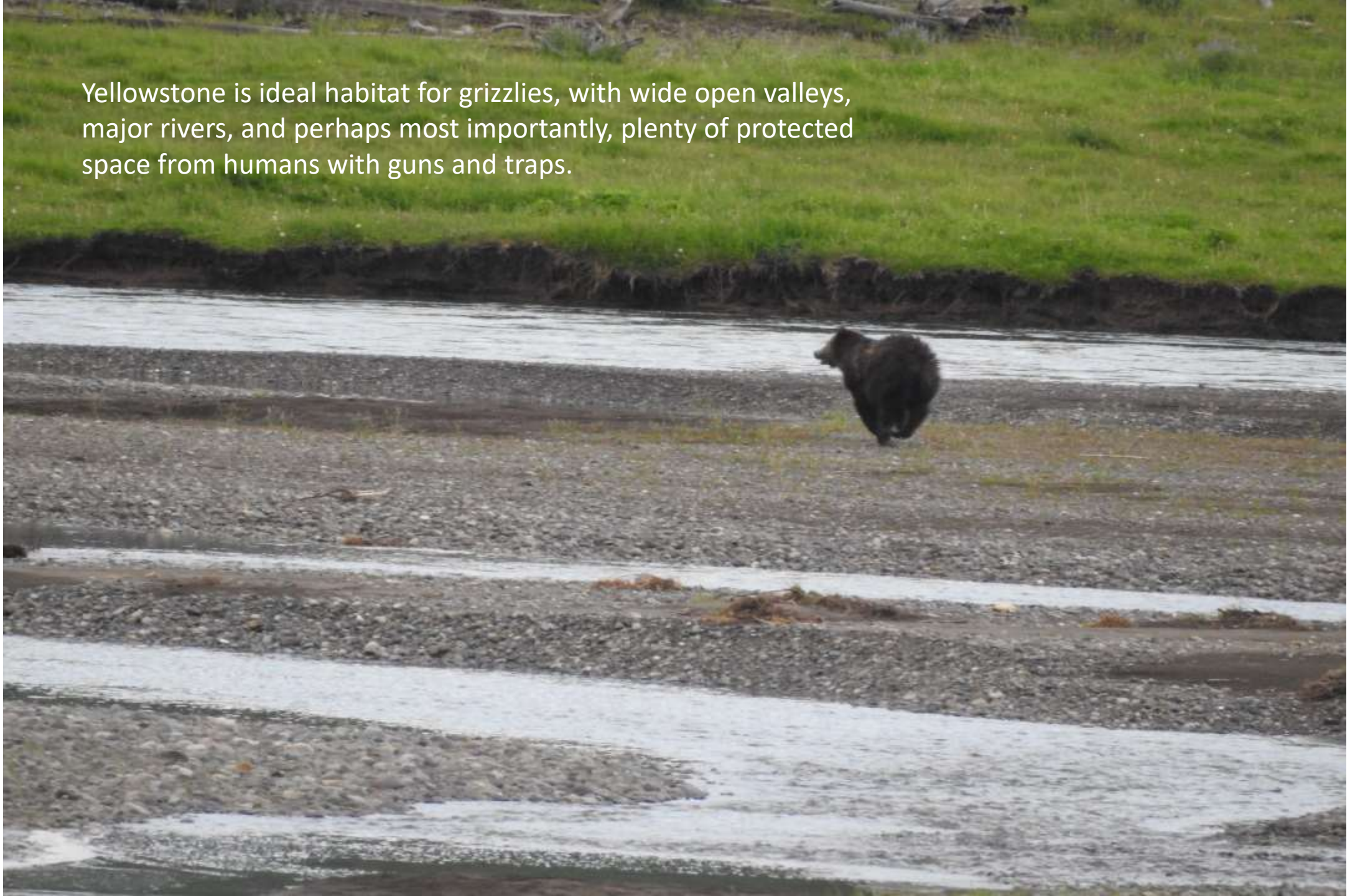
Both grizzly and black bears are omnivores and eat a variety of plant and root material. However, in Yellowstone, grizzlies, especially large males (pictured here), eat a high percentage of meat. This is due to the abundance of ungulate carcasses, which are either killed by wolves, killed by grizzlies themselves (especially elk and bison calves), or from bison that die naturally. Bison most often perish during winter (called winter kill) or after the August rut when males gore each other to death.





A boar grizzly approaching a bison carcass only 200 meters from the park road.

Yellowstone is ideal habitat for grizzlies, with wide open valleys, major rivers, and perhaps most importantly, plenty of protected space from humans with guns and traps.



A grizzly sow foraging with her two cubs.





The trio from the previous page encountered a male grizzly during their travels. That caused the sow (middle grizzly on left picture) to chase the boar away (bottom right). Males have been known to kill cubs, so sows have to be extra cautious and defensive around them.



Next page: The male received the message and swam all the way across the Lamar River.





Seeing grizzlies in the backcountry, like this sow and cub on the Cascade Meadows Trail near Canyon, is a powerful experience. Left: It appears that the grizzlies just ignored the hiker and so did the person unless s/he never saw them.



Next two pages: We carry [bear spray](#) when we hike, but have never come close to using it. Instead, we always try to maintain proper distance from wildlife and do not approach or crowd them (see next page).







This and next page: Hayden Valley is a stronghold for grizzly bears. The open valley and high abundance of food is perfect habitat for them where they can often be seen digging for roots and rodents or competing for wolves for access to ungulate carcasses.





I most commonly see boars in Hayden Valley. I have observed sows and cubs over the years but suspect that they avoid the open areas heavily used by males.



Antelope Valley, which is north of Mt. Washburn, is another good place to see bears. This open area is located on the back (south) side of Specimen Ridge that leads north to Lamar Valley and Little America.


A good perspective of Antelope Valley during the mid-summer wildflower season, as viewed to the east.



While many regions of the park are good grizzly bear habitat, the Lamar Valley has been where I have observed the most simply because I spend the greatest amount of time there. They often are a mile or two away so they appear small until using equipment with good magnification capabilities (next page).

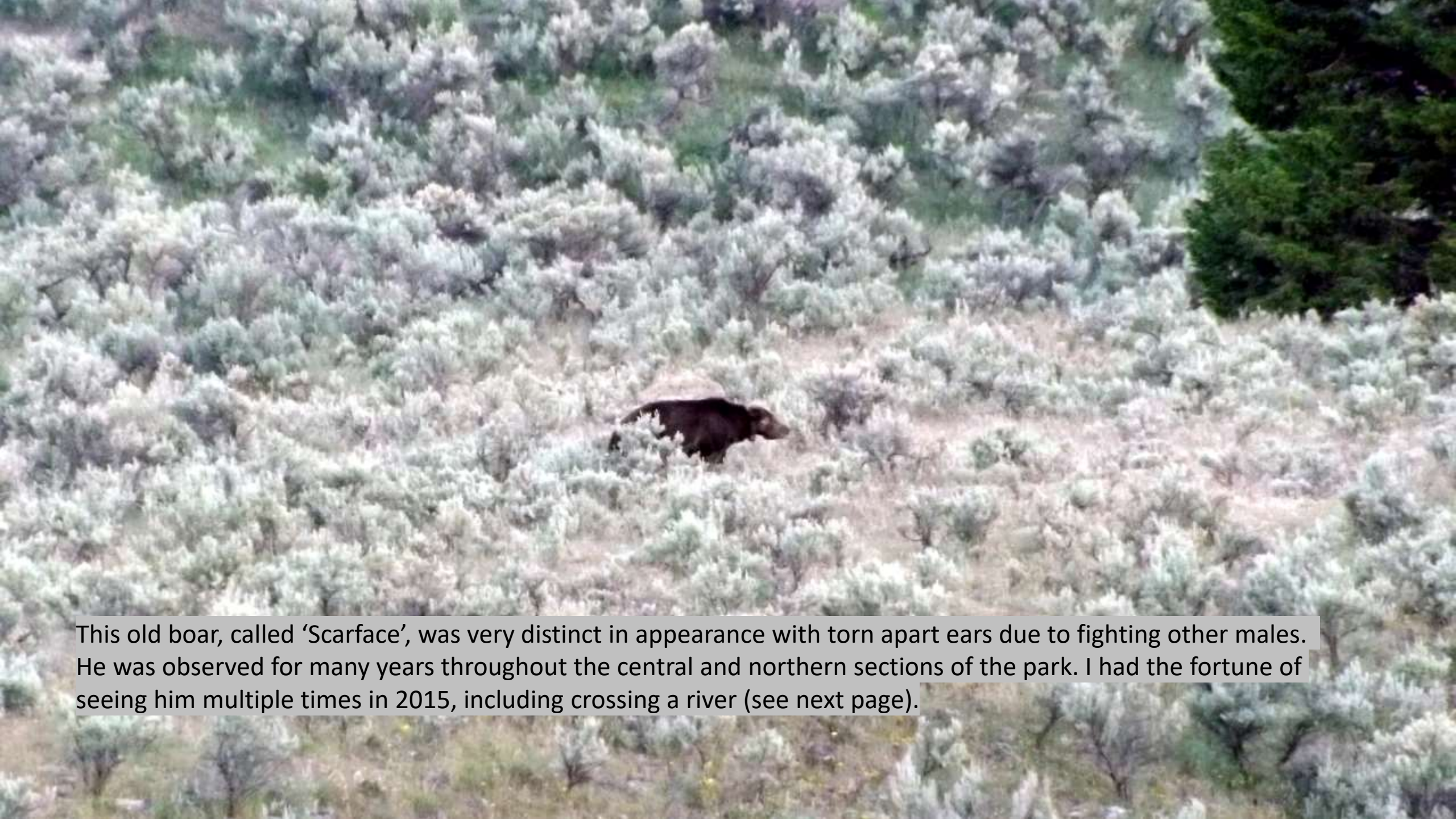




A photograph of a mother grizzly bear and her cub walking through a grassy field. The mother bear is on the right, and the cub is on the left. They are surrounded by sagebrush and several black birds, possibly ravens or crows, are scattered throughout the scene. The text is overlaid on the image.

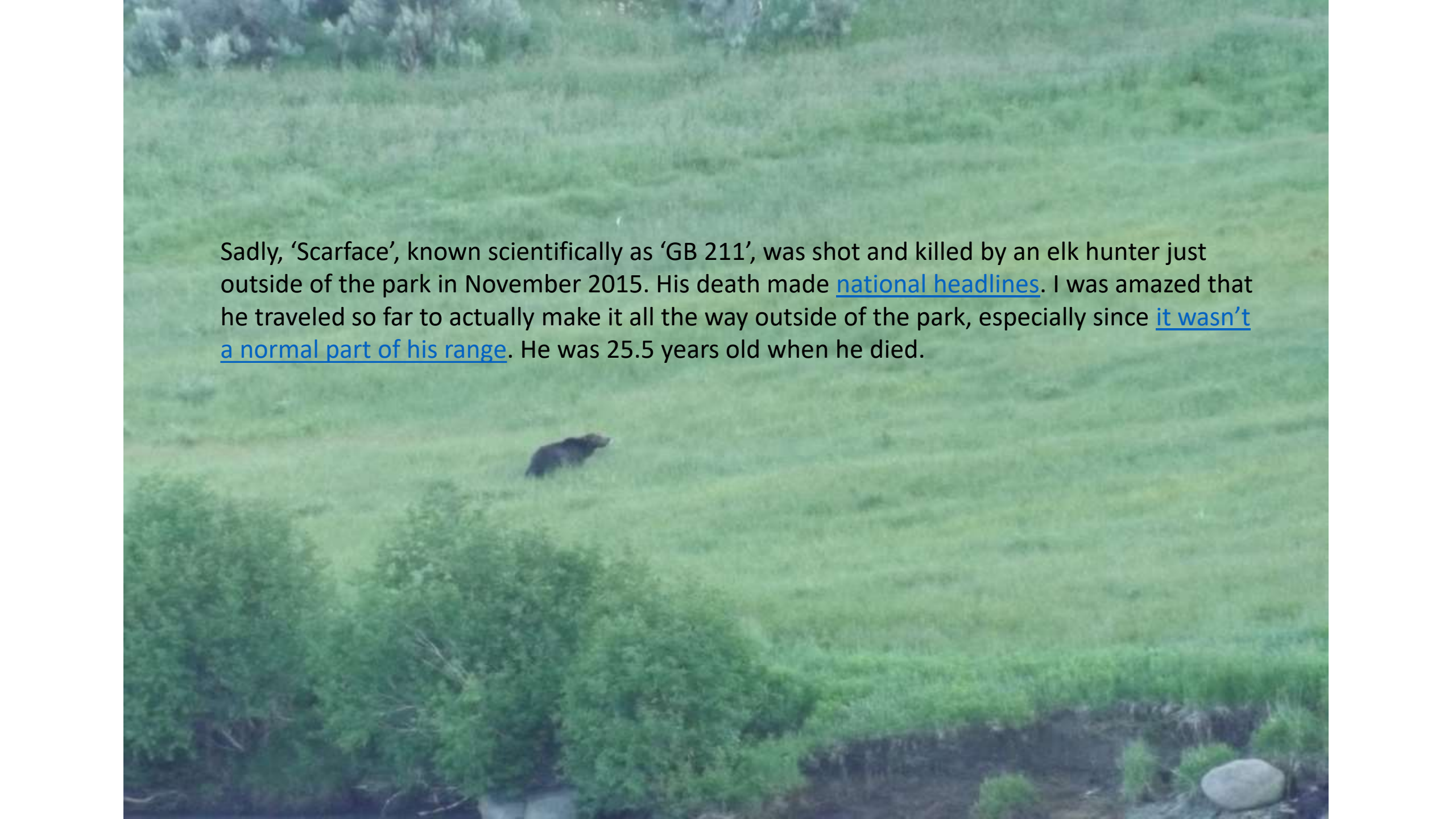
Occasionally one lucks out and has a close encounter with such a magnificent animal, as exemplified in the *Wolves and Grizzly* section of this book.





This old boar, called 'Scarface', was very distinct in appearance with torn apart ears due to fighting other males. He was observed for many years throughout the central and northern sections of the park. I had the fortune of seeing him multiple times in 2015, including crossing a river (see next page).





Sadly, 'Scarface', known scientifically as 'GB 211', was shot and killed by an elk hunter just outside of the park in November 2015. His death made [national headlines](#). I was amazed that he traveled so far to actually make it all the way outside of the park, especially since [it wasn't a normal part of his range](#). He was 25.5 years old when he died.



Small to Medium-Sized Mammals

The previous chapters highlighted the larger animals in the park, which are usually the most sought after fauna to observe. In total, [67 different mammal species inhabit the park](#). In this section, I highlight some other common but lesser discussed critters. While this chapter is not expansive, it will cover many of the 'other' animals that you are most likely to observe on a summer visit.



Badgers are in the Mustelidae or weasel family and are commonly found in grassland habitats. They spend time digging out ground squirrels, a main food source.



Badger on patrol (above) and a road-killed one in Little America (right).



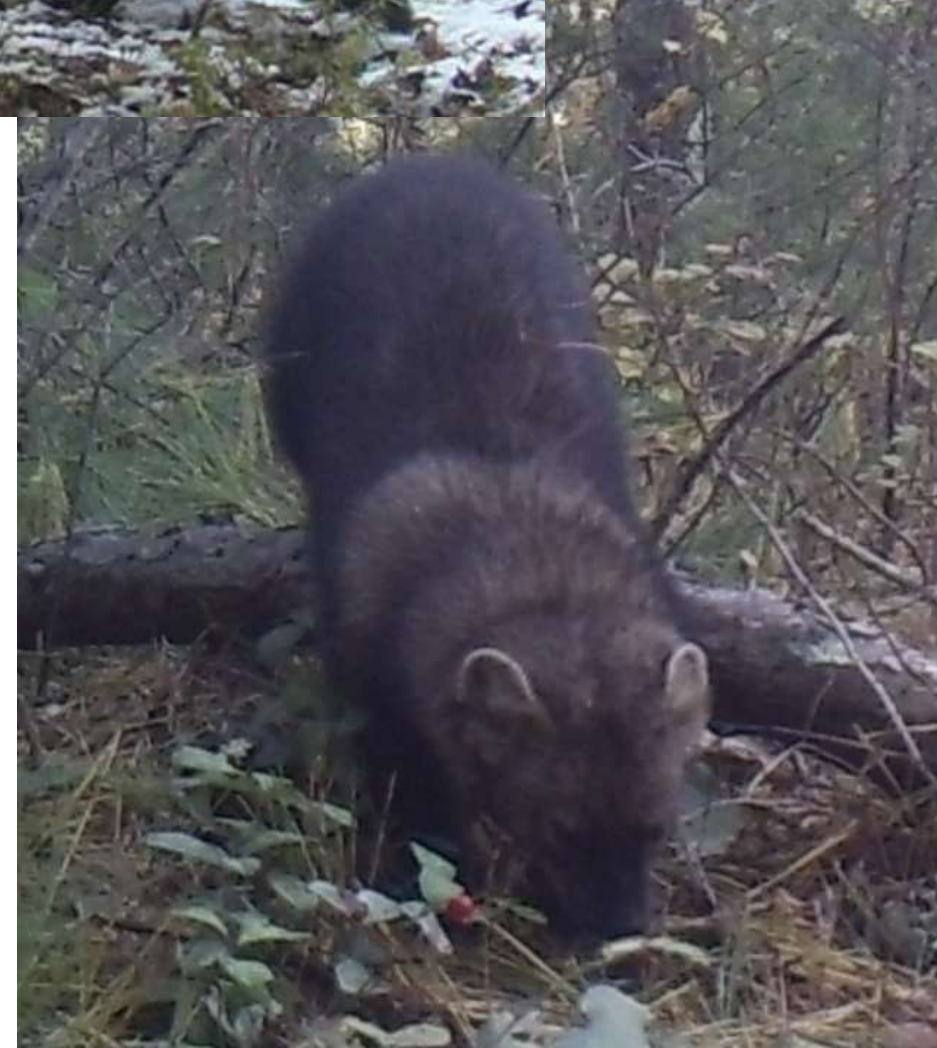
Similar to badgers, [long-tailed weasels](#) are in the Mustelidae family. Of the 57 species of mustelids found worldwide, [Yellowstone is home to eight](#) of them, including badgers, fishers, marten, mink, river otters, long-tailed weasels, short-tailed weasels, and wolverines. Members of the weasel family are elusive, so don't expect to spot many on your travels. I have not taken pictures of otters, fisher, or marten in the park, so I share images I have obtained of these mustelids from the Northeast U.S. for reference (see next 3 pages).

Otters from Cape Cod, MA (left) and the White Mountains of New Hampshire (right). Otters are often observed in Yellowstone's water bodies, even though I haven't obtained any images of them in the park.



Next page: Fishers in the Northeast. The top left picture is from Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument in Maine, while the rest are from Cape Cod, MA. While common in the Northeast, even in urbanized areas, fishers are rarely observed in Yellowstone.

Fishers





Marten in Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, Maine. Martens live in the forested and high elevation areas of the park, such as near the Northeast Entrance where they are occasionally observed.

Beaver have [recovered in Yellowstone since wolf recovery](#). While many think this is because wolves have reduced elk abundance so that aspen and willow trees – beaver favorites – have been able to recover, another important event is that [beavers were reintroduced to lands just north of the park](#) right around wolf reintroduction in the mid-1990s. It is likely that both factors aided beaver recovery.



Beaver in the Soda Butte River with a dawn view of Soda Butte Valley.





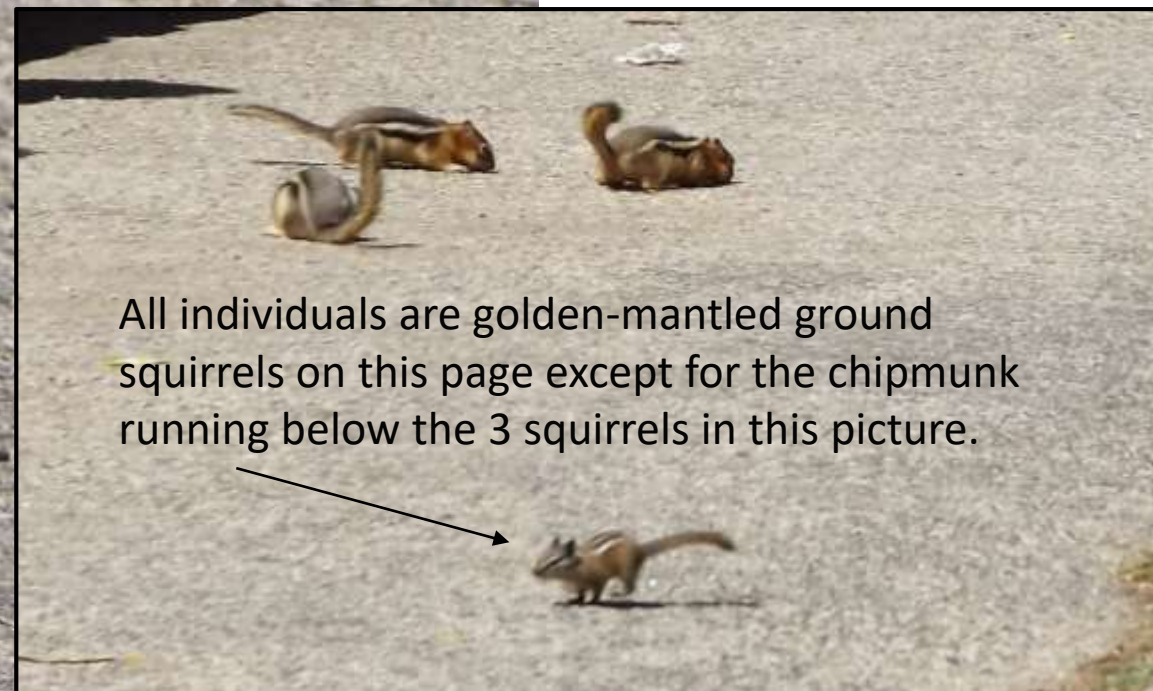
Just like at many parks, including urban ones, chipmunks are common in Yellowstone and can often be observed in developed places, including picnic areas where they've learned to find human food scraps around the tables. This species is the [least chipmunk](#). They are the smallest member of the squirrel family.



Golden-mantled ground squirrels (right) look similar to chipmunks (left) but are larger and do not have stripes on their head (see next page). They are often found in mountainous habitat up to timberline.



I commonly observe golden-mantled ground squirrels in the Beartooth Mountains northeast of the park and up at the top of Mt. Washburn in Yellowstone. Next page: Notice the reddish 'golden' color (i.e., mantle) behind their necks.



All individuals are golden-mantled ground squirrels on this page except for the chipmunk running below the 3 squirrels in this picture.



Five larger golden-mantled ground squirrels (left) near two least chipmunks (top right).





The Uinta ground squirrel is the most common rodent species observed in the northern part of the park. They live in open country, digging burrows in the grasslands, and are commonly heard chattering to each other.



Ground squirrels eat as much grass as they can (left and right), and store extra amounts in caches in underground chambers for later consumption. They can also occasionally be observed on trails consuming minerals, such as this pair (bottom) on the Slough Creek Trail.



Uinta ground squirrels (pictured here) resemble prairie dogs, which do not live in the park. They reside east of Yellowstone in the open, Great Plains.



A ground squirrel surveying its expansive domain (above left), while another builds up fat to survive hibernation (right).

Jackrabbits are [not a common sight in Yellowstone](#). They live in sagebrush dominated areas but high ungulate numbers in the park likely keeps their numbers low. They are more common in lower elevations, such as the Gardiner Basin and outside the park. It is likely that a combination of predators and poor habitat limit their numbers inside the park.



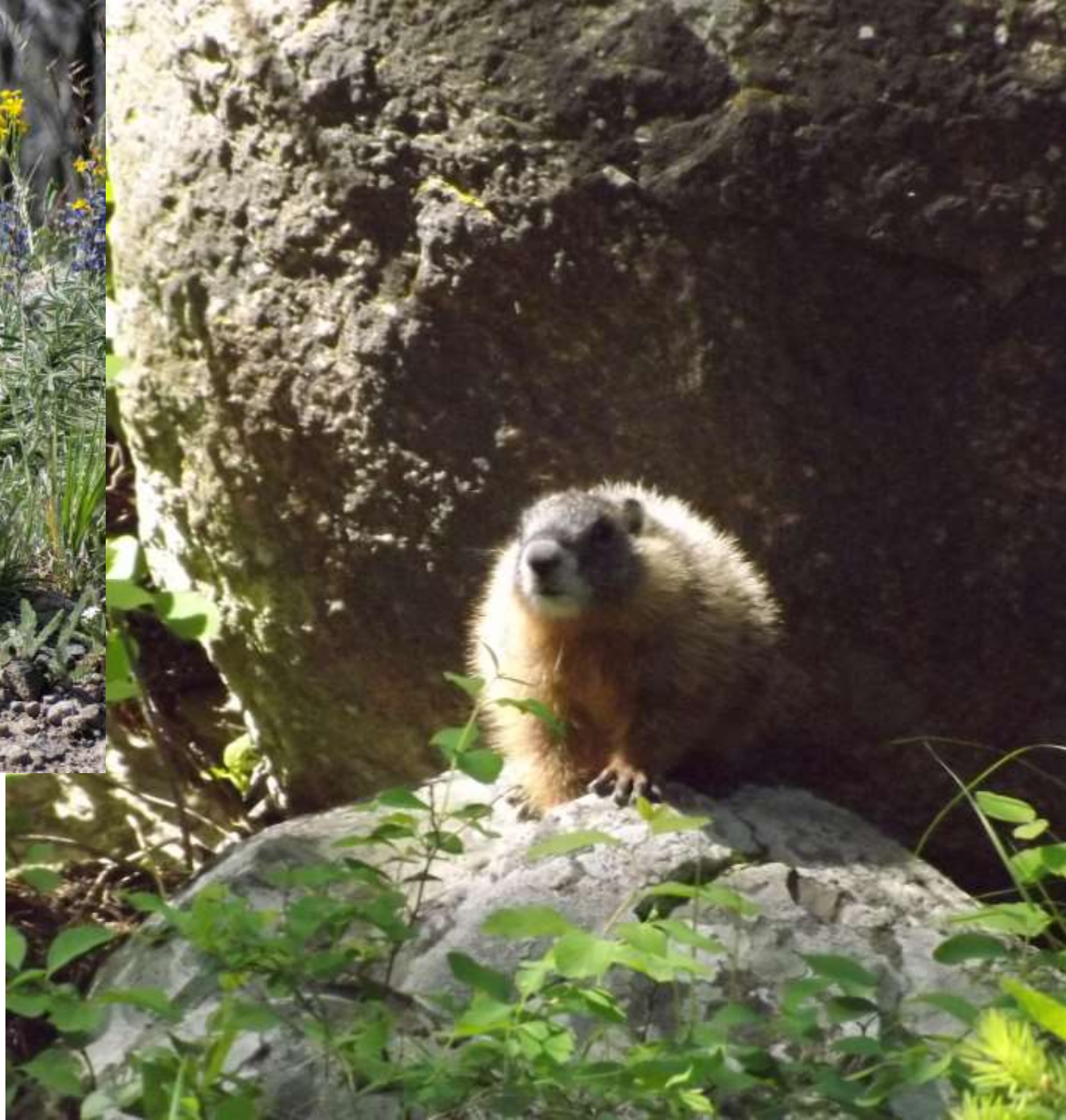
Yellow-bellied marmots are a common sight in Yellowstone. They are frequently observed on rocky areas in grasslands and range all the way up to alpine areas.



Marmots are closely related to the woodchucks or groundhogs of the east, with each belonging to the same genus, *Marmota*. Both are called 'whistle pigs' for the screaming sound they often make, which warns others of danger.



Left: A marmot in a wildflower field up on the high elevation Mt. Washburn hike.



Right: Marmot on a boulder near Rainy Lake, a mid-elevation area above Tower Junction.



A mother marmot and her pup (right side of both pictures) inhabiting typical rocky terrain characteristic of the species. These boulder fields provide plenty of cover for them to hide in to escape their many predators, such as hawks, eagles, coyotes, and grizzlies.



Close-up of a marmot on a boulder just off the Slough Creek Trail.





Another common place where I have observed marmots in the park is along the Yellowstone River Trail, which provides a great view of the Yellowstone River across the canyon from Calcite and Tower Fall.



Next page: Perspective of that area with marmot circled in the shade of the picture. This area is also a common place to observe bighorn sheep due to the steep terrain.



The Yellowstone River Trail provides beautiful views of Specimen Ridge (left) and the Yellowstone River. This varied area, from cliffs to meadows, provides ideal habitat for marmots and bighorn sheep, among many other species.



Next page: Pikas (formerly also called picas) are small, rabbit-like animals. They live in high elevation, cold areas, typically on talus slopes. They are [considered an indicator species](#) for detecting the ecological effects of climate change. Due to rising temperatures, pikas are losing habitat in lower elevation areas in Yellowstone and beyond. While they are relatively numerous atop mountain peaks, I have not observed that many over the years.



Pika on a talus slope atop Bunsen Peak, typical habitat for the species.



Top: Bunsen Peak (back center) from Swan Lake Flat. Bottom: View from the top of Bunsen Peak of Swan Lake Flat and the surrounding area. Pikas live at the top of Bunsen in the scree fields characteristic of the top of many mountains in this area (see next page).



These talus slopes provide good cover for pikas, similar to what boulder fields (including these areas) offer for the more widely distributed and abundant marmot.



This and next page: Red squirrels in their domain.



Red squirrels are common within the park's forested areas. They have a loud, long chirp or chatter to advertise their presence and when spotting danger. In fall, [they cache pine cones in piles called middens](#), which are used for years and can be 15 by 30 feet wide. Grizzlies search out these middens to obtain vital, pre-hibernation calories.

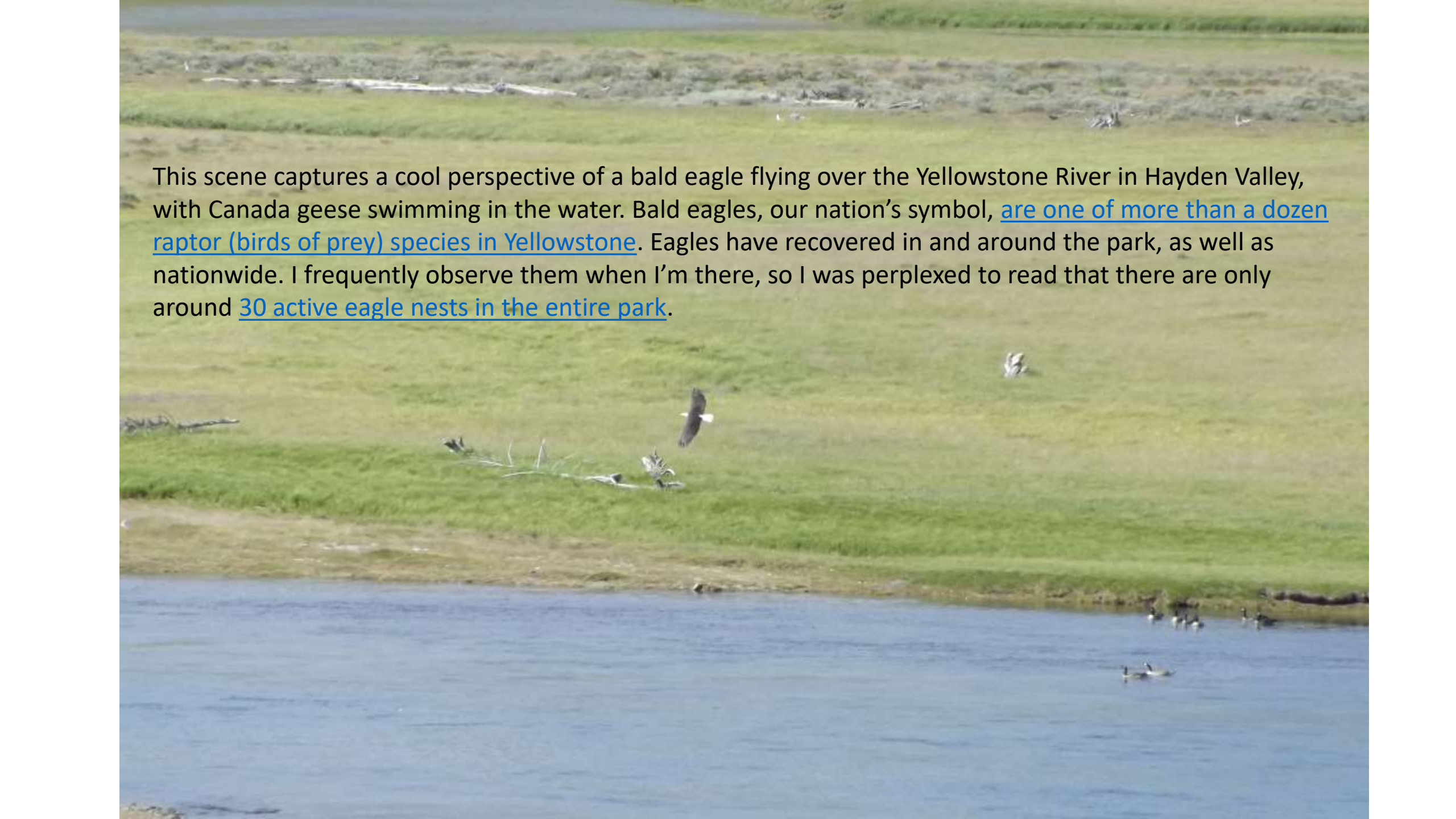


Birds

I want to state at the outset of this chapter that I am not a bird expert. According to Yellowstone officials, nearly [300 bird species have been sighted in Yellowstone National Park](#), including raptors, songbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl. About 150 species build their nests and fledge their young in the park. There are a variety of habitats in the park and that makes it ideal habitat for many species, including birds. In this chapter, I will share with you my favorite bird species as well as the ones that you are likely to observe. For the ornithology experts, I apologize in advance for my limited knowledge of the subject compared to previous chapters. Maybe you can write a similar e-book on these guys to help fill in the gaps of information presented!

A bald eagle and two ravens at the dead bison that drew in the wolves and grizzlies during July 2019. Both avian species are scavengers and are frequently observed at carcass sites.



A photograph of a bald eagle in flight over a river. The eagle is in the center of the frame, with its wings spread wide. In the foreground, a group of Canada geese is swimming in the blue water. The background consists of a grassy bank with some driftwood and a line of trees in the distance.

This scene captures a cool perspective of a bald eagle flying over the Yellowstone River in Hayden Valley, with Canada geese swimming in the water. Bald eagles, our nation's symbol, [are one of more than a dozen raptor \(birds of prey\) species in Yellowstone](#). Eagles have recovered in and around the park, as well as nationwide. I frequently observe them when I'm there, so I was perplexed to read that there are only around [30 active eagle nests in the entire park](#).



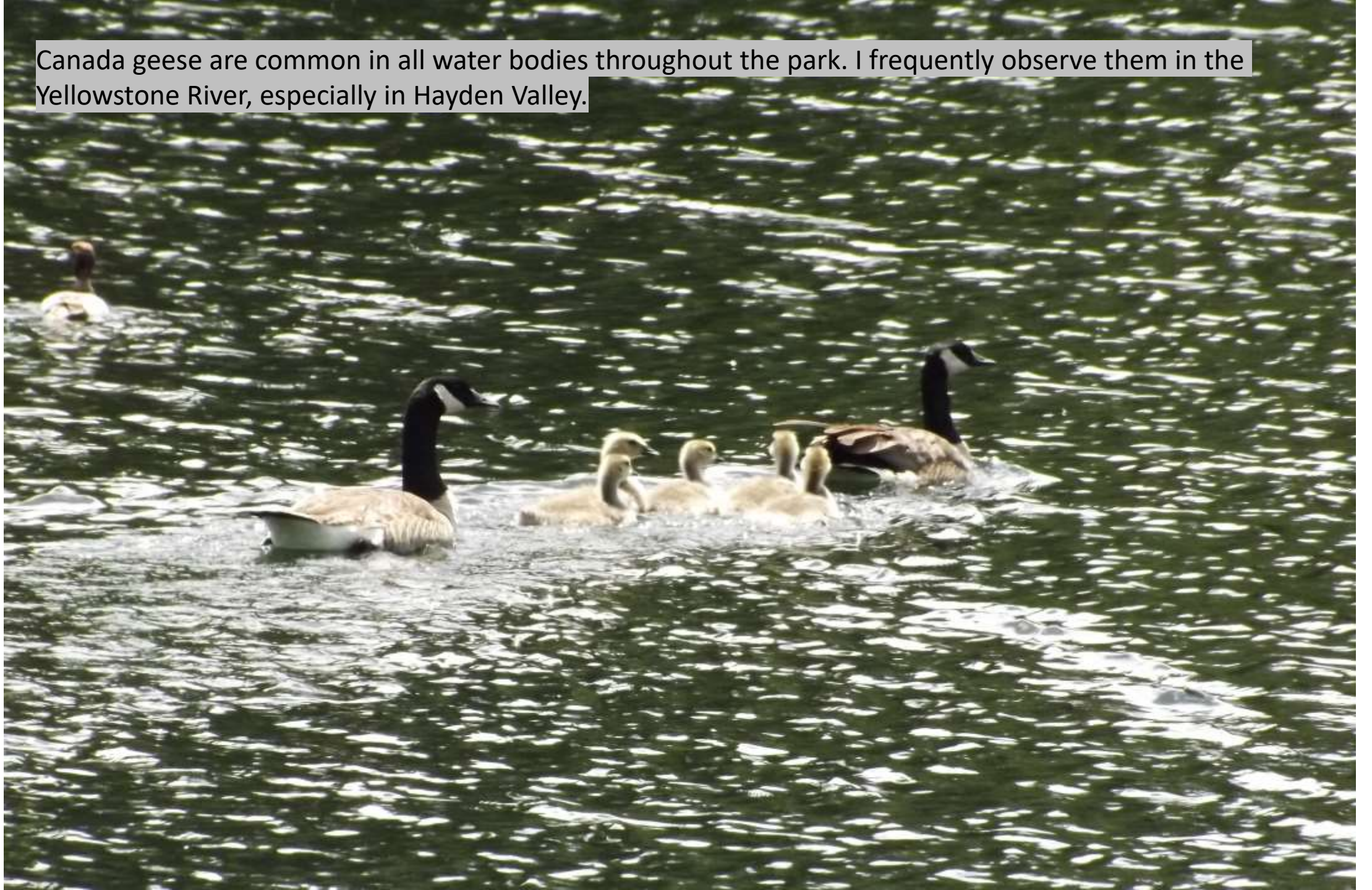


Bald eagles are commonly seen in dead trees near rivers such as this one (left) above the Lamar River. They are less frequently observed on top of hillsides (top right), where ravens often are spotted.

Next page: Younger eagle (head is not completely white) with fish above Trout Lake.

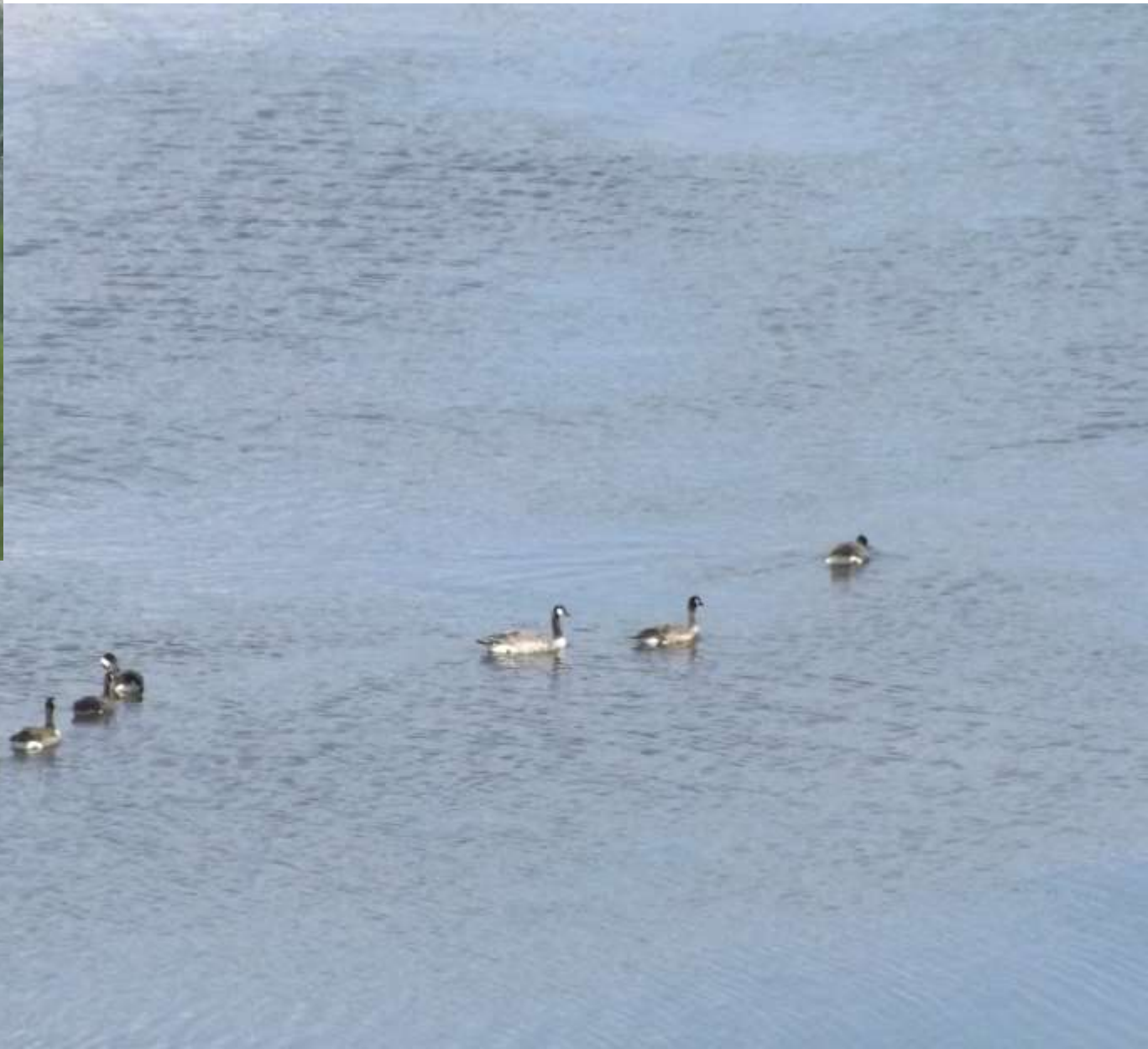


Canada geese are common in all water bodies throughout the park. I frequently observe them in the Yellowstone River, especially in Hayden Valley.



Canada goose family on the banks of Trout Lake.





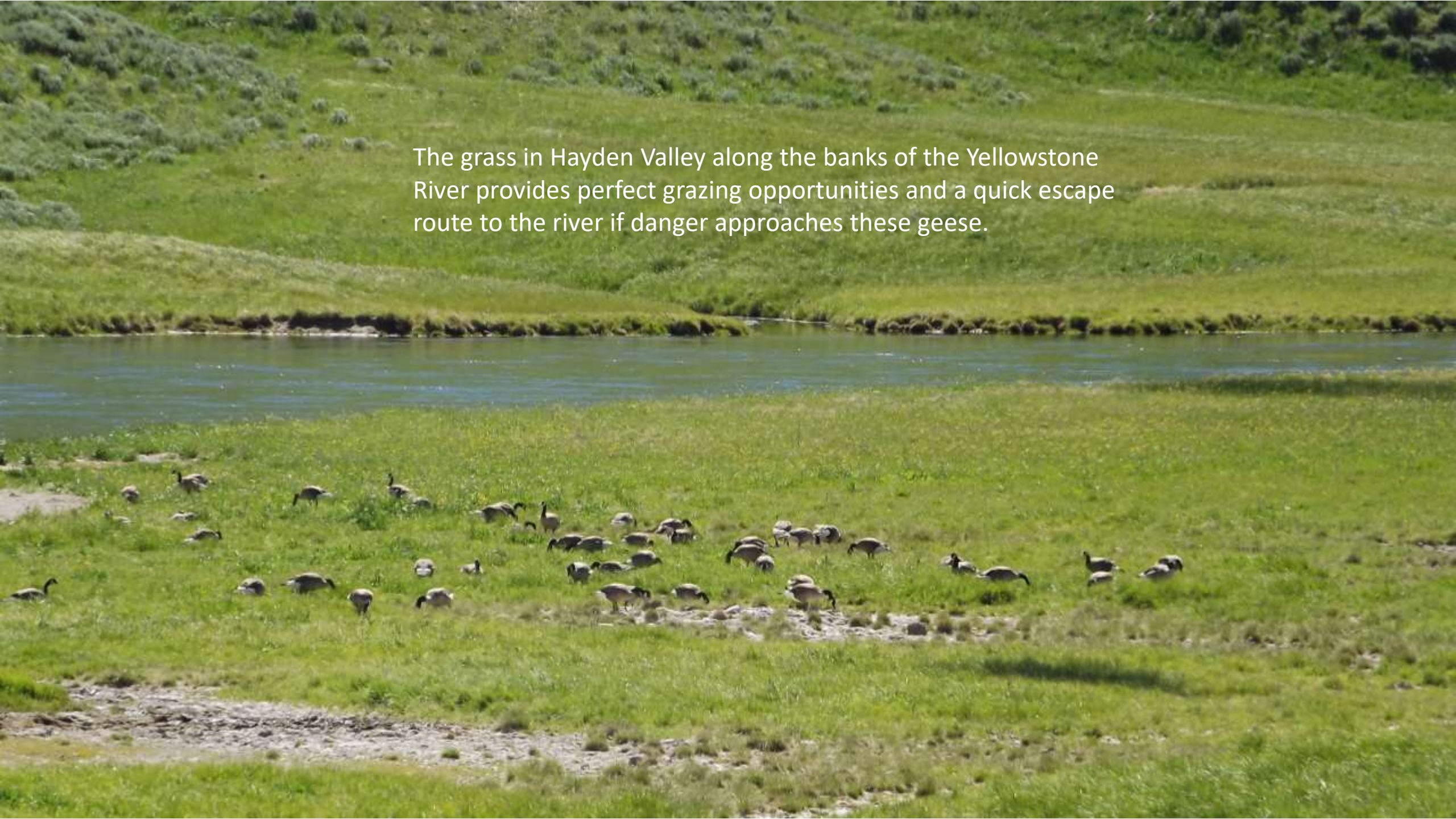
The typical 'V' shaped flying formation that Canada geese are famous for.



It was amazing to see this 'gaggle' of geese so relaxed on the edge of Trout Lake given all of the predators that could eat them, ranging from hawks and eagles to foxes and coyotes.



The grass in Hayden Valley along the banks of the Yellowstone River provides perfect grazing opportunities and a quick escape route to the river if danger approaches these geese.



Case in point!





Young Lazuli bunting. This guy reminded me of a bluebird, which we often see in the park. Yet, I don't ever seem to obtain pictures of them.



After consulting two field guides, these little birds seemed to be common pintails, but female American wigeons look very similar.





The great blue heron is common in Yellowstone and can be found near water. It is the largest of the herons with long legs, a sinuous neck, and a long, dagger-like bill that it uses to stab its prey.



Next page: Great blue heron in flight, a magnificent sight that is reminiscent of a pre-historic animal.



Dusky grouse on the Bunsen Peak hike. There are also ruffed grouse and spruce grouse in the park. I often see them on the side of the road in the Silver Gate area at dawn.





Ruffed grouse just off the Solfatara Creek Trail near the Norris Campground.



Cliff swallows in their nest under the roof of the Hitching Post portable bathrooms. These are cliff dwelling, insect eating birds who have adapted to human structures to make nests.



Another good-sized colony of cliff swallows can be observed on the walls of Soda Butte Cone (left). Here, a chick just leaving the nest but not yet fledged (flying) sits on the base of the cone.



Cliff swallow provisioning its young. It is incredible that they can make such elaborate nests (see next page), which seemingly defy gravity.





Killdeer at Mud Volcano. Killdeer are a shorebird but curiously live inland and use disturbed areas like ballfields, lawns, and even airports. They have a loud, distinct, almost obnoxious-sounding call.



Osprey adult and chick. Ospreys are also known as 'fish hawks'. Given that prey source, they are most often found near lakes and rivers. I see them quite often at home on Cape Cod, MA. Maybe I know how to quickly recognize them due to seeing them so frequently, as I also see them commonly in [Yellowstone too](#). That is interesting given that there are [only ~20 active nests monitored by the park](#).



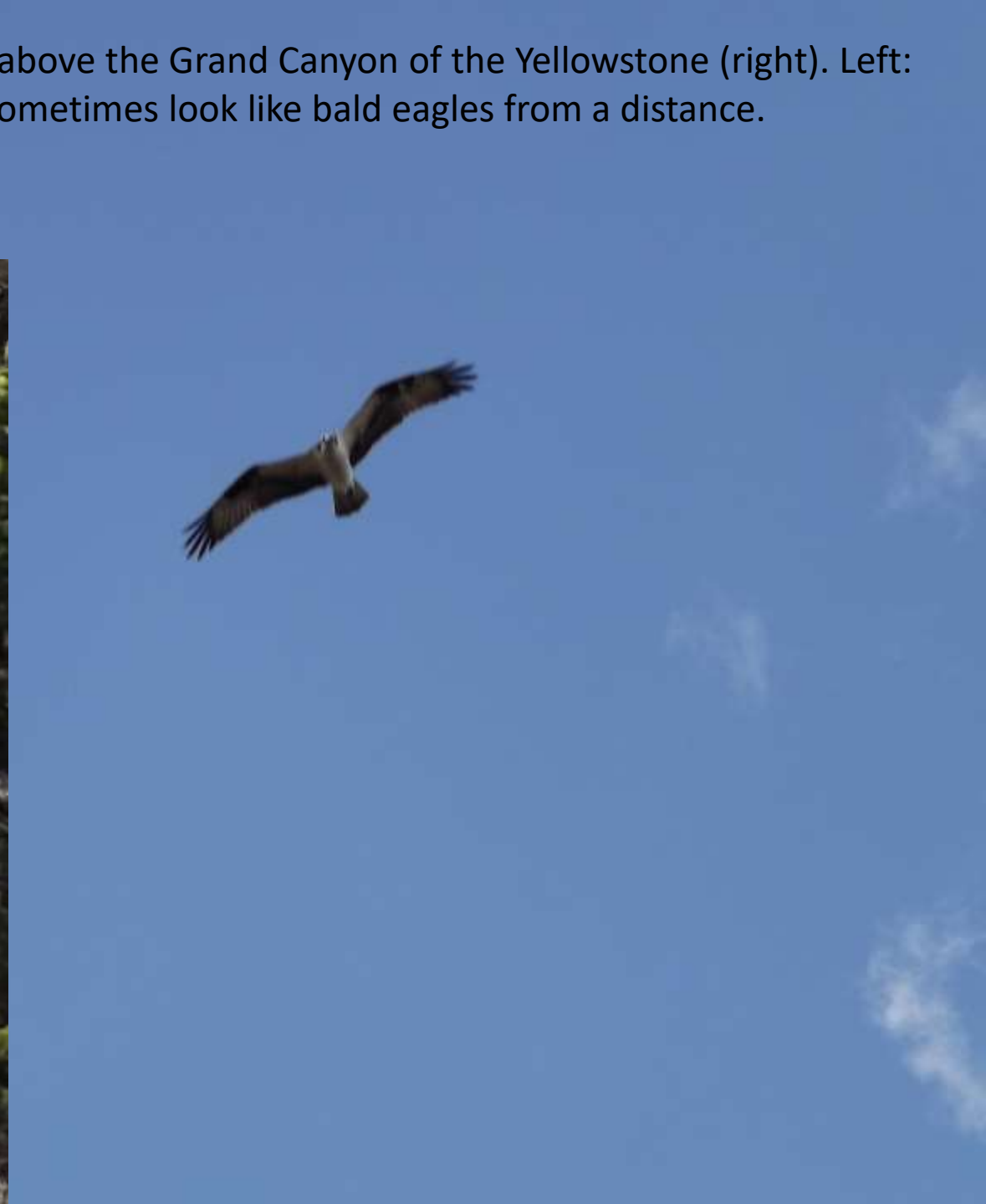




This large nest in Lamar Canyon has been used for years by ospreys and is a common spot for visitors to watch them raising their chicks. The picture on the left was from 2013 (also see next page, left picture) while the one on the right was taken during summer 2020.



Osprey flying above the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone (right). Left: Ospreys can sometimes look like bald eagles from a distance.

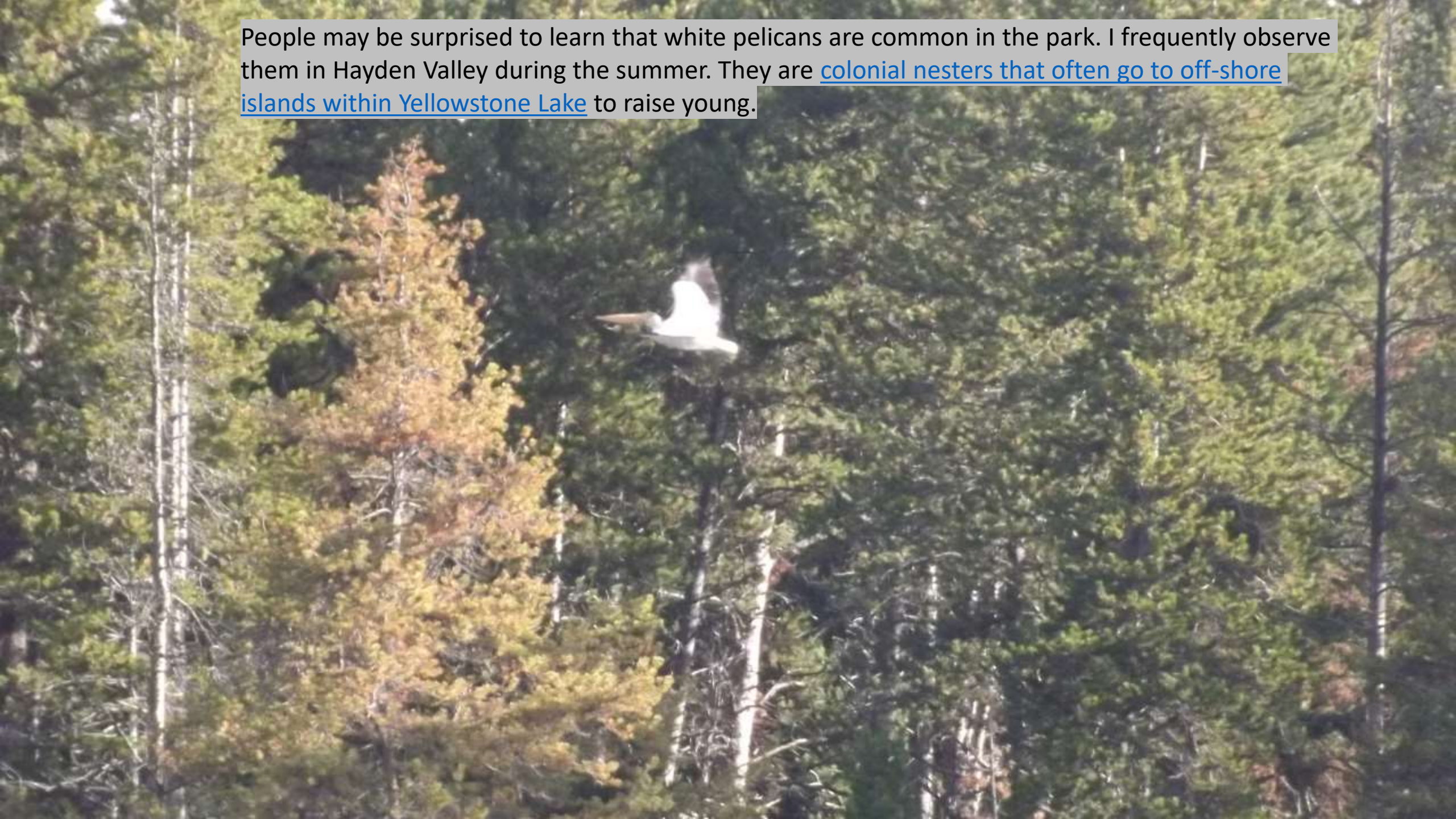


Owls are mostly nocturnal so are difficult to spot in Yellowstone and beyond. This nest of great horned owlets is in the village of Mammoth at park headquarters, hardly a wilderness location (also see next page). There are [7 species of owls that live in and around the park](#) with great horneds being the most common.





People may be surprised to learn that white pelicans are common in the park. I frequently observe them in Hayden Valley during the summer. They are [colonial nesters that often go to off-shore islands within Yellowstone Lake](#) to raise young.





American white pelicans are popular for wildlife watchers (top and next page), as they cruise the waterways and tributaries in and around the Yellowstone River (left). The pictures on this and the next two pages were taken in Hayden Valley.





This and next page: Good perspectives of white pelicans in the Yellowstone River in Hayden Valley.





Pelicans flying overhead.





Pelican Valley is north of Yellowstone Lake and only about 5 miles east of Hayden Valley. I have observed pelicans in their namesake before but the area is more famous for its high density of grizzly bears, which requires people to hike in groups when there. The region is also home to the Mollie's wolf pack. This group sometimes ventures 20 miles north into Lamar Valley, especially in the winter and early spring when most prey (especially elk) migrate out of this high elevation plateau near Yellowstone Lake.

Ravens are the largest member of the Corvidae or crow family. They are frequently seen throughout the park, such as this one in Hayden Valley. They also closely associate with wolves, as seen in many of the pictures in the *Wolf* chapter. They are highly intelligent, social birds.



Raven eating berries on the Yellowstone River Trail above Calcite and near the Yellowstone Picnic area.





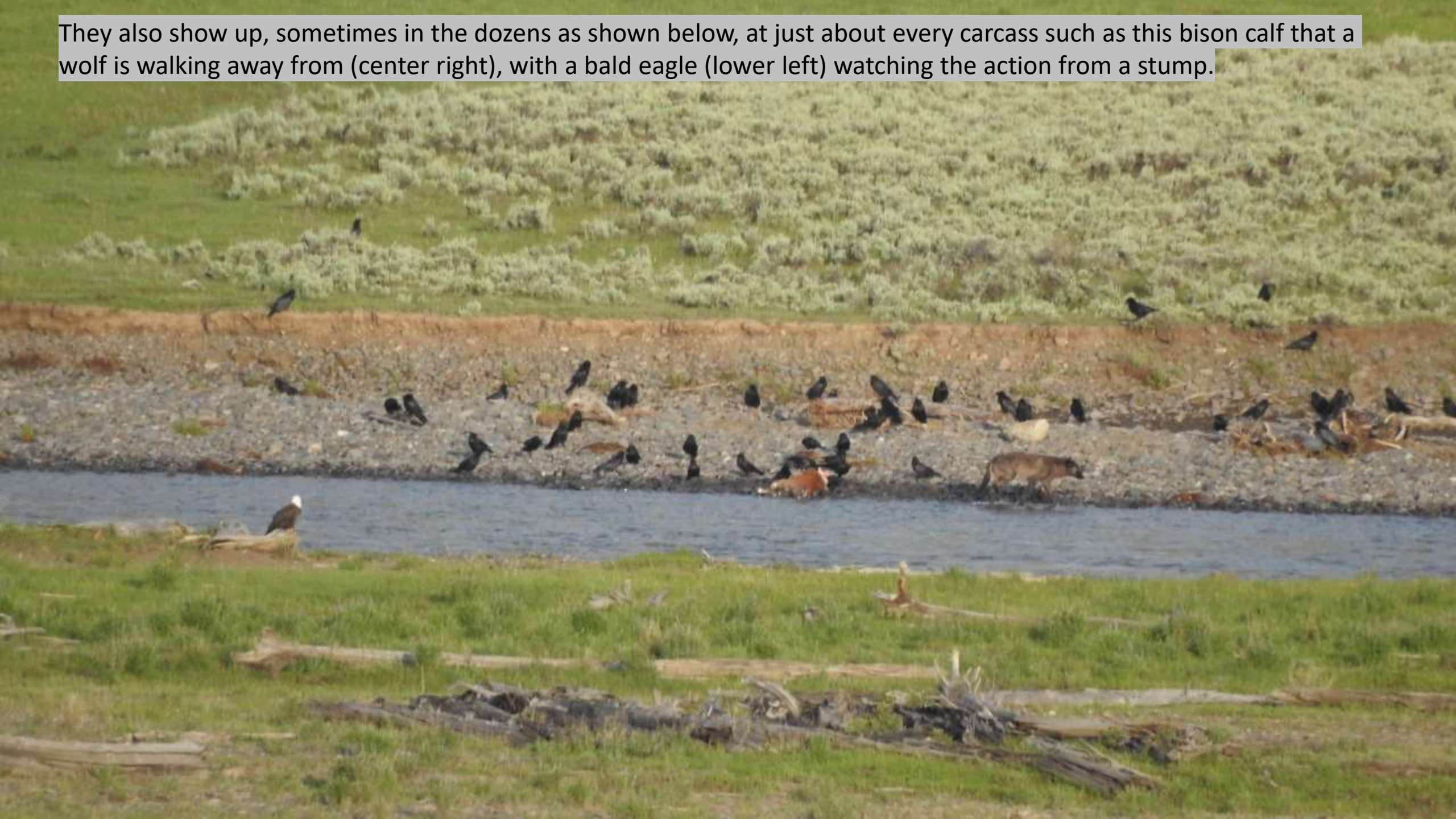
Adult raven (left) feeding young in Hayden Valley.



Ravens are incredibly smart animals and are found in just about every developed area scavenging for food.



They also show up, sometimes in the dozens as shown below, at just about every carcass such as this bison calf that a wolf is walking away from (center right), with a bald eagle (lower left) watching the action from a stump.





Red-tailed hawks are the most common hawk in the park and are easy for me to identify since I often see them soaring in the skies in Massachusetts as well. Red-tailed hawks eat mostly rodents and rabbits. They are the species that makes the loud shrilling sound often heard in the movies.



Next page: Rough-legged hawk or buzzard. They are fairly large hawks with broad wings that, compared to other Buteo hawks, are fairly long and narrow. Luckily a more knowledgeable birder helped me identify this one in Hayden Valley.





American robins are common throughout the country, including in Yellowstone. Their sweet, melodious call is always a welcome start to a spring or early summer morning.



As they say, 'The early bird gets the worm!'





Sandhill crane in Lamar Valley. These birds have a beautiful guttural call and are attractive, big animals standing 4 feet tall. I saw many on my [April 2021](#) trip, but often are not that close to them in the summer.

Next page: Sandhill crane near Pelican Creek in the central part of Yellowstone.





Good perspective of meadow with sandhill crane and Yellowstone Lake in the background.



Sandhill crane pair in Lamar River about a half mile from my location.



Trumpeter swans have a resonant call that echoes over Yellowstone's waterways when they fly. They are North America's largest waterfowl, with an impressive 8 foot wingspan. They are a recovering species in the U.S. with about 30 birds inhabiting the park. These birds were photographed in the Yellowstone River at Otter Creek north of Hayden Valley (also see next page).







Swan Lake Flat with Swan Lake. This is a beautiful area above Mammoth where I have not spent enough time wildlife watching. I know that swans are observed there every year, often nesting. It is a worthwhile area to look for bird life.

Turkey vulture, Blacktail Plateau. They once were rare in the park but climate change seems to have allowed these southern birds to move into Yellowstone as the region warms. I now often see them in the park and not just during my summer visits. They have the very distinct dihedral flying shape when they soar, using little energy as they soar and search for dead animals..

Next page: The white-crowned sparrow is one of [21 New World sparrow species who inhabit the park](#). This picture was taken at Soda Butte picnic area.



Turkey vulture circling above Lamar Valley on a cloudy summer day.





There are [9 species of woodpeckers](#) in the park, including this Williamson's sapsucker in a forest of fire-burnt trees below Bunsen Peak.



Other Animals

The previous chapters highlighted the vast majority of wildlife that you will observe in Yellowstone during the summer. However, there are other animals who are present in the park that either are extremely difficult to see (e.g., wild cats) or I just don't focus on photographing them when I am there (e.g., insects). Enjoy the final chapter on Yellowstone's wildlife. While this is relatively incomplete, I provide facts on each group of animals discussed.

Cougar (also called mountain lion and puma) tracks on the Lava Creek Trail between Blacktail Plateau and Mammoth.



Cats: Bobcats, Lynx, and Cougars

Three species of cats inhabit the park. All are elusive and difficult to see. I have never observed a live cat during any of my trips and it is rare for people who even live there to glimpse them. For example, folks that study wolves full-time might see one or two cougars a year, unless using radio-collars and other related technology. It is more common to spy their tracks (see previous page), which are more circular than a canid's oval print. Also, cats have 3 lobes on the bottom of the print and retractable claws which don't register in substrates like dirt, sand, snow, or mud.

The bobcat is the [smallest species and is relatively widespread](#), but secretive, in the park. Wildlife watchers sometimes observe them in the winter along the Madison River. The [lynx is uncommon in the park](#), but has been documented. They are medium-sized but have huge feet, which aides in their movement through deep snow. Cougars, also called mountain lions and pumas, are by far Yellowstone's largest felid species weighing 85-120 pounds for females and up to 170 pounds for males. They are [well established across the 'Northern Range' of the park](#), with a population of around 40 individuals. Deep snow prevents them from living year-round outside of that area. They are incredibly elusive and are rarely observed.

Reptiles and Amphibians

There are [6 confirmed species of reptiles in Yellowstone](#): bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, rubber boa, sagebrush lizard, common garter snake, and terrestrial garter snake. The cold environment of the park perhaps shouldn't make it a surprise as to the relative paucity of these vertebrates. I have observed terrestrial garter snakes infrequently in the park (despite seeing them regularly back home), such as at Norris Geyser Basin (next page, top picture) and at the 'Confluence' of the Lamar and Soda Butte Rivers (next page, bottom pictures). They are the [most common reptile in the park](#). I once quickly observed a sagebrush lizard at Norris Geyser Basin, having no idea at the time that they lived there. I spent nearly an hour searching for that picture, and finally located it, back in June 2006.

During the course of my research for this book, I was perplexed to learn that no turtles, which are reptiles, are located in the park. Apparently western painted turtles and common snapping turtles [live nearby, but not in Yellowstone](#). That was a group of animals I would've sworn I have seen before, especially since I see them so regularly back home (including box turtles). But when I thought about it I couldn't think of an actual location where I had observed one before, nor did I find anything in my field notes or picture files.

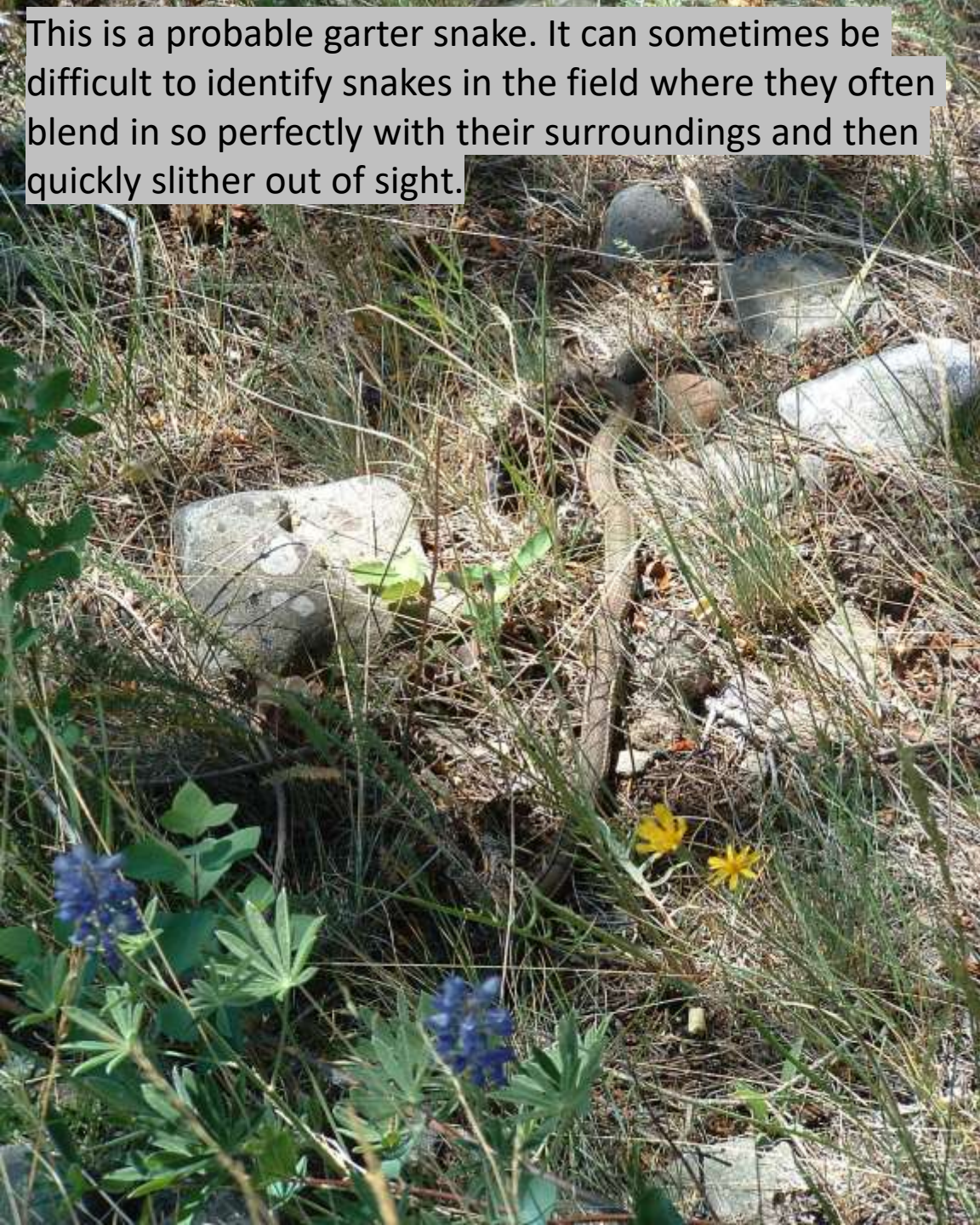


Terrestrial garter snakes. While road-killed (bottom pictures), we were able to obtain a close-up view of this individual.



Sagebrush lizard at Norris
Geyser Basin.





This is a probable garter snake. It can sometimes be difficult to identify snakes in the field where they often blend in so perfectly with their surroundings and then quickly slither out of sight.



Western toad, at the edge of Trout Lake, cooling off on a hot day.

There are 5 species of amphibians in the park: boreal chorus frogs, Columbia spotted frogs, western tiger salamanders, and western toads (see previous page) are all common, while the plains spadefoot is rarely seen. [Amphibians are valuable indicators of environmental stressors such as disease or climate change.](#) From the park service link: “Both amphibians and reptiles are ectothermic (cold-blooded), meaning they derive body heat from outside sources rather than generate it internally. Reptiles have scaly, dry skin. Some lay eggs; others bear live young. Amphibians have thin, moist glandular skin permeable to water and gases. The young must pass through a larval stage before changing into adults. Amphibious means double life and reflects the fact that salamanders, toads, and frogs live in water as larvae and on land for much of the rest of their lives.”

I often observe Columbia spotted frogs in lakes, ponds, and even rivers around the park. For the longest time, I thought they were northern leopard frogs until consulting the [park service's website.](#)





Columbia spotted frogs at Trout Lake (left and next page, left picture), along the Rescue Creek Trail (right), and near the Slough Creek Trail (next page, right picture).





Columbia spotted frogs at Trout Lake.

Insects

There are a variety of insects in Yellowstone. Describing them all would be worthy of a book in and of itself (e.g., [visit this website](#)). I witness many of them, especially mosquitos, during the summer. Beetles, grasshoppers, and butterflies are probably the most observable species because of their size. They are often in and around trails, especially in grassy areas. Butterflies, in my view, are the most beautiful of the insects. There are [many species in the park](#).

Callippe fritillary. Notice the rounded wings.





I could not identify these butterflies in Mammoth Hot Springs, despite the distinctive curvy and pointed hindwings near their abdomens.

Clouded sulfur butterfly on the Mt.
Washburn hike.





There were many butterflies on the decomposing remains of an elk. Most appear to be northern checkerspots. You'll also often see [butterflies on fresh animal scat](#) (poop) as that is a vital food and mineral source for them.

For a year, I assumed this was a black blister beetle that I saw on the Monument Geyser Basin Trail. However, in spring 2022 I had a fantastic Zoology student, Sam Jupin, who is going to the University of New Hampshire to train to be an entomologist. He made a convincing argument, based on the animal's abdomen, that it was actually a darkling beetle (the larval form of these guys are mealworms!). There are many species of beetles and insects in the park and I am far from an expert at identifying them, but many [helpful online sources](#) can guide you in this endeavor.





Mormon cricket. Both were observed on the Cache Creek Trail in Lamar Valley. The one on the top right has a sword-like ovipositor which identifies it as a female. They use them to dig holes to deposit their eggs in the ground.

At first I thought this was a two-striped grasshopper on the Slough Creek Trail by a scat pile, but after consulting field guides it appears to be an olive colored Mormon cricket. Notice her large head shield, which looks like body armor, and the sharp ovipositor that appears to be a tail.



Pallid-winged grasshoppers on sand along Sour Lake in the Mud Volcano Geyser Basin.



Fish

Yellowstone's native fish are an important part of the regions varied food webs, have great local economic significance, and provide exceptional visitor experiences. There are 11 native and 5 non-native species of fish. These include arctic grayling, whitefish, sculpin, minnows, and suckers, but trout are the namesake of the group. There are two species of native cutthroat trout and 4 species of non-native trout: lake, brown, brook (native to the east coast), and rainbow.

Lake trout are a serious threat to the biodiversity of the park as they have greatly reduced cutthroat trout abundance. Cutthroats feed dozens of Yellowstone's animals, including grizzly bears, otters, and eagles, when they travel up shallow tributaries to spawn. Lake trout ([see video on link](#)), conversely, live and lay their eggs in deep water, so are not accessible as a food source. The park has spent much effort and money in trying to eradicate them from Yellowstone Lake.

Cutthroat trout in a stream





Cutthroat trout are still observed in the Yellowstone River but the tributary above Trout Lake is one of the best and most reliable places to observe them (see next page).









Cutthroat trout spawning in the inlet stream to Trout Lake. These fish are somewhat inland due to waterfalls leading up to Trout Lake from Soda Butte Creek. It is unclear if non-native rainbow or brook trout hybridize with cutthroats here or if these are pure cutthroats.



Epilogue

I hope you continue to enjoy my Yellowstone book series, including [My Yellowstone Experience](#) (2013), [The Trip of a Lifetime](#) (2020), [Christmas in Yellowstone](#) (2021), and [Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone](#) (2021). With this fifth book (and the fourth one being a free, Open Access e-book) related to the park and its focus on the amazingly visible and abundant wildlife that lives there, I can't help but stress the importance of having national parks. Simply put, there is no possible way that I would have seen all the wildlife that I did without having a large area protected from human interference, especially human hunting. The [National Park \(NP\) Service's mission](#) of preserving 'unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations' is a model that the rest of the world has replicated. It has been extremely effective in protecting core wildlife populations and ecosystems as well as being an important boost to local economies as people vacation in these areas.

However, there are many places in our great country that do not have national parks. Other locations where they do have parks are small in size and heavily influenced by state wildlife agencies. Their goal is to ensure consumptive activities, even on park lands. To at least partly rectify this, I wrote a book pleading to create more national parks in the Northeast United States. [Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What is and What Could Be](#) is an Open Access, free e-book that anyone in the world can download. It makes the case to expand the NP System in the Northeast, beyond just having Acadia National Park as its only large "natural" park, by adding 3 units: Cape Cod NP in MA, Kancamagus NP in NH, and Maine Woods NP and Preserve. These three areas are already existing federal land and could immediately be added to the NP Service by an Act of Congress. Giving national park status to these areas would provide an important, higher level of protection to better safeguard these areas, and its resources, especially during politically volatile times. I strongly believe that NPs are "[America's Best Idea](#)", as Ken Burns eloquently noted. Creating these parks in the urbanized Northeast is important, especially since [wildlife watching is such of an important economic contributor](#) to the country, and animals need full protection to be as visible as they are in places such as Yellowstone.

I urge readers to peruse [Northeastern U.S. National Parks](#) (see book cover on next page) and contact the legislators and other decision-makers listed on the last page of the read to make that dream a reality in the Northeastern United States.

Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What is and What Could Be

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www.EasternCoyoteResearch.com

www.MyYellowstoneExperience.org



Moose in proposed 'Kancamagus National Park'