NEWSLETTER

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Across the Zooniverse

Greetings, volunteers! Another year is winding down, and we are now smack dab in the middle of the holiday season again. From the entire Focus on Wildlife team, we would like to wish all of our dedicated volunteers the happiest of holidays, filled with enjoyment and fun with family and friends (and hopefully a little time in there for Zooniverse ID's as well)!

In early November, the Focus on Wildlife project leadership team held an evening informational session for our project volunteers at the Watershed Stewardship Center in Parma, Ohio. Jon Cepek, Wildlife Ecologist with the Cleveland Metroparks, presented some of the findings from the study, as well as some additional background information and a photo montage from the project. In addition, Remington Moll from the RECaP Lab at Michigan State University presented a paper he will soon publish which was based on data collected from our Focus on Wildlife project, and focuses on interactions between humans, coyotes and red foxes. The evening was packed with lots of information and Q&A (and a hearty appetizer spread to boot).

Easy as 1 To 3

Many of the attendees at the aforementioned meeting, as well as many of the readers of this newsletter, are active project volunteers who travel out to our cameras each month and collect the photos that ultimately appear on the Zooniverse site. Those volunteers are familiar with a change that was made to our camera settings several months back, which was requested by our project team, and which will lead to an eventual improvement in the quality and content of the wildlife photos seen on the website.

Previously, cameras had been set for a minimum one-minute time interval between photos taken. Based on this setting, once an animal appeared in the camera's field of view and triggered a photo, the camera could not fire again for a full minute. However, setting the camera for this one-minute time delay also meant that false triggers, such as leaves or tall grass blowing in the wind, could also force multiple photos in succession, taken as frequently as one minute apart. Under certain outdoor conditions, such as a

windy day, these false triggers could cause hundreds of successive photos to be snapped, with no wildlife in view in any of the photos. As anyone who regularly classifies photos on Zooniverse knows, the number of "nothing there" photos can dampen your enthusiasm for IDing photos on Zooniverse. The Focus on Wildlife team is developing special software to filter out these "false positive" photos, but until this is available, they felt they needed to develop other methods to reduce the number of “nothing there” images.

The team worked in conjunction with the RECaP lab at Michigan State University to analyze whether there would be any adverse impact to lengthening the minimum time delay between photos from 1 minute to 3 minutes. The rationale behind this study was that large chunks of “nothing there” photos could potentially be reduced by a factor of three by increasing the time gap to 3 minutes. However, on the other hand, there is also a potential that actual wildlife photo opportunities could be lost by increasing this time interval, and wildlife activity occurring during the intervening 3 minutes could be missed. The results of the analysis suggested that the risk of missed shots was minimal, and that benefits could be realized through reduction in the number of “empty” shots.

Camera time interval settings were modified from 1 to 3 minutes by volunteers during the July camera visits. However, since our project currently has a very large backlog of photos, the improvement to Zooniverse users may not be apparent for some time. Current photos appearing on Zooniverse are over a year old, so photos taken after the above change was made will not be seen by website users for quite a while. The team is hoping that, once the software to filter out false positives is implemented, it will help speed up the ID work on Zooniverse, allowing us to catch up to more current photos. The project team continues to seek out opportunities to improve photo quality and content, and to enhance the website volunteer user experience in general. More details regarding these efforts will be discussed in future newsletters.

Species Spotlight

In this column, we feature an animal species seen in our wildlife photos, providing facts and information about the species, as well as helpful tips for identifying it in our Zooniverse photos. This month's Species Spotlight highlights the grey fox.

The grey fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) is of special interest to our project currently, because they have recently been discovered in several photos from our very own wildlife cameras! Multiple cameras from the same west-side reservation have captured images of active grey foxes in night-time photos. This is exciting news, because populations of grey foxes have generally been declining across Ohio in recent times, and there have been no documented sightings within the Cleveland Metroparks for a number of years.

Like red foxes, grey foxes are opportunistic feeders, consuming the most easily obtainable foods, including small mammals and birds, insects, eggs, fruits, grasses, and

even roadkill. Female grey foxes normally give birth to a litter of 4 to 10 young, and their gestation period of 63 days is almost 2 weeks longer than that of the red fox. Male and female grey foxes are similar in size, in contrast to red foxes, which exhibit sexual dimorphism, with females being about 20% smaller than males. Grey foxes have retractable nails, and consequently actually have the ability to climb trees, making them the only member of the canid family to have this skill.

While red foxes are seen fairly frequently in our project's photos on Zooniverse, grey foxes may not be as easily identifiable for the average person. Grey foxes are roughly similar to red foxes in size and weight, leading to further identification difficulty. However, red foxes can be distinguished by their reddish fur coat, black lower legs and feet, black-edged ears and white-tipped tail. By contrast, grey foxes lack the black feet and white tail tip, and will typically have a grizzled greyish coat, with a black stripe running down the top of the tail, ending with a black tail tip. Grey foxes have also been described as having a strong neck and an almost “cat-like” face. Grey foxes are very secretive and are almost exclusively nocturnal, so a fox seen in one of our daytime photos on Zooniverse will more than likely be a red fox.

Keep checking our photos on Zooniverse! You may be fortunate enough to come across an exciting and rare photo of the elusive grey fox!

Grey foxes seen on our wildlife cameras

ID Tips

In each newsletter, we would like to include a few tips to assist you with identifying those "hard to determine" animals in the photos you are viewing. Here are a couple of suggestions you may not have thought of:

- For many camera locations, there are logs or sticks lying on the ground immediately in front of the camera. In night-time photos from these cameras, if you do not see any obvious animals elsewhere in the photo, look closely at the logs for slight movement or eyeshine that might be a small rodent. These animals are usually small enough that they are difficult to see at first glance, but if they are close enough to the camera, they can trigger it to shoot a photo.

- Specific identification of these animals is not critical. Since they are small in size, and typically are seen only in night-time photos that are generally of poorer clarity, there is a generic identification tag of "Mouse or Mole or Vole or Rat" that can be selected.

As always, use your best judgment when providing identifications, but always consider other factors such as the position of the animal within the photo, size of the animal relative to other objects within the photo, etc.

A mouse showing eyeshine (lower right side of photo)

Other Wildlife Camera Projects

In addition to the Cleveland Metroparks "Focus on Wildlife" project, there are many other wildlife camera projects in progress across the U.S. and abroad. In this newsletter, we would like to feature interesting findings from other projects, in addition to our own.

Wildlife camera catches uncollared mountain lion roaming the Hollywood Hills

Source: http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-mountain-lion-spotted-20171031-story.html

A strategically placed wildlife camera captured the above photo of a mountain lion in the Hollywood Hills in late October, 2017. The lights of Los Angeles can be seen in the background of the photo. The camera is managed by Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW) and the Laurel Canyon Association, and is placed on a 17-acre parcel of protected land in Laurel Canyon. The absence of a collar suggests that this particular cat has never before been captured and collared for the purposes of tracking its whereabouts.

Although "mountain lion" is listed among the mammals that might be seen in our "Focus on Wildlife" project on Zooniverse, we have yet to confirm an observation of one among the many thousands of animals that have been identified to date. Sporadic reports of mountain lion sightings in Ohio occur from time to time, and a couple have been documented in recent years in Shawnee State Forest in southern Ohio. As wild animals continue to expand their ranges and adapt to urban settings, a photo capture similar to the one above could someday happen within our own Cleveland Metroparks.

Cool Photos

To close out the newsletter, we would like to feature cool photos from our own Cleveland Metroparks wildlife camera study. If you would like to "nominate" a photo that you have come across, please call out the photo on Zooniverse using the "#cool" hashtag, or save it to a collection.

This issue's "Cool Photos" column features Part 2 of the magic camera! In the last issue we showed photos of a variety of mammal species, all taken by the same camera located within a west-side Metroparks reservation. Considering its proximity to a nearby residential area, this camera attracts an amazing biodiversity, and provides frequent high quality images of the various species that visit it. In Part 2 below, you will see more great shots from this same camera, this time of bird species.

American robin

Juvenile American robin

Brown thrasher

Wild turkey

White-breasted nuthatch

Common grackle

Mourning dove

Northern cardinal and downy woodpecker

Red-bellied woodpecker

Blue jay

Newsletter compiled by John Felix (volunteer)