

Injured bobcat found in Boulder County park can't be saved

Animal possibly struck by car at Heil Valley Ranch

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The Boulder County Sheriff's Department Animal Control attempted to save an injured female bobcat at Heil Valley Ranch on Wednesday, but the cat was put down due to serious injuries,

possibly from a car. For more photos and a video, go to www.dailycamera.com. Cliff Grassmick
Staff Photographer May ...

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Animal control specialist Brandy Perkins puts a hoop around an injured bobcat's neck on Wednesday at Heil Valley Ranch in Boulder County. Animal control officers tried to save an injured female bobcat, but the cat was put down due to its injuries, possibly from being hit by car. (*Cliff Grassmick / Staff Photographer*)

Boulder County's juxtaposition of civilization growing rapidly at the front door of the wilds spelled tragedy for one unlucky animal earlier today.

A young female bobcat that was discovered injured at the Heil Valley Ranch parking lot this morning was euthanized shortly before noon by animal control officers who tried hard to save it.

A Boulder County Sheriff's Office animal control team responded to the parking lot mid-morning, after a member of the public texted to them a photo of the injured animal, showing bloodied front legs, theorizing that it had been hit by a car.

At first, the tawny, spotted cat was not visible, having made it out of the grassy median area where the tipster first had seen it.

Animal control officers Brandy Perkins and Sara Spensieri, joined by several other Boulder County Parks and Open Space employees who had been at nearby Heil Valley Ranch 2 on related business, fanned out in the immediate vicinity, to see whether it had sought refuge nearby.

Before long, Perkins spotted the bobcat in a bed of pine needles beneath a stand of ponderosa pine.

"I thought at first it was a carcass, when I walked by her," Perkins said. "Then I saw a head stick up and look."

Consultation by phone with Colorado Parks & Wildlife indicated that it would be 90 minutes before a state wildlife officer could be there. It was also established that Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center could take the cat, but not if its injuries were compound fractures.

An initial cautious approach by Perkins, Spensieri and county senior wildlife biologist Susan Spaulding spooked the bobcat into making a frantic run uphill toward the west, which came quickly to a halt about 40 feet away at the top of a rocky draw.

There, Perkins was able to get close enough with a Ketch-All animal control stick to slip the loop at one end of it gently around the animal's neck. She stayed with the cat, keeping it quiet, until her two partners toted a large carrying crate to them.

The animal erupted in a brief and frenzied struggle when Perkins then lifted it into the open crate, and it was only after it was safely caged that the officers saw fractures in both elbows. The left leg was revealed to have suffered a compound fracture.

It is only speculation that the injuries, which appeared to also include puncture wounds to its chest, were caused by a car. But, given that it was first spotted in a parking area, the wildlife officers believe it's a good theory.

Spaulding said the lesson to be taken from the sad encounter was simple.

"Watch for wildlife on the road," she urged the public. "It's a huge cause of mortality for wildlife."

The fate of the animal, estimated to weigh no more than about 20 pounds and probably 1-to-2 years old, was sealed. After a final consultation with Colorado Parks & Wildlife by phone,

Perkins used a syringe placed at the end of a jab-pole to inject the animal with the tranquilizer Rompun, containing the chemical Xylazine.

"That helps lower the stress level and the pain" of the euthanasia injection that was soon to follow, Perkins said, which would otherwise be felt as a painful burning sensation.

When it was clear that the tranquilizer had done its work, Perkins then administered the pentobarbital sodium injection, a solution also known as Fatal-Plus.

It was quiet on the hillside, save for the songs of the birds and the wind in the trees, as the cat's heart soon slowed to a stop.

The animal's next and final destination would be the Humane Society of Boulder Valley, where it was to be cremated.

Perkins raised her sunglasses to wipe her eyes, as she stood to remove her gloves and begin packing away the tools that brought the morning's drama to a close.

"It's been 18 years and it never gets easier," Perkins said, a few minutes later, alluding to her time on the job.

"It does break your heart, because it's a human-caused injury," she said. "It's a beautiful animal, and we wish we could have saved her."

Then it was back into her truck and on to the next assignment.

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