

# The Beasts Among Us

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As God's new year begins (Exodus 12:2), His creation is once again springing to life, displaying in sometimes awesome ways the beauty and freshness of nature. Trees are putting forth new leaves. Flowers, shrubs and fruit trees are arrayed in brilliant shades of red, pink, yellow, blue, white and other colors—beautiful hues only God could have made (Genesis 1:11-12; Matthew 6:28-30).

The animal kingdom is also producing its next generation. Every spring adds millions of young birds and beasts to the world's animal population. These animals are simply following the dictates of their instinct, for God, in His blessing on them, says, "Be fruitful and multiply. . . . Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind" (Genesis 1:22, 24).

But on a planet with only so much room, man and beast have fought intermittent battles for living space. Because of his fame for killing and driving off ferocious animals that endangered the people of his day, Nimrod became a leader of men after the Flood (Genesis 10:8-9). Before leading them to Canaan, God told the Israelites He would

send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. (Exodus 23:28-30)

Confrontations between men and animals have occurred throughout history. As migrating peoples have opened up new territories for settlement, conflicts inevitably arose. Whether mountain lions, bears, wolves, snakes, alligators, spiders, scorpions or other beasts, men have always tried to eradicate predators to protect themselves.

## Threatened Animals Now Thriving

When settlers began arriving in America, the abundance of wildlife provided them with their major source of food. But as the human population grew in certain areas, the wildlife population decreased and/or moved on to other wild lands. By the early 1900s, the whitetailed deer, the wild turkey, the Canadian goose and the black bear were near extinction. In 1967 the alligator was placed on the federal endangered species list.

Amazingly, however, all five of these species have survived man's relentless onslaught and the destruction of their habitats. What is more startling is that these same species are *thriving* in densely populated areas on the east coast! In fact, some of them are considered nuisances by the suburbanites whose yards, gardens and buildings are being damaged by them.

With their voracious appetites, whitetailed deer threaten commercial crops, timberlands and private trees, shrubs, flowers and grass. With the elimination of their natural predators, the deer's return has been so rapid that some people refer to them as "hoofed rats"! Some areas of the northeastern U.S. have posted speed limits as low as ten miles per hour at deer crossings.

The wild turkey can now be found in every state but Alaska, and they are seeking out additional feeding grounds in populated areas. At least 130,000 Canadian geese no longer feel the need to migrate but remain on the migratory route, where they cause significant damage to crops, and foul beaches, ponds, lawns and sidewalks with their droppings.

The predators are no different. The black bear now roams all of the U.S. mainland, with its greatest concentration in the east. The alligator has totally recovered in Florida, where the state Game Commission receives nearly 10,000 complaints each year from frightened citizens *in the cities*. The gray wolf is thriving in Canada, and will soon be reintroduced in the U.S. In Canada more than thirty wolf attacks against livestock were reported in 1994. As a proof of their recovery, coyotes have even been sighted in the Bronx!

### **Fulfilled Prophecy?**

Could these "remarkable recoveries" be the first signs of fulfilled prophecy? As the nations of Israel plunge toward total decay and disaster, they may be causing—directly or indirectly—a future plague. Notice one of the curses of disobedience in Leviticus 26:21-22:

Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins. *I will also send wild beasts among you*, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate. (see Deuteronomy 28:26)

One of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse also pertains to this subject:

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, *and by the beasts of the earth*. (Revelation 6: 8)

These prophecies could also include animal-caused or -carried diseases like rabies, malaria, bubonic plague, hantavirus and Lyme disease. Incidentally, rabies cases have doubled in the U.S. in just the last few months.

Though Amos uses fleeing from animals as a metaphor to illustrate the terrors of the day of God's judgment, he may also be speaking literally:

It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. (Amos 5:19)

We do not know for sure if the resurgence of these species will eventually lead to such a scenario, but this is another small facet of this world we can watch as the end draws ever closer.