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The Daily Press

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BEAR PROJECT IN LIMBO



SARA NEMEC/STAFF PHOTO

A young bear cub rests his paws on a member of the Ashland Bear Project Sunday afternoon as the group collects data from his slumbering mother. View more photos or a video from the day's events at www.ashlandwi.com.

Bye-bye, bears!

Folks in Ashland County might not have known, but Sunday was the end of an era.

After about two decades of work, retired science teacher Bruce Prentice took the final radio collar



Sara Nemec

off of Sow 51 — a slumbering female black bear — putting the Ashland Bear Project on an indefinite hiatus.

The Ashland Bear Project is a group of middle and high school-aged students who share a special interest in the local bruin population. Led by Prentice — who founded the project — and retired middle school teacher Ron Nemec (this reporter's father), the group tracked female black bears through the use of radio telemetry, gathering data from the sleeping animals wintering in their dens.

Over the years Prentice estimates the group has worked with about 38 animals, with an average of five or six sows collared at a time, sharing data with the state Department of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin System and other researchers.

The permit Prentice has allows for the group



SARA NEMEC/STAFF PHOTO

Retired teacher Bruce Prentice removes the radio collar from Sow 51, a mother bear who has been visited by the Ashland Bear Project for about four years. The project is now suspended indefinitely.

to collar up to seven animals at a time — a paper he's not going to give up, just in case someone comes forward wanting to resurrect the project.

"It's hard because it's been a very important learning tool throughout

the years," Prentice said of putting the program on hold. "It's been important to me and it's been important to a lot of my students."

Prentice made the decision to stop the program

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BEARS: A truly amazing experience

FROM PAGE 1

after he and Nemeć retired and found it difficult to get replacements. Prentice also said with district funding being tight, he wasn't sure the program would be allowed a future anyhow.

On Sunday the group met with UW-Stevens Point researchers and students in the Ashland High School parking lot, following Prentice in his "bearmobile," a rusting jeep with a giant antenna sticking from its roof, to an undisclosed location in Ashland County.

The den surprisingly wasn't far from the road, but the deep snow made

it slow going as we crept as quietly as possible toward the bruin's hiding place. After the she-bear had been safely tranquilized, the young project members and this excited reporter were able to make the rest of the way to the den for an up-close-and-personal encounter.

Approaching the den, the project members sprang into action, with one brave student even crawling inside to retrieve Sow 51's precious cargo: Three cubs.

The infants squalled and blue eyes blinked furiously as they made their way into the afternoon sunlight and the waiting arms of the project members. At about 2 months old, the young bears had to be kept warm and were snuggled inside winter coats.

Cradling the cubs was an amazing and truly once-in-a-lifetime experience, made all the better by their tiny pink noses and puppy-like smell. They were absolutely adorable, but one was always reminded of their wild status by the sharp claws clinging to your



SARA NEMEC/STAFF PHOTO

Maggie Heino of UW-Stevens Point, left, and the Ashland Bear Project's Bruce Prentice examine Sow 51 Sunday afternoon at an undisclosed location in Ashland County.

clothes, ready to help the baby scale your body like a tree.

But time with the cubs was really just a fringe benefit of coming along on the trip. The real reason for the excursion was to collect data — mainly weight, heart and respi-

ratory rates — to determine the health of the animals. To accomplish this, the approximately 12- to 14-year-old, 285-pound mother bear was hoisted from her den and given a once-over, with students recording the necessary items on a clipboard.

And the end of this real-world experience of allowing students to collect scientific information in the field is something Prentice lamented.

Over the years, the Ashland Bear Project not only gave students a window into the natural world, but helped many gain admission into colleges and universities with the valuable skills they had honed in the project. Some even found careers in the natural sci-

ences, inspired by what they had learned in the wilderness.

Perhaps unbeknownst to him, Prentice had also helped a young college student discover a non-science-related career. In the spring of 2008, I wrote my very first article as a journalism major, which I later submitted to The Daily Press. The subject: The Ashland Bear Project. My assignment quickly became my first published article thanks to Prentice's willingness to submit to several interviews conducted by a fumbling student attempting to find her voice.

Over the years I had heard many stories of my dad's bear adventures with Prentice, though I was never invited to tag along. The project stressed science, not people who wanted to ogle bears, so naturally I didn't get to go. Therefore, my presence at Sow 51's den was special. I knew I was there to record what could have been the project's final excursion.

Prentice's removal of the mother bear's collar was a somber moment in the midst of screeching 5-pound cubs, as was the tobacco ceremony he conducted after the den was processed, thanking 51 for the knowledge she had shared with them.

I only hope Prentice and Nemeć know that many are thankful for the knowledge and guidance they have helped bestow on many area students, myself included.

From my first article published June 21, 2008:

"As the weather in northern Wisconsin continues to warm, the bears and their cubs will soon emerge from their dens, blinking in the sunlight.

"With the winter's snow melted, the bears will begin to roam and feed again. The mother bear will teach her young cubs how to survive, ensuring not only their survival, but the survival of the Ashland Bear Project."

Or so we hope.

Sara Nemeć can be reached at snemeć@ashlanddailypress.net.

BAY CINEMA 6

ACT OF VALOR **R**
MON.-THURS. 5:40 & 8:00

THE LORAX in 3D **PG**
MON.-THURS. 5:40 & 7:40

JOURNEY 2 (in 2D ONLY)
THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND **PG**
MON.-THURS. 5:30 & 7:40

THE VOW **PG-13**
MON.-THURS. 5:30 & 7:50

GHOST RIDER 2 in 3D **PG-13**
MON.-THURS. 6:00 & 8:00

PROJECT X **PG-13**
MON.-THURS. 5:50 & 7:50

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PRIME-TIME TV LISTINGS

Thursday Evening

Please visit <http://www.ashlandwi.com/> for complete and updated television listings.

March 8, 2012

	6 p.m.	6:30	7 p.m.	7:30	8 p.m.	8:30	9 p.m.	9:30	10 p.m.	10:30	11 p.m.	11:30
CW	2 Seinfeld "The Plinkoats"	Seinfeld	The Vampire Diaries Caroline is unable to stop a tragedy.	Supernatural "Ripco Man" A demon from the past returns.	CW 2 News at Nine	Til Death "Ali Abroad"	The King of Queens	South Park	South Park	Roseanne "Workin' Overtime"		
FOX	5 Foxnews at 6 (N)	Two and a Half Men	American Idol "I Voted Off" The contestants face elimination.	The Finder A teen who went missing during a storm.	Fox 21 News at 9 (N)	(05) Two and a Half Men	(35) The Big Bang Theory	(05) How I Met Your Mother	(35) Paid Program			
KBJR	6 KBJR 6 and Range 11 News	Wheel of Fortune	30 Rock (N)	The Office "Last Day in Florida"	Up All Night (N)	Awake "The Little Guy" Michael deals with his two worlds.	KBJR 6 and Range 11 News	(35) The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	Late Night With Jimmy Fallon			
KDLH	3 CBS Evening News/Pelley	KDLH 3 News at 6:30	The Big Bang Theory (N)	(31) The Big Bang Theory	Person of Interest "Baby Blue" A 6-month-old baby is the latest PCI.	The Mentalist "Cheap Burgandy" Jane helps Agent Susan Darcy.	KDLH 3 News at Ten (N)	(35) Late Show With David Letterman	Late Late Show/Craig Ferguson			
MNT	9 30 Rock Jack's nemesis returns.	30 Rock "Let's Slay Together"	Without a Trace "The Source" A television reporter vanishes.	Without a Trace "Cam U" Team searches for a missing officer.	TMZ (N)	Family Guy	Family Guy	American Dad	American Dad "Can't Stan You"	It's Always Sunny in Phila.		
WDIO	10 High School Hockey MSHSL Class AA Tournament, Third Quarterfinal: Teams TBA. From Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn. (N) (Live)	High School Hockey MSHSL Class AA Tournament, Fourth Quarterfinal: Teams TBA. From Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn. (N) (Live)	Eyewitness News at Ten (N)	(35) Nightline								
WDSE	8 PBS NewsHour (N)	Great Gardening "Spring Gardening Special"	Lost Duluth	BBC World News	Nightly Business Report (N)	The Playlist	Independent Lens "Bulldo"					
WGN-A	11 America's Funniest Home Videos Baseball mishaps; practical jokes.	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	WGN News at Nine (N)	30 Rock Jack's nemesis returns.	Scrubs "My New Kiff"	It's Always Sunny in Phila.			
WLEF	13 PBS NewsHour (N)	Elvis '56 Presley's early years.	Live From the Artists Den "Adele" Adele performs.	Dr. Wayne Dyer: Wishes Fulfilled	Getting the most out of life.							