

Bam Bam gets the boot: G&F relocates popular bighorn sheep over concern for his, public's safety



Wyoming Game and Fish personnel lure "Bam Bam" the bighorn sheep into a trailer last week. Bam Bam was transported from Sinks Canyon State Park to a new home on the north end of the range after growing concern he might injure himself or visitors at the park. (Courtesy/Wyoming Game and Fish Department)

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GREEN RIVER -- Like a lot of two-legged celebrities unaccustomed to the spotlight, this four-legged star couldn't handle fame either.

He rose quickly to the top of the YouTube.com charts, then turned on his adoring fans and now he's got a long, rocky climb back from seeming obscurity.

"Bam Bam" the famous bighorn ram has been banished from Sinks Canyon State Park.

The bighorn sheep who gained local popularity and a devoted following on the Internet was moved to a new home in the eastern Wind River Mountains last week by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

"We hope he will stay where he's at and live a happy sheep life," Sinks Canyon State Park Naturalist Randy Wise said. "He was all by himself here ... and we all felt he was kind of lonely and just looking for some company."

The ram had become something of a local celebrity because he was so tame and easy to pet, Wise said in a phone interview Tuesday.

But he was also prone to chasing visitors around the park for no apparent reason.

"Why he chased any given person, we just don't know," Wise said. "Ten people could walk up to him and he would be just fine, but that 11th person he'd charge for some reason."

The ram earned the moniker Bam Bam after park officials discovered his penchant for butting vehicles. When he saw his reflection, Bam Bam tended to break taillights and mirrors on cars in the parking lot.

"Pretty much every park vehicle and many of our personal vehicles have broken taillights or some pretty good dents in them," Wise said.

"You could hear that sound of him thumping on a vehicle all the time. ... You'd run out and of course, it'd be too late by then."

So early one morning last week, several wily Game and Fish biologists lured Bam Bam into a trailer and transported him to his new home in the north end of the range.

"It went as smoothly as any transplant could," said Kent Schmidlin of the agency's Lander Regional office. "Now he can be with other wild sheep and live like he's supposed to."

People from around the world visiting the park over the past few years got close-up looks at the ram, which Wise said was a rarity among bighorn sheep. Bam Bam even starred in his own YouTube video earlier this year in which he was video-taped charging a truck in the park.

"He was so habituated, he would just walk up to people and they would feed and pet him," Wise said.

"But he sort of get a wild hair every once in a while and started chasing people or cornering them against fences, butting cars and things like that," Wise said. "The problem was getting worse. He was just getting more and more aggressive."

Park Superintendent Darrel Trembly said it became too easy for people driving through the park to stop and pet or feed Bam Bam by the roadside.

"It was only a matter of time before someone got hurt, or he got hit by a vehicle," he said.

Last survivor

The popular Sinks Canyon State Park is located six miles south of Lander on Highway 131 in central Wyoming's Fremont County.

The park contains hiking trails, a visitors center and abundant wildlife, and offers camping, rock climbing and fishing opportunities.

The park also features a geologic phenomenon in which the Popo Agie River vanishes into a large cavern known as the Sinks, but reappears in a trout-filled pool called the Rise about a half-mile down the canyon.

The approximately 7-year-old Bam Bam was one of the last surviving bighorn sheep from the Sinks Canyon herd that was transplanted to the region in the early 1990s.

"There were two big transplants of sheep into this canyon back then, with the idea they would take because it's great habitat for sheep," Wise said. "Unfortunately, it just didn't work out for a variety of reasons, most prominently because of disease. ... So over the years the herd dwindled down to just two rams and a ewe last year.

"The other ram died over the winter and the ewe just sort of disappeared and we were left with Bam Bam."

He said park personnel spent most of the summer trying in vain to haze Bam Bam back up the hill and away from roads and people. After consulting with Game and Fish staff, park officials decided to relocate the ram.

"So we stayed out of the (capture effort) because Bam Bam knew when we came, we were there to chase him off," Wise said. "But he didn't know the Game and Fish guys and he literally walked right up to them, they scratched him behind his ear and he followed them right into the trailer."

Biologists set the odds at 50-50 as to whether Bam Bam will make his way back to the park, Wise said.

"It's been a week so far and he hasn't shown up, which is a good sign," he added.

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