

BEAR ON THE PROWL

Animal escapes from owner, roams streets

By JOE LOUDON
and VICKI VAN METER
C-O Staff Writers

Mike O'Loughlin and his family had an unwanted guest prowling about their house at 608 N. West in Cameron Tuesday morning—a full-grown black bear peeking into windows and even banging on the back door.

"He head-butted our door, and we all went *woosh* and ran for cover," said O'Loughlin's daughter Dana.

The bear, named B.J., busted through the wall of his owner's garage, which also served as the back wall of his cage, around 10:30 a.m. Tuesday. He then led Cameron police officers and state conservation officers on a two-hour odyssey throughout a west Cameron neighborhood before eventually being secured inside a horse trailer.

No one was harmed.

"I'm so grateful nobody got hurt," said the bear's owner Kathy Bishop. "I'm sure people in this neighborhood were very concerned. B.J. is not a small animal and, even though he's not aggressive, if there had been a child and he'd gotten a hold of them—somebody small—he could have hurt them."

Animal Control Officer Alan Hale kept the bear confined inside a lattice under the O'Loughlin's back deck more than 40 minutes until Bishop returned to Cameron from Kansas City. Hale sprayed B.J. with a garden hose repeatedly, while others led the animal, which Bishop estimated weighs between 400 and 500 pounds, a steady diet of marshmallows.

"I was in Kansas City working, and that was a 45-minute drive driven in about 30 minutes, wondering if B.J. had gotten a hold of someone and hurt them or whether they'd shot him and I'd find a dead bear when I got back here," said Bishop.

She explained that she'd been searching for a home for B.J. and her other exotic pets since the Cameron City Council passed an ordinance June 3 banning dangerous animals within city limits. She planned to transport B.J. along with her cougar, two bobcats and red box constructor to her parents' farm in southern Kansas either Tuesday night or Wednesday morning.

All the cats and the bear have been declawed, Bishop noted.

"It isn't reasonable to expect the neighborhood to put up with the city police department allowing this to happen or to expect (Bishop) to confine these animals," said Cameron City Manager Phil Lammers. "Something has to be done. It just isn't safe."

"Since this happened," Cameron Police Captain Gaylen White said, "we're going to require the owner (the animals) today. It's not the animals' fault." (Initially,



KEEPIN' COOL—Cameron Animal Control Officer Alan Hale continually sprayed B.J., the night-wild bear with garden hose in effort to keep the animal calm inside a lattice on the property of the Mike O'Loughlin family in Cameron Tuesday morning. The bear busted through the wall of the building his owner kept him around 10:15 a.m. (C-O Photo/JOE LOUDON)

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Bear On The Prowl

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“It isn’t reasonable to expect the neighborhood to put up with the city police department allowing this to happen or to expect (Bishop) to confine these animals,” said Cameron City Manager Phil Lammers. “Something has to be done. It just isn’t safe.”

“Since this happened,” Cameron Police Captain Gaylen White said, “we’re going to request she move (the animals) today. It’s not the animals’ fault.” (Initially, Bishop was given a 60-day notice to remove the animals from city limits.)

Mace Used

Bob Miles glanced through his kitchen window at 511 N. Hunt and saw B.J. soon after the animal escaped. His wife, Helen, promptly dialed 911 and began contacting neighbors, warning them that the bear was on the loose and that they should get their children inside.

“The biggest point is we got a lot of children in this neighborhood,” White said. “If (the bear) had tried to play with them, someone could have been hurt.”

Soon after White and Hale responded to the emergency call, the bear wrapped his paws around one of Hale’s legs and at one point had one of White’s legs inside his mouth. At that moment, the animal was nearly “exterminated,” according to Lammers. Instead, the officers maced the bear to get him off them.

“The bear was more playful than anything,” Cameron Police Chief Hale Riddle said.

But Alan Hale said with a sigh, “I thought he was going to rip my leg off.”

With assistance from Mike Scott of 607 N. Groat, the officers simply tried to contain B.J. before he settled into the O’Loughlin’s enclosure.

After spotting B.J. roaming about in his back yard, Scott, who works for his family’s towing service business, Scotty’s Carriage Works, became a makeshift zookeeper. He recently returned from a trip to

Colorado, where he observed bears in the wild, and he used a hiking stick approximately 7 feet long with a sharp point to guide B.J.

“I’ve used it (the stick) for other things, but nothing like this,” said Scott.

“Mike Scott went above and beyond the call of duty,” said Bishop. “I think he missed his calling in life. He should have been a bear tamer.”

She added, “A lot of people were concerned about B.J.’s safety too. They could have just shot him and been done with it. Gaylen White had to make the decision whether or not to shoot B.J., and he didn’t. I really appreciate that.”

Scott also provided a wire cable that Bishop secured around B.J.’s neck, after the animal knocked down part of the lattice structure and started wandering around the O’Loughlin’s deck. The bear also bowled over Bishop’s friend, Becky Reagan, in the O’Loughlin’s driveway before Bishop fastened the cable around a tree trunk.

“When I built the lattice, I never dreamed we’d contain a bear in there or I would have built it sturdier,” joked Mike O’Loughlin.

Charges Possible

The police department will be filing a report with Cameron City Prosecutor Scarlett Butts, according to Riddle. Butts will determine whether or not to press charges, possibly in the “public nuisance area,” he said.

“The Department of Conservation regulations apply to bears native to the state, such as this one,” said Missouri Department of Conservation agent Kyle Carroll. “She (Bishop) has a permit through the department. She’s in violation of the regulations today because the animal escaped.” (Bishop stressed that B.J. had never escaped before. The animal has been kept in captivity his entire life.)

Asked if Bishop would be required to pay restitution to the O’Loughlins for damages, Riddle said officers had yet to speak with the family.

Originally, O’Loughlin thought a wayward cow had ventured upon his property before getting a closer look at B.J. He described the whole ordeal as more unique than frightening.

“I’m not real happy, but I’m not furious about it,” O’Loughlin said. “I don’t think you need a pet like that in town.

“It really wasn’t vicious, but it’s not exactly the type of pet you want running around your yard.”