THE TRICKY ALARM CLOCK

Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Do you have a love-hate relationship with your alarm clock? (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

Alarm clocks are a treacherous invention that bring much despair and deliver almost no joy.

I had an old wind-up model when I was a kid. You wound it up every night before bed and turned a small knob on the back to line up an indicator with the time you wanted the alarm to go off.

At the prescribed time, or thereabouts, the treacherous thing would make a clanging noise like that of the recess bell in elementary school, only much louder. There was no "snooze" button like the modern clocks. The snooze button was my grandmother, and you did not want her to come get you out of bed.

Besides, your heart was already in tachycardia mode as you were scared to death when it went off.

All the alarm accomplished was to get me out of bed, to go to a place I did not want to go: school. There were a few times the alarm was a good thing, like for getting me up to go hunting or fishing, hence the little joy comment. Most of the time, the clock was just a wind-up version of a prison warden.

Your body does have a natural alarm clock which can subconsciously wake you up when you want, according to new research. Scientists at the University of Lubeck say people release hormones before waking, which help them to anticipate the stress of getting up at different hours.

It is not some trick of the brain. It is your biological clock or circadian rhythm. Simply put, if you wake up at a routine time, then your body releases hormones at that time which induce wakefulness. On those nights that you stay up late, it is why you wake up at your normal time instead of sleeping later.

As outdoor people, we still need to wake up at set times when we are camping. If you want to fish the morning rise on the stream, you are going to want to wake up early, and an alarm is still needed. The same goes for the hunter who wants to head to the woods before the sun breaks into the eastern sky.

Sure, you can bring along the wind-up alarm clock, but when it goes off, it will wake up all the animals in a 3-mile circle around camp. The cell phone in everyone's pocket has an alarm feature and can be set to play your favorite tune. On my best trips, I leave the cell phone at home. Solitude and time away from the phone are important to mental health.

Ancient people learned the importance of waking up at a certain time in the morning. They drank large amounts of water before bed; the more water consumed, the earlier one woke up to hit the outhouse. Any male over 40 understands this concept.

As far back as 1500 B.C., folks understood the importance of time. Everything from sundials, hourglasses filled with sand, and water clocks were used. Each calibrated the passing hours with movements of the medium — oil, sand, or water. Out of these came the earliest of alarm clocks.

One old-time favorite of mine was the candle clock. The candle burned down at a known rate of time. A nail was pushed into the candle at a certain hour mark. When the candle melted to that point, the nail fell out, landing on a piece of metal, thereby making a noise to wake you.

Either that or it burned down the house. Probably not the thing you want to take camping.

In 1800s Great Britain, wealthier families would employ knocker-uppers. These were people armed with long sticks they used to tap incessantly on someone's window until they were roused. Some knocker-uppers used straws as a peashooter to shoot peas at their client's window.

I am not sure what the sleeping client used as a snooze button — a bucket of water on the knocker-upper, maybe? I don't think I can afford a knocker-upper to take along on a camping trip either.

At the dawn of the industrial age, workers lived around factories in which they were employed and would wake at the sound of the factory whistle. Steel and textile mills drew in the farmers from the countryside by the awful sound of a steam whistle. The same whistle sounded lunch break and quitting time. The steam whistle probably gets the veto as a camp alarm.

Necessity being the mother of invention eventually led to the first American alarm clock. Created in 1787 by Levi Hutchins, this device rang only at 4 AM. It was not settable for different times. The first adjustable mechanical alarm clock came about in 1847, created by the French inventor Antoine Redier. Life has not been the same since.

Any child of the late 60s and 70s probably had a clock radio with a built-in alarm. Mine had a choice between an annoying buzzer or music from a preset radio station. One bad thing about it — mine had a snooze button. I hit the button and went back to sleep until the secondary alarm, my grandmother, woke me. When I go camping, I usually don't have anywhere to plug in a clock radio.

I guess the old wind-up clangor is still the best choice for an outdoor person. I would set mine the night before opening day of trout season or hunting season, to wake me in the very dark, predawn hours.

Then I would lie awake all night worrying the alarm will not go off. Even though the thing woke me every morning for school, without fail, it would be just like the treacherous thing to fail me on opening day.

And my grandmother would not come and wake me if I slept through the alarm on a non-school day. She said, "You probably needed the extra sleep."

So much for my snooze button.

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Tiny, endangered toads transplanted to Colorado pond successfully breed after 7 years

By Jennifer Brown
The Colorado Sun

Colorado wildlife officials are celebrating some long-awaited good news — the mountain toads are making tadpoles!

For seven years, biologists have been toting tadpoles to high-elevation bogs and ponds in a massive effort to save the inch-long boreal toad. And for the first time at a mountain wetland above Pitkin, they've discovered that those transplanted toads are making their own babies in the wild.

"It's a really big deal," native aquatic species biologist Daniel Cammack said in a Colorado Parks and Wildlife news release.

Boreal toads, which live in wetlands around 11,500 feet and spend their winters buried under multiple feet of snow, have been dying off at a rapid pace across the Rocky Mountain states. A fungus that infects the toad's skin with a cluster of spores, then bursts and spreads through the water to other toads, is to blame.

Colorado biologists have been trying to stop the fungus by dipping the tiny toads in a wash nicknamed "purple rain" and have been taking new tadpoles from a hatching center in Alamosa and dropping them in wild ponds.

This summer, when Cammack went to check on his transplanted toads above Pitkin, northeast of Gunnison, he found they were reproducing, a discovery that Colorado Parks and Wildlife called "potentially game-changing."

Cammack's team has been bringing tadpoles to the wetland since 2018, which is about the length of time it takes for a female toad to reach reproductive age.

The state wildlife agency has stocked about 20,000 tadpoles at the Pitkin bog, most of which began as eggs that were collected from the backcountry and raised to tadpoles at the Native Aquatic Species Restoration Facility in Alamosa. In 2022, biologists threw in 570 tadpoles from the Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance.

Before the relocation efforts, there were no boreal toads at the Pitkin bog.

"Everyone who has been involved in this project has poured their heart and soul into it," Cammack said, calling it a "really special day."

Now, biologists will watch to see if the tadpoles turn into toadlets and then into adult toads. It will become only the second place in Colorado where transplanted toads have had tadpoles that grew into toads. The first is near Cameron Pass, outside of Fort Collins.

Boreal toads are the only high-elevation toad in the Rocky Mountains and are an endangered species in Colorado. They live at elevations from 7,500 to 12,000 feet, just below treeline, and hibernate beneath the snow for six to eight months of the year. Researchers say that when the toads are stressed, they release a secretion that smells similar to peanut butter.

A 2005 file photo of a Boreal toad at the Native Aquatic Species Restoration Facility in Alamosa, Colorado. Thousands of rare boreal toads are bred each year at this hatchery for reintroduction into the wild. (Judy Walgren, Rocky Mountain News via Denver Public Library)

The toads were once abundant, even sitting under Buena Vista lamp posts at night in the 1960s to feast on insects that swarmed to the light, according to historical articles reviewed by CPW. Then the fungus came, killing off thousands of the tiny creatures in the 1980s and 1990s.

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