LEGISLATURE SIGNS GROUNDBREAKING BILL TO PROTECT STATE’S WILDLIFE

SACRAMENTO—On the heels of another mountain lion death from rat poison, the California Legislature passed AB 1788 (Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica) late last night. The bill protects non-target wildlife—from mountain lions and bobcats to owls and eagles—from rat poison in the food web. For over a decade, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has been tracking the impacts of the highly toxic second generation anticoagulant rodenticides or SGARs (also known as “one feeding kills”) on non-target wildlife and found harm to a wide array of species. A California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) analysis found second generation anticoagulants in more than 90 percent of tested mountain lions, 88 percent of tested bobcats and 85 percent of protected Pacific fishers tested, even after DPR took steps in 2014 to restrict consumer access.

AB 1788 places a moratorium on the use of second generation anticoagulant rodenticides until the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) finishes its formal reevaluation of these products. In late 2018, DPR agreed to reevaluate these products due to the harm they are known to cause to non-target wildlife, a process that finally got underway in March 2020.

“Reducing the threat from super-toxic rat poisons is a big step toward protecting some of California’s most imperiled wildlife, like the San Joaquin kit fox and the Pacific fisher,” said Jonathan Evans, environmental health legal director for the Center for Biological Diversity. “We hope Gov. Newsom signs this bill to provide safe, cost-effective options that protect both public health and our wildlife.”
Although DPR pulled these dangerous products from consumer shelves in 2014, in a huge loophole, it allowed professional companies to continue to use them, so SGARs have continued to kill and harm non-target wildlife. Thousands of children are also endangered every year by these poisons as well as domestic pets and animals.

“SGARs are the worst of the worst poisons as they do the most damage to non-target wildlife. As a result of secondary poisoning, non-target species can suffer from internal bleeding resulting in death,” said Jennifer Hauge, legislative affairs manager for the Animal Legal Defense Fund.

The California bill could act as a model for other states that are considering stricter regulation. “California can lead the nation, yet again, on protecting wildlife and the environment by enacting this groundbreaking legislation, which many other states with similar problems are watching closely,” said Lisa Owens Viani, director, Raptors Are The Solution.

Many pest control companies have switched to traps and exclusion or other less damaging rodent control products; one new product reduces rat fertility. Over 175 different types of rodenticides—that are not SGARs—are still available for use in California.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund was founded in 1979 to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system. To accomplish this mission, the Animal Legal Defense Fund files high-impact lawsuits to protect animals from harm; provides free legal assistance and training to prosecutors to assure that animal abusers are punished for their crimes; supports tough animal protection legislation and fights harmful legislation; and provides resources and opportunities to law students and professionals to advance the emerging field of animal law.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

Raptors Are The Solution is a nonprofit project of Earth Island Institute based in Berkeley, CA, dedicated to educating the public about the ecological role of birds of prey and other predatory wildlife and the danger they face from rodenticides.
Barn owl found in Davis, CA, tested positive for SGARs. Photo by Cayce Wallace/Raptors Are The Solution. Image available for media use.