

Boulder's famous 'falling bear' killed on U.S. 36

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Posted:

DailyCamera.com

The bear famously tranquilized on the University of Colorado campus last week, and immortalized in a viral photo by CU student Andy Duann, met a tragic death early Thursday in the Denver-bound lanes of U.S. 36.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials said a 280-pound black bear that died on U.S. 36 after being hit by a car at about 5:40 a.m. Thursday was the same bear that became known worldwide last week after wandering onto the CU campus near the Williams Village dorm complex.

The bear, photographed in a now-famous image by Duann in mid-air falling from a tree after being tranquilized, was picked up by wildlife officials Thursday morning about a half-mile from the Cherryvale bridge southeast of Boulder.

Jennifer Churchill, spokeswoman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, confirmed that officials positively identified the bear as the same animal tranquilized April 26 and relocated to a wilderness area about 50 miles west of Boulder.

"It's a bummer. It's so hard to go through this and not be able to give these bears a good place to live," Churchill said. "The community sees relocating bears as a kind of perfect solution, and unfortunately it's a really difficult proposition."

Colorado State Patrol Trooper Josh Lewis said two cars were involved in the accident, resulting in minor injuries to one of the drivers.

The first car to hit the bear was a 1992 Toyota Camry driven by Hugo Silva-Arellano, 31. Lewis said he was transported to Boulder Community Hospital with minor injuries, and his car was towed from the scene.

The second car was a 2002 Ford Focus driven by Kale Broeder, 22.

Reached by phone Thursday night, Broeder's father, Gary Broeder, said his son was fine but the car was totaled. He said his son was on his way to work in Louisville from his girlfriend's apartment in Longmont when the accident happened. As Kale Broeder told his dad, he was in a group of cars in the right lane of U.S. 36 when he saw a car in front of him put on its hazard lights and pull off to the right side of the road.

"He saw (the first car) move over to the right with flashers on, and he moved over to the left lane and that's when he hit the bear," Gary Broeder said. "It was in the middle of the road."

Churchill said officials were able to identify the bear by an ear tag placed on him after the brush with authorities at CU.

The problem with relocating the animals, she said, is that Colorado lacks a sufficient wilderness area to accommodate all of the bears that wander into heavily populated areas. And a relocated bear often views the area where it was captured as its home range and does its best to return, Churchill said.

"A couple years ago, there was a bear we moved ... from Table Mesa all the way to the Wyoming border, and he came back within a month," she said.

Churchill said she hopes Boulder-area residents will keep Thursday's incident in mind when it comes to cleaning up trash and other items in their neighborhoods that attract bears.

"(With) Boulder in particular, once (a bear) hits town and they start getting to food sources in town, they become a town bear," she said. "We need everybody to clean up every attractant they can, especially trash and bird feeders and any other food sources outside their homes."

Duann's photo of the now-deceased bear became an instant Internet sensation last week after appearing on the website for the CU Independent and Daily Camera on April 26. The "falling bear" ended up with its own Facebook page and Twitter account and appeared in countless newspapers, magazines and television programs around the nation and world.