

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:14	Jesse Thorn	Host	From MaximumFun.org and NPR, it's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:18	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:25	Jesse	Host	First up this week, Mary Roach! The legend. Mary Roach is the author of nine books, all of them nonfiction, most of them with one syllable titles: <i>Grunt</i> , <i>Stiff</i> , <i>Gulp</i> , <i>Bonk</i> . Mary is a very particular kind of science writer. The stuff she obsesses over can seem weird or gross or marginal, but her passion and her humor leave the reader just as wrapped up in them as she is. In <i>Grunt</i> , it was the science of war and how soldiers on the battlefield are kept alive. In <i>Stiff</i> , it was about how we, living human beings, interact with cadavers—dead human beings. Let me put it this way, <i>[chuckling]</i> of all the nonfiction writers who have ever appeared on our show, Mary's the one who has done the most research into whether people have had sex in space.
			Her newest book is called <i>Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law</i> . It's a book about how humans have tried and usually failed to manage nature—bears that break into dumpsters, mooses stepping into traffic, gulls that eat papal flower arrangements. That kind of thing. It is <u>always</u> fun to talk to Mary, so let's not delay our conversation any further.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
			My conversation with Mary Roach.
00:01:51	Music	Transition	Jazzy synth.
00:01:55	Jesse	Host	Mary Roach, welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . Always nice to get to have you on the show!
00:01:59	Mary Roach	Guest	Aw, thank you, Jesse Thorn!
00:02:01	Jesse	Host	Not least 'cause I get to read these great books, but you know, I'm gonna start by asking you the question that I start every interview with, which is: can you explain the difference between real and counterfeit tiger penis?
00:02:17	Mary	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> <u>Yes!</u> I can! I can explain why you need to know that. I can explain how to tell. I can describe various attributes of the tiger penis. I don't know where to begin!
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:02:31	Jesse	Host	It really is an embarrassment of riches, here!
			<i>[Mary agrees.]</i>
			Well, first of all, let's start with this. Tell me how you came to know about tiger peni.
00:02:43	Mary	Guest	Yeah. Yeah, it's penises, first of all. Okay.
00:02:46	Jesse	Host	Thank you. <i>[Playfully.]</i> Don't copyedit me, Roach.

00:02:50	Mary	Guest	<p><i>[Giggles.]</i> I don't recall how this happened, but I stumbled upon a paper that was also published as a guide for wildlife officers. And it was entitled "How to Distinguish Real vs. Counterfeit Tiger Penis". And that's the kind of thing that I get very excited about.</p> <p><i>[Jesse laughs.]</i></p> <p>The fact that there's a—and this was not a short—it was like a 15-page document about how to tell real versus counterfeit tiger penis. And the reason that these individuals need to know that is these are people in the forensics field—the wildlife forensics field. So, they're trying to keep people from selling the body parts of endangered species. So, say there's a package that comes into the United States, and it's intercepted and there's this material. And you need to know, okay, is this an endangered species? Is this—has somebody broken the law here and do our officers need to get involved and track these people down? These people are smuggling, in this case, tiger penis—which is used medicinally in traditional Asian cultures, some of them, as a virility enhancing aid.</p> <p>The tiger penis is put into—is made into a soup and that supposedly makes you more potent. So, it's important to be able to tell whether it's real tiger penis or something else. And it is almost always—you'll be happy to hear—it is almost always something else. And here's why. Number one, it's a lot cheaper to use horse or deer penis. It's cheaper, easier, and also, the deer penis and the cow penis are much bigger and more, shall we say, inspirational. The tiger has a pretty small organ, considering that this is an animal that—it represents virility and potency and power. It's got a pretty little member. So, things that are labeled <i>[chuckles]</i> tiger penis, or thought to be, rarely turn out to be tiger penis. They're usually deer penis.</p> <p>And I could go on. <i>[Chuckling.]</i> We don't really—you don't really wanna hear that much more about this, do you? 'Cause just, you know, stop me. I'll go on for the whole hour!</p>
00:05:11	Jesse	Host	<p>Well, first of all, I wanna just salute and—this is something that I've probably done in every interview I've ever had with you on the show, which are now several, is just salute your commitment to like going to a very particular kind of library and then pressing Ctrl+F and typing in "fart" or something.</p>
00:05:34	Mary	Guest	<p><i>[They laugh.]</i> Nothing brings me more joy.</p>
00:05:39	Jesse	Host	<p>So, Mary, why is this book about criminal animals and not animal criminals? That is to say, why are the miscreants in this book the animals and not the people?</p>
00:05:59	Mary	Guest	<p>Well, I'll tell you why. The tiger penis paper got me thinking, "Well, let's look at animals as the victims of crime." Okay? So, I went up to the National Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. And I had thought, you know, maybe there's some sort of book idea, here. I don't know. I went to see Bonnie Yates, who's the woman who published the paper about the counterfeit tiger penis and I spent a very diverting afternoon talking with people who prosecute these individuals who commit crimes against animals. And then I went to see the director of the lab, and I said, "This is what I'd like to</p>

do. And I'd like to follow along on some cases, some smuggling cases and some—you know, just some of the things you guys do.”

And he said, “Nnn-no.” Because if it's an open case, you legally can't be involved. You cannot report on the scene. And for me, that is, uh, a dealbreaker. I want to tag along. And I mean, this is how I have fun in my life, other than hitting Ctrl+F [*chuckles*] on a, you know, NASA 1000-page mission transcript. I need to be on the scene and talking to people and seeing things and sniffing things. And I was told I couldn't do that. So, on the way home or maybe after I got home, at some point I thought what if I kind of turned it inside out? And what if the animals were the victims? And I think what—you know, my memory of how this all came about is a little hazy, but somewhere in there, I came across a book from 1906, I think it is, called *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*.

And this is a book about, well, what the title suggests! Animals that kill or steal being tried in human courts of law and punished and sometimes hung. And I was like that is really strange! This is 1600s/1700s, not stuff that's going on today, with a couple of exceptions. But it—that sort of gave me the idea. Well, what about—what about—I mean, animals, they break all of our laws. You know? They commit manslaughter and home invasion and littering and trespassing and stealing and burglary and assault. And we can't just throw the book at them. What do we do? And that led me to the science of human wildlife conflict, which I had never heard of. And I get a little—I get kind of excited when there's a branch of science that is completely new to me. You know. There's textbooks and conferences and people with titles like “Bear Manager” and “Danger Tree Assessor”.

And so, that's how it happened.

00:08:54 Jesse Host So, did you think about whether you had been the victim of animal crime when you embarked upon this subject?

00:09:01 Mary Guest Mm, no, 'cause I know that I haven't been the victim. Or I hadn't at that point been the victim of animal crime. No, I mean—well, I mean, we all have, in the sense that—you know, squirrels start trespassing. They get in the attic. Rodents steal things. Mice [*censored*] in the pantry. I mean, I've had all that. I guess you could say yeah. But you know, I didn't set out on this project out of personal passion for [*chuckles*] revenge upon these creatures.

[*They laugh.*]

00:09:38 Jesse Host So, who do you ask, then? Who do you ask what are the important intersections between people and animals?

00:09:47 Mary Guest Mm, well, I go through a protracted period of just poking around and trying to see who is involved in this, what they do and how they do it. You know. I don't go too deep into the ethics and philosophy of it, because I'm kind of more—I'm more interested in how do you solve these crimes, what do you do afterwards, how do you prevent them, what can you do? You can't lecture these animals. You can't sit them down and reason with them, so what do you do? How do you try to fix these situations? So, that's how I perceived it, you know. Just contacting people with the strange titles. You know.

[Jesse chuckles.]

The Elephant-Human Wildlife Conflict Specialists and the—just—I just send out as many feelers as I can and try to find somebody who’s gonna be doing something that’s interesting in the field who will let me tag along. A lot of what ends up in the book—‘cause I pick very broad topics. I mean, there’s thousands of different species in—you know—hundreds of countries that are involved in conflicts with people. And I’m—you know—zeroing in on ten of them, say. So, for me, it has a lot to do with who’s going to be doing something in the field that’s interesting, who will let me tag along. So. That’s kind of how my books go.

00:11:11 Jesse Host

More to come with writer Mary Roach. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:11:18 Music Transition

Relaxed synth with a steady beat.

00:11:23 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest is the best-selling science writer, Mary Roach. She’s the author of books including but not limited to: *Packing for Mars*, *Grunt*, *Bonk*, and *Stiff*. Her newest is called *Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law*. In it, she looks at the way animals and law enforcement have interacted over human history. Spoiler alert, not a great fit, there. Let’s get back into our conversation.

My brother-in-law was a law enforcement professional for a time. He was a park ranger at Yosemite and most of his work involved keeping mountain climbers safe. But you know, they do rotations. And at one point, he was awakened in the middle of the night in one of the villages in Yosemite by his chirping radio or whatever and had to grab a rifle with a tranquilizer in it and run literally through people’s cabins and campsites—like the classic “in the front door, out the backdoor” style—after a bear who was loose in the, you know, populated part of Yosemite. And he was able to tranquilize the bear and I don’t think the bear ended up being destroyed. But bears are, I think, [chuckles] one of the most iconic American fraught intersections between people and animals.

[Mary agrees.]

00:13:07 Mary Guest

So, what bears did you look at for the book?

I was gonna say, that sounds like a nightly occurrence in Yosemite and many other areas. I was in Aspen, Colorado. Aspen is a—it’s a ski resort town, so it’s up in the hills. And it’s in prime bear country. People are building large homes amidst oak and chokecherry and—oh, what’s the other? There’s a couple of others. And it just is the plants that bears live on. And there’s these big houses all over there, now. And on a regular basis, bears come around and it usually starts out with a bird feeder or a bag of dog food or a garbage container that isn’t bear-resistant. And so, then the bears figure out, “Hey, this is easy pickings.” And they start coming around more and they start to lose their fear of people, and they get emboldened. And then they start coming through the door or the window.

And that’s when, in this case, Colorado Parks and Wildlife gets involved. I mean, I’m from New Hampshire. There are black bears. As a kid, I never saw—I don’t recall ever seeing a bear. I was in

Aspen two days, and I went with a bear researcher, Stewart Breck, and I figured, ah, you know, what are the odds? You know? We're gonna go. I'm gonna insist that we set the alarm for 3:30 in the morning and I'm gonna go in the back alleys of downtown Aspen where all the restaurants are and the dumpsters and a lot of good eating for bears, but what are the odds on any given night you're gonna see a bear? Well, we instantly saw it.

We pulled up in Stewart's truck and down the alley were a couple big garbage bags torn open, food scraps everywhere. And the bears weren't there, and I was like, "Aaah! We just missed them?"

And he's like, "Mm, let's just pull over here. They'll be back." And within five minutes, not one but two [*chuckles*] black bears ambling down the alley and get back to their food scraps. And this is some really good eating for them. This is like sustainably grown lamb and, you know, Alaskan salmon. And it was good stuff. So, we looked. We looked in the bag.

00:15:22 Mary Guest [*Jesse chuckles.*]
Anyway! So, it's—I was surprised at how regularly, on a daily basis, this occurs. I mean, there's so many—so often, tourists—usually tourist—in downtown Aspen, there's a—if they see a bear, they will go up to it with a selfie stick to take pictures. And it happens enough that there's now a law. You can be fined for taking your photograph next to a bear.

00:15:51 Jesse Host
The thing about bears and their intersections with humans are that even though bears are much more powerful than an unarmed human and just doing their thing when they interact with humans, just looking around for berries or equivalent.

[*Mary affirms.*]

00:16:46 Mary Guest
A bear that becomes habituated to human food both becomes much less effective as a wild bear, much less—you know—comfortable doing regular wild bear stuff and much more dangerous to people and property. What did you learn about what happens in those situations where goofy, old bears are pawing through garbage that belonged to—you know—squagillionaires in Aspen? Yeah, the situation becomes dangerous when—well, you know, they start to lose their fear. They're rewarded by these large amounts of tasty food, so they're more motivated and they're less fearful. So, they get closer and closer and at the point where a bear starts breaking into a window or a door, now there's a situation where, say the person is home and maybe the person has a dog, and the dog is trying to protect the home. The dog gets involved. Now the bear feels threatened. The person may try to come between the dog and the bear and now the bear—it's called "attack redirection". There's a term. Now, the bear may just go after the person.

And that's when people get killed. And there's a lot that can happen in someone's home that the bear perceives as a threat. And so, at that point, if the person reports the bear, that's when parks and wildlife sets a trap, and that bear is destroyed. So, it's not good for the bears. You know? And people will say, "Well, why don't you just

trap it and relocate it?” And that is something that’s tried. If a bear is just seen in a neighborhood in Aspen, wandering around, hasn’t yet broken into a home, hasn’t yet seemed to realize this is a ongoing supply of really great food, that bear—they’ll set a trap, a culvert trap, and they’ll take the bear back to the closest woods and they will try that.

But bears tend to—you know, the statistics and studies, when you look at relocating bears, they’re very good at finding their way back. And the other thing that can happen is that if you relocate a bear close—and it can go—it goes in the other direction and ends up in another community and it starts doing the same things it was doing. Yeah, if it’s a bear that had been breaking into homes and is habituated to human food, and now it’s doing it there in this other community, that’s a liability situation for the organization that moved it in the first place. So, it’s not appreciated by the community who now has this food habituated bear in its midst. And it’s also—you know, potentially a lawsuit. And there have been lawsuits where bears have, you know—parks and wildlife or fish and wildlife, every state has its own different name, have been sued successfully.

So, it’s—there’s not an easy solution. The best solution, obviously, is don’t leave your garbage unsecured and don’t have bird feeders and don’t leave—you know what I mean? But the problem, again, with Aspen—Aspen’s a community where a lot of these homes are vacation rentals. People are coming in from out of town. They don’t know from bears. They don’t know the consequences of, you know, leaving trash unsecured. And some of them are feeding the bears so they can take a video and put it on YouTube. So, that compounds the problem.

00:19:58 Jesse Host

I mean, you started this process with a borderline ancient book about animals being put on trial for crimes. When animals are put on trial for crimes, it suggests that they—you know, as goofy as it is, it suggests that they have rights. You know. They have the right to trial if they’re accused of a crime, if you’re gonna put animals on trial. Right?

00:20:23 Mary Guest

Yeah, they were assigned legal representation! Yep.

00:20:26 Jesse Host

So, as silly as it may be to—you know—accuse a snake of theft, it is, in a way, like a generous act in the eyes of the law to include snakes in the definition of theft. So, what did you learn about what rights animals have, especially in the United States? And you know, how those rights and the ways that we think about those rights have changed or are changing?

00:20:58 Mary Guest

Well, animals—if they’re pets or livestock, they’re considered property. They’re owned by a human, and they’re considered property, so legally, what happens depends on—you know, if somebody comes in and mutilates or kills or destroys your property, you the homeowner or the rancher have rights, because it’s your property. Wild animals are under the jurisdiction of the state where—there are agencies. Like, there’s federal and local agencies, and they decide what’s to be done. And the attitude has changed somewhat from the 1800s and early 1900s, when wild animals were mostly thought of as a threat, either to the rancher or the hunter or the farmer. So, they were considered varmints and something to be killed in large numbers. You know, or they were a commodity—something to be trapped and sold.

00:23:08 Jesse Host So, they don't have rights, like human rights. There's—there was just a long story in *The New Yorker*, I think last week, about efforts to confer personhood upon—I guess it was—is it primates? Elephants. There's an elephant, I think, that was the base of the story. I haven't read the story, but that is an approach that some in the animal rights community are trying to push forward. And it doesn't—it doesn't mean that the animals will be voting. You know. Or—you know, it's not like they're going to be considered human beings, but it's a way of conferring some sort of protections. But on the whole, animals don't have rights. They no longer have attorneys representing them. So, it's... kind of a bum deal for the animals. The people who are, let's say, enforcing the law against animals—whether it's park rangers or, you know, officials of a—you know, a state wildlife department or whatever, I imagine that they got into that line of work because they like animals.

[Mary agrees.]

00:23:59 Mary Guest So, it must be difficult for somebody who went off to be a forest ranger 'cause they love spending time in the forest to think about whether they have to kill an animal or—you know, cull a population, or—you know, take other steps that are hurting creatures that they love. Yeah, it's—as far as I can tell, a really difficult job for that reason. I mean, for anybody, but in particular somebody—often people who take these jobs are wildlife biologists. They're people who've studied animals and, like you said, they're very fond of animals and being in the wilderness and seeing wild animals. And I mean, while I'm sure there are some that were more attracted to the law enforcement side of it, I didn't meet any of them. The people that I met and spent time with were animal people. And those are, like you said—when it's time to destroy an animal because it's come too close and spent too much time in close proximity to humans and is considered a public health threat, they're the ones that have to kill the animal.

And I talked to this ranger in Aspen, in the county—Pitkin County, it is—who has to do that. And I said something like, “Yeah, that must be—” In my kind of—I don't know. *[Laughs.]*

[Mimicking herself dopily.] “Yeah, that must be really hard.” I don't know. I didn't really know how to say it or bring it up and I said something clumsy like that, and he said, “Yeah, it is.” And he gave me the example of that week he'd had a female bear, a sow, and a cub that were breaking into homes regularly and had been trapped. And he had to kill them. And he said, “I was thinking on I don't want the mother bear to see the baby bear destroyed. Likewise, I wouldn't want the baby bear, the cub, to see its mother destroyed. So, how do I do this? So, I anesthetized—tranquilized one, killed the other, and then killed the tranquilized one.” And like, to have to think that through when—you know—you're somebody who doesn't wanna kill a bear in the first place, but to have to do a family unit? And how do you do that?

[Sighs helplessly.] It was just—ugh, it's just brutal!

00:26:08 Jesse Host Okay, so how did—how did beans get to be in this book, Mary? That's not an animal.

00:26:13 Mary Guest *[Giggles.]* I know! Yeah, okay. This book—this story kills me. I—this book used to be titled—my title, originally, was *Animal, Vegetable, Criminal*.

00:26:26 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]* That's fun.

00:26:27 Mary Guest Yeah! Right? I thought it was a good title. I was almost very excited to have nine syllables instead of one. 'Cause I don't have to have the single syllable, one-word title. I just end up there.

So, we were pretty close to going into the production phase of things, when Mark Bittman—I say that with no bitterness at all. Mark Bittman.

00:26:52 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]* It's a hard name to say without bitterness. Not because anything about him, personally, engenders bitterness. It just sounds bitter when you say it.

00:27:01 Mary Guest Yeah, 'cause it contains the first syllable of bitter. Bitter. Mark Bittman. Although Mark Bittman released a book called—it was a history of food, called *Animal, Vegetable, Junk*. And I got an email from my editor telling me about this and saying, you know, "We really—we need to change the title of your book, because Mark Bittman is a major best-selling author. Everyone will think you stole his idea. People will get confused on Amazon." That was their decision, to change the title. Now, the whole time I was writing the book—I'm getting to your question about the beans—the whole time I'm writing the book, I'm thinking the title's *Animal, Vegetable, Criminal* and I'm thinking there needs to be some vegetable matter in the book.

And I did have—I had a chapter on danger trees, which I felt fulfilled that requirement. But my editor said, "Mary." I don't think she played animal, vegetable, mineral as a child. She never quite got onboard with that title. And she said, "Mary, why—there's no vegetables in this book." *[Laughs.]* "You need more vegetables in this book. Or more vegetable matter." So, at the last minute—and this was during covid, so there wasn't anywhere I could go. So, I stumbled onto beans.

[Jesse chuckles softly.]

00:28:32 Jesse Host Yeah! Because beans—beans—okay.
Beans, known universally as the musical fruit.

00:28:35 Mary Guest *[Laughs.]* There's castor beans from which ricin is derived. And there are these beans—these peas, rosary peas, and abrin or aye-bron—I never did figure out how you say it—incredibly deadly. So, I have this chapter, "The Killer Beans" chapter, which was kind of—it was fun to report on the killer beans, but—

00:28:57 Jesse Host Who is your favorite beanspert with whom you spoke?

00:29:00 Mary Guest *[Laughs.]* I—yeah, I—my favorite was a guy—we ended up taking him out. This was before—oh, it's before I decided on beans. I was looking at killer vines. Like, and I wrote to this guy who's an expert in the strangler vine. And I said, "Could a strangler vine, given enough time, strangle a human?"

And he wrote back with this—he took the question seriously, and he described a strangler—it's the strangler fig, actually—and how it

starts out as an epiphyte in the trees and then it sends down these roots and it begins to kind of wind its way around things. And if you stood still long enough, yes, in fact. *[Beat.]* Well, it wasn't that you'd be—'cause it doesn't strangle, 'cause it's not getting tighter and tighter, but you would be encased. You would be encased in it. But you know. It's not likely to—don't worry about it.

00:29:57 Jesse Host *[Laughing.]* Thank you! Thank you for that, Mary! I was growing more and more concerned about encasement.

00:30:06 Mary Guest But I love this guy. Also, his name was Dr. Putz.

[They chuckle.]

And I love anybody named Dr. Putz. Dr. Putz was incredibly tolerant and patient and would answer, you know, a ridiculous question like could a strangler vine, given time and the right situation—circumstances—kill a human being? But he's not in the book.

00:30:33 Jesse Host We'll finish up with Mary Roach after a quick break. When we return, we'll talk with her about how the book impacted how she interacts with the animals that populate her day-to-day life. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:30:48 Promo Clip **Music:** Relaxed, bluesy keyboard.

Speaker 1: Hey! Did grad school ruin your reading habits?

Speaker 2: Oh my god, all those books you had to read for grad school?

Speaker 1: Did becoming a parent destroy your ability to focus on a book? Did the pandemic tank the number of novels you can get through in a year?

Speaker 2: Ugh. That happened to everyone and we're Reading Glasses, and we're here to help.

Speaker 1: We'll get you out of a book slump, dismantle all that weird reader guilt.

Speaker 2: Which we know you have a lot of. But most importantly, we'll help you fall back in love with reading. Reading Glasses, every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

00:31:21 Music Transition *[Music fades out.]*
Bright, chiming synth with a steady beat.

00:31:25 Jesse Host I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is writer Mary Roach. She's the author of the new book *Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law*. Let's get back into our conversation.

So, I've got this cabin in the southern Sierras, and there's giant sequoias around. And giant sequoias live for thousands of—literal thousands of years. Right? And one of the ways that they do that is by resisting fire. And one of the ways that they resist fire is that when there is fire and fire damage, they shed their branches. And so, that means there have been several huge scale fire events thanks to forest management practices and climate change working in concert and human behavior working in concert. When there are big fires, even when the sequoias survive, they are naturally

dropping their branches. And they don't just do it like when the fire is licking at their heels. They do it thereafter, as well. Right?

And so, the end result of this is that when there is a fire, the giant sequoias become extraordinarily dangerous.

00:32:49 Mary Guest

Yes. There's a term for that.

00:32:52 Jesse Host

So, *[chuckles]* what's it gonna be? Widow maker? That's what they call it up in the mountains.

00:32:57 Mary Guest

The term widow maker's more colorful. They become—this is a classification—a danger tree.

00:33:05 Jesse Host

Oh, yes. Danger tree. *[Laughs.]*

00:33:07 Mary Guest

Danger tree!

[They chuckle.]

00:33:09 Jesse Host

One of my favorite British Saturday morning cartoons.

[Mary chuckles.]

00:33:21 Mary Guest

So, what trees are dangerous to people and why are they dangerous to people?

Very, very old trees are dangerous to people. Trees that—generally speaking, trees that are nearing the very end of their lifespan. They may have been dead for some time. They are dying or they are dead. Sometimes they're diseased. And there's a reasonable risk that they are going to fall over in the next storm or even without the next storm and land on somebody and kill that person. And what's difficult for tree people—I spent some time in McMillan Grove, which is up in British Columbia and it's this beautiful grove of ancient conifers, Douglas firs and others. And they are hundreds of years old. And some years back, one of them did fall onto the roadway and killed a family who had pulled over.

It was a storm—snow, wind. And they'd pulled over in order to be safer, and the tree fell on their car. And since then, the park has employed a danger tree assessor who goes around and, as the name implies, assesses these very old trees to be sure, okay. You know, this one has some fungal issues. We're having some rot, but it's still pretty safe. And so, every year he goes around, and he watches. And he's been doing this for decades—watches these trees. 'Cause they don't—you know, they don't wanna cut them down, because this is why people come to McMillan Grove, to see these big trees. So, they don't—on a whim—go and cut them down.

00:35:09 Jesse Host

So, these giant conifers, they die very slowly. A couple hundred years. The worst part about living 900 years is the 200 years spent slowly dying. *[Chuckles.]* And they—but you can—so, you can—*[Dryly.]* Tell me about it.

00:35:13 Mary Guest

[They chuckle.]

You know, plenty of time to figure out which tree is a danger tree. And they don't—even when a tree is starting to be a danger tree, what they'll do is send someone up the tree, an expert in explosives, and they will blow off the top. That makes the tree safer, because now it weighs less. It's more stable. It doesn't have the branches getting caught in the wind, blowing around. So, it's—and with these very, very tall trees, you walk through that forest and

00:35:47 Jesse Host you, as the visitor, have no idea that the top third of it has been blown off.
 What I'm excited about is the idea of getting a gang together to take care of these trees. Like, *[through laughter]* a lockpicker, an explosives expert.

[Mary laughs.]

A getaway driver.

00:36:09 Mary Guest Do you now look at trees and assess them for danger, yourself? Are you—?
 I do! All the time. Yeah. There was—we have a neighborhood email chain for our street, for our block. And someone wrote and said, "We have a redwood in the backyard, and it seems perfectly healthy to me, but there's an owl up there. And my landlord's gonna take it down. Help! What do we do?" And I thought, Mary, don't get involved. Don't be that person.

[Jesse laughs.]

And I restrained myself for the better part of a day, and then *[laughs]*—and then I wrote in, and I tried to say it really nicely. I said, "You know, well, it does look like that tree is well into its retirement years, like it's a very, very elderly tree. If I were the landlord, I would take that sucker out." But I did say, "You know, one thing that these danger tree assessors—" And I said, "I had a chapter on danger trees in my last book." *[Laughs.]* So, I am that kind of know-it-all neighbor. And I said, "One thing that they do try to do is wait 'til any bird life, any small birds, have fledged. So, maybe you could persuade him to wait a few months for the sake of the owlets."

00:37:17 Jesse Host And by god, they did! They agreed to come back in the fall.
 Aww, isn't that nice?

00:37:18 Mary Guest Isn't that nice?! So.

00:37:20 Jesse Host I love it for the owlets.

00:37:22 Mary Guest For the owlets. So, I'm always—I go hiking and I'm always—'cause I like to say, "danger tree". You see, right there? That right there? That there, you got a danger tree, here.

00:37:32 Jesse Host How... did doing all this reporting on these really intense conflicts between people and animals—ones that, in a lot of ways, neither party was asking for—change the way that you feel about interacting with animals in your life?

00:37:56 Mary Guest I ended up being a kind of annoyingly outspoken advocate of the animals that most people think nothing of, treating very poorly. That is the ones we call pests. The mice. The rats. The birds in the rafters. The racoons. I think it's partly because we call them pests and because there are people we can call and kind of outsource the unpleasant parts. We're just kind of quick to do that, and if you kill a mountain lion or a bear, there's going to be media. There's going to be angry people. Rightly so. I mean, there's—sometimes those are—those things are undertaken too quickly, depending on what state you live in.

And I get that, but why are we still using glue traps? I mean, there are far more humane—if you have a rodent situation, first of all, why do you have a rat problem? [Chuckles.] You're either providing shelter or food. So, stop it. Clean up your act, first of all. And second of all, if you have to—you know—get ahead of the problem and do some kind of exterminating, there are humane ways to do that. Don't get a glue trap! Anyway, I felt—also, 'cause just some of the history of how we've treated agricultural pests, which tend to be birds and rodents, with impunity. Just, you know, millions—literally millions—offed and nobody blinking an eye.

So, like anyone else, I never gave much thought to those creatures. I was, of course, aware of the situation—of the very touchy situation with bears in this country, with wolves, with coyotes. You know, the large mammals that people feel passionate about, for or against. But the little guys, you know, we tend to just kind of go, "Yeah, alright. Just call the exterminator. Just get rid of them." I felt bad for them. And I didn't used to be that person.

00:39:58 Jesse Host Well, Mary Roach, it's always fun to have you on the show. Thanks for the great book. Thanks for stopping by from your house in Oakland. You're the best.

[Music fades in.]

00:40:07 Mary Guest Any time.
Oh, you are, Jesse Thorn! You're the best. Thank you so much. I love being on *Bullseye*!

00:40:15 Music Transition Synth rock music.

00:40:18 Jesse Host Mary Roach, a true legend! Her new book is called *Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law*. Like all of her books, it is just an absolute delight. Just front to back, delightful, full of interesting things to learn. Full of great laughs. She's really one of the best. *Fuzz*, in bookstores now.

[Music fades out.]

00:40:42 Music Transition Thoughtful piano.

00:40:45 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, we just got a new cactus. My son had one cactus whose name was George Washington. The new cactus is named Abraham Lincoln. He's into naming the cactuses!

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio, Valerie Moffat and Richard Robey. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", recorded by the group The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. Special thanks this week to Mary Roach for recording herself and for agreeing to reschedule our interview three times. A true legend! The great Mary Roach. Thank you, Mary! We have no choice but to stan this flexible legend.

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us in those places, follow us. We share our interviews there. I think that's

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about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]