

Commission Sets Tentative 2009-10 Migratory Waterfowl Seasons

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) has tentatively set the season dates, bag limits and shooting hours for the 2009-10 migratory waterfowl season. Proposed dates will be ratified pending approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A 60-day season has been proposed with a west and east zone season framework as follows:

West Zone:
 Nov. 14-Dec. 6
 and Dec. 19-Jan. 24

East Zone:
 Nov. 21-Dec. 6 and
 Dec. 19-Jan. 31

The youth waterfowl weekend is Nov. 7-8 in the West Zone and Nov. 14-15 in the East Zone.

The daily bag limit on ducks is six and may include no more than four mallards (no more than two of which may be females), one pintail, one canvasback, one mottled duck, one black duck, three wood ducks, two scaup and two redheads. Unless otherwise noted, shooting hours for migratory bird hunting are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators

One of the most common requests made to me is information on individuals who can assist Louisiana homeowners and landowners with controlling a vast assortment of nuisance wildlife. For individuals to legally engage in this activity, they must meet certain requirements as outlined by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). The current rules, under which Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators (NWCOs) must operate, include the following:

- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Must make a minimum score of 80 percent on a NWCOs exam.
- Must attend a LDWF sponsored NWCOs training class prior to receiving a permit to practice.
- Must attend a six-hour LDWF-approved continuing education class every three years.

Recent changes have also created a standard LDWF reporting form for NWCOs to document nuisance animal complaints. Individuals can obtain a current list of NWCOs by contacting me at dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Hunters for the Hungry Sponsor Annual Clean-Out-the-Freezer Day

The Baton Rouge area Hunters for the Hungry organization scheduled Sunday Sept. 27 as the date for their annual "clean-out-the-freezer day." Events were suspended last year because of Hurricane Gustav in early September, which caused many Louisiana residents to lose electricity, along with much of the frozen items that would have normally gone to the program later that month. Frozen game and fish are collected at various sites around the Baton Rouge area and delivered to the local food banks for distribution to shelters and other needy entities. The old Alex Box stadium parking lot near LSU is the main drop-off point in the Baton Rouge area with scheduled hours from 1-4 p.m. Additional satellite drop-off points will be available in surrounding areas. For information on where these additional sites are located, contact the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank at 225-359-9940, ext. 206.

National Hunting and Fishing Day Marks Silver Anniversary

On Sept. 26, Louisiana celebrates the 25th anniversary of the National Hunting and Fishing Day. Events are scheduled in Baton Rouge, Minden, Monroe and Woodworth, hosted by the LDWF. All events are open to the public with activities, food and drink free of charge. Specific locations and contact information on this year's program are coordinated by:

Baton Rouge: Waddill Outdoor Education Center, at 225-765-2800.

Minden: Bodcau Wildlife Management Area, at 318-371-5210.

Monroe: LDWF's District 2 Headquarters, at 318-343-1241.

Woodworth: Woodworth Education Center, at 318-484-2276.

Wildlife Species Profile

Southern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*)

The southern flying squirrel inhabits the forested areas of Louisiana except for the wooded cheniers along our coast. They are not capable of true flight but rather glide through the air with the aid of a fold of skin extending along the sides of the body from the wrists of the forelegs to the ankles of the hind legs. A flattened body and tail aid in their gliding feats.

Flying squirrel fur is extremely dense, soft and plain-looking without spots or stripes. Dorsal coloration is a drab brown, and ventral parts are a creamy white, sometimes tinged with pinkish cinnamon. The large black eyes have lids rimmed in black, appearing almost as if brilliant eye-shadow has been applied. These are the most spectacular features of flying squirrels and are indicative of their nocturnal habits.

Because of their lack of activity during daylight hours, flying squirrels are seldom seen. The best chance to catch a glimpse of one is to knock on any snag containing cavities such as woodpecker holes and watch for their heads to poke out to make an investigative look. I've personally seen them on occasion when evicting them from bluebird nest boxes surrounding my yard. In this regard, I've found they are much more likely to take over these artificial cavities when cavities are placed on the side of a tree, rather than along a fence line in more open areas.

Flying squirrels are much more gregarious than their tree squirrel relatives, with as many as seven or more roosting together in a single cavity. Nests are usually constructed in natural or artificial cavities but where these are lacking, outside nests are constructed of leaves and small twigs. Shredded bark is commonly used in cavity nesting situations as well as the lining for outside nests. On more than one occasion I've had to remove large handfuls of shredded cedar bark from my home dryer vent to prevent a flying squirrel from using an innovative housing design.

Mating takes place twice a year, with litters produced each fall and spring. The gestation period is around 40 days, and the number of young in a litter varies from two to four. The young are helpless



at birth but by their sixth week they are weaned and able to care for themselves.

Flying squirrels primarily eat seeds, fruit, berries, acorns, nuts and grain, although they also may eat meat. Any cavity nesting bird in either artificial or natural situations is likely to become preyed upon by flying squirrels when the two species come in direct contact. When not directly preyed upon, cavity nesting birds are often usurped from their living quarters by the more aggressive flying squirrel. In situations where the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker is being managed, flying squirrel control is sometimes necessary to protect the woodpecker colonies.

Despite their aggressive nature, flying squirrels are unique creatures in our outdoor environment and provide a pleasing show when able to watch one glide gracefully through the air.

Critter Corner

Crows (*Corvus spp.*)

The American crow (also known as the common crow or eastern crow) along with the fish crow are the two species of crows commonly found in Louisiana. They look very similar in the field, although the American crow is slightly larger than the fish crow. Male and female American crows are 17 to 21 inches long with a solid "coal-black" coloration. Their familiar call of "caw caw" is one of the easiest ways to identify an American crow. Fish crows have a shorter nasal sounding "ca-ha ca-ha" call.

Crows are one of the most intelligent birds found in Louisiana. I've found them to be among the most common bird species seen along our highways, often feeding on carrion. In more than 35 years of driving, I've yet to see a crow hit by a vehicle, even though they often dart in and out of passing traffic.

Experiments with crows have shown them to possess good memories, employ a diverse and complex range of vocalizations and quickly learn to associate various noises and symbols with food. Crows can mimic sounds made by other birds and animals and can be taught to mimic the human voice. They often post a sentinel when feeding, assuring the safety of other birds in the group.

In Louisiana, crows begin nesting as early as February, building a nest of twigs, sticks and coarse stems. Nests are lined with shredded bark, feathers or grass and are built 18 to 60 feet above the ground in any tress available. Where trees are absent, crows can utilize other structures such as transmission poles. The average clutch is four to six eggs that hatch in about 18 days. Young fledge in about 30 days, and in southern populations such as Louisiana, two broods may be produced each year.

Both sexes help in nest building and care of the young. Older offspring, called "nest associates," also help with feeding chores. These nest associates, along with the male, also will feed incubating females. Fledglings remain with both parents through the summer and later in the year join up with other family groups, forming the large flocks seen congregating prior to fall and winter migration. Few crows live for more than 4 to 6 years in the wild, although in captivity individuals have reached ages of 20 years or older.

Crows are responsible for a wide array of agriculture and wildlife damage. They damage corn fields by pulling young sprouts from the ground and consuming the kernels, along with feeding on older ears of corn during the milk stage. Peanuts, milo, sunflowers, pecans and fruits of all kinds are often targeted as a food source. In areas around our state, figs and blueberries are favorite foods of foraging crows.

Wildlife damage occurs when crows break up the nests of waterfowl and other birds, consuming the eggs contained within. Crows have also been associated with the spread of various diseases such as avian cholera and histoplasmosis when large flocks concentrate in

an area. They have also been implicated in the spread of West Nile virus in humans.

Control Measures. No repellents or toxicants are labeled for the control of crows, and trapping is generally ineffective in reducing overall numbers. Exclusion is sometimes effective when small areas with high-value crops are targeted for depredation. Nylon or plastic netting can be used to cover crops in these situations. The use of cords or fine wires stretched across a field is another way to deter crows from entering an area. These lines are placed 6 to 8 feet above the ground with aluminum or cloth strips attached along their length.

Shooting is more effective as a dispersal technique than as a method for reducing overall crow numbers. The season on crows in our state runs from Sept. 1-Jan. 1 with no daily bag limit. When found to be depredating agricultural crops, ornamentals or wildlife, crows may be taken at any time during legal shooting hours. Crows can provide a recreational shooting opportunity with the use of electronic calls and owl or crow decoys. When these techniques are used in areas where crows concentrate in the fall, many individuals can be taken in a short period of time.



Plant Species Profile

Annual Smartweeds (*Polygonum spp.*)

The annual smartweeds in Louisiana include two species that are easily identified by either their pink or white flowers. Regardless of the species, smartweeds are an excellent waterfowl food, and any management plan involving the manipulation of water levels to promote native waterfowl plants should take them into consideration. The seeds have an extremely hard coat that is not easily broken down in the digestive tract but are also very resistant to deterioration in wet field conditions.

Smartweeds germinate and grow best when moist soil unit drawdowns are conducted early in the growing season. They are usually found on the wetter sites within these areas. Greatest seed production normally occurs the year following a soil disturbance or in areas that are drawn down following a period of prolonged flooding. Seed yields of 1 ton per acre in these situations are typically reduced to only a few hundred pounds per acre by the third year following a soil disturbance. When establishing smartweeds on an area, you can purchase seeds from a limited number of outlets that cater to providing waterfowl foods for management purposes.



Louisiana Wildlife News

Dr. Don Reed
Professor (Wildlife)
Idlewild Research Station
(225) 683-5848

Reviewers:

Dr. Michael Chamberlain
Associate Professor
School of Renewable Natural
Resources

Dr. Dearl Sanders
Professor & Resident Coordinator
Idlewild Research Station

Visit our Web site:

www.lsuagcenter.com



Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
William B. Richardson, Chancellor
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
David Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.