

Spring Squirrel Season Set to Open

The new Louisiana spring squirrel season runs from May 5-27 on private lands and May 5-13 on selected Wildlife Management Areas. Other southeastern states have established spring squirrel seasons, and Louisiana is embarking on the endeavor in a very conservative fashion regarding length of season and bag limit (3 with a possession limit of 6). When initially proposed, some turkey hunters were opposed to the season because of the possible disruption of turkey nesting by hunters. That disturbance was regarded as negligible, however, and the ruling was allowed to go forward. From a biological standpoint, hunters have no reason not to take squirrels this time of year. Grey and fox squirrels in our state have two distinct breeding seasons. Males are in rut from late December to late February and again from late May to the middle of August. The gestation period is 44 days. Young produced from the spring and summer ruts are the juveniles harvested during the opening days of our traditional fall season. Young produced from the winter rut will comprise this same juvenile portion of the bag limit for our spring season. Given the population dynamics of squirrels and the simple fact that small game populations in general cannot be “stockpiled” from one season to the next, squirrel hunters should enjoy this upcoming spring season and take advantage of the opportunity.

Time to Prepare for Dove Season

The 2007 season on mourning doves is several months away, but hunters need to start preparations in May to increase their chances of success. I receive far too many calls in early August from individuals wanting to “plant” winter wheat for deer food plots, hoping that a recommendation can be made that allows top-sowing of the grain. My answer is “no” on both points. The earliest recommended planting date for wheat is September 1, and top sowing is not a recommended planting practice unless rainfall occurs within 24 hours of planting. If rainfall and germination does not occur within this time frame, the seed must be covered. Individuals in these situations are usually trying to skirt the baiting laws in regard to mourning doves. May is the time to plant sunflower, milo or corn fields that can be legally used to attract mourning doves for hunting in the early fall. If browntop or Japanese millet is chosen, planting can be delayed until early June since these crops have a shorter maturation period of around 60 to 75 days. The key is to plan now to have an area that will not only attract doves but will be legal to hunt in September.

New Mourning Dove Seasons Planned for Fall 2007

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has the authority in establishing the broad guidelines for any migratory hunting regulations that a state proposes to enact. Individual states have some leeway in setting season dates and bag limits, but they must work within the USFWS framework. A recent change occurred regarding mourning doves when the USFWS eliminated its prohibition of opening a south zone prior to September 20. As a result, the use of zones for hunting mourning doves will allow an early September opening season date that is better suited to regional dove hunting interests. Dates recommended for this upcoming season are as follows:

<u>South Zone</u>	<u>North Zone</u>
Sept. 1-9.....9 days	Sept. 1 – 16.....16 days
Oct. 13 – Nov 26.....45 days	Oct. 13 – Nov. 11.....30 days
Dec. 22 – Jan 6.....16 days	Dec. 15 – Jan. 7.....24 days

The proposed boundary of the north and south zones extends from Texas to Mississippi in southern Louisiana. From Texas, it begins on La. Hwy. 12 west of Starks, continues to S. Hwy. 190 at Ragley, follows U.S. Hwy. 190 to Interstate 12 in Baton Rouge, continues along Interstate 12 to Interstate 10 in Slidell and runs along Interstate 10 to the Mississippi state line.

Parasite Counts Used as Density Index In White-tailed Deer Herds

White-tailed deer are capable of increasing in numbers to the point of damaging their habitat by over-browsing the plants that sustain them. Deer managers should monitor their herds to prevent malnutrition, disease and habitat deterioration that occurs as a result of an excessive population. One tool that biologists use to determine if deer are exceeding the carrying capacity of an area is called the abomasal parasite count or APC. White-tailed deer are ruminates with a four-chambered stomach. Food first enters the rumen, then goes to the reticulum, omasum and abomasum. In the abomasum, stomach worms called abomasal parasites are found in virtually every deer in the southeastern United States. These stomach worms are transmitted from deer to deer by fecal

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Plant Species Profile:

Grain Sorghum (Sorghum Bicolor)

When planning the use of warm-season food plots for white-tailed deer and other wildlife species, many individuals fail to provide what is needed at the proper time. In early spring, deer will browse heavily on the tender succulent vegetation that emerges throughout the forest, often totally abandoning winter food plots of oats, wheat and other cereal grains. As summer progresses and many forest plants tend to “harden” and lose palatability, wildlife species can benefit greatly from a nutritious and dependable food source. Grain sorghum, also known as milo, is an excellent choice to consider. In Louisiana, milo can be planted around May 1 when soil temperatures reach 60 F to 65 F. Plants require 90-120 days to reach maturity. Milo not only provides wildlife with a high protein food source during a time of nutritional need, but if not entirely consumed, will be available throughout the fall and winter. Milo therefore serves as a warm- and cool-season food source. Successful plantings in areas of high deer densities

are possible because plantings are often left unmolested until seed heads begin to develop and mature. Many other warm-season plots planted at similar times are totally eaten in their early vegetative stages before any real nutritional value is gained. Milo is also an excellent food source for mourning doves, serving to attract birds for fall dove shoots.

Milo can be drill-planted at 8 pounds per acre in 24- to 36-inch rows or broadcast at the rate of 12 to 15 pounds per acre. Plants are extremely drought-tolerant and weed control is easily obtained by the use of Atrazine (1 quart per acre) and Dual (1.5 pints per acre) as a pre-emergent herbicide. Seed must be of a safened variety for herbicides to be safely used in planting. Seed production can reach more than 2.5 tons per acre on fertile ground. Varieties should be chosen that have low tannin content to increase their acceptance to wildlife.



Wildlife Species Profile:

Louisiana Black Bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*)

From Alaska to northern Mexico, 16 subspecies of the American black bear may be found. The subspecies found in eastern Texas, southern Mississippi and all of Louisiana is generally referred to the Louisiana black bear. Historical references indicate that black bears were once relatively abundant throughout Louisiana. Populations reached peak levels in the forested bottomlands of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya river drainages prior to encroachment by human settlement in the early 1800s. Declining populations prompted state officials to begin a restocking effort. From 1964-1967, 163 nuisance bears captured in Minnesota were released into Louisiana by the La. Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The effects of these restocking efforts on native Louisiana bears created considerable controversy when plans for listing Louisiana bear populations on the endangered species list were first proposed. Taxonomic and genetic research concluded that genetics of the Louisiana black bear were not compromised by the Minnesota introductions, clearing the way for the listing of the Louisiana black bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1992.

Black bears in our region are generally black with a brown muzzle, along with an occasional white blaze on the chest. Body weights are often greatly exaggerated. Adult males generally weigh from 150 to 350 pounds, while adult females seldom exceed 250 pounds. Total body length from nose to tail varies from 3 to 6 feet. Bears are extremely adaptable with remarkable reasoning ability and long-term memory. These factors have done much to contribute to their success over time in overcoming tremendous obstacles but it has also lead to many conflicts when interacting with humans.

Females reach sexual maturity at 3 to 5 years of age. Habitat quality plays a key role in determining when females are capable of breeding successfully. Mating usually occurs in the summer months with egg implantation delayed for about five months. Cubs are born in winter dens usually during January and February. Twins

are most common, but litter sizes can vary from one to five individuals. Cubs measure approximately 8 inches in length, weighing only 8 to 12 ounces at birth. Cubs remain with their mother through the first year, sharing a winter den. Family units usually dissolve the following summer. Black bears, while not true hibernators, go through a winter dormancy period referred to as "carnivorean lethargy" or torpor. This condition allows bears to survive food shortages and severe winter weather. Most bears are easily aroused if disturbed during this period of inactivity. Factors contributing to this include human activity, fluctuating water levels, fluctuating extremes in weather conditions and lack of concealment.

Male bears move much greater distances than females, often ranging as far as 35 miles from their capture site. The search for food, water, cover and mates during the breeding season are the reasons for movement activity. Estimates of home ranges are 40,000 acres for adult males and 18,000 acres for adult females. Bears relocated to new sites pose an additional problem in trying to reestablish populations throughout their former range. In an attempt to relocate familiar territory, bears have been known to travel up to 400 miles from relocation sites. Although classified as carnivores, bears are much more omnivorous in their feeding habits. Vegetation, hard and soft mast, agricultural crops, insects and all types of garbage food discarded by humans are readily consumed by bears. In Louisiana, bears are known to prey on white-tailed deer fawns but typically will focus foraging on vegetation during the summer, particularly cereal grains.



Black bears in Louisiana are found in relatively large contiguous areas of bottomland hardwood forest. A 1980 report indicated that these areas had been reduced by as much as 80 percent. Habitat destruction or modification is therefore the primary threat to the Louisiana black bear. The most significant approach to reversing this trend has been undertaken by a broad coalition of more than 50 state and federal agencies, forest and agricultural companies, special interest organizations and universities. These groups were organized in 1990 into the Black Bear Conservation Committee. The goal of this organization is to work in restoring the Louisiana black bear to suitable habitat within its historical range. It is hoped that the ultimate success of these efforts in bringing back the black bear in Louisiana will be realized when the animal can be removed from the Endangered Species List.

Critter Corner:

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

The cedar waxwing is slightly smaller than a robin at about 6 ½ to 8 inches in length. It is a sleek, crested brown bird with a black mask, yellow tips on the tail feathers and hard red wax-like tips on the secondary wing feathers. They are almost always seen in flocks, occupying open woodlands, orchards and residential areas. Nesting habits involve the laying of 4-6 blue-grey eggs, spotted with dark brown and black and placed in a bulky cup of twigs and grass in trees occupying open areas. Although Louisiana is outside of the breeding range for cedar waxwings, where this does occur, fledglings are often fed some type of fruit. Nesting is often correlated with the occurrence of a good supply of berries in the area. Adults store these berries in their crop and regurgitate them to their young. Cedar waxwings are very social birds and have the amusing habit of passing berries from one bird to the next along a long row of individuals sitting on a branch, until one bird eats the food.



The flocking and feeding habits of the cedar waxwing tend to create serious problems for fruit growers, most notably strawberry farmers in our state. Hundreds of these birds will suddenly appear in an area to exploit a crop of strawberries, then suddenly vanish and seek a different feeding area when that crop is exhausted. The birds are known to be quite persistent in their use of strawberry fields and will simply fly a short distance into a different section of the field when scare tactics are used. Migration patterns tend to cause little or no damages to fields in some years, but other times entire crops are in danger because of the numbers that descend on them. The pecking habits of cedar waxwings also lead to the damage and unsalability of much more fruit than what is actually consumed.

Control measures: Cedar waxwings are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, in addition to protection at the state and local level. Lethal control is not an option in dealing with them. Protective netting can be used on small plots, but installation expenses and difficulty in picking fruit often make this impractical in large operations. A solution that has had limited success in some areas is the use of mylar tape, also known as "bird tape." This tape is one-half inch wide with red and silver reflective coatings that tend to scare birds away from an area. The tape, when placed above the rows between the strawberry plants and allowed to blow in the wind, will have a tendency to deter birds from landing in this area.

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contamination of their range, and deer acquire the parasites when they eat low-growing vegetation. Research concluded that when the numbers of abomasal parasites from five or more adult deer in an area were calculated, the figure could be used as an index to determine the density of the deer herd. Across the Southeast, deer herds at low carrying capacity had few parasites, herds at carrying capacity had intermediate levels and over-populated herds had high numbers of parasites. An APC does not measure the actual deer density per unit of area but is a very useful index to determine the status of deer density with respect to the nutritional carrying capacity of the habitat. Where deer densities are questionable, APCs are usually performed in the late summer and early fall. The technique is used in conjunction with browse surveys and other harvest data.

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Dr. Don Reed
Associate 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

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