

## Hunting- and Fishing-related Events Set for Louisiana

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has set Saturday, September 22nd, as 2007 National Hunting and Fishing Day. The event celebrates our outdoor heritage with events such as canoeing, skeet-shooting and fishing contests. Events in the Baton Rouge area will be held at the Waddill Refuge, 4142 Flannery Road from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Individuals can check with the LDWF information desk in Baton Rouge (1-225-765-2800) for more details on events in the Baton Rouge area. Locations and contact information for activities in other parts of the state include the following:

Minden, La. – Steve Hebert  
318-371-3050

Woodworth, La. – Mike Burns  
318-484-2212

Monroe, La. – Bill Breed  
318-343-4044

In holding with tradition, the annual “Clean Out Your Freezer Day” will be held the following day on Sunday September 23rd. The program, which began in 1994, allows sportsmen to donate surplus game and fish to needy organizations throughout the state. Participation has grown to the point where collections are handled through local food banks for distribution to kitchens and shelters. Prior to the event, local newspaper sporting sections detail times and drop-off points for items collected. For more information prior to this time, I can be contacted at [dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu).

## Early Migratory Bird Seasons Set

Many hunters have gotten their first taste of action due to our annual Labor Day weekend season opening date for mourning doves. Shortly thereafter is the opening of the September teal season in Louisiana. Population estimates for 2007 indicate a record 6.7 million teal, which will allow for a 16-day season from September 15th to September 30th. A daily bag limit of four and possession limit of eight will be allowed. The first split of the rail and gallinule season will run concurrently with teal season, followed by a second split running from November 10th to January 2nd. Limits on king and clapper rails are 15 in aggregate with a possession limit of 30. Daily bag limit and possession limit for Virginia and sora rails are 25 in aggregate. Common and purple gallinules have a daily bag limit of 15 and possession limit totaling 30. Woodcock season will run from December 18th to January 31st with a 3-bird daily bag limit and 6-bird possession limit.

## Draft Recovery Plan for Ivory-billed Woodpecker Revealed

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service recently released the draft recovery plan for the ivory-billed woodpecker. Recovery plans are intended to serve as a guide for land management decisions in protecting and increasing the population of species that are listed under the endangered species act. The 182-page document outlines a recovery plan with a hefty \$27 million price tag and issues that ultimately could impact forest management in areas of the Southeast. There is also concern that monies allocated to implementing the recovery plan are being taken from funding sources that might better serve other wildlife species. The release of the recovery plan, intended for public comment, comes following yet another article in a scientific journal (Stokstad, Erik. 2007. Gambling on a Ghost Bird. Science. Vol. 317. pgs. 888-892.) where the existence of the bird continues to be questioned. Controversy lies in the quality of evidence originally presented to document the birds' presence, along with a lack of further sightings in over two years.

## New Commission Member Confirmed

During the 2007 regular legislative session, Mr. Steve Oats was confirmed as the newest member of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. Mr. Oats was appointed to an at-large commission seat, which will run through April 30, 2013. The history of the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission dates back to 1909 when former governor John Parker, an avid conservationist and friend of President Theodore Roosevelt, created the Louisiana Board of Commissioners for the Protection of Birds, Game and Fish. The agency changed names several times throughout the following years until December 11, 1944, when the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries was officially created. Governor Jimmie H. Davis named John Appel as the first commissioner of the department. Mr. Appel was followed by a long list of succeeding commissioners, including current commission secretary Mr. Bryant Hammett. In 1952 the current seven-member commission format was created to oversee and direct the activities of the agency. Members are appointed by the governor pending approval by the state senate. Six members are designated to serve overlapping terms of six years and one member serves a term concurrent with the governor. Three members are designated to be appointed from coastal parishes, representing commercial fishing and fur industries. The other four are designated to be appointed from the state at large. Our state hunting and fishing regulations – including seasons, bag limits, method of take, etc. – are determined in large part by decisions made at monthly commission meetings, held on the first Thursday of each month. Joining Mr. Oats on the

current commission are Pat Morrow of Opelousas, Wayne Sagera of Abbeville, Henry Mouton of Lafayette, Robert Samanie III of Houma, Earl King Jr. of Amelia and Fred Miller of Shreveport.

## Proposed Deer Tagging Program Update

Like many new programs, Louisiana's new deer tagging program is experiencing its share of early growing pains. LDWF enforcement officials spoke recently at two AgCenter-sponsored wildlife programs to explain some of the problems that have been encountered. Some lifetime license holders were unable to obtain tags, whereas, in other cases, individuals received twice the number of antlered and antler-less tags allotted for use. These problems have prompted the LDWF to recommend that the program be dropped as a mandatory requirement for hunters this upcoming season. The license vendor contracted to develop and implement the system failed to get the program up and running in a timely manner, which ultimately led to the current situation. Failure to implement the program as intended will delay for at least another year a wealth of information that could have been obtained from deer hunters across the state. Voluntary participation is encouraged to test the system for any unforeseen problems and to provide some deer harvest data. To participate in the program, individuals should verify all harvests within 72 hours by calling the toll free number indicated on their harvest card or by visiting the LDWF website at [www.wlf.state.la.us](http://www.wlf.state.la.us). The season limit is 3 antlered bucks and 3 antler-less deer except on lands enrolled under DMAP or LADT. On these areas, the number of antler-less tags issued determines how many antler-less deer an individual can harvest. Many hunters, including myself, were able to purchase tags without any difficulty, which makes inconsistencies in the program most likely not a widespread problem. A final ruling on the tagging program will be made at the September 6th Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting. The current proposal for delaying implementation is expected to be passed at that time.

## Plant Species Profile: Millets

The millets are a group of small-seeded cereal grains that are widely grown throughout the world for food and fodder. In Louisiana, their main use in wildlife management is for attracting doves and migratory waterfowl for hunting. Millets are classified into several different genera, and for that reason they do not form a taxonomic group but rather a functional or agronomic one. Those of importance to wildlife in our state include the following:

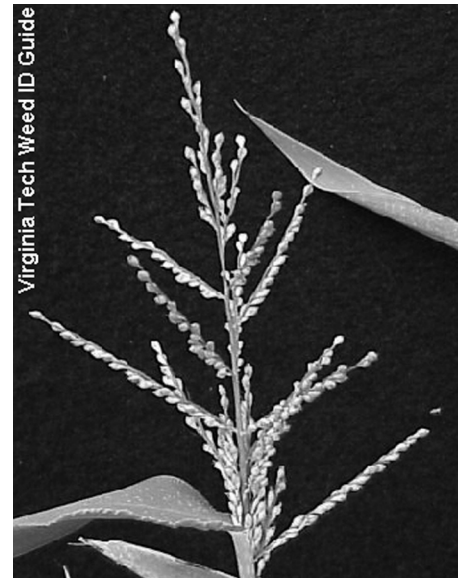
Pearl Millet	<i>Pennisetum glaucum</i>
Foxtail millet	<i>Setaria italica</i>
Proso millet (also known as common millet or white millet)	<i>Panicum miliaceum</i>
Barnyard millet (also know as Japanese millet)	<i>Echinochloa spp.</i>
Browntop millet	<i>Panicum ramosum</i>

In general, millets can tolerate dry soil conditions once established, and planting dates often fall within dry periods of summer in order to synchronize seed maturation with wildlife use. When planting dates have passed for crops such as sunflowers, milo and corn, millet stands can still be established in time for attracting doves and ducks for fall hunting. Exact planting dates should allow time for seed maturity at least two weeks prior to hunting an area. Browntop and Japanese millet have the shortest maturation dates of 45 to 60 days. Pearl and proso millet have intermediate maturation dates of 60 to 75 days, and foxtail millet requires the longest maturation period of 75 to 90 days. Millets can be drill planted at 10 pounds per acre or broadcast at 20 pounds per acre. Disking and proper soil preparation should precede seed coverage to a depth of no more than 1/2 inch. Soil pH should be in the 6.0 range.

In preparing fields for doves, millets should be manipulated by mowing mature stands and either windrowing or burning to make seed more available and lessen the amount of accumulated vegetative material on the ground. Doves do not "scratch" when feeding, and easy seed availability is necessary for them to utilize an area.

Although legal in dove hunting, manipulation beyond simply flooding a standing crop is illegal in waterfowl hunting. Japanese millet is a preferred crop for this purpose. Standing crops should be flooded when plants are at least six inches tall, and water should be available on these areas at least 2 weeks before duck season.

Photo: Virginia Tech Weed ID Guide



## Critter Corner: Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

Tautonymy, the taxonomical term for the generic and specific names being the same in an organism, is especially noteworthy in the case of the striped skunk. The Latin translation for *Mephitis*, meaning “foul odor,” is an appropriate reminder of a critter that almost anyone in Louisiana can recognize by scent alone. The species occurs widely throughout the United States and is found everywhere in Louisiana with the exception of extreme southeastern portions of the state. Striped skunks are omnivores, about the size of domestic cats with glossy black bodies and white paired stripes extending down the back. The amount of white on the tail will vary with individuals, some being entirely white. No two skunks appear to be exactly alike in the extent of white in the pelage. Individuals sometimes occur with only a small white spot on the head. These animals are referred to as “stars” in the fur trade and bring premium prices when pelted and sold.

Throughout Louisiana, the exact presence of individuals is evident by the familiar scent and frequent numbers found dead along highways. The rarity of individuals from our southeastern parishes is a mystery that even the famed LSU mammalogist Dr. George Lowery could not explain. Trapping records from the 1931-32 trapping season documented a record number of 122,679 skunks taken as part of the Louisiana fur trade. This number includes the much less common spotted skunk, which normally accounted for a very small portion of total skunk furs. Recent comparative take data of fur animals in our state show a complete absence of skunks in the fur trade. This has more to do with the declining pelt prices, rather than a decrease in state-wide numbers.

Female striped skunks usually come into heat in late winter, and breeding is followed by an average 62 to 66 day gestation period. Litters usually consist of six or seven kits but can be as large as 10. Young are born with eyes and ears closed, but before the end of the first month, these features open and small amounts of scent fluid can be discharged.

Control measures: In Louisiana, skunks are classified as outlaw quadrupeds and can be disposed of year-round during daylight hours. Prior to initiating a control program, however, it should be noted that both striped and spotted skunks are extremely beneficial by consuming large numbers of rats, mice and noxious insects around our homes and farms. Many times, however, benefits are outweighed by the burrowing and feeding habits of these animals. They often burrow under porches and buildings, whereas at other times they will dig up lawns and gardens in search of insect grubs and other food. On several occasions, homeowners have contacted me seeking information on how to rid skunks from underneath homes where they have taken residence. The strong ammonia-like odor left by these unwanted guests is a constant reminder of their presence.

Skunks are not climbers, and any small fence can serve as a deterrent in their movements. All points from which skunks can gain access beneath buildings should be made inaccessible with the exception of one opening where a wire-cage live trap should be set. Cat food or sardines

can be used as bait, and traps should be completely covered with a canvas bag to prevent animals from discharging their scent when captured. The canvas creates a dark, secure environment for the animal, allowing the skunk to be removed from the area prior to release or euthanasia. A heavy line can be secured to the trap cover in order to release animals at a distance and prevent spray exposure. Leg-hold traps should not be used to catch skunks near houses due to the likelihood of scent discharge. The scent from skunks is expelled through two tiny nipples located just inside the anus. This opening marks the outlet of two ducts leading from the scent-producing musk glands lying adjacent to the anus.

When hit by a skunk's spray, diluted solutions of vinegar or tomato juice can be used to eliminate most of the odor from people, pets and clothing. Neutroleum alpha is a commercially available scent-masking solution that can be applied to sprayed areas to reduce odor. Overly aggressive skunks and those that approach without hesitation should be treated with extra precaution due to the ability of these animals to serve as a carrier of rabies.



## Wildlife Species Profile: Wood duck (*Aix sponsa*)



The wood duck is a small to medium-sized dabbling duck that is native only to North America and is one of the few species of waterfowl that nest exclusively in tree cavities or man-made nesting structures. As the common name implies, it is a species associated with woodland habitat, and its entire life history is linked to the forested wetlands of North America. In the 1950s and 1960s, large areas of forested wetlands across much of the wood duck's range was cleared and converted to agricultural use.

These land use conversions eliminated or greatly reduced in value many lakes, sloughs and backwater areas that were prime wood duck habitat. The adaptability of wood ducks to switch from the natural nesting cavities associated with these wetland areas to man-made artificial cavities has been the most important factor in bringing the species back from once precariously low populations.

Wood ducks in the northern portions of their range begin a southward migration in September and October, taking them into Louisiana and other Gulf Coast states. The last migrants usually do not arrive until mid-December, and very few remain in northern areas past this time. In the Mississippi flyway, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama are the major wintering grounds for wood ducks. Banding records indicate that Louisiana receives migrants from at least 34 different states and four Canadian provinces.

Wood ducks will usually breed their first year, and mates are selected during the winter months prior to spring migration. Resident populations will pair up well before our warmer spring weather arrives in the state, and hens will always choose the nesting location. A strong homing instinct will draw females back to the same breeding areas, even the same hollow tree or nest box, year after year. Drakes will follow hens in their search for a nest site. When a suitable nesting location is found, females will lay about one egg per day until an average clutch of 12 eggs is produced. Wood ducks produce the largest clutch sizes of any North American duck, and occasionally more than one female will lay eggs in a single nest. This activity, known as "dump nesting," results in tremendously large clutches, but these clutches typically have reduced hatching success relative to normal clutch sizes.

If nests are destroyed by predators or flooding, hens will re-nest as many as three times in an attempt to produce a successful hatch. Some females have been shown to produce two successful broods in a single season. Incubation takes 28 -30 days, and hatchlings will remain in the nest for 12 to 24 hours prior to departure. Young instinctively know to leave the nest when the female positions herself below the cavity or nest box and begins making a series of soft clucking calls. The downward journey of the hatchlings is truly a "leap of faith" that may be 30 feet or more. A host of predators such as hawks, owls, mink, raccoons, snakes, turtles and large fish all make for hazardous early conditions. Research has shown that only half of the ducklings that leave the nest will survive to flight stage at 8 to 10 weeks.

Installation of artificial nesting boxes is the first step in any program to increase nesting success in any suitable area, but boxes must be diligently maintained each year to insure use. Structural integrity of boxes should be checked along with the removal of old nesting material and un-hatched eggs prior to each nesting season. Given the early time frame when mates are selected, nest box maintenance should be one of the first items on a wildlife managers "to do" list after January 1st. An important item to remember is that wood ducks do not bring nesting material into the structures they choose to nest in, and acceptance of boxes is greatly enhanced by the addition of wood shavings or other types of nest material. Detailed plans of materials and layout for constructing wood duck boxes can be obtained by contacting me by e-mail at [dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu).

## Louisiana Wildlife News

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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