

Crawfish News



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Nuisance Wildlife Control

Raccoons and river otters have been causing havoc in quite a few crawfish ponds. In many cases, farmers have reported hundreds of traps turned over during the night. The direct loss of crawfish and the wasted time to reset the traps can add up to hundreds of dollars in damages. Because of their status as “furbearers,” there are certain guidelines that must be followed when dealing with these animals.

A detailed description of the laws and trapping suggestions can be found in the “Louisiana Crawfish Production Manual” available on the LSU AgCenter Web site or copies are available at any of the parish extension offices. The following is a brief overview of what can be done to solve your problem.

First of all, poisons *are not* a legal option. It is illegal to put out poisons for any animals except field rats. The wax-coated bait blocks work well on rats around the bait cutting station or where you park your boat. It also helps to keep the area clean of old crates or other trash. Raccoons and otters will not touch these bait blocks. Using any other chemical poison is illegal and may result in pets or non-target wildlife being killed.

The legal options are to trap or shoot the raccoons and otters. If you cannot find a local trapper to catch the animals for you, you will have to do it yourself. Buy a \$25 trapping license if you plan to sell the hides of the animals you catch. Trapping season lasts until March 31 each year. Raccoons can be caught with leg-hold traps or the body-gripping traps. A relatively new raccoon trap is a small, pipe-shaped trap that catches the animal by the paw when it reaches into the hole



for the bait. Otters are more difficult to trap. The body-gripping traps work well but take a little practice to set effectively.

Farmers and landowners can hunt raccoons and opossums with a .22 caliber rifle anytime during the year when they are found destroying crops. You will need a basic resident hunting license. If river otters and mink are also causing damage, you will need a special nuisance animal permit. Permits are available from the USDA Wildlife Services office (formerly called USDA Animal Damage Control Unit), which is located in Crowley, La. (337-783-0182), the state directors office in Port Allen, La. (225-389-0229) or by contacting the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) in Baton Rouge at 225-763-3557. There is no charge for the permit. The permit will allow you to use a shotgun instead of a .22 rifle.

A different Louisiana law allows licensed hunters to hunt raccoons at night with a spotlight using a .22 caliber rifle and a dog. During the trapping season, there is no limit to the nightly take. You will need to have either a basic resident hunting license or a trapping license to be out at night hunting raccoons. If you plan on hunting at night, contact the local LDWF enforcement agent or the closest LDWF district office and let them know you will be hunting nuisance raccoons. Enforcement agents are sympathetic with farmers trying to control problem raccoons. The agents can also assist farmers with crawfish poaching problems if you suspect someone is running your traps.



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Handling and Transporting Your Catch

One of our field crawfish extension agents recently received a call of complaint from a restaurant about crawfish arriving at the restaurant dead. Even though we are officially in winter, warm spells, such as we had in late December, dictate that crawfish be sufficiently cooled from the time they are caught through transportation to their end destination, whether that be a wholesaler or direct sale to a restaurant. Let's review basic handling and transport recommendations for sacks of live crawfish to insure they get to your buyer in the best condition possible. We often hear that buyers love to purchase from certain producers because their crawfish remain alive in their coolers for several or more days – this is because those producers maintain good water quality in their ponds and they are handling and transporting their crawfish properly from the time they leave the water to the time they get to the buyer.

Handle with Care

Many crawfish that are being harvested at this time are small and “tender” (they have thin shells) and they are highly susceptible to being crushed if the sacks are not handled with “kid gloves.” Avoid rough handling (throwing or bouncing the sacks) or stacking the sacks more than three high when crawfish are tender as this can crush the shells and cause death of crawfish, particularly in sacks at the bottom of the stack.

Wet, Cool and Covered — “ICE IS NICE”

Do not leave sacks sitting in the sun or exposed to the wind for very long, even in cool weather. Do not let sacks lie in water. A wet burlap tarp is a good cover for sacks of crawfish and will keep them cool, moist and out of the sun. It is important that the gills of the crawfish not dry out – this leads to rapid death. Use a tarp in the boat, for sacks placed on the bank for later pickup and in the bed of the truck on the way to the buyer. If crawfish are stored in a cooler, the



temperature should be 38 to 45 degrees and the crawfish kept moist by placing crushed ice on top of the sacks. To quote a former LSU AgCenter extension seafood processing specialist when he spoke about commercial shrimpers on how best to maintain top quality of their catch, “ICE IS NICE.” As the ice slowly melts, water will drip through the sacks keeping the crawfish moist. If ice is not available, spray the sacks with water as needed to keep them moist. If the weather is warm and you are transporting crawfish in the back of your truck, put ice on them as well to keep them cool and prevent them from drying out.

Make Sure They're Clean

Take care to insure that crawfish are not bagged with grass, bait, turtles or mud in the sack. Keep the floor of your boat and the bed of your truck clean to prevent contamination of sacks from oil, fuel, grease or dirty water that is bound to accumulate. Consider placing sacks of crawfish on a pallet. Store empty sacks in a clean container until you need them.

Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION: I have always heard an old wives tale that if we have thunder in October that it will be a good crawfish season? Is this true, because we didn't have much rain in October and it appears the season is off to slow start?

ANSWER: Based on reports that we have been getting from producers, it appears that the 2008-09 season is starting out slow, with few (and small) crawfish available, but as in football or other sports, a “slow start” does not necessarily mean a “slow finish.” As we reported in the November 2008 Crawfish News sampling, your pond with a dip-net should tell whether you have a good crop of young coming on. As reported in the September 2008 Crawfish News, and also the last issue of Louisiana Farm and Ranch (December 2008), few, if any, of this year's hatch of young are ready to harvest



before January if ponds are flooded after October 1. It is our impression that many crawfish ponds were flooded later than usual, which would contribute to a delayed crop of young prior to January. So, typically the only crawfish that could be harvested before January in any significant amount are holdovers from the previous crop year and some young from early to mid-September flooded ponds in which water quality was well-managed. If holdovers are more scarce than normal this season, which would contribute to the slow start this season, a large number may have died during the summer from drought (July was a particularly dry month), levee renovation or other factors. It is also likely many were flushed from their burrows prematurely in early September, before ponds were flooded, from heavy rains associated with hurricanes Ike and Gustav. These “flushed-out” holdovers, along with some young, may have perished or were scattered “out” of the ponds. Finally, this past October and November were drier than historical norms for south Louisiana. Crawfish that burrow high on the levees, away from the pond edge, depend on rainfall to soften the hard plug that seals the burrow so that they can emerge. Many crawfish do not emerge from these “high” burrows, even if the pond is flooded, until considerable rains come. So a drier-than-normal October and November could also be a contributing factor to the slow start by delaying significant crawfish emergence from burrows. Because heavy rain is most often associated with thunderstorms, the old axiom about crawfish production being associated with thunder in October has some validity.

Industry News



We thought it would be good for the crawfish farming industry to know a bit more about some of the organizations that represent their interest. In this newsletter we will feature the Louisiana Crawfish Promotion and Research Board. The Louisiana Crawfish Promotion and Research Board was established in 1983 by Act 679 of the Louisiana Legislature. It is domiciled within the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF). Funds are generated for crawfish promotion and research activities through a check-off (assessment) of (1) ¼ cent per pound on all manufactured crawfish bait sold in the state, (2) 2 cents for each sack capable of holding over 25 pounds, (3) 1 cent for each sack capable of holding less than 25 pounds and (4) 1 cent per pound levied on all crawfish tail meat sold in the state by crawfish tail meat producers who have not paid the assessment through R.S. 3:556.6 (basically, non-Louisiana-produced crawfish meat). Participation in the check-off for baits and sacks is voluntary, and those who don't want to participate can seek refunds charged to them from the LDAF by showing proper receipts for bait and sack purchases. Annual revenues depend on the state's crawfish crop, both farmed and wild, but funds usually range from \$80,000 to \$100,000 per fiscal year (July 1

through June 30). By statute, the board may spend funds on advertising, promotion and marketing of Louisiana crawfish; research that will aid the crawfish industry; efforts to increase the consumption of Louisiana crawfish and providing producers, distributors, retailers and consumers with educational information on the nutrition and health value of crawfish. The board, appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture and confirmed by the Louisiana Senate, has 13 members representing various segments of the crawfish industry.

Present members and the organizations they represent are as follows:

- Ralph Babin, Raceland, La., representing Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association-Crawfish Farmers East of the Atchafalaya River
- Fran Stroud, Elton La., representing Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association-Crawfish Farmers West of the Atchafalaya River and South of Highway 190 (chairperson)
- Robert Buller, Opelousas, La., representing Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association-Crawfish Farmers West of the Atchafalaya River and North of Highway 190
- Jody Meche, Henderson, La., representing those engaged in harvesting wild crawfish
- Mike Bienvenu, St. Martinville, La., representing those engaged in harvesting wild crawfish
- Wylie Jewell, Maringouin, La., representing those engaged in harvesting wild crawfish
- Wayne Romig, Maringouin, La., representing those engaged in harvesting wild crawfish
- Greg Faulk, Lafayette, La., representing Louisiana Farm Bureau
- Greg Benhard, Palmetto, La., representing owners/operators of crawfish bait facilities
- David Savoy, Church Point, La., representing crawfish processors
- Mike Maenza, Kenner, La., representing Louisiana Restaurant Association, Louisiana restaurant owners/operators
- Bill Pizzolato, Baton Rouge, La., representing owners/operators of crawfish retail facilities
- Rudy Sparks, Patterson, La., representing Louisiana Landowners Association, landowners engaged in commercial crawfish leasing

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Additional information on crawfish aquaculture is available on the LSU AgCenter Web site at

www.lsuagcenter.com/en/crops_livestock/aquaculture/crawfish

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LSU AgCenter extension and research personnel have scheduled five crawfish producer meetings in February. The items to be discussed will include: Springtime Crawfish Pond Management Concerns, Factors Affecting Growth and Production, Industry Update, Your Questions – Our

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Answers and other topics of interest. Meeting locations and times are listed below. The Louisiana Crawfish Promotion and Research Board and Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association will be sponsoring a lunch at the Acadia Parish meeting on February 13.

Upcoming Crawfish Producer Meetings

Date	Parish	City	Address	Time
February 11	Jeff Davis	Jennings	Jeff Davis Parish Extension Office 1006 S. Lake Arthur Avenue, Jennings, LA 70546	9AM-Noon
February 11	Vermilion	Abbeville	Vermilion Parish Extension Office 1105 W Port Street, Abbeville, LA 70510	6:30 –9:30 PM
February 12	Avoyelles	Mansura	Avoyelles Parish Extension Office 8592 Hwy. 1, Suite 1, Mansura, LA 71350	9AM-Noon
February 13	Acadia	Crowley	Acadia Parish Extension Office Conference Center 157 Cherokee Drive, Crowley, LA 70526	9 AM-Noon (Lunch Served)
February 25	Concordia	Ferriday	Concordia Parish Correctional Center 26356 Highway 15, Ferriday, LA 71334	