

New Boating Regulations for Louisiana

Effective July 1, 2008 three changes in boating regulations became effective for Louisiana boaters.

1. Anyone onboard a vessel less than 16 feet in length that is propelled by a hand tiller-type motor is required to **wear** a personal flotation device while the vessel is in motion. The law exempts any type of electric trolling motor.
2. Anyone onboard a vessel less than 26 feet that is propelled by a hand tiller-type motor in excess of 10 horsepower is required to use an emergency engine cut-off switch while underway.
3. Persons engaged in water sports, including, but not limited to, waterskiing, wake boarding or wake surfing, must wear a personal flotation device.

White-tailed Deer Educational Program Set for mid-July

The LSU AgCenter, in conjunction with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the South La. Branch of the Quality Deer Management Association, will host a white-tailed deer educational program on Tuesday July 15 at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) building at 2000 Quail Drive in Baton Rouge, La. The program begins at 6:00 p.m. and includes an overview of the state's new deer tagging program along with changes in the rules and regulations for the 08/09 hunting season. Information also will be presented on the South La. deer telemetry study, the Black Bear Conservation Committee and the nutritional needs of white-tailed deer. There is no cost for attending the event but participants must register by calling the South La. Branch of the Quality Deer Management Association at 225-291-7500.

Hunting-related Laws Take Affect

The Louisiana legislature passed, and the governor signed, two hunting-related acts that will go into law for the 2008-09 season. Act 22 raised the age limit for youth hunts in the state to be set at 17 years of age rather than the current 15-year-old requirement. The new law gives young hunters an additional two years where they can take advantage of the many special youth hunt weekends that Louisiana offers.

Act 51 legalized the use of crossbows during archery season for all licensed archery hunters, along with changing the wording of the muzzleloader season to the primitive weapons season in the hunting regulations.

Time to Schedule Hunter Education Courses

Hunters should begin to consider registering for Hunter Education Courses, which are mandatory for anyone wishing to purchase a Louisiana hunting license if born on or after September 1, 1969. The classes are free, and many individuals in need of the one-time certification wait until it is too close to hunting season and classes are either filled or no longer available. For information on class times and locations, contact the information desk of the LDWF at 225-765-2800.

Wildlife Species Profile

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)

Eight species of hummingbirds have been recorded in Louisiana as either transients or winter residents. A ninth species, the ruby-throated, is the only hummingbird that breeds and nests in Louisiana. The crown, nape and back of adult males are a bright glittering green with a characteristic iridescent ruby-red throat. Depending on the angle at which light strikes the throat however, its color can vary from scarlet, geranium, yellow, green or black. Adult females possess the same glittering green crown, nape and neck as adult males but their throat is a clean grayish-white. Immature males closely resemble adult females except for varied amounts of greenish or dusky streaking or spotting on the throat. In some cases, a few iridescent red feathers may also be found in this area. Immature females never show any red iridescence on the throat.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are migratory, flying southward from their breeding grounds more than 500 miles across the Gulf of Mexico to the wintering grounds in the tropics of Mexico and Central America. In winter, they are common as far south as Costa Rica. A complete molt takes place during the winter, and following the restoration of all plumage, the birds begin their flight back North. Breeding populations arrive in the southern parts of Louisiana in March. Birds that breed in our northern parishes arrive a week or two later. Males are the first to arrive in the spring, and since they do not share parental duties, they usually begin leaving our state in early July, immediately after breeding is completed. Females usually depart by mid-August, followed in September by juveniles. These young from Louisiana are joined by a flood of northerly breeding ruby-throats that inundate the state in late September and early October.

Male ruby-throats establish territories as soon as they arrive on their



breeding grounds, and intruders are aggressively challenged by a series of broad U-shaped flights from the male whose territory is being threatened. The first task for arriving females is to build a deep-cupped walnut shell-size nest that is located anywhere from 5 to 50 feet above the ground. Females lay two elliptical white eggs similar in size to navy beans. Young ruby-throats hatch blind, naked and helpless following a 15-day incubation period. They are fed a high protein and high energy diet of insects and nectar by their mother who uses her needle-like bill to pump the regurgitated liquid directly into the crop of the young. Louisiana has a long nesting season, allowing ruby-throats to possibly nest as many as three times in a single season.

Nectar provides the sugar that is needed by ruby-throats for the enormous amount of energy that they expend each day. Equally important in the diet, however, are small insects and spiders that provide

the protein necessary for growth and cell repair as well as essential vitamins and minerals. Feeders are an excellent way to supplement a hummingbird's regular diet with an unlimited amount of calories to fuel their rapid metabolism. A good simple formula can be made by dissolving 1 cup of cane sugar with 3 cups of boiling water. Red feeders that are commonly found on the market will disallow the need to add any type of red colorant to the mixture. Another great advantage with feeders is the excellent viewing opportunities they provide. If you can stand perfectly still within inches of a feeder, ruby-throats will fly so close you can literally feel the breeze of the wing beats! There are also a host of trees, shrubs and vines that can be planted in a home garden to attract hummingbirds of all kinds. You can contact me at dreed@agcenter.lsu.edu, and I'll be glad to send you a list of these plants.

Critter Corner

Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

The Virginia Opossum is common throughout Louisiana and can be found in almost all our wooded areas and coastal marshes. Adults are similar in size to large domestic house cats but have shorter legs and heavier bodies. Females possess an external fur-lined abdominal pouch or marsupium in which six pairs of teats are arranged in a horseshoe design. A thirteenth teat can be found in the middle of this pattern. Mating occurs in late January or early February, followed by a second breeding period in early summer. Young are born after 12 to 13 days of embryonic life and even though completely blind and only four-tenths of an inch in length, they are able to crawl to their mother's marsupium and latch onto one of the available teats. Weaning occurs 75 to 80 days later, and young will normally disperse on their own after 3 to 4 months of age.

The opossum is usually active only at night and spends its daylight hours resting in hollow tree stumps or rotten logs. At nightfall, the animal begins its forays for food. Opossums seldom go hungry, mainly because they will consume almost anything. Insects, fruits, berries, grain, birds and their eggs,

along with carrion of any sort are all part of their diet. Around our homes they often can be found in garbage cans and waste piles feeding on scraps. The well known mammalogist Dr. George Lowery often told the story of desiring to try a meal of cooked "possum" and sweet potatoes until one day when he watched one emerge from the inside of a dead horse where it had been feeding on the entrails from the bloated carcass.

Opossum tracks are quite easy to distinguish from most any other mammal of similar size. The front feet have five claw-bearing toes while the hind feet possess four. Associated with the clawed toes on the hind feet is an opposable clawless appendage that is almost thumb-like in appearance. The animal is very dexterous while climbing up among tree limbs and often uses its tail as a "fifth leg." When frightened or threatened, opossums will often bear their teeth, growl, hiss and exude a greenish fluid from their anal glands. This portrays them as much more ferocious than they really are, and when these tactics appear to be failing, the animal will usually enact its famous behavioral pattern of "play-

ing possum." In this posture, it will roll over, close its eyes and allow its tongue to hang out of its mouth while feigning death.

Control Measures. Opossums are classified as regulated quadrupeds by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. They have no closed season and can be taken at night by one or more licensed hunters with one or more dogs and one .22 rimfire rifle. There is no bag limit for nighttime or daytime hunting of opossums during the open trapping season. During the remainder of the year, the bag limit is one per person per day or night. Opossums are of little value (\$1.06 was the average unit price in 2007) and accounted for only 77 pelts out of over 18,000 taken last year. Pelt-ing and selling of any furs, including opossum is illegal during the closed trapping season. Damage from opossums usually comes from their raiding habits around our homes, in addition to destroying poultry, game birds and their nests. There are no fumigants or toxicants labeled for opossum control. Trapping and shooting are the best control options available.



Plant Species Profile

Strawberry Bush (*Euonymus americanus*)

The strawberry bush is one of a very small list of plants so highly sought after by white-tailed deer that in areas with even extremely low deer densities, the plant is often absent. This "ice-cream" plant as it is often called, is also known as wahoo. The plant is a small shrub with distinct square green branchlets and leaves 1 to 3 inches long that are oval to lanceolate. The tiny flowers are found in the leaf axils with the fruit resting on the blades of the adjoining leaf. The fruit is a distinct capsule about 1 inch in diameter that, upon opening, will expose four to five bright red seeds. Strawberry bush has the potential to grow throughout Louisiana, but because it is so highly preferred by deer, it is nowhere abundant.



Louisiana Wildlife News

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