

Results of Recent Feral Hog Survey

Results from the feral hog survey that was included in the January 2008 issue of Louisiana Wildlife News were recently compiled.

Two hundred surveys were returned from 50 parishes in Louisiana. Eighty percent of respondents reported feral hogs on lands that they owned or leased.

More than 95 % of individuals with feral hogs experienced some type of damage. The most frequent damage occurred in wildlife food plots, physical structures or general ground damage and timber resources.

Other problems reported were loss of recreational hunting opportunities and disease concerns. Landowners consistently reported that hog numbers had increased on their area over the last one, five or 10 years. Most respondents believed these increases were the result of natural causes.

Landowners are spending an average of \$400 each year on control costs with hunting and trapping being the major methods used.

An option currently being considered to help battle the continuing feral hog problem in the state is House bill number 693, which would legalize the shooting of coyotes and feral hogs at night in designated areas. Landowners would be required to obtain a \$20 permit, valid for three consecutive days.

Deer Telemetry Study Enters Final Year

A joint research effort between the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries involves the use of radio tracking collars to monitor deer movement on approximately 40,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest near Baton Rouge, between the Mississippi River and Atchafalaya Basin. Thirty-six deer are currently being monitored while important survival, mortality and movement data are obtained. This information will help landowners, hunting clubs and the LDWF with future deer management plans. The study is being directed by Dr. Michael Chamberlain and his graduate student Mr. Justin Thayer with the LSU School of Renewable Natural Resources.

Quail and Native Grass Habitat Workshop Planned

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center is hosting a quail and native grass habitat workshop on Saturday July 26, 2008 at the Southern University AgCenter, Maurice A. Edmond Livestock Arena in Baton Rouge, La. The program is entitled "Cash for Conservation" and will focus on quail production, quail habitat restoration, native grassland production and methods of increasing income through environmental incentive programs that benefit quail. For registration and specific program details, contact Dr. LaShunda Anderson at 225-771-2262 ext. 235.

Wildlife Issues of Concern in Current Legislative Session

The regular Louisiana Legislative session is currently considering several bills of importance to hunters and fishermen in our state. Included in the following list are House and Senate bill numbers along with each piece of legislation in the event that you would like to contact your local representative concerning any of these matters.

HB 645: Would dedicate one-twentieth of 1 percent of the state sales and use tax to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation Fund. This legislation is important to help fund many of the current programs within the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that have become financially strained in recent years primarily because of decreasing revenue from license sales.

HB 694: Would increase the age eligibility for youth deer hunts to under 18 years of age. The current law makes the cutoff at under 17 years of age. It is hoped this legislation will help continue to keep young hunters involved in the sport of hunting during a time period when many other activities are available to occupy their time.

HB 696: Would prohibit the import, transport and release of feral hogs on property where the hogs are unconfined and likely to move freely onto adjacent property. A permit from LDWF would be required for the transport of any feral hogs within the state. This legislation is sought to alleviate the problem that now exists with individuals moving hogs into areas for recreational hunting purposes. *(continued on page 2)*

Wildlife Species Profile

Eastern Cougar (*Felis concolor concolor*)



Although officially listed on the endangered species list in Louisiana by way of the Florida panther, the status of the Eastern Cougar in our state remains a mystery. Taxonomic listings at one time classified the Florida panther as a distinct subspecies but current genetic research is now suggesting that all North American cougars can be treated as one subspecies (*Felis concolor concolor*).

Adult male cougars measure 7 feet or more in length with the tail comprising more than 35 percent of this total. This long tail is the surest way to distinguish the cougar from our much smaller and more numerous bobcat, which has a tail of only 6 inches or less in length. Cougars are a tawny cinnamon-buff in coloration with a black-tipped tale from which the nickname "painter" was derived. There are no known melanistic color phases of cougars and reports of "black panthers" have no scientific evidence to support such sightings. Cougars usually breed at 3 years of age and females are polyestrous, coming into heat almost immediately after giving birth. After a 96-day gestation period litters of 3 to 6 spotted kittens are born.

There is a belief that these big cats can still be found in our state. This comes from the stories and reported sightings that almost every

outdoorsman and wildlife biologist has heard from friends and acquaintances. In some crowds, nothing short of religion and politics can stir up a fuss quicker than denying that these folks really saw what they "thought" they saw.

There are several reasons in support of the possibility that these animals may still be present in Louisiana. Cougars are sold and moved extensively in the exotic pet trade, and odds are that some of these animals are accidentally or intentionally released into the wild. Although these animals would not contribute greatly to the overall benefit of any wild populations, they would explain some of the possible sightings. Secondly, cougars are known to have wide home ranges (25 square miles or more) and in some instances travel hundreds of miles when dispersing. This would increase the probability that an individual could

be seen passing through any area with suitable habitat in our state. Because they are such habitat generalists a wide variety of landscapes serve to benefit their needs. Finally, the number one prey item for cougars are white-tailed deer, whose populations have greatly expanded within Louisiana and throughout the Southeast.

There are other reasons, however, for doubting the existence of cougars in our state. Despite a small population of cougars in Florida where individuals are killed every year on that state's highways, no known instances of cougar road-kills have occurred elsewhere in the eastern United States. The thousands of game cameras in operation throughout Louisiana and the Southeast also have failed to document a single sighting of one of these big cats.

A common mistake for reported cougar occurrences in remote areas are the presence of tracks along creek beds and dirt roads. These are often the result of large domestic dogs that leave a characteristic claw mark on the front of each toe. Cougars lack these distinguishing claw marks since their claws are held in the retracted position while walking.

(continued from page 1)

SB 165: Would allow the use of crossbows during the special archery season for deer and also change the name of the special muzzleloader deer hunting season to primitive firearms season. The bill is supported by the LDWF as a means to increase the opportunities for Louisiana hunters while also serving as an additional means to control increased deer populations over much of the state.

SB 292 and SB 293: Provides for public access within the high-water stages of navigable waterways for the purpose of recreational hook-and-line fishing. Further clarification would designate fishing as a specific public use for which privately owned banks could be accessed. This legislation is supported by most fishing groups in the state while strong opposition is being heard from individuals concerned over trespassing and private property rights.

Critter Corner

Brazilian Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*)



Approximately 11 species of bats are known to live in Louisiana, of which the Brazilian free-tailed probably causes more problems than any other. The unique physical feature that distinguishes them from all other Louisiana bats is their tail, extending over one-half its length beyond the interfemoral membrane connecting the hind legs. This “free-tailed” appearance is unlike all of our other bats with a membrane extending the entire length of the tail. Brazilian free-tailed bats tend to occur in large numbers, occupying old buildings where cracks and crevices provide them access to attics and inside walls. Once established in these areas, the daily deposits of feces and urine create an unpleasant odor that smells strongly of ammonia. These bats also have facial glands that exude an oily substance on the muzzle and beneath the lower jaw. When hundreds or thousands of individuals are concentrated in small areas, the strong musty odor from these glands can be overwhelming.

Most all species of Louisiana bats have the unique reproductive trait of mating in the late summer and fall months, with the sperm being stored in the female until the following spring when ovulation and fertilization take place. Brazilian free-tailed bats mate in the spring in the span of a few days, followed immediately by ovulation and fertilization. Females produce a single young that is blind and naked at birth. Large amounts of milk are produced, and females will accept any individual that attaches itself to one of her nipples. This is unlike any of our other Louisiana bats that will only accept their own young when nursing.

Growth is rapid, and young begin to fly at about 5 weeks of age. Adults and young usually leave occupied buildings on a daily basis after sunset and return well before sunrise. These feeding forays lead to an average daily consumption of 3 grams of insects (mostly mosquitoes), by each bat. This is the major reason why many Louisiana residents erect bat-houses on their property to aid in attracting these mammals.

Control Measures. The probability exists that bats attracted to artificially erected cavities will become uninvited guests in other areas. When a colony has occupied a building, no registered toxicants or fumigants are labeled for lethal control. All bats are protected in this regard, and the only viable option is to seal up all cracks and crevices to exclude them. Unlike rats and mice, bats have two characteristics that make their control much easier. They will not chew new openings into a structure, and entire colonies will leave the structure on a daily basis for feeding purposes.

Control is achieved by closing off all openings with the exception of one major access point in which a bat excluder is installed. For small openings, this can be as simple as a loose pant leg nailed over the opening, allowing bats to exit down the inside of the material but preventing their re-entry back the same way. For larger openings such as soffits and vents a sheet of plastic can be hung down for about 4 feet in front of the opening, allowing individuals to fall down and fly off after hitting the plastic. Returning bats tend to fly directly into the plastic barrier, rather than negotiating their way up the back-side of the obstacle. When all bats have been successfully excluded, the remaining openings can be sealed. To avoid trapping flightless young in occupied structures, control measures should be initiated prior to parturition (no later than May 31) or following that time when young are able to fly (no earlier than August 15). Another serious concern when dealing with bats is the possibility of rabies infection. Studies have shown that the causative viral agent for rabies can be airborne, infecting individuals without any direct contact with bats, but only having entered areas where large colonies were present.

Plant Species Profile

Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

Black walnut is a large tree with distinctive black bark on older plants that is divided into broad ridges and deep furrows. Leaves are alternate, even-pinnately compound, and 1-2 feet long. Fifteen to 23 falcate leaflets, 2 ½ to 4 ½ inches long, comprise each leaf. The twigs of black walnut possess a distinct chambered pith that is a good identifying characteristic, especially on younger trees during the dormant season when leaves are absent. Flowers are monoecious, meaning that both male and female flowers are present on the same tree. Fruits are nuts enclosed in a distinct yellow-green husk, approximately 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches in diameter.

Although widely distributed in Louisiana, black walnut is nowhere abundant. In the rich upland soils where they are normally found, they occur as scattered individuals. The wood is of great value and used extensively by some of the finest furniture manufactures for veneer and solid furniture products. It is also used in the manufacture of gunstocks on some of the finer quality rifles and shotguns. Cabinets, boat building and interior paneling are some of the other uses for the hard, heavy and durable wood of black walnut. Wood shavings from black walnut should never be introduced into the bedding stalls of horses. If consumed by horses, laminitis (an inflammation in the hoof) will occur along with mild colic.

The meat contained within the hard shell of the nut is extremely sweet and used in many dessert recipes and ice-cream toppings. These nuts are also highly prized by squirrels and hogs for the tasty meat they contain.

The outer husk surrounding the hard shell of black walnut contains quantities of the chemical rotenone that is used in the renovation of old ponds to remove existing fish populations when restocking is desired. Crushed black walnut husks can be used in this manner to interfere with the respiration cycle of fish, forcing them to gulp at the surface for air. In this manner, fish can be caught and consumed if desired since rotenone has no effect on meat quality.

As a historical side note, black walnut husks also contain a strong dye that was extensively used to impart the "butternut" color on the uniform of many Confederate soldiers in the War Between the States.



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