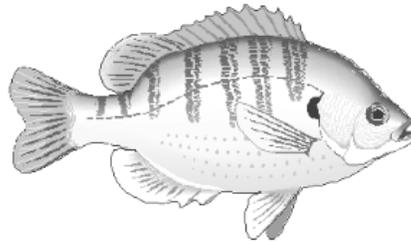


# Ohio Pond News



The Ohio State University



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## Gracefully Surrender to Muskrat Management!

**Forget about muskrat “control”.** One can remove a fence post and it will stay removed. Remove a muskrat from a body of water and in uncommon hours, another one will replace it. So it is with The Things of Ponds & Wildlife!

Throughout the year – all year long, the number one species of human-wildlife conflict in Ohio is the native muskrat - *Ondatra zibethicus*. Dismiss the havoc of deer browsing and the defecations of Canada geese; it is the mighty burrowing muskrat that drives pond owners and pond managers crazy.

Many pond owners report going for years or decades without experiencing muskrats, but under the cover of darkness, one – then two, show up. Unless one is present at dawn or dusk to witness the wake’s “V” formation from the swimming muskrat, they often go unnoticed. It is the inexplicable cattail cuttings that wash ashore from the previous night’s feeding, or the lawnmower’s wheel that drops into a subsided burrow that causes alarm. “What’s this”, they ask.

Though often compared to the much larger beaver, muskrats are actually related to mice and rats. A rodent, it is easy to envision a soaking wet muskrat as being a large rat – owing to its nearly hairless tail.

However, when dry, which is seldom, they have a beautifully brown soft coat comprised of a thick undercoat (warmth) and an outer coat of long, shining and waterproof hairs.

**Why so many muskrats and why now?** Like never before, new “people ponds”, as well as storm water management ponds, are erupting upon the Ohio landscape. This, combined with

the muskrat’s high biotic potential, spells human conflict. Muskrats breed from February to August. The birthing activity takes places from March to September, with the peak period being May. In as little as 26 days, a litter

of 1 to 11 arrives. Average litter size is 6. There may be 2 to 3 litters – or more, each breeding season. One can now begin to see why muskrats can suddenly explode in numbers around a quiet pond-scape. In 10

to 12 months, newborns will be of breeding age. It doesn’t take a math major to see just what is coming. Even factoring in a high mortality rate, a breeding pair of muskrats can suddenly explode in numbers around a quiet pond-scape. In 10 to 12 months, newborns will be of breeding age. It doesn’t take a math major to see just what is coming. Even factoring in a high mortality rate, a breeding pair of muskrats can exponentially increase in just one summer. Above water lodges are seen in wetlands, but in deeper water ponds muskrats any

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### Muskrats at a Glance...

- Monogamous (Usually)
- Breeding Period: Feb.-Aug.
- Gestation: ~26 Days (22-30)
- Birth Period: March-Sept.
- Litters Per Year: 2-3 (1-5)
- Litter Size: 1-11 (6)
- Breeding Age: 10-12 Months
- Adult Weight: 2-5 lbs (3)
- Life Expectancy: < 2 Yrs (4)
- Home Range: 100-200 Yards from Den or Lodge
- Primary Predators: Mink, Fox, Coyote, and Raptors

### About This Issue?

- I’ve gotten numerous requests this past year on problematic wildlife around ponds. Over the past 10 years, I’ve written articles on many of the concerns. For this issue, I’ve re-printed these articles incorporating updates wherever necessary.

## Gracefully Surrender to Muskrat Management! *(Continued)*

burrow into embankments. If there is any light at the end of the tunnel – *or den*, it is that muskrat lives are short.

No matter how one manages their pond, there is always something for the muskrat to feed upon. Their diet consists of plant stems, roots, rhizomes, and foliage of aquatic plants, cattails, water lilies, pondweed, and sedge – as well as clams, snails, mussels, insects, crayfish, small fish, frogs, and even neighboring corn plants.

**So what is the solution to reducing the damage and the presence of muskrats?** Right now is a great time to begin planning-for, or actively recruiting, trappers to harvest muskrats during the regulated statewide furbearer season of **November 10, 2006 through February 28, 2007**. This is an important time to reduce their numbers.

If active damage is occurring outside of the regulated season, *on a case by case and county by county basis*, state wildlife officers can issue a permit to legally trap muskrats.

**There are non-lethal tactics to deter muskrats from burrowing into pond embankments.**

- Rock rip-rap placed along the shoreline can be effective if it is extended well below the anticipated low water line.



Ohio Division of Wildlife

- Some pond owners have chosen to lay flattened chain link fence along shorelines extending well below the projected low water line. Vegetation is then left to grow up into the flattened chain link fence that is shore-anchored. This can be an aesthetic concern as well as a stumbling source.

The most effective solution is a comprehensive trapping program during the regulated season. One thing is for certain; doing nothing will result in a dangerous place to walk, fish, and mow as former underground burrows collapse. Like many rodent family species, population cycles ebb and flow.

For many pond owners and managers, muskrat management has become a perpetual maintenance item. **Never-ever assume that once muskrats are perceived to be eliminated from the pond, that they are gone for good!**

*John Rockenbaugh—Union County Soil & Water Conservation District.*

## Coping with Pond Leeches

Many a pond swimmer has come out of a pond and been taken aback with horror at the sight of leeches hanging onto their skin. Quite frequently, that's the end of swimming in that pond. Leeches conjure up visions of giant blood-sucking monsters or the transfer of hideous diseases to the poor victim. Let's set the record straight about leeches in ponds.

Almost all ponds have leeches in them, they are part of the pond ecosystem. They attach to all kinds of pond animals, from aquatic insects to fish, and yes humans. Their abundance is largely determined by several factors. Ponds with good populations of bluegills and small bass tend to have far fewer leeches in them. Bluegills are quickly attracted to anything that wiggles along the bottom or on vegetation, and will devour a leech quite quickly. Excessive vegetation and decaying organic debris can lead to dense populations of leeches. Part of this population explosion increase is that dense vegetation inhibits the ability of bluegills to find and eat the leeches.

Do leeches transfer diseases to humans? No, I know of no instance where a leech has transferred some disease to humans. That does not mean they cannot cause a human some discomfort. In some folks, the attachment site can be an area of slight to

intense itching. In extreme cases, the "wound" can become infected and require medical attention. Like any other wound, a leech attachment site should be cleaned with a mild soap and treated with an antibacterial, over-the-counter cream.

So what can be done with a pond full of leeches? The only approved product is copper sulfate pentahydrate which is the same copper compound used to control many nuisance algae problems. The recommended dosage to kill leeches is 5 ppm, about three times the level used to kill algae. The problem with applying 5 ppm of copper sulfate to a pond is it will kill everything else, including the fish. Thus, this strategy is only recommended only for fish-less ponds.

The best leech control strategy is to maintain good populations of largemouth bass and bluegills, whose predation on leeches should keep their populations low. Combining that with a good aquatic plant management strategy is wise, since excessive vegetation is conducive to high leech abundance. Strive to maintain plant abundance at about 10% of the pond's surface area.

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## Coping with Pond Leeches (continued)

Another strategy that can work for removing leeches is bait trapping, but it requires some daily labor on the part of the pond owner. A metal can with a re-closable lid and fresh, raw meat is all that is needed. Coffee cans work great. Drill holes in the can with hole size being dependent on leech size. Put some raw meat in the can, attach a string, and lower it to near the bottom in

shallow water. The leeches will come for the raw meat. Each day, check the can, remove the leeches, and destroy them. Repeat the procedure until leech catches dwindle off to near zero. Leeches are most active in warm water, so the can technique should be done in June, July, and August.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

## Unusual Creatures in Ponds!

Bryozoans are large, globular, brown jelly-like growths that occasionally show up in Ohio's ponds and lakes, usually attached to woody debris or docks. They can range in size from a baseball to as large as a basketball. Freshwater jellyfish resemble their saltwater counterparts that so many of us are familiar with from nature and science shows on TV. In our ponds, they grow to about the size of a quarter and are white in color. Some ponds will only have a few jellyfish while other ponds can have thousands present.



They almost always appear in September and October, live for a few weeks, and then disappear. Some pond owners have told me they have seen freshwater jellyfish only 1 or 2 times in the decades they've owned the ponds.

Jellyfish are the medusa stage while the sessile, bottom attached stage is called the hydra stage. Same creature. Most ponds have the sessile, hydra stage but very specific, poorly understood conditions cause the appearance of the medusa stage, or free-floating jellyfish.



In general, the life history of these two freshwater oddities are poorly understood. What is known is that they are filter feeders and pose no threat to humans.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

## Pond Factsheet Update

**Available at [ohioline.osu.edu](http://ohioline.osu.edu)**

*Placing Artificial Fish Attractors in Ponds and Reservoirs:* OSUE Factsheet A-1.

*Pond Measurements:* OSUE Factsheet A-2.

*Controlling Filamentous Algae in Ponds:* OSUE Factsheet A-3.

*Chemical Control of Aquatic Weeds:* OSUE Factsheet A-4.

*Muddy Water in Ponds: Causes, Prevention, and Remedies:* OSUE Factsheet A-6.

*Understanding Pond Stratification:* OSUE Factsheet A-7.

*Winter and Summer Fish Kills in Ponds:* OSUE Factsheet A-8.

*Planktonic Algae in Ponds:* OSUE Factsheet A-9.

*Fish Species Selection for Pond Stocking:* OSUE Factsheet A-10.

*Cattail Management:* OSUE Factsheet A-11.

*Algae Control with Barley Straw:* OSUE Factsheet A-12.

*Ponds and Legal Liability in Ohio:*

OSUE Factsheet ALS-1006.

*Ice Safety:* OSUE Factsheet AEX-392.

*Farm Pond Safety:* OSU Factsheet AEX-390.

*Notifying the Ohio EPA Prior to Applying Aquatic Herbicides:* OSUE Factsheet A-13.

*Duckweed and Watermeal: Prevention & Control:* OSUE Factsheet A-14.

*When to Apply Aquatic Herbicides:* OSUE Factsheet A-15.

*Pond Dyes and Aquatic Plant Management:* OSUE Factsheet A-16.

*Benefits & Problems of Aquatic Plants in Ponds:* OSUE Factsheet A-17.

*Using Grass Carp to Control Aquatic Plants:* OSUE Factsheet A-19.

*Coping With Canada Geese: Conflict Management and Damage Prevention Strategies:* OSUE Factsheet W-3.

# Problems with Great Blue Herons

Great blue herons are large, fish-eating water birds that are a common sight along Ohio's rivers and streams, in our wetlands, and are now frequent visitors to our ponds. While they are considered by most to be a stately bird, standing almost five feet tall, they are causing an increasing number of wildlife—human conflicts. Each year, I receive more calls concerning great blue herons and it appears this is directly related to an increasing heron population in Ohio. Once considered an occasional visitor during migrations in much of Ohio, there are now heron rookeries in most Ohio counties. As adult herons are feeding young in the nests, they fly throughout each county looking for water bodies with easily accessible fish to take back to the rookery. Later in summer as young fledge and leave the rookery, these immature birds fan out in search of food as they begin to hone their “fishing” skills. Ohio's small ponds are attractive for several reasons. One, many contain large areas of shallow water, allowing the herons lots of real estate from which to stalk their prey. Second, most Ohio ponds are stocked with largemouth bass and bluegills, two fish species that cruise shallow water—particularly at dawn and dusk. It appears visitation to Ohio ponds by herons will continue and will cause problems for some pond owners. As an aside, great blue heron appear to be getting bolder given the calls I receive from garden pond owners who tell me herons are eating their goldfish. Some of these small pools are located right next to the decks of houses!

Concerns really center around two general themes: consumption of fish and the introduction of parasites into fish flesh. Herons are fish-eating birds for the most part and are looking for fish to eat when they visit your pond. If they would limit their consumption to small bluegills, most pond owners would not be overly concerned. What gets the pond owners in a real tizzy is when these herons spear a large bass or bluegill, realize they cannot eat a fish that big, and then let it lay on the bank as they commence stalking new prey. Often they repeat the process, killing more large fish. If this only occasionally occurs in a pond, the damage to the fish population is not severe. However, there is a time of year when bass and bluegills are very vulnerable to heron attacks and it coincides with the period in which herons are busy feeding their young. If you guessed May and June when fish are spawning, you are correct. Both bass and bluegills spawn in shallow water only a few feet deep. The males of both species fan out a circular depression and then guard the eggs laid in the depression. This takes a week or longer depending on water temperature. These male bass and bluegills are vulnerable to the stalking heron who can stand motionless above these nests for as long as it takes for the heron to feel the need to strike. Many of these bass and bluegills are small enough to be eaten. Bluegills are colonial nesters, with much of a pond's bluegill population spawning in a localized

area of the pond. If a heron figures that out (and it will), considerable numbers of bluegills may be eaten.

The second problem associated with herons (and other fish-eating birds) is that herons are a critical host for fish parasites that can make fillets unappealing to those wishing to eat some of their bass and bluegills. The most common parasites in Ohio ponds are black spot and yellow grub. Black spot appears as pepper-like spots on the skin of the fish, while yellow grubs are actually found in the fillet. Three hosts are required to complete the life cycle of these fish parasites: a fish, a snail, and a fish-eating bird. If snails are absent in a pond (rare) or fish-eating birds do not visit a pond, then these parasites will be absent.

Great blue herons are federally protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and cannot be killed without a special permit. An aquaculture facility who's livelihood depends on raising fish can get such permits, but the Ohio pond owner will not be issued such a permit. Also, there is no hunting season for herons and thus hunting is not an option to reduce numbers or scare herons away from a pond. To keep herons from eating bass and bluegills or contributing to a parasite problem, the pond owner can really only use scare tactics or decoys to persuade heron to move to a different pond. The pond owner can legally use dogs, vehicles, noise makers, and themselves to scare great blue herons away. Scare tactics work best when a heron first shows up. Once the heron has become comfortable with your pond and realizes your pond is an easy source of food, it will be difficult to keep the herons away. Often, the heron will learn to visit the pond at a different time of day if you continually scare at the same time—like after work. This is why scare tactics alone often do not work—herons simply adjust their visitation schedule to mimic your absence.



Pond owners are beginning to use great blue heron decoys to persuade live herons not to visit. You read right. I know, goose and duck hunters use decoys to attract more geese and ducks. Heron decoys apparently work in an opposite manner. Other than in a nesting rookery, great blue herons are not group oriented birds, meaning they prefer to be alone as they stalk prey. I've actually witnessed on many occasions, a heron chase away an approaching heron as it nears a pond. This is the basis for why decoy herons work. As a heron approaches, it should fly away if he sees another heron or decoy somewhere along the pond's shoreline. I would recommend the user of such decoys

*Continued on page 4.*

# Coping with Burrowing Crayfish

Burrowing crayfish can cause problems for pond owners. Their tunnels can undermine the structural integrity of dams and levees by weakening the compacted clay and by causing leaks that only become larger with time. Most owners equate burrowing crayfish with their mud chimneys located throughout their lawn. These chimneys are located close to the pond (or stream) but it is amazing how far from water they can be found. These chimneys can be 6 inches tall, and when dry are very hard. A large, dry chimney can damage the deck of a lawnmower.

Why do these crayfish dig burrows? Male and female crayfish dig burrows as a refuge from predators and as a resting place during molting and inactive periods. However, crayfish release their young in water and young spend most of their life in water. Adult crayfish are willing to exit the pond and dig burrows but young crayfish are not. In drought conditions, females may lay their eggs in the burrows but few survive due to a lack of food.

The best method to minimize or even eliminate the appearance of burrows in the dam or yard is to maintain good populations of largemouth bass and bluegills in the pond. Young crayfish are a favored food of these two fish species and few survive to adulthood if these fish species are present. Keeping aquatic plants and filamentous algae abundance low reduces crayfish hiding places and allows for more effective control by fish.

Wildlife will also eat crayfish from shallow water as well as those crawling on the lawns. These non-fish predators include

bullfrogs, turtles, snakes, herons, as well as raccoons and mink. Encouraging wildlife use of your pond by properly managing shoreline and adjacent habitat will help control burrowing crayfish. Mown grass all around a pond is not attractive to wildlife other than Canada geese. And the farther the mown grass extends from the pond, the less wildlife will use your pond.

Trapping is another method to remove crayfish from a pond. A simple double funnel minnow trap baited with meat scraps, fish heads, etc will attract crayfish and trap them. Make sure the funnel opening inside the traps are 2 inches in diameter. If several traps are collecting large numbers of crayfish, the pond owner needs to add additional traps and check them frequently. Also, trapping many crayfish should cause a re-evaluation of the fish community and plant abundance to insure control by previously mentioned techniques.

Chemical control options are limited. Pouring diesel fuel or Clorox into burrows is no longer recommended. These chemicals are considered pollutants when used in such a fashion and also kill other soil and aquatic organisms. Making a solution of 50% cheap pepper sauce / 50% water and pouring a cup or so into each burrow has worked for me. It is not unusual to see the crayfish exit the hole quickly due to the capsaicin in the pepper sauce.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

# Problems with Great Blue Herons (continued)

move them around to different parts of the pond on a regular basis. Also, make sure they are always visible to an approaching heron. Don't hide them in the cattails!

For those owners wanting to protect spawning areas in May and June and can't seem to keep a heron away, installation of a temporary barricade along shore that is angled 45 degrees over the water can keep herons away from the colonial nesting areas of bluegills. I like 10 foot long tomato stakes driven into 1 foot deep water and angled 45 degrees or so over the water. Run string or wire from stake to stake at about 2 foot intervals on each stake. The addition of foil pie plates to the strings can enhance the barrier. Once fish spawning is over, remove the barricade. Keep in mind, such barricades are not pleasing to the eye.

For those pond owners worried by parasites in fish fillets, an alternative to scare tactics can be tried. The key is to minimize snail habitat and snail abundance. Snails thrive in ponds with large amounts of submerged plants and filamentous algae. So, snail habitat can be reduced by simply maintaining vegetation abundance at a low level. Secondly, the pond owner may con-

sider stocking redear sunfish into the pond. Redear sunfish, also known as shellcracker, actually eats snails as this sunfish species has crushing plates in the throat. It simply crushes the snail and digests the meaty part of the snail. In a new pond or renovated pond, stock 150 redear fingerlings that are 3-4 inches. In an existing pond, stock larger redear sunfish (4-5 inches) to minimize predation by largemouth bass and to allow quicker consumption of snails. A larger redear sunfish can eat a wider variety of snail sizes than can a smaller sunfish. Limiting aquatic vegetation abundance helps the redears as the snails have few places to hide and are more vulnerable to being eaten.

If you see the infrequent great blue heron who on occasion eats a fish, you might wish to enjoy their presence at your pond. If you are convinced herons are ruining your fish population, or you notice unacceptable levels of parasites in your fish, you might consider trying some of the strategies presented in this article. Whatever you choose, keep in mind shooting them with a firearm is not an option.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

# Frogs and Ponds: Factors Affecting Abundance

Frogs and ponds go hand-in-hand, but owners often wonder why they don't have any frogs or why they have so many. The two predominate frog species in permanent ponds are bullfrogs and their close smaller cousin, the green frog. Some ponds will also have a few pickerel and leopard frogs. And, land-dwelling toads will use ponds for mating and laying eggs and then leave. Toad tadpoles reside in ponds for about 6-8 weeks, then metamorphous into small adults and leave.

Many pond owners want frogs because they enjoy their presence and find their evening serenade pleasurable. Other owners would just as soon not hear the serenade as they try to sleep. In the latter case, the problem may not be due to just a frog or two singing but be the result of hundreds of adult frogs chorusing all at the same time. So, problems typically boil down to how many are present and how many frogs the pond owner can tolerate. Which leads to the question, what controls frog abundance in ponds?

As with any wild animal, abundance is largely controlled by weather and predation. A cold, damp spring can lead to significant frog and toad reproduction failures. Frog and toads lay their eggs in long ribbons near the surface. A severe cold front that drastically drops water temperatures can cause significant

mortality of eggs incubating in those ribbons. This can lead to far fewer toads and frogs later that summer.

The most significant determiner of frog abundance around ponds is the presence or absence of it's major predator—the largemouth bass. Largemouth bass are very opportunistic predators and do not solely eat fish as many think. Frogs, snakes, and even mice are typically eaten if they make themselves vulnerable. The strangest food items I've seen in a bass stomach were a cardinal and a blue jay. Largemouth bass eat both frog tadpoles and adults. Smaller bass are limited to smaller tadpoles, while larger bass will routinely prey on adult frogs.

When an owner complains about excessive numbers of frogs and their accompanying noise, I know they either have no bass in the pond or too few bass which are often small. Conversely, the owner who wants frogs but can't find one around the pond generally has a bass population anglers would love to fish.

A secondary predator who will readily eat frogs is the great blue heron. Thus, a pond regularly visited by herons will also have fewer frogs.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

## Worm-like Creatures in Ponds

Pond owners have expressed concerns over the appearance of aquatic worm-like creatures in their ponds. Calls range from creatures attaching themselves to swimmers to shallow areas are teeming with worms in the sediments. A number of pond creatures resemble worms, some more so than others.

Attachment to swimmers usually involves leeches, a group of species that thrives in old ponds with lots of vegetation. Fortunately, Ohio ponds do not have blood-sucking leeches but have leeches that feed on decaying materials. Leeches thrive in vegetated areas over soft, organic bottoms.



Aquatic worms are another creature that can, under certain conditions, build up large populations, causing the pond owner some concern. For all practical purposes, these worms closely resemble earthworms in gardens. They also prefer soft-bottom areas in shallow water.

Aquatic nematodes can become quite numerous in shallow water, and seem to have a preference for sandy areas of beaches. This causes the pond owner considerable anguish as family members complain that the sand is alive, as these nematodes go about their biological business.



There is a group of worm-like creatures known as chironomids that inhabit bottom areas throughout the pond, including deep water. The adults of these species resemble mosquitoes but cannot bite. They are known as midges. The larvae live in the pond's bottom until they are ready to pupate, at which time the adult emerges and leaves the water.

There is no legal pesticide to control any of these bottom-dwelling creatures. However, several fish species eagerly prey on these creatures, keeping their populations in check



and hopefully at a level pond owners can tolerate. The first species is the bluegill sunfish whose primary diet, as juveniles and adults, are the nymphs and larvae of aquatic insects and other worm-like creatures. For worm-like creatures, wiggling around in front of a bluegill is a death sentence. Ponds with good bluegill populations typically have low abundances of the worm-like creatures. Some pond owners do not wish to have bluegill because they have a tendency to nip swimmers. For those ponds, redear sunfish are an option as they also consume worm-like creatures. Bluegills typically do a better job, but redear sunfish are a viable option.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

# Coping With Canada Geese

Canada geese are a major concern for pond and lake owners in Ohio. A review of the problems geese cause in ponds is in order. Aesthetically, geese on your pond may be picturesque, creating a scene of postcard quality. However, it is the little piles they leave behind that cause the problems. Most pond owners or managers, particularly those dealing with golf course, parks, and corporate lakes and ponds, have come to dread the sight of numerous little green piles on their manicured lawns. It is unsightly and folks just plain hate to accidentally step in the green piles.



A bigger problem is also associated with those little green piles. Specifically, the addition of nutrients to ponds and lakes to levels that can cause excessive aquatic plant problems. While the specific types of plants that will proliferate in response to more nutrients depends on any number of factors, the take home message is that the continual addition of unwanted nutrients will lead to an explosion of green plants of some sort. Canada geese leave the pond and go feed in farm fields, on golf courses, and elsewhere and then return to the ponds and lakes. There, digestion is completed and feces deposited wherever they are standing or swimming. Generally, they relieve themselves on the pond's shoreline, where a rain quickly transports those nutrients into the pond or lake.

So what is the pond owner or manager to do? There are a number of guidelines and options available that can help. In general terms, it is legal to harass, chase, or scare Canada geese in the hopes of encouraging them to leave your pond. However, you legally cannot kill those birds or their eggs without a permit from the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODW). The only exception is during hunting season when you can legally kill geese. Read the hunting regulations for season dates and bag limits.

One key to preventing problems with geese is to never allow them to get comfortable being at your pond. Hunting is one such tool that can be used to let geese know they are not welcome at your pond. Geese remember where they've been shot at. During months when hunting is not legal, a pond owner should make every effort to scare geese away as soon as they arrive. This can be accomplished with a dog, you chasing them with a vehicle of some sort, or using noisemakers to scare them. Keep in mind the longer geese are allowed to become comfortable with your pond prior to you trying to scare them away, the harder it will be to scare them away. If you allowed them several weeks of uninterrupted visitation, scaring them may only result in them flying to the pond's opposite shoreline.

Trying to scare geese away during the breeding season and as they raise their goslings rarely is successful, unless the birds in question are sexually immature. Once a pair of geese has laid their eggs, it is extremely difficult to get them to leave. And once those eggs hatch and they have goslings to attend to, they will not leave. Of course, when geese are molting and growing new flight feathers, they are incapable of flying away. Molting by mature birds occurs as they raise their young during summer. **Take home message: never let breeding pairs of geese establish a nest by your pond.** Geese begin pairing off in February if winter is mild. The successful pond owner will scare geese diligently from August thru March.

Certain ponds are more attractive to Canada geese than other ponds. Two things to consider here. First, ponds with a ready food supply adjacent to the pond are very attractive. Second, ponds lacking shoreline cover are also very attractive. If you really want to attract geese, have mowed grass growing all the way around the pond down to the edge and have that grass grow hundreds of feet in all directions. The mowed grass is a cherished food source for geese, particularly with goslings. And all the flat, mowed area does not allow predators to sneak up and kill a goose. Geese know that, and flock to ponds that prevent these sneak attacks. This is why golf course ponds and corporate center ponds are so attractive to geese. Lots of food and little predation pressure. Minimizing the amount of mowed grass around the pond plus allowing natural shoreline vegetation to grow along the pond's edge can reduce geese visitation.

There are spray on products on the market that make grass surrounding the pond unpalatable. It gives the grass a bad, bitter taste and geese will avoid those areas. Problem is that it needs to be reapplied regularly, particularly after rain events. This can become costly.

Finally, if geese are a continuing problem for you, you should consider contacting your County Wildlife Officer, an employee of the Ohio Division of Wildlife. He has many publications that are available to the public that may help. He/she also deals with nuisance geese on a regular basis and know many tricks-of-the-trade that can be successful. Again, that officer is the only person who can issue kill permits or egg-shaking permits.

Keeping Canada geese away from a pond is an ongoing activity for many pond owners. They must always be diligent and be ready on a moments notice to chase geese away. The successful pond owner will also use a variety of tactics to prevent geese from becoming comfortable with their pond. It takes work, but allowing geese to over-fertilize

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## Snapping Turtles—Should You Be Concerned?

The common snapping turtle so often seen in Ohio ponds is a most formidable looking creature. But do they really cause pond problems? The general answer is no if only a few are present. While they do on occasion eat live fish, they are more apt to eat recently dead or dying fish and animals. As such, they do a service to the pond owner in helping “clean up” a pond of dead animals. For the pond owner that promotes wood duck and mallard breeding, snapping turtles can become a nuisance as they will drag down and eat ducklings. If more than just a few are present in a small pond, they can cause turbidity problems. Excessive turbidity can cause problems for successful fish management. And finally, owners of ponds used primarily for swimming prefer

not to have snapping turtles, even though turtles quickly move away from swimmers.

You can legally remove snapping turtles from Ohio ponds throughout the year with turtles traps and turtle lines. No shooting allowed. Name and address must be on all traps and turtle lines. Turtle lines are nothing more than a heavy line tied to a jug with a large hook on which fresh meat is attached. Fresh, dead bluegills work well. Be sure to check traps or lines daily. Each year, check the Ohio Division of Wildlife’s fishing regulations for any changes in rules regarding turtles.

*Bill Lynch, Program Specialist, OSUE Natural Resources*

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