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## Pond Home Study Course

### Lesson 5 Attracting and Managing Wildlife

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#### Frequently Asked Questions

***How can I discourage Canada Geese from my pond?***

Barriers like rip-rap, fishing line, or vegetation that will inhibit their movement to and from the water may be effective. Geese like to feed on vegetation around the pond. Planting undesirable vegetation around the pond may deter geese from staying for prolonged periods

***Trapping has been our most effective method of muskrat control, but it is very controversial. Are there any other alternatives?***

The addition of rip rap to the pond edges and elimination of food sources (like cattails) are good muskrat controls beyond trapping. You really want to use an integrated management approach. Modify the habitat to reduce the vegetation food source. Concentrate your trapping efforts in winter to reduce the breeding population and use toxicants (zinc phosphide) and trapping together to be most effective.

***Would attracting types of wood frogs to my pond have any type of benefit?***

Wood frogs can be beneficial because they can help control the insect population around a pond. They eat spiders, beetles, bugs, moths, slugs, and snails. However, they may attract snakes, birds and herons to your pond, as well, looking for a frog meal. Wood frogs are rarely found in ponds except for a very short visit during spring. They are found in any wooded area. I have tons of them around my house and there is no stream or pond within a mile of my house. They usually hang out in moist areas in the forest (under old trees, etc.) They will utilize vernal ponds, streams, puddles and perhaps ponds for mating in the spring but only for a very short time. I've never actually seen a wood frog in a pond.

Attracting frogs is beneficial IF you want to see frogs and if you want big bass. Like we said, attracting frogs can attract unwanted things like snakes and some frogs can be very LOUD during the mating season (We get a

surprising number of calls from pond owners wanting to KILL ALL FROGS because of how loud they are!).

Anyway, we think frogs are cool and we would want them around our pond but it is up to the pond owner. Attracting them would require a pretty good vegetated buffer around the pond edge.

***How could I keep the mosquito population down around my pond?***

Most people would not want to introduce pesticides around a pond to control mosquitoes. A possible mosquito solution would be to erect some bat boxes around the pond. One bat can eat thousands of mosquitoes in just one night. The other possibility is *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* or Bti. This is a natural insecticide that is specific to mosquitoes and flies and would work on the mosquito larva in the pond. You would treat the water on the edge of the pond only as this is where the mosquitoes would be breeding. Be sure to follow the label recommendations.

Mosquito control with BTi works well on backyard ponds, but is not going to be economical on a large pond. Bat houses are a great idea. A good fish population (especially bluegill, sunfish or minnows) in the pond will keep the mosquito population under control.

***What is the best way to discourage Canadian Geese from taking up residence in a pond?***

Canadian Geese prefer wide open spaces of land, so they can see approaching predators. So a good riparian buffer around the pond with tall native grasses and shrubs will be the best way to keep them away.

***What is the substance used on goose eggs to keep them from hatching? Is it oil?***

I talked with Margaret Brittingham, Penn State Extension Wildlife Specialist, concerning your questions. Margaret says: "Canada geese eggs are oiled with 100% food grade corn oil. The oil keeps air from moving through the shell so the embryo does not develop. A federal and state permit is required for oiling, but this permit is relatively easy to acquire."

***Is snapping turtle predation of fish a big concern for the pond owners?***

Snapping turtles are generally not a problem, but I suppose could be a problem in a small pond. Our advice would be not to worry unless you have trouble maintaining any fish.

***If Muskrats are present at a pond are they easily noticeable?***

Muskrats are not always seen at a pond as they are mainly nocturnal and so will be most active at night. In addition, they have the ability to stay under

the water for twenty minutes. So, avoiding you will be easy. You will, however, often see muddy water around their dens where they are active.

***Do Muskrats move around much looking for suitable habitat?***

We found the following information at this website entitled "Acreage Living" from Iowa State University Extension

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/acreage/AL2002/aljuly02.html> It does a good job discussing the movement of muskrats throughout the year.

"In the midwest, most muskrats live in streams. In spring or fall, some of the muskrats move. In their spring travels, they are hunting food and safe places to rear young; in fall, they are hunting food and safe winter quarters. These traveling muskrats usually stay in their summer locations until fall and in their winter homes until spring. They may stay in either location permanently if the food and denning facilities are good enough. When they travel they may go several miles, even across dry uplands, in their search for better places to live. It is on these travels that muskrats find farm ponds and it is usually during spring that they locate in them. If the pond is large and contains abundant food, they may stay. But ponds seldom contain enough aquatic vegetation to hold muskrats past the fall season, especially if they can find better homes."

***How tolerant are beavers of water pollution?***

The primary problem with water pollution in mammals is the effect on their food source (loss of fish, aquatic life, etc). Because beavers are feeding on bark and other plant material, they would not be directly impacted unless the pollution either killed them out right or killed the trees around the pond. We have seen them living in streams that are severely impacted by acid mine drainage and other streams impacted by sediment and nutrients.

***Are crayfish a pond problem?***

Crayfish are usually not a problem in Pennsylvania ponds. However, crayfish can harm game fish populations by preying on eggs and fry. They also can degrade habitat by destroying aquatic vegetation.

***Are snakes a pond problem?***

Snakes are usually not a problem in Pennsylvania ponds. They mainly scare people. Most snakes seen in and around ponds are nonpoisonous water snakes. The best way to control snakes is to keep the pond banks mowed, eliminating their hiding places. This idea can interfere with your riparian buffer, so a management decision needs to be made. If snakes are not a problem, then the riparian buffer is more advantageous. It is best to live with the snakes because it is very difficult to get rid of them.

***Is it legal to shoot muskrats if they are causing damage?***

According to the PA Game Commission, it would not be legal for you to shoot muskrats even if they were causing damage. You should contact the Game Commission at 1-570-398-4744 and ask them to have your local game warden contact you. He or she will try to trap the muskrat first.

**Source: Penn State Cooperative Extension Pond Management Website and PA Fish and Boat Commission Pond Website**

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