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THE ROLE OF THE INDIANA DIVISION OF FISH AND
WILDLIFE IN WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL

by Glenn Lange

As defined by state statute, the Division of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for the protection, reproduction, care, management, survival, and regulation of all wildlife populations. By law, the Division must take a leading role in solving wildlife damage problems when they occur.

In Indiana, wildlife damage or nuisance animal problems takes two forms: damage from individual birds or mammals that are in the wrong place at the wrong time (such as raccoons nesting in an attic) and damage from bird or mammal populations that have grown large enough to cause serious economic losses for agricultural, forestry, or other land use interests (such as deer depredation on row crops).

Biologists of the Division have recognized basically three levels of wildlife damage or nuisance problems: 1) An example of the first level would involve a bird or mammal taking up residence in a man-made structure where, routinely, there is little or no damage. Birds or mammals at this level are classed as being simply nuisance animals. 2) The second level would involve animals that are actually causing damage. Examples would include minor beaver dam flooding, individual animals consuming garden crops or ornamental trees, muskrat damage to pond banks or dams, and damage to attics or basements from squirrels or raccoons. 3) The third level of damage is the most serious from an economic point of view. In Indiana, examples include coyote depredation of livestock, deer damage on or chards and row crops, and large concentrations of geese in urban areas.

The Division's approach to solving wildlife damage problems involves one or more of the following: providing technical assistance through telephone calls, publications, and on-site vis-

its; providing general regulatory relief with more liberal taking measures for individual animals causing damage and setting up specialized hunting regulations to reduce large wildlife populations.

For nuisance animals, the Division provides over-the-telephone technical advice plus written information in the form of publications on controlling wildlife damage. A Wild Animal Control Permit is required for trapping or otherwise possessing nuisance animals that are protected by Indiana law. Skunks, mink, raccoon, long-tailed weasel, red & grey fox, coyote, muskrat, beaver, or opossum may be taken at any time, without a permit, when in the act of depredation. Technical assistance is also provided to individuals having trouble with the above named fur bearing animals.

The most serious wildlife damage comes from Indiana's expanding deer herd. Some localities have suffered extensive deer depredation, primarily to the row crops of corn and soybeans. The Division has approached the problem with the following measures: 1) The implementation of mandatory statewide deer checking station system to get a better handle on population dynamics on a more local level; 2) Inspection of crop depredation areas by District Biologists to determine the extent of the damage; 3) Provide on-site technical advice for problems that can be solved with non-lethal means (repellents, fencing, etc.); 4) Where herd reduction is indicated, implement county-wide special any-sex deer hunting during the fall firearm harvest seasons; and 5) Where depredation problems are severe, Deer Depredation Zones have been established allowing two deer to be taken and concentrating a larger group of hunters in local areas.

Despite increased hunting efforts and liberal taking regulations, deer depredation problems persist in some level areas where a refuge situation exists or where hunter access is a problem.

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