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The Nature and Timing of Wildlife Damage Events in Nebraska: A Five-Year Review of Requests to Three Extension Wildlife Personnel

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We examined 2,241 telephone calls that were received by 3 University of Nebraska-Cooperative Extension personnel (the 3 junior authors) concerning wildlife damage during 1988-1992. Our objectives were to (1) determine the species/groups responsible for most damage-related telephone calls, (2) determine the timing of wildlife damage events by species/group, and (3) differentiate damage-related telephone calls by urban versus rural situations.

Fifty-three species/groups were reported as causing damage or nuisance problems, with most calls related to tree squirrels (13.5%) and snakes (10.1%), followed by moles (6.1%), rabbits (5.9%), birds (5.6%), thirteen-lined ground squirrels (5.3%), pocket gophers (5.0%), voles (4.8%), house mice (4.6%), bats (3.6%), starlings (3.4%), pigeons (3.4%), and raccoons (2.7%). Sixty percent ($n = 32$) of the species/groups were the source of less than 25% of the calls over the 5-year period. All damage-related calls were organized by date into the first or last half of each month (e.g. early June, late June) to allow for temporal analysis. Less than 75 calls were received per 2-week period during the months of October through February. We observed an increase in the

number of calls beginning in late March ($n = 107$), peaking in late May ($n = 225$), and declining steadily after late August ($n = 137$). Sixty-six percent ($n = 1,477$) of the total calls were received during this 5-month period.

Telephone calls from urban clientele represented 79% ($n = 1,761$) of the total data, with the top 4 urban offenders being tree squirrels, snakes, rabbits, and moles. Tree squirrel problems were reported throughout the year but increased from early April, reaching a peak in late July, and then decreasing after October. Tree squirrel calls continued to be frequent from late May through late September. The increased number of tree squirrel calls corresponds with increased squirrel activity in spring, summer, and early fall relative to feeding in gardens, flower beds, and bird feeders; digging in yards; bark stripping; twig clipping; nut burial and excavation; and nest building. The frequency of snake calls increased in early April, peaked dramatically in late May, and declined after late June. Urban rabbit calls also peaked in late May, and were uncommon from late September through early April. Calls concerning moles were unique in that they did not clearly

show a single peak period for call frequency. Rather, peaks appeared in early April and late May followed by a decrease in activity until late July through late September when calls again increased.

Rural sources were accountable for 21% ($n = 480$) of the total calls with pocket gophers, prairie dogs, coyotes, and deer being the top 4 species reported. Pocket gopher calls occurred mainly in mid-winter and spring, peaking in early March. Pocket gopher mound building activity peaks in spring and declines as soil temperatures increase through the summer. Activity increases again in the fall as soil temperatures decline. Prairie dog calls peaked in early June, with calls being more evenly distributed throughout the year than other species. Calls for assistance with coyote problems also peaked in early June and were scattered throughout the year. Deer calls were received throughout spring, summer, and early winter.

The frequency and timing of wildlife damage-related events impacts how the public perceives and deals with wildlife. Such information can be used by extension specialists and agents to develop proactive programs in wildlife damage management. Increased public awareness of proper damage prevention and control methods will likely decrease economic impacts of wildlife damage and increase appreciation and tolerance of wildlife.