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# Controlling Wildlife Damage in Crops

Listed are a few common Ohio wildlife species, along with the characteristics of the crop damage they may cause.

## **Deer**

- Ohio's deer herd is now estimated at 420,000. The herd size likely peaked in 1995; a record harvest of 179,543 deer were recorded that season.
- Deer hunting rules are modified from year to year to meet target levels for the deer herd in each of Ohio's 88 counties. Consult the current *Ohio Hunting Laws Digest* for current bag limits and seasons in your county.
- Adult deer consume from 4 to 6.5 pounds of forage per day. Although hard and soft mast and grasses make up much of their diet, row crops are also consumed. Fields with access to nearby wood lots are usually the hardest hit, particularly the outside 3 to 5 rows.
- In smaller areas such as gardens and ornamental crops, control options such as fencing, dogs, and taste/odor repellents may be effective. In larger fields, or when deterrents don't work, deer control permits may be an option.
- The Division of Wildlife has two permits that may be issued to control local deer problems:
  - Deer kill permit – valid from February through September
  - In-season control permit – valid during legal deer hunting seasons

Shooters listed on these permits must be from the landowner's home county or an adjacent county. Only 4 deer may be kept by the landowner under this permit system.

## **Canada Geese**

- Ohio's resident population of Canada Geese has increased from 15,000 to 75,000 birds over the past 10 years. Goose complaints increased over 300% in this same time interval. Many of the birds causing problems are local geese that don't migrate out of Ohio. Geese are very adaptable to most situations; they prefer closely-mowed areas.
- When experiencing goose problems, it is important not to let the geese nest successfully. Hazing is effective in preventing nesting. Do not feed the geese! If you continue to have

problems, it is important to file a complaint with the county Wildlife Specialist or the Division of Wildlife. File a complaint early, not when the damage is the worst!

- Relocation of birds is not effective. Division of Wildlife research has shown that 70% of moved birds return to the original location within 1 year.
- If you experience goose damage or problems, one of the best options is harvesting some birds during the available hunting seasons. Ohio offers early nuisance goose season from September 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> with a daily bag limit of 4 birds and a possession limit of 8 birds (these are double the usual limits). The area to be hunted must not be within city limits and all hunters must have both a Federal Duck Stamp and an Ohio Wetlands Conservation Stamp.
- The Ohio Division of Wildlife can also issue goose damage permits (effective March, 2000) which may allow egg/nest destruction, goose shooting, or in some extreme cases, a goose roundup. These permits are usually issued only if other deterrents are not effective and the landowner has completed a complaint form for more than 1 year.
- If the landowner is not a hunter but would like to harvest some geese, the wildlife specialists maintain a list of interested local hunters.

### **Groundhogs, Raccoons, Opossums, Blackbirds**

- Any of these wildlife species may be shot at any time, if they are causing crop damage.
- Groundhogs often have a crescent or half-moon shape of damaged crops near their den. In field corn they often eat ears from stalks brought down by raccoons or deer. Their bite pattern often makes the corncob look clean as opposed to raccoon bites that are “patchy” with some portions of the cob uneaten.
- Blackbirds and crows cause the most damage in the outside rows of corn. Their damage often looks like the top of the ear has been shredded back with a fork. This damage most often occurs in the milk stage. Rarely is more than the top of the ear eaten. Opening the husks leaves the ear susceptible to fungus, insects, and other types of damage.