



OUTDOOR CONNECTION

STORIES, ADVICE, AND INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS



Farm ponds and youngsters go hand in hand.

Photo courtesy the Iowa DNR

A look at farm ponds in Iowa

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

I recently wrote a story about the Master Angler program in the state of Iowa. In one section, I listed the top locations where these proud angler fish were taken. The top one shocked me! It was a general classification: farm ponds! Being an angler from northwest Iowa, there aren't a lot of productive farm ponds, so I was kind of surprised by this. As a matter of fact, in 2023, 186 qualifying catches were taken at farm ponds in Iowa.

I still feel good about living in the Iowa Great Lakes area because next on the list was West Lake Okoboji with 58 qualifying catches, while East Lake Okoboji was third with 46 qualifying catches. Fourth on the list was Clear Lake with 43 qualifying catches and the Des Moines River (Saylorville to Red Rock) in fifth place with 34 qualifying catches.

Still, there's no doubt that farm ponds with good fish/habitat management are true trophy fish catching gems...but why? I found many of my answers to this question at Iowa Ponds (iowadnr.gov) and by visiting with Mark Flammig, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist in southcentral Iowa.

Farm pond history

According to the Iowa DNR data, there are 110,000 ponds in the state, and anglers enjoy 1,600,000 fishing trips each year to Iowa's ponds. Here's an amazing fact: that means an economic impact of somewhere around \$7,500,000. Why? There are actually several reasons.

Solitude and quiet! You don't have to fight crowds of people with pleasure boaters, skiers and jet skis. Nope, while there are public ponds, many of these are on private land, and people must have permission to access the property.

Secondly, Iowa's ponds are fertile, often mirroring the fertility of the surrounding agricultural land. While too much fertility can be a bad thing for water quality and fish, in the right level, this can mean larger and faster growing fish.

The third reason is a delicate one, because a pond is a complex system with the many life forms dependent on each other. Small single and multicellular plants called plankton live in ponds. These



The smile says it all: success!

Photo courtesy the Iowa DNR

microscopic plankton are eaten by animal plankton as well as some crustaceans, insects and tadpoles living in the pond. Small fish, crayfish and frogs eat the animal plankton, crustaceans and insects and are then eaten by larger fish. Bluegills, although they may grow to nine inches and over, eat mostly animal plankton and insects throughout their lives, while bass eat plankton and insects only during their early stages. As bass get larger, they become the major predator in a pond eating fish, crayfish and frogs. Each link in this web of life is needed to survive. Man, actively looking for and eating fish caught from the pond, forms the final link in the chain.

Proper management of the pond and its surroundings is important to keep the pond healthy. Sounds easy, so simple, doesn't it? Oh, but it is far from easy. If something goes a little off kilter, then the rest of the system is affected. It's much easier to be managing from the front side rather than after something goes wrong.

Starting the process

An often-overlooked purpose of these farm ponds is that of helping reduce flooding during significant rain events or spring runoff. In other words, a strategically placed farm pond will catch runoff, helping provide temporary storage for this water. According to Iowa State University research, this will reduce runoff after a significant rain by 10-30 percent.

Strategically placed multiple farm ponds can significantly reduce downstream flooding. The farm pond also helps recharge ground water by seepage through the bottom of the pond. At the same time, the farm pond catches up to 85 percent of the phosphorus and sediment that would normally just runoff downstream.

Although some of these ponds are surrounded by grasslands, and erosion is greatly reduced most ponds have at least some and usually have a significant amount of their watersheds in agricultural production. So, by placing ponds in the watershed, we can capture a lot of those nutrients and sediment that are running off that agricultural land.

For landowners, there are sometimes financial incentives to establish a farm pond. As a matter of fact, the Iowa Watershed Approach provides a 90% cost-share for installing farm ponds in select watersheds. Help can be secured through Soil and Water, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency.

Designing a farm pond

Let's look at what it takes to properly design and manage a farm pond. The bottom line in all this is that problems can be avoided if the pond is properly designed and constructed. First, look at the watershed for the pond. According to the Iowa DNR, the best ponds in Iowa have 10 to 20 acres of water-

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42nd Walleye Opener another success

By STEVE WEISMAN
OUTDOOR EDITOR

It's been a month since the 42nd annual Walleye Opener on the Iowa Great Lakes, but I thought Outdoor Connection readers would like to see the specific results. First off, it was the second largest turnout ever with anglers from 18 different states participating in the annual contest.

Blain Andrea, president of the Iowa Great Lakes Chamber of Commerce, discussed the success of the weekend. "With almost 2,200 anglers vying for one of the 10 tagged walleye with \$42,000, we couldn't be more pleased with the turnout for the 42nd Annual Iowa Great Lakes Walleye Weekend."

Andrea continued, "The event is great for the entire Iowa Great Lakes, and what a boost to the local economy! The IGLA Chamber appreciates the partners that make Walleye Weekend possible: the Iowa DNR, all the sponsors, the area bait shops and weigh stations, and of course all of the anglers that participate!"

In one capacity or another, this was also my own 42nd Walleye Opener. Lots have happened over those years, and the group continues to diminish as friends have aged and passed away. At one time, it was quite a crew with up to 10 friends staying in the one cabin (Bill Elling), and we often used three boats. This year we were down to four total staying at the cabin with two other friends coming over for meals. Still, the comradery, banter and jokes continued as always.

We don't fish out of boats at night, so for the last three years, we haven't done very well for walleyes. I did catch one nice 19.25" walleye on Saturday morning trolling a shiner in about 14 feet of water. We also caught two decent perch (up to 11") on shiners, something I don't remember ever doing. That was it for walleyes.

We did find some decent crappies up to 10" on Saturday



Joel Anfinson took the top place for the largest walleye with 26.75 inches.

Photo courtesy of IGLA Chamber

afternoon in about 12 feet of water off Jackson Point. Unfortunately, so did another 20 boats or so. It didn't take long before that bite was over.

For those who fished at night, the walleye fishing excellent for lots of keeper fish up to 19 inches, slot fish to 25 inches and a good number of walleyes over 25 inches.

How the bite went

Night fishing...trolling crankbaits was the best presentation on both Big Spirit and West Okoboji. Here are a couple of examples. My future son-in-law, John Walz fished with two friends from midnight to 2 a.m., and they boated nine beautiful walleyes between 18.25" and 18.75" trolling Hit Sticks in 12-15 feet of water. John has put lead core on each of his linecounter reels and initially works to get all the baits at the depth he is targeting. It takes a while, but he soon gets all the baits dialed in and adjusts his speed to trigger the walleyes. John came back on Saturday evening with a friend, and the two of them caught their 6-fish limit starting around dusk.

Meanwhile, Laef Lundbeck, owner of Blue Water Guide

Service, and his partner Kelly Cook seem to put everything together each year. Each year is a little different with 2023 probably being the best night bite Laef has ever encountered. As the boat captain, Laef works to find the right crankbaits to troll at the right speed. "I like to start with a different crank-bait and color, and then as we find the 'hot' bait and color, we begin changing over."

This year's opener was still good, however, with Kelly weighing in the third heaviest stringer off walleye under 19" with a weight of 7.14 pounds. Laef came back on Saturday night to capture first place with a weight of 7.28 pounds.

Some success came off the docks at night, but it wasn't consistent around the entire lake. Some fished with lighted bobbers, while others cast jigs the crankbaits. My son, Curt caught three smaller walleyes and one 15" fish casting off a dock on the east side of Big Spirit on Sunday evening. He came back with a really nice 22" slot walleye on Monday evening.

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Eurasian watermilfoil and curly-leaf pondweed update

By MIKE HAWKINS

DISTRICT FISHERIES BIOLOGIST, IOWA DNR

The battle to fight invasive species in the Iowa Great Lakes continues to consume a lot of staff time and resources for the Iowa DNR and local partners. Our recent skirmishes with Eurasian watermilfoil in the East Okoboji Chain and then the West Okoboji Lake canal systems are important reminders of how vulnerable we are to invasion.

With all the work being done on Eurasian watermilfoil and curly-leaf pondweed, it might be helpful to step back a bit and summarize where we've been and where we're going.

2015 - Curly-leaf surfaces

Beginning in 2015, it became evident that curly-leaf pondweed was increasing in density in the northern portion of East Okoboji. Curly-leaf pondweed has a long history in the Iowa Great Lakes. It was first reported sometime around

1950 and has been found throughout the Iowa Great Lakes since. It was rarely a problem until conditions allowed it to establish in the shallow nutrient rich areas of East Okoboji. Curly-leaf pondweed growth starts in the fall after germination and continues under the ice, outcompeting the native plants that don't germinate until spring. It then dies back in late June causing water quality issues as it releases nutrients as it decomposes.

2018 - A plan is executed

Planning and fundraising began in 2017 with the East Okoboji Lakes Improvement Corporation and the local community to use both mechanical and herbicide control techniques to make navigation easier in the areas north of the Narrows on East Okoboji Lake. In 2018, a fast acting, contact herbicide was used along a narrow strip of the shoreline and mechanical cutting and

removal was used to create navigation paths to open water.

In subsequent years, this plan expanded to more areas on East Okoboji, Minnewashta and Lower Gar as the plant continued to increase in density to the south.

2021 - A new technique deployed

Challenges can push ingenuity. When it comes to water, Iowa has plenty of challenges, and our staff seem to lead the way with new techniques and technology. Experiments on smaller ponds in central Iowa using a slower acting herbicide treatment under the ice in the winter showed significant promise for treating larger areas of curly-leaf pondweed with little to no impact on native plants.

This new technique was used in East Okoboji north of the HWY 9 bridge. The treatment requires 45 to 60 days

of contact with the plant at a very low concentration. Concentrations must be monitored every two weeks and adjustments made, if needed. This treatment seemed to control most of the growth of curly-leaf in the treatment area in 2022 and plans to expand this type of treatment south to the Narrows and in Lower Gar Lake were made. These areas are all shallow enough to make this type of application cost-effective.

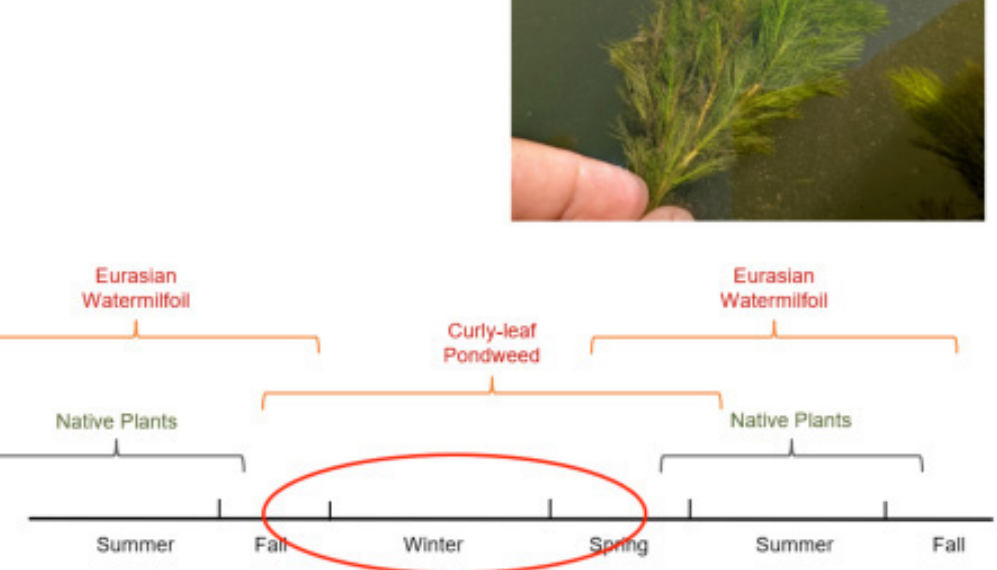
2022 - Eurasian watermilfoil strikes

The Iowa DNR has a robust surveillance program for invasive species detection. Hundreds of areas around the lakes are sampled twice a summer in an effort to detect any invasive species that may try to establish.

After 30 years of successfully preventing Eurasian watermilfoil from entering

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Eurasian Watermilfoil



This figure shows the growth periods for Eurasian watermilfoil and curly-leaf pondweed. The winter treatment window for targeting both of these plants is highlighted in red.

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Hatchery Technician Garald Rivers holds a three-year-old South Pine Strain Brook Trout. This fish was hatched from eggs fertilized on the banks of South Pine Creek and reared to sexual maturity in the Manchester Hatchery. These three year old broodstock can produce upwards of 3,000 eggs each.



Hatchery Technician Eric Bailey and Hatchery Biologist Dan Rosauer fertilize eggs streamside at South Pine Creek.

KEEPING BROOK TROUT ALIVE

Manchester Fish Hatchery staff selected for Stream Stewardship Award

MANCHESTER — Iowa DNR Manchester Fish Hatchery staff Dan Rosauer, Aaron Schwartzhoff, Eric Bailey and Garald Rivers were recently honored by the Iowa Driftless Chapter of Trout Unlimited with their Stream Stewardship Award.

The Iowa Driftless Chapter of Trout Unlimited recognizes outstanding contributions to Iowa trout conservation, education and public access. Manchester Fish Hatchery staff have helped raise and stock over 192,000 native brook trout fingerlings into more than 60 northeast Iowa streams.

“If anglers catch a wild brook trout in northeast Iowa, there’s a good chance it’s there because of the dedicated current and past staff of the Manchester Fish Hatchery,” said Michael Siepker, Northeast Iowa regional fisheries supervisor.

Brook trout restoration efforts began in 1994, when a genetically-distinct strain of healthy brook trout unique to Iowa was found in South Pine Creek, a tiny spring creek buried between lush vegetation in eastern Winneshiek County. These brook trout have likely called this place home since before the first European settlers came to the region.

To save this fragile native Iowa species, hatchery staff transported 900 fertilized eggs back to the Manchester Hatchery in a coffee cup. That first year, 160 fingerlings were produced.

DNR fisheries staff take special care when spawning South Pine brook trout. Instead of spawning the fish in the hatchery, like they do with domesticated strains of rainbow trout, technicians go on site around the first week of November and spawn the fish on the river bank and bring the eggs back to the Manchester Hatchery. More than 51,430 fingerlings were stocked into 34 streams during the first 23 years of restoration work.

The eggs are hatched and raised to about two inches in size, and reintroduced into other streams to grow up wild. “Our capacity to restore brook trout is limited to the number of eggs we can collect from South Pine,” explains Siepker. “We have to balance collecting as many eggs as possible with minimizing impacts to the South Pine Creek brook trout population.”

To increase egg availability, Manchester Hatchery staff started to hold wild fingerlings at the hatchery and raise them to adults in 2016. By 2018, milt from wild South Pine males was used to spawn females at the hatchery. Captive brookies were maturing one to four weeks later than wild fish, so hatchery staff developed a protocol to store milt for the later spawns.

Siepker estimates that there are more than 500 miles

of coldwater streams in northeast Iowa. Not every mile is suitable for brook trout, but there are many miles where brook trout can be restored. “Iowans deserve to have these beautiful native brook trout in any place that we can have them,” Siepker said.

The ability to sustain brook trout indicates great stream health, as they are an indicator species of northeast Iowa’s streams, demanding the coldest and cleanest waters to prosper. DNR staff consider water temperature, current fish populations, and stream habitat conditions before stocking trout in a stream.



A typical sized wild collected South Pine Creek adult. Fish this size yield around 900 eggs each.

Brook trout are stocked into a new stream with suitable habitat three consecutive years to try to establish a strong and healthy population. About three years after the last stocking, fisheries staff sample the stream to see if there are young brook trout in the stream.

The process to determine where this colorful trout that is part of Iowa’s history is stocked is a complex process that involves a lot of partners. The areas that are determined viable to reintroduce brook trout have undergone significant conservation work to reduce bacteria and sediment. In some streams, it’s been decades since trout have been able to naturally reproduce and survive.

Trout lay their eggs in gravel so clear conditions are critical - sediment can smother the eggs and prevent young trout from hatching. Healthier streams have been able to support larger and naturally reproducing trout populations. “You have more robust trout populations with improved water quality and habitat,” said Siepker.

Spring is a great time to explore Iowa’s coldwater streams. Anglers can find wild brook trout in 11 streams that are open to public fishing. Find the list of streams on the DNR Trout Fishing webpage at www.iowadnr.gov/trout.



In the summer, if a fish sees our bait it will often eat it.

Photo by Bob Jensen

CATCH MORE FISH ALL SUMMER LONG

By Bob Jensen
FISHING THE MIDWEST FISHING TEAM

It's starting to feel a lot like summer. Fish behave differently in the different seasons, and if we want to catch fish in the different seasons, we need to vary our lure presentations and how we go about catching fish. Following are some ideas for catching fish during the summer months.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that, regardless of when you're fishing, you've got to find the fish. If you don't put your bait in front of a fish, you won't get bit. You can't catch fish that aren't there. Now that the spawn has been completed in most places, the fish will be where the food is. That could be pretty much anywhere in many bodies of water.

A weedline will often be a good place to start. Several species of fish will hang out along the weedline. You'll find largemouth bass, walleyes, several species of panfish including crappies, and northern pike on the weedline. If two

anglers are fishing, it works well for one angler to throw a crankbait and the other a slower presentation. That slower presentation will often be a jig tipped with some form of plastic.

With this plan, you're showing the fish two very different presentations. The crankbait moves faster and covers water, the jig/plastic provides a slower moving look. If the fish are hitting one bait better than the other, the angler using the not-so-productive technique should try something else. Maybe not exactly what the successful angler is using, but something else.

An angler who tries different lures when the fish are biting on a particular style of bait can learn a lot. When it comes to crankbaits to use along a weedline, something in the Pro Model XD Series will almost always be a good starting point. Try a slower retrieve, a faster retrieve, and a stop and go retrieve. Let the fish reveal what they're liking.

The angler throwing the jig should

In the summer, along the weedline or on deeper structures, sometimes the fish will be scattered, sometimes they'll be tightly schooled. You might catch one here and one there, or you might discover that you have to be very precise as to where you put your bait.

try an eighth or three-sixteenth's ounce jig tipped with something like a KVD Ocho. Start with the five or six inch size. If the fish are aggressive, go bigger. If they're not so willing to bite, go a bit smaller. A plastic such as this will appeal to almost any species of fish that sees it. The variety of colors and shapes and sizes that plastics are available in provide lots of presentation options.

In the summer, along the weedline or on deeper structures, sometimes the fish will be scattered, sometimes they'll be tightly schooled. You might catch one here and one there, or you might discover that you have to be very precise as to where you put your bait. On the

weedline, look for points or pockets to hold concentrations of fish.

Sonar can shorten the time between bites. In deeper water, twenty feet or more, it usually isn't productive to drop a bait until we've located fish on the sonar. If you're not seeing fish on your sonar when you're fishing deeper water, strongly consider moving to an area where you do see fish.

Spring and fall fishing can provide outstanding fishing, but summer fish are eating machines. Put the right bait in the right place and you're chances for getting bit are pretty good. For most of us, getting bit is why we go fishing. In the summer you can get bit a lot.

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ished for each surface acre of water impounded. With too little watershed, keeping a pond at a functional level is extremely difficult. Too much drainage is problematic as the system is unstable, and nutrient loading tends to be excessive.

It is also important to look at the watershed cover like timber, grassland and pasture. In addition, a good buffer strip of native warm season grasses around the pond will provide nesting and winter habitat for wildlife, as will strategically placed shrubs and conifers. The NRCS can help design a comprehensive plan to put this all in place, while the Iowa DNR biologists can also make suggestions.

Putting in a pond with row crop as the predominant cover in the watershed is the worst because runoff loaded with silt will not only cause negative issues with the fish populations but also dramatically shorten a pond's life.

A pond can be used for livestock watering but use sound practices and work with the NRCS for help in designing a proper watering system. Definitely erect a fence around the pond to keep livestock away from the dam away from the bank slopes and edges.

Stocking farm ponds

First of all, don't get all kinds of crazy ideas about the many favorite "fishing" species you'd like to stock. Three tried and true fish species are best suited for Iowa ponds. The two primary species are largemouth bass and bluegills and must be stocked in combination to provide a good fishery. Bluegills, of course, are an excellent panfish and serve as prey for largemouth bass. A third compatible option is the channel catfish for their fishing popularity, and they don't inhibit the other largemouth bass and bluegills. All three species are available from many private hatcheries in Iowa.

The DNR has a stocking formula that includes fish size and number of fish based on the number of acres in the farm pond. How about other species? Well, walleye and northern pike can be stocked, but there is seldom reproduction, so they must be restocked from time to time. Black crappies can be stocked, but the pond should be more than five acres. A huge warning: do not stock crappies until largemouth bass and bluegills are well established. Forget about yellow bass!

Balance, balance, balance...catching and keeping bluegills can start the second year after stocking, while anglers are encouraged to release most of the largemouth bass. Reason? To keep the bluegill population under control.

Vegetation

Often called weeds, aquatic plants play an extremely important part in a farm pond's health. There are floating, under water and partially above (emergent) the water plants. Rooted plants are necessary for a healthy pond, but too many can upset a fishing pond's balance and become a nuisance. Most biologists agree that once the plants cover over 40% of the surface area of a pond, they are over-abundant. The Iowa DNR has a pond plant guide Iowa Ponds (iowadnr.gov) that helps identify and give plant control options, along with recommended plants.

This is where professional help is extremely important. Newly constructed ponds will have lots and lots of seeds from past decades. Some can be good; others can bring negative results. It's better to be proactive and be on top of things even before the pond is made.

Yes, farm ponds are an important part of fisheries in the state of Iowa. After all, in 2023, a total of 186 proud angler qualifying catches were reported at farm ponds in Iowa.



A nice largemouth bass taken from an Iowa farm pond.

Photo courtesy Iowa DNR

Help stopaquatic hitchhikers

DES MOINES — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds all boaters and anglers to "Clean, Drain, and Dry" their boats and equipment throughout the boating season to protect Iowa lakes and rivers from aquatic hitchhikers.

Aquatic invasive species, everything from zebra mussels to Eurasian watermilfoil, move from one waterbody to another by hitchhiking on boats, in bait buckets and on other equipment used in the water. They often grow quickly and spread fast when brought to another lake or stream due to lack of natural controls.

"Boaters and anglers can help slow the spread of aquatic invasive species to new water bodies by checking their boat and equipment for unwanted hitchhikers after each time on the water," said Kim Bogenschütz, aquatic invasive species program coordinator for the Iowa DNR.

Aquatic invasive species can create serious problems for Iowa waters by reducing native species and making lakes and rivers unusable for boaters, anglers and swimmers.

Clean, Drain, Dry is a simple three step process that boaters need to follow every time they move from one body of water to another.

- CLEAN any plants, animals, or mud from your boat and equipment before you leave a waterbody.
- DRAIN water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well, bait bucket) before you leave a waterbody.
- DRY anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before you move to another waterbody either: Spray your boat and trailer with hot or high-pressure water; or Dry your boat and equipment for at least five days.
- Never release plants, fish, or animals into a waterbody unless they came out of that waterbody and empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species. It is also illegal to transport any aquatic plants on water-related equipment in Iowa. Signs posted at public accesses remind boaters to stop aquatic hitchhikers and identify infested waters.

Boaters must also drain all water from boats and equipment before they leave a water access and keep drain plugs removed or opened during transport. It is also illegal to introduce any live fish, except for hooked bait, into public waters.

Find more information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters in the current Iowa Fishing Regulations or at www.iowadnr.gov/ais.

Spring turkey season was one for the books

DES MOINES — The final segment of Iowa's spring turkey hunting season closed Sunday, ending the spring season with a record harvest of 16,059 birds reported, surpassing the 2023 record harvest of 14,843.

Turkeys were reported from all 99 counties, from a high of 649 birds bagged in Clayton County to a low of three in Osceola.

"We have turkeys in all 99 counties, but not all counties are equal. Most of the turkey habitat is in the eastern third of the state," said Jim Coffey, forest wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Iowa has had three straight years of good turkey hatchings across much of the state, thanks, in part, to the long-term drought that benefited all ground nesting birds.

"Two-year-old birds drive the population, and we have a large population of two-year-old birds," Coffey said. "These are birds that do lots of the gobbling and tend to move more than the older toms and make up the bulk of the harvest."

Iowa's five spring turkey seasons began April 5 with the youth only season, and ended

May 12 with the conclusion of gun/bow season four and the archery only season. Hunters purchased more than 56,600 spring turkey tags across all seasons in 2024.

The higher harvest wasn't completely unexpected thanks in part to Iowans who participated in the DNR's annual turkey brood survey that occurs each July and August. Iowans who see young turkeys in July and August are encouraged to report the birds through a link on the DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Turkey-Hunting/Wild-Turkey-Survey.

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Big Walleye Contest

Nearly 100 registered anglers joined in on the optional Biggest Walleye Category by using the Fish Donkey App. A total of 30 large fish submissions over 25" were recorded: Joel Anfinson of Spirit Lake, IA took the top two places for his 26.75 incher worth \$455 and his 26 incher worth \$275. Meanwhile, Nick Klatt of Spirit Lake, IA took third place with his 26 incher worth \$182.

Other Heaviest Fish categories brought in tons of fish to the local baitshops. Over \$3500 in rods and reels were donated from Fisherman's Factory Outlet and Pure Fishing for each of the following categories:

Northern Pike

1st Place - James Gossman of Terril, IA with 9.10 lbs (34.875")

2nd Place - Jake Lasch of Truman, MN with 8.55 lbs (32.75")

3rd Place - Aaron Espey of Hartley, IA with 8.16 lbs (31")

Heaviest Stringer of (10) Bullhead

1st Place - Chris Daisy of Estherville, IA with 16.83 lbs.

2nd Place - Hudson Schneckloth of Cushing, IA

with 16.07 lbs.

3rd Place - Berklee Carpenter of Sioux City, IA with 15.75 lbs.

Heaviest Stringer of (5) Panfish

1st Place - Conner Cregeen of Jackson, MN with 8.71 lbs.

2nd Place - Carrissa Stethem of Milford, IA with 8.26 lbs.

3rd Place - Jacob Westhoff of Dyersville, IA. With 8.1 lbs.

Heaviest Stringer of (3) Walleye (under 19") - Charlie Shuck Memorial

1st Place - Laef Lundbeck of Royal, IA with 7.28 lbs.

2nd Place - Aaron Hill of Fenton, IA with 7.18 lbs.

3rd Place - Kelly Cook of Spencer, IA with 7.14 lbs.

Largemouth bass

While there is no contest for the largest stringer of bass, it should be noted that the largemouth bass bite on the Okoboji has been really good with lots of three to four pound fish, along with an occasional 5-7 pound bass. I talked to a couple of bass fishermen casting on East Okoboji and then on Lower Gar. I asked them how they were doing, and one of them said with a smile. "Oh, it's been a good morning!" I really see the Iowa Great Lakes

offering really good fishing as the open water fishing takes off. If only we can keep the wind below a gale - even a 10 to 20 mph wind would be acceptable.

For sure, I believe the crappie bite will be outstanding on Big Spirit as evidenced by the 8.71-pound, 8.26-pound, 8.1-pound weights taken during the tournament. Recent guide posts on Facebook continue to show pictures of those big black crappies.

Plus, I see East Okoboji, Lake Minnewashta and West Okoboji as good for crappies. I only hope that we selective harvest a bit to extend the bite for more people. A meal is good, but do we really need to catch and clean 25-fish limits time after time. We selective harvest walleye, largemouth and smallmouth bass; it's just what we do!

Don't forget Center Lake, Silver Lake, Tuttle Lake, Little Swan, Ingham Lake, Lost Island and Storm Lake. Oh, so many, many opportunities and probably not enough time to fish them all!

Great opener, and anglers were able to avoid the bad weather.

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the Iowa Great Lakes, we detected it on the East Okoboji Chain of lakes in 2022. It was not found in high density, but it was widespread.

Working with a diverse group of community leaders, the DNR proposed a first of its kind large scale treatment. Everyone agreed that this would be the only opportunity to eradicate the plant. Once it spread to West Okoboji or Spirit Lake, a treatment would become unfeasible.

Using a similar approach to the new curly-leaf pondweed control technique, a slow acting herbicide was applied through the winter. However, since Eurasian watermilfoil dies back in the winter, the treatment was started in late fall and the concentration maintained through early spring. Unlike curly-leaf pondweed which produces seed-like structures, Eurasian watermilfoil only spreads through fragmentation. This means that if all the plants are treated, it can be eradicated from an area with no threat of regrowth. An added benefit to this treatment technique was the temporary control of curly-leaf pondweed in 2023 throughout the East Okoboji chain.

Monitoring in 2023 found no Eurasian watermilfoil in the East Okoboji chain of lakes.

2023 Eurasian watermilfoil strikes again

With a successful treatment behind us, the focus became surveillance in 2023. However, in late summer Eurasian watermilfoil was detected in the Miller's Bay Canals, the West Okoboji Harbor canals and in the Lazy Lagoon on West Okoboji. No plants were found on the main lake. The DNR and the community quickly began planning for a herbicide treatment. Because of the small area of infestation, a new, fast acting

herbicide was selected. This herbicide selectively kills several invasive aquatic plants without harming native plants. By September, all the permits were in place and 19 acres of the canals were treated.

2024 - We're not out of the woods

Surveillance will again be the key to long-term management of these invasives and the ability to quickly react before the plants have a chance to spread. Monitoring sites around the Iowa Great Lakes will be visited and past infestation areas will be surveyed.

On the East Okoboji Chain, the lake association and DNR are back to a ground attack on curly-leaf pondweed. Under ice treatments were completed on the areas north of the Narrows and on Lower Gar Lake and shoreline treatments were completed in early May to help with navigation and access.

As we've often discussed, these aren't the only invasive species threats out there. Several plant and animal species are getting closer to the area. Prevention is needed to slow the spread of these species and allow control strategies and tools to be developed. The Iowa Great Lakes community continues to rise to the challenges we face.

However, we also must not let our foot off the conservation gas pedal. Healthy lakes and native aquatic plant communities are more resilient to the impacts of these invaders. The main lake portions of West Okoboji and Spirit Lake make large scale treatments cost prohibitive and unfeasible. Working to keep the lakes and their watershed as healthy as possible is our best and only option for long-term success.

Outdoor Connection

Colorful



Female painting bunting (According to post on Iowa birding, as of May 2020, only 16 painted bunting recorded in Iowa)

Visitors

Male Baltimore Oriole enjoying jelly.



All visitors photographed in Mike Fredrickson's yard.

Mourning doves

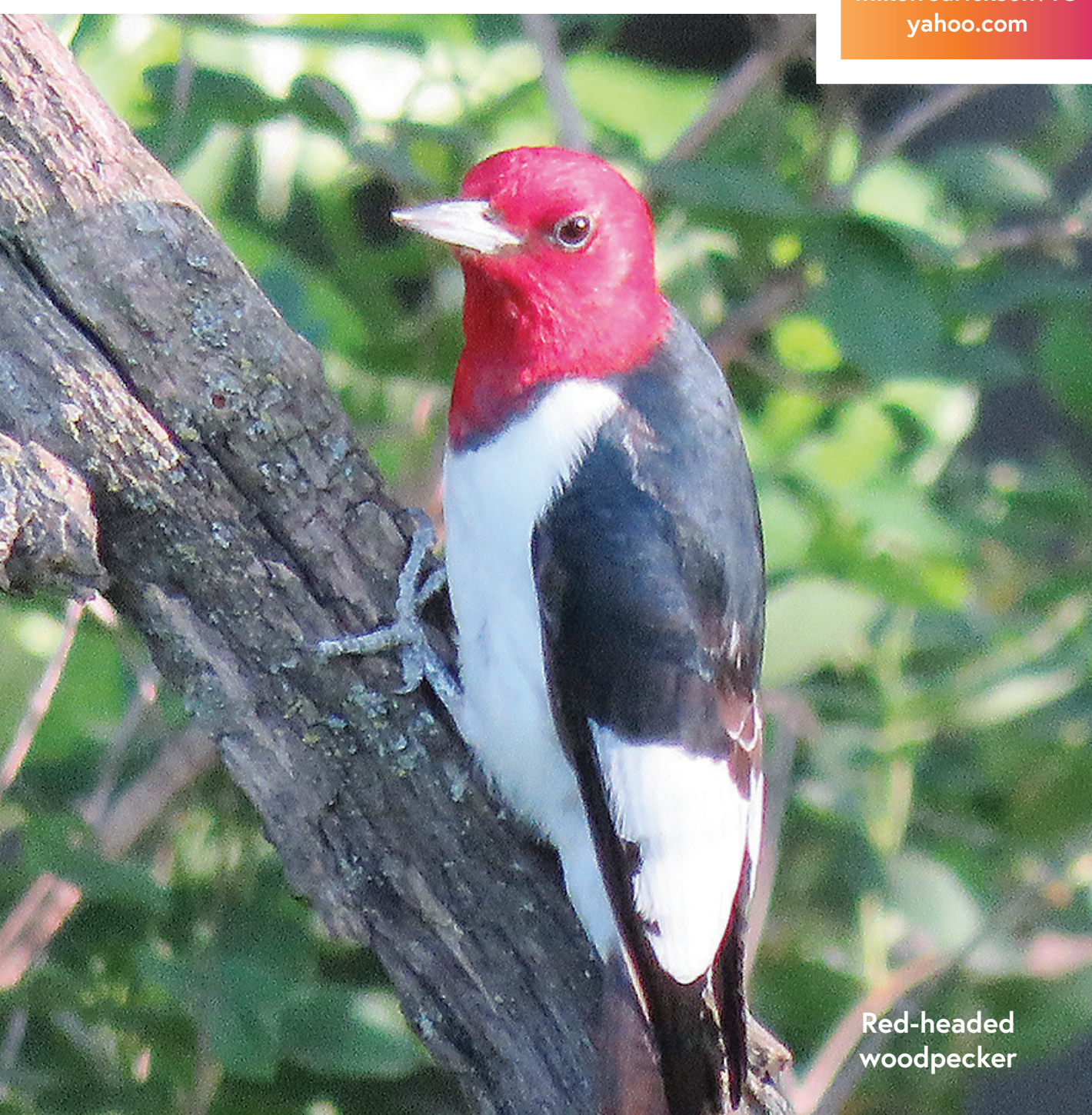


Pine warbler



Photos by Mike FREDRICKSON

If interested in buying digital copies of Mike's photos, contact him at 712-209-4907 or mikefredrickson91@yahoo.com



Red-headed woodpecker

Inspiration for Our Day- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." ~1 Peter 1:3

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