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2003-2004 migratory birds seasons set by commission

LITTLE ROCK - Waterfowl hunters will get 60 days of duck hunting in Arkansas. Commissioners from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission last week approved the liberal season along with a six duck bag limit for the 2003-2004 waterfowl season.

Duck hunters will be allowed no more than four mallards of which only one mallard may be a hen. The daily bag limit may also contain one pintail,

three mottled ducks, three scaup, two wood ducks, two redheads, one black duck and one canvasback, but no more than a total of six ducks.

The waterfowl season will be split into three segments. The first portion will open on Saturday, Nov. 22 and continue through Dec. 7. After a four-day break, the second season will be open from Dec. 12 through Dec. 24, the final season will continue from Dec. 26 through Jan. 25, 2004.

Reports from biologists in Canada and the United States indicate that snowstorms in April and rains in May improved habitat conditions from poor to good across much of North America's breeding grounds. The number of ponds in the Canadian prairies has increased dramatically from the previous year. In recent years there had been a severe drought in these areas. The total May 2003 survey shows that the number of ponds increased from 1.4 million in 2002 to 5.2 million in 2003. At the same time, duck breeding pairs increased from 31.2 million birds to 36.2 million birds.

Arkansas' late migratory bird season selections are due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Sept. 1. The commission's vote on the duck bag limit was split evenly

with commission chairman Lester Sitzes casting the deciding vote for the six duck limit. Commissioner Sheffield Nelson requested a more restrictive limit of five ducks.

The commission also approved a 30-day canvasback season beginning on Dec. 27 and continuing through Jan. 25, 2004. Pintail season will again have a split season. The first portion of the pintail season will begin Nov. 22 and continue through Nov. 30. The second part of the season will open Jan. 5 and continue through Jan. 25, 2004. The youth waterfowl hunt was set for the Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 2004 weekend.

In other commission business:

- Heard a proposal from the AGFC wildlife management division concerning the establishment of a possible duck hunting zone in northeast Arkansas. Enforcement issues have arisen in the area since it is mandatory to stop all waterfowl hunting at noon on public lands. Boundary lines are not established between some state-owned and privately-owned lands between the main levees of the St. Francis Floodway. The commission will be addressing the issue at its Sept. 26 meeting in Little Rock.
- Approved several fishing regulations that included implementing an 18 inch minimum length limit and four fish daily limit for walleye on Beaver Lake in Carroll, Washington and Benton counties. The walleye minimum slot limit was increased on Greers Ferry Lake from 18 to 20 inches. Implemented a 10-inch minimum length for crappie on Lake Charles in Lawrence County. Approved a catch and release program for largemouth bass on Bois d'Arc Lake in Hempstead County. At the same time, the 13 to 16 inch slot limit was removed on Lake Hinkle.

Surplus zone 10 doe hunting permits available Oct. 4

LITTLE ROCK - Doe hunting permits for deer zone 10 will be available at the Little Rock office early next month. Almost 200 of the zone 10 doe permits were not claimed before the deadline and will be available from the agency.

The permits will be distributed to hunters on a first-come, first-served basis and are free of charge. The permits will be available at the Little Rock office on Saturday, Oct. 4 between 9 a.m. and 12 noon.

Originally, this doe permit did not allow more than one hunter the opportunity to apply. However, the AGFC will allow each person the opportunity to obtain permits for up to four people. Each applicant will need name, date of birth, Social Security

number, or driver's license number for each hunter over 16. Hunter education or Social Security numbers will be required for those hunters 15 years of age and under.

The leftover Wildlife Management Area permits will not be available until Oct 6. WMA names, permit numbers and locations will be published later this month.

Disabled licenses are now available from the AGFC



LITTLE ROCK - Disabled sportsmen are now eligible for a special hunting and fishing licenses from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Commissioners from the AGFC recently approved a three-year special license for sportsmen who are 100 percent permanently and totally disabled. The license will be available to persons who are disabled as determined by the Social Security Administration, Veterans Affairs or Railroad Retirement. The new license became available on Sept. 2.

Sportsmen must show proof of Arkansas residency of at least one year to be eligible. Cost of a combination hunting and fishing license is \$35.50. The hunting only license is \$25.00 and fishing only is \$10.50. The license is valid for three years with re-certification and residency required to be renewed after that period.

For more information on the disabled sportsmen license, call the AGFC central office at 501-223-6300 or toll free at 1-800-364-4263 during normal business hours. The license is also available at the Little Rock AGFC office at 2 Natural Resources Drive.

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Commission agrees to land swap at Gene Rush WMA

JASPER - Commissioners from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission last week approved a land swap involving the Gene Rush/Buffalo River Wildlife Management Area in north Arkansas.

The commission will trade 110 acres it owns for an 80 acre in holding in the WMA. Lloyd Dodson is the owner of the 80 acres that will now become a part of the approximately 17,650 acre

WMA. The land that Dodson is trading has a significant amount of timber located on it. The commission's land did not have a significant amount of timber located on it. The difference in the acreage is balanced by the timber value.

The wildlife management area is located in southeastern Newton County and west central Searcy County. It is about 15 miles southeast of Jasper and 15 miles northwest of Marshall. The Ozark National Forest borders the area to the north and by the Buffalo National River to the south.

The official name of this wildlife management area is Gene Rush WMA. The area was originally called Buffalo River WMA (due to its proximity to the Buffalo River), but was renamed in honor of Gene Rush, long-time employee, native of Newton County and former chief of the wildlife management division of the AGFC.

The area has a generally northwest to southeast orientation with approximately 1,375 acres in smaller non-adjacent tracts lying both north and south of the Buffalo River. Nearly 3,650 acres are located in Searcy County with the remainder in Newton County.

Large snake skin is probably from Burmese python

MENA - A large snake skin that was found last month near Mena is probably from a Burmese python. Pythons are exotic animals and are native to southeast Asia. The shed skin was found in the Shirley Creek area of the Ouachita River.

According to Arkansas Game and Fish Commission herpetologist Kelly Irwin, this species of python is the most commonly produced python (captive bred for pet trade) in the U.S. “Either someone discarded the shed skin or the animal was intentionally released or escaped. Needless to say, if the snake is roaming free about the countryside it will not survive the winter, unless it finds a heated building to take up residence in,” Irwin said. “The only threat posed by such a snake would be to small dogs, cats, chickens, raccoons, opossums, etc. until freezing temps arrive,” he added.

Irwin said the snake poses no real threat to humans. “It will probably feed on something that it can easily subdue,” Irwin explained. “This is not the first instance of an exotic animal getting loose in Arkansas. Some people just don’t control their animals like they should,” he said.

The Burmese python has a bold color pattern mainly in browns and yellows. It grows to a length of 20 feet with a maximum recorded length of 25 feet.

Should anyone spot an exotic animal, they should contact their local wildlife officer immediately. It is unlawful for anyone to release native or non-native wildlife into the wild. It is punishable by a fine of \$500 to \$1,000.

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