

Kudzu Brings Down Power Lines!

Kudzu (KUD-zoo), sometimes referred to as “the vine that ate the South,” has finally pushed local patience to the limit. Properly called *Pueraria lobata*, it was first introduced in the 1920s to the southern United States as food for farm animals and to reduce soil erosion. Today, this fast-growing vine from Japan has overgrown entire forests and choked local ecosystems. Last week, the weight of kudzu vines pulled down power lines, causing a two-day power outage. Mayor Lam has called for control measures. All community members are invited to a town council meeting to consider what should be done to control this destructive vine.



Response to Tiger Mosquitoes Raises Questions

The public outcry over the worsening problem with the tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) continues. In response, the city has begun nighttime spraying of insecticide. Jesse Butler, principal of the Little Town Preschool, said, “How can the city be allowed to spray poison on the backyards where children play?” City Spokesperson Kate O’Neil told reporters that the insecticide is harmless to people. “Tiger mosquitoes are very aggressive. They are much worse than the native mosquitoes. Apart from the nuisance, tiger mosquitoes can spread diseases, such as yellow fever and Zika. We have to take action!”

O’Neil invites interested residents to attend the Camford Mosquito Abatement Board presentation on the tiger mosquito problem and possible solutions.



Residents Report Rats Rampant in Rockwood

It's Rockwood against the rats, and the rats seem to be winning. The number of people calling this year to complain about rats has increased from last year, according to the Rockwood Department of Streets and Sanitation. The city says the rats go for any available food source, from garbage to dog waste. That's why the city asks residents to pick up after their dogs and keep the lids on their garbage cans. But even residents who follow these guidelines continue to see more and more rats. One concerned resident said, "The problem is we can't sit out in our backyards because the rats just come

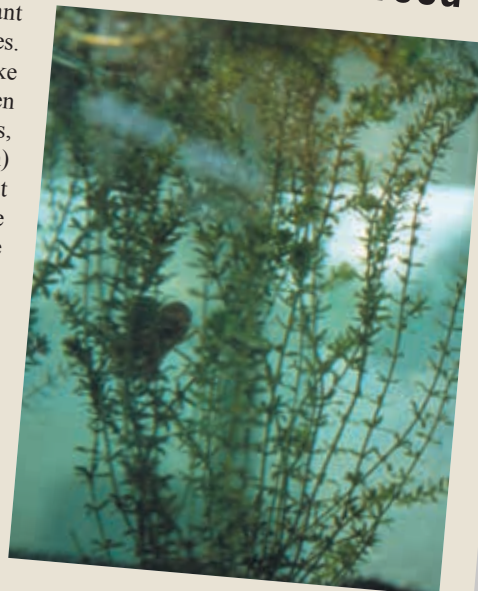
from the alley, go under the fences, and scurry around all night long."

City dwellers aren't the only ones who cringe when they see rats. Farm families are also bothered when they see rats crawling into the grain bin. As the rats eat the grain, they also leave behind their waste. These offending rodents, all just one species (*Rattus norvegicus*), go by many names: house rat, barn rat, sewer rat, brown rat, and Norway rat. What many people in the United States don't realize is that these common creatures came from China long before the United States was its own country.



Aquarium Plant Turns Out to Be Worst Weed

You may have seen this aquatic plant sold in small bunches at aquarium stores. It's a popular plant because goldfish like swimming between its stems. But when aquariums are dumped out into lakes, ponds, or rivers, hydrilla (hie-DRILL-uh) can quickly grow into a dense mat that chokes out other vegetation. This change of the environment is dramatic for native animals and plants. *Hydrilla verticillata*, as it is known scientifically, can clog up city water intake valves and get tangled in boat propellers. "We used to have the best swimming hole down by the bridge," said Rita Aziz, a seventh grader at Robin Middle School. "Now it's filled with this gross weed. The last time I swam there, I got tangled in it. It was scary. I would really like to find a way to do something about it."

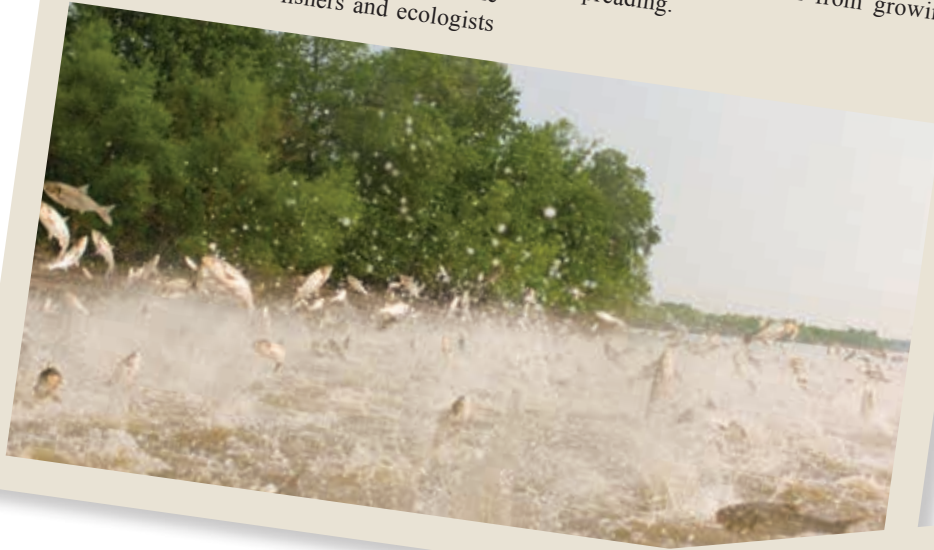


Flying Fish Tournament?

No, you didn't read that wrong—it's not a fly-fishing tournament but, rather, a flying fish tournament. Asian carp are so numerous in several rivers in the United States that fishers no longer need to use poles to catch them—they just motor their boats up the river and let the fish jump into the boats. Last year's winner caught 432 fish in a four-hour period. With these carp averaging 30 pounds each, that's over 12,000 pounds of fish.

This would seem like a good thing for the fishing industry, but fishers and ecologists

alike are distressed by the impact these fish are having on the environment and other species of fish. One fisher complained, "I used to be able to catch largemouth bass, crappies, and sunfish. Now I hardly ever catch them, and all I see are these fish that aren't even from this river." The Fish and Wildlife Department and the sport-fishing industry are working together to try to stop the Asian carp population from growing and spreading.



A Landscape Beauty Is Taking Over

What is the link between landscaping your yard and the recent reports that local marsh species are declining? Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), whose magenta flowers are admired by gardeners, is the weed to blame. It was introduced from Europe as a medicinal herb in the early 1800s and is still sold today as a landscaping plant. According to Fish and Wildlife Service Ecologist Johanna Brown, "It totally takes over an area, crowding out native species. It's really devastating for fragile marsh ecosystems." Brian Van Horn, a teacher at Garden Middle School, is also concerned. "It's a tough plant to get rid of, and killing it can damage the marshes even more." A meeting at Middleton Junior High will be held to discuss this issue.



Farmers Rally to Scare Off Starlings

The recent outbreak of hog cholera may be related to starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) droppings getting into pig food. Carol Polsky, a pig farmer in Poseyville, encouraged local farmers to work together to help get rid of



the birds. "In addition to spreading disease, those birds eat crops, seeds, and animal feed. A flock of starlings will eat just about anything, and they poop everywhere. That spreads disease to other animals, not just pigs," Polsky told reporters.

Many control options are available, according to Dr. Tony Caro of the Agricultural Sciences Board. Dr. Caro commented, "In 1891, 60 starlings were released in New York, and now they are the most common bird in America!" But a representative of the local nature society told reporters that the latest annual survey showed that starling populations had dropped since the previous year. Dr. Caro will be speaking at the next meeting of the County Farm Association, where control measures for starlings will be discussed.

Snakes on the Plains

Unlike pet dogs and cats, which get to a predictable size and then stop growing, snakes often grow much larger than their owners had expected. What do these owners do when their snakes, especially Burmese pythons, get too big to keep? Unfortunately, some people release them into the wild. In the southern part of the United States, these snakes can often survive and thrive. These pythons are literally squeezing the life out of mammalian prey and ecosystems. At first a problem only for the coastal plains in Florida, the snakes are spreading north. Willie Washington, a resident of Palmetto Park, shared, "I used to be able to let my dog out to play in my fenced backyard, but now I don't dare! My neighbor saw a snake in her backyard just last week. She called the Wildlife Depart-

ment, and when they caught it, they said it was a Burmese python and that it measured 15 feet long! I don't even want to let my children out to play." The Wildlife Department urges everyone to be on the lookout for unwanted snakes and to call them if they have a pet snake they no longer want.



ANALYSIS

1. What kinds of human activities seem to lead to problems with introduced species?