

Arizona Wildlife Podcast Comprehension Activity

Episode 10: Crayfish Invasion

Part A: Determine whether each statement below is true or false. If it is false, correct the statement so that it will be true.

1. Crayfish are actually crustaceans rather than fish.

True.

2. Crayfish were an important food source for early Arizona settlers.

False. Crayfish are not native to Arizona. They were not introduced into the state until the 1940s or 50s. They were not here when Arizona was first settled.

3. Crayfish are endangered in Arizona.

False. Crayfish are non-native invaders to the state. Their populations have increased significantly since they were first introduced.

Part B: Explain the affect that crayfish have on each of the following.

1. Frogs – Crayfish will eat just about anything. This includes frog eggs and tadpoles. They may even kill adult frogs. They are dramatically impacting our native frog populations by eating the eggs.

2. Birds – Crayfish can actually be good news and bad news for birds. In some cases, they provide an additional food source for herons and other similar birds. However, the crayfish also eat many of the insects that these aquatic birds rely on.

3. Aquatic Plants – Crayfish do not just eat animals. They eat plants as well. They will eat al of the plants in a stream or pond, as well as the ones found along the shore.

4. Soil – Crayfish dig burrows in the soil around water. In addition, they eat the plants whose roots stabilize the soil. These two actions cause the soil to loosen and erode.

5. Water Quality – By digging into the soil, the crayfish cause it to be released into the water. As this dirt accumulates in the water, it lowers water circulation which can decrease the amount of oxygen available for fish and other organisms.

Part C: Answer each question below in complete sentences. The answers are not necessarily included in the content. They may require some critical thinking.

1. Would crayfish best be described as carnivores, herbivores, or omnivores? Why?

Crayfish are most definitely omnivores. They will eat just about anything edible, including frogs, fish, eggs, plants, and bugs. If it became necessary, crayfish could even eat each other.

2. Why are crayfish referred to as ecosystem engineers?

Since they remove aquatic plants and dig into the soil, they change the very structure of the habitat. As a result, they greatly impact the ecosystem as a whole. In the podcast, this was compared to a beaver which builds a dam, thus changing the flow of the stream and the entire ecosystem.