

Arizona Wildlife Podcast

Transcript: Episode 10 – Crayfish Invasion

(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)

The content for this episode came from the Crayfish Eradication workshop that took place at Seven Springs on May 8, 2008. It was part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Nature's Classroom Homeschool Program. Department staff took members of the homeschool community along as they collected data about crayfish populations in this riparian system.

Listen as Jeff Sorensen, the Department's Invertebrates and Native Fish Program Manager, explains a little bit about crayfish biology and their history in Arizona. Following the live recording, the audio was edited and Eric Proctor, a Department educator, interjected appropriate questions to link the content.

ERIC:

So, today we're going to learn a little about an animal that is known by a number of different common names. You may have heard them referred to as crayfish, maybe crawdads, or even crawfish. Some people even call them mudbugs. Huh, that's kind of interesting. They look like a baby lobster. Are they actually a bug?

JEFF:

So, they're not insects. They're, uh, crustaceans. And the Game and Fish Department...not only do we manage, you know, our mammals, our birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, but we also have crustaceans and mollusks under our charge.

ERIC:

I always thought crayfish were in the south, maybe places like Louisiana. Are they actually here in Arizona?

JEFF:

We do not have any native crayfish. We're one of the few states that does not have any native crayfish. So all these guys are exotic – something that doesn't belong here and has an unfair advantage.

ERIC:

Perhaps the obvious question then is how did they get here?

JEFF:

They were brought back in probably in the 1940s and 1950s as bait for a lot of our sport fish – bass, catfish. But also for a lot of the irrigation canals and agricultural folks. They were using them to control the plant growth.

ERIC:

We brought the crayfish here to try to do some good. What's the problem now?

JEFF:

Part of our problem is they've gotten widespread in Arizona. We want wildlife to kind of stay where they belong, especially those that we've introduced in the past because some of our habitats...we've got a lot of rare species – endangered, you know, fish and frogs and birds. Crayfish are all going to affect those.

ERIC:

In what ways?

JEFF:

Crayfish are very hungry. They pretty much eat everything: ah, plants, bugs, ah, fish, frogs, snakes. They'll, you know...For that reason they're a problem in our wild... our natural habitats because they are very good at what they do, which is eating.

And they also change a lot of the environment. They're kind of like beavers where they can make a stream into a pond. What we call ecosystem engineers. They're able to dig burrows into the muddy banks and, uh, eat up a lot of the vegetation.

We didn't realize that birds will even be affected by crayfish because the crayfish will eat up all these aquatic bugs the birds would normally feed on and now the birds are sometimes disappearing in some of these areas.

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Thank you.