

# Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Summer 2004

## THE HABITAT CONNECTION: INVASION

### Shhh!

#### DON'T LOOK NOW BUT WE ARE BEING INVADED!

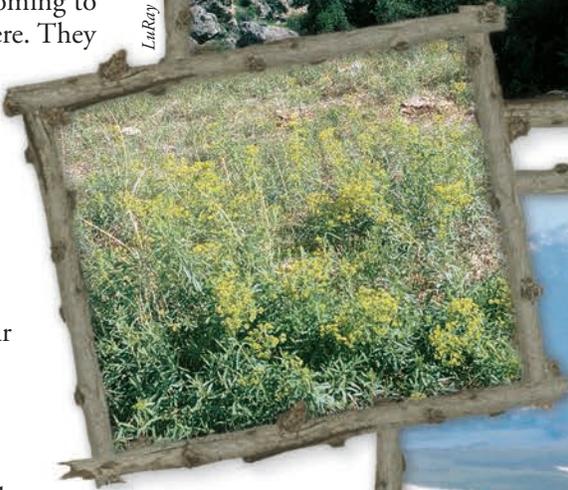
No, the invaders aren't little green men in flying saucers from outer space. They are plants and animals from other parts of our earth. Some live in nearby places like Oregon and Illinois—others come from distant lands like Russia, China, Syria and New Zealand. But they are coming to Wyoming. In fact, some of them already are here. They are moving into our grasslands, forests, rivers and lakes. Some might even be living in your yard.

Why should we care that plants and animals from other places have invaded our state? We should care because our native plants and animals are in balance with each other and with nature. Invaders can upset that balance and harm the natural food web. One way they do this is by taking over the habitat used by our wildlife. Some invaders are plants that take up space needed by our native plants. We have a name for these invaders: weeds.

Invading animals can mess up the land and water. They eat food that is needed by our wild animals. Some invading animals may even kill and eat our wildlife.

In this issue of *Wild Times*, you will learn about some of the many invaders that are trying to take over Wyoming. And you will find out how you can help our habitat and wildlife survive the invasion.

LutRay Parker



Wyoming's native plants and animals are in balance with each other and with nature. Invaders that aren't supposed to be here, like the yellow plants above, can upset the natural balance and take over habitat that wildlife need to live.



LutRay Parker

# FIELD Wildlife Journal

There are specially trained people who watch for any invading plants and animals that come into our state. These people are biologists. Some keep an eye on the land, checking the plants that grow there. Other biologists study water—lakes and rivers. On land, biologists have to know all the different kinds of plants that grow in Wyoming. This is not easy because there are hundreds of them. In college, these biologists learn botany, which is the study of plants. When they find a weed they haven't seen before, they watch how it affects other plants and animals.

Water biologists have to know about aquatic plants and animals. Aquatic means from or living in water. The biologists learn all about these things in college.

Biologists get to spend a lot of time outdoors. Sometimes they get wet and covered with mud. But they get to go to places where most people never go and they see lots of wildlife and scenery. Most Wyoming biologists love working in this state.

If you enjoy learning about plants and animals, start planning now to be a biologist. Maybe someday you will save our wildlife from an invader.

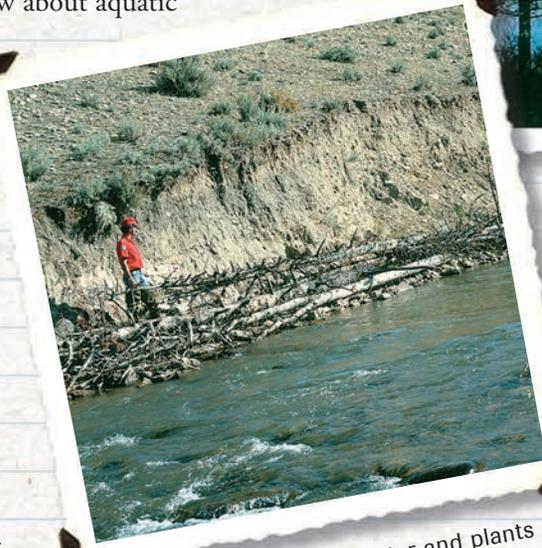
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**There are specially trained people who watch for any invading plants and animals that come into our state.**

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Wyoming is beautiful; let's keep it that way!



A biologist is studying the water and plants around it.

LuRay Parker

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**If you enjoy learning about plants and animals, start planning now to be a biologist. Maybe someday you will save our wildlife from an invader.**

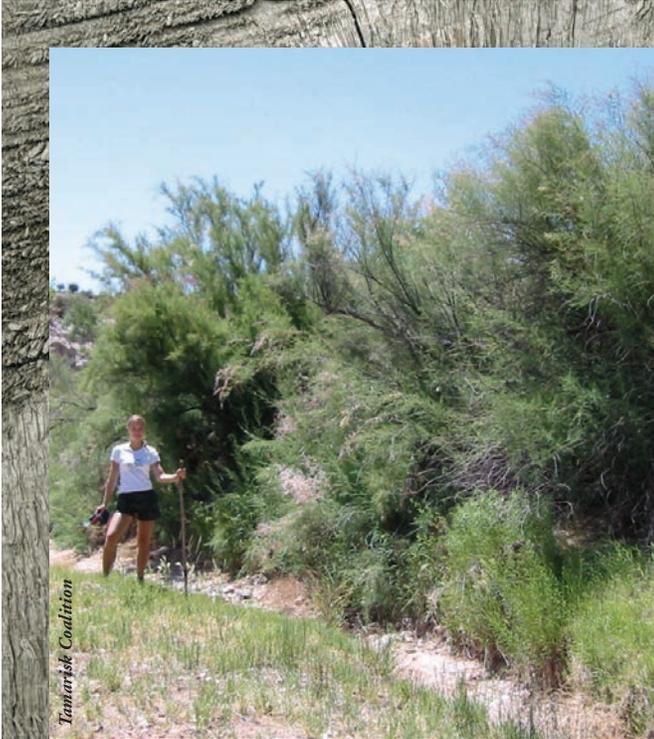
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LuRay Parker

# WILDLIFE PROFILES

Any kind of wild animal or plant can become an invader. When it spreads to a new place the plant or animal can change the food web and take the place of whatever was living there before. Sometimes, plants or animals from faraway places



Tanarisk Condition



Yellowstone National Park

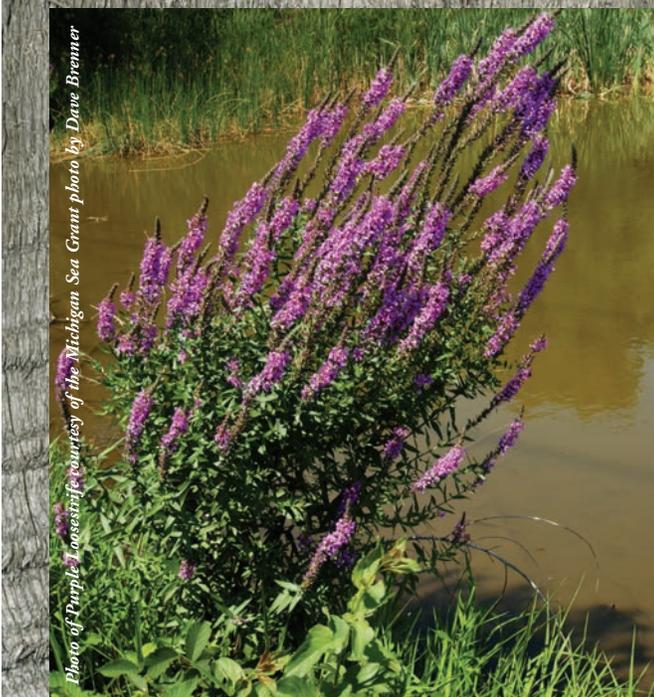


Photo of Purple Loosestrife courtesy of the Michigan Sea Grant photo by Dave Brenner



Iowa Department of Natural Resources

# WILDLIFE PROFILES

Continued from Page 3

are called exotics (eck-ZOT-iks). Here are two plants and two water creatures that have invaded Wyoming and other western states.

## NEW ZEALAND MUD SNAIL

Get out a world globe or map and find New Zealand. There are few places farther away from Wyoming than New Zealand. It is hard to believe the New Zealand mud snail has come this far, but it has. It was brought to America by accident but it now acts as if it is trying to take over our streams. The snail has been found in rivers of northern Wyoming. This pest harms the food web that trout depend on.

## TAMARISK

The tamarisk (TAM-uh-risk) is a tall shrub that comes from Asia. It is a plant you might think looks pretty with its feathery leaves and pink flowers. But it is a problem when it grows along rivers. There, it crowds out our native trees and shrubs, which are needed by wildlife. Since the tamarisk is not native to Wyoming, our wild animals don't use it much for food or shelter. The tamarisk is also a very thirsty plant. It takes water away from the roots of native plants. Wyoming is a dry place and water often is scarce. Sometimes people plant the tamarisk on purpose thinking it will be good for the soil. They should not do this. We need to get rid of tamarisks, not plant more of them.

## BROOK STICKLEBACK

The brook stickleback, a native of Minnesota and Wisconsin, is a small fish that has been turned loose in Wyoming waters. Fish experts think fishermen who were using sticklebacks for bait dumped them in ponds and streams. Now the brook stickleback is spreading. These fish make lots of baby sticklebacks very quickly. Brook sticklebacks are not eaten by bigger fish very often. This may be because of the spikes on their backs. The brook stickleback is not good for Wyoming because it eats the eggs of trout and other fish.

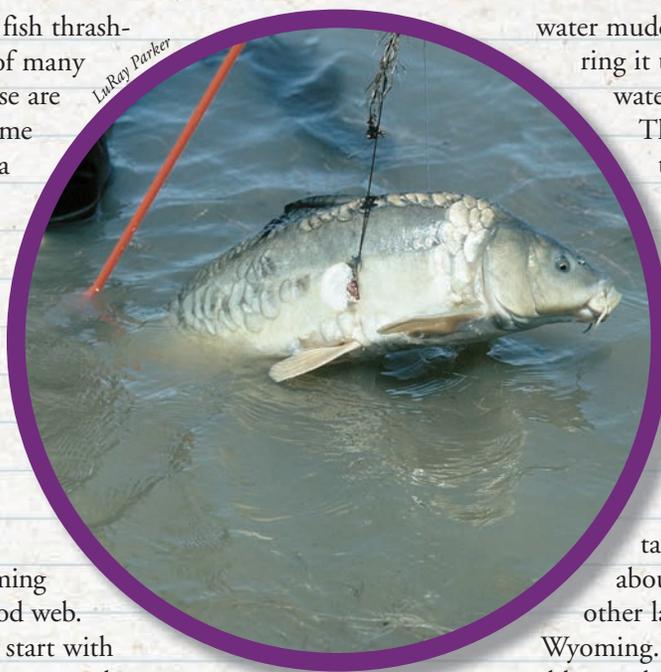
## PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Many weeds are pretty plants with colorful flowers. Some are plants you might think would look nice in a garden. Purple loosestrife (LOOSE- strife) is one such plant, and some people do grow it in their yards. But loosestrife is a problem when it gets loose. It only takes three loosestrife plants to make nearly a million seeds. The tiny seeds are picked up by the wind and blown everywhere. When the seeds fall on damp soil, they sprout and turn into new loosestrife plants. These plants then make millions of seeds. Soon the soil is covered with loosestrife plants and nothing else has room to grow. This plant can be a real pest.

# OUR Wildlife Heritage

In early summer, you can see big fish thrashing around in the shallow water of many Wyoming lakes and streams. These are carp and they are mating at this time of year. The carp comes from Asia and Europe. It is a relative of the goldfish but gets much larger. Carp were brought to America in the 1800s and were used for food. People found carp were easy to raise and harvest. Before long, carp were in rivers and lakes. Soon they had spread all over the country. They were first brought to Wyoming more than 100 years ago.

Carp are not good fish for Wyoming because of what they do to our food web. Carp lay lots of eggs. Even if you start with only a few carp, in a few years you can end up with hundreds or even thousands of them. Carp ruin the habitat for other fish in a lake or stream when they feed on the bottom. They make the



Common carp

water muddy by rooting in the mud and stirring it up. Green plants that grow in the water don't grow well where carp live.

This is bad for many fish such as trout. These fish hide under the water plants and hunt for food around them. Muddy water is also bad for ducks and other water birds that need the plants.

Carp have made a muddy mess in several Wyoming waters. It is expensive to get rid of them so that the water can be used by fish and fishermen again.

Carp have taught us an important lesson. We should be careful about bringing wild animals from other lands and turning them loose in Wyoming. They can cause a lot of trouble and hurt other wildlife and habitat.

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Goldfish are relatives of the carp.

LuRay Parker

# Around Wyoming



LuluRay Parker

Walleye are exotic species.

## Walleye

Walleye are fish with big, sharp teeth. They are predators that eat other fish. Walleye are important fish in Wyoming. Fishermen like to catch them. They taste good and they get large. The walleye is not a native of Wyoming. It was brought here illegally from outside Wyoming. The Game and Fish Department now manages walleyes in certain lakes.

But some other people have captured walleye without permission and turned them loose in waters where they thought walleye should be. They should not have done this. It is against the law. Walleye may eat trout and other fish. When walleye are in a lake, other kinds of fish that fishermen want can sometimes start to disappear. Only experts at the Game and Fish Department should decide where fish or other wildlife should be turned loose.



LuluRay Parker



Russian olive trees have gray leaves and produce many seeds.

## Russian Olive

Along some Wyoming streams, the cottonwoods and willows are giving way to a new tree with gray leaves. It is called the Russian olive. As you might guess by its name, the Russian olive is not a Wyoming native. The trouble with the Russian olive is that it spreads around by dropping lots of seeds that sprout into new trees. The Russian olive isn't as good for wildlife as our native trees but it takes up space where native trees otherwise would grow.

**Walleye are fish with big, sharp teeth.  
They are predators that eat other fish.**

# Outdoor Classroom

## THE PROBLEM WITH BARE GROUND

Invader plants grow very well on bare ground. They like places where the ground has been dug up or where the native plants have been cleared away. A school playground is just such a place. Playgrounds are good places to find different kinds of weeds. How many different kinds of weeds can you find around your school? Display them on a poster board.



Playgrounds are good places to find different kinds of weeds.

## INVADER IN YOUR LAWN

Dandelions are invading plants that came from Europe. Blow on a fuzzy dandelion and watch the little parachutes fly out. Each parachute contains a seed. Try to count the dandelion seeds. There might be more than you thought. Each can become



Are dandelions in your yard?

a new dandelion plant if it finds a damp place to grow. Now you know how weeds such as dandelions can spread so fast.

## HOW DO INVADERS SPREAD?

Look at the seeds of different weeds.

Seeds of some have stickers.

Others, like the dandelion, have lightweight, feathery or hair-like things attached to the seed. How do you think these things might help the weed seeds to spread?

Aquatic invaders cling to rubber fishing boots and boats. You can stop them from spreading by washing off your equipment after fishing or boating.



LuRay Parker

If you wear waders when fishing, be sure to wash them.



# ▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

## TRUE OR FALSE?

1. T/F In Wyoming, it is okay for you to take live fish from one lake or river and put them in another.
2. T/F Weed seeds like to sprout in bare ground.
3. T/F When you get tired of your aquarium, you should dump the fish and snails into a lake or river.



Answers: 1-F, 2-T, 3-F

## WORD MATCH

Match each word with its meaning from the column at right.

- |            |                                  |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Exotic  | A. from the water                |
| 2. Botany  | B. from a faraway place          |
| 3. Carp    | C. the study of plants           |
| 4. Aquatic | D. a fish that makes water muddy |



Answers: 1-B, 2-C, 3-D, 4-A

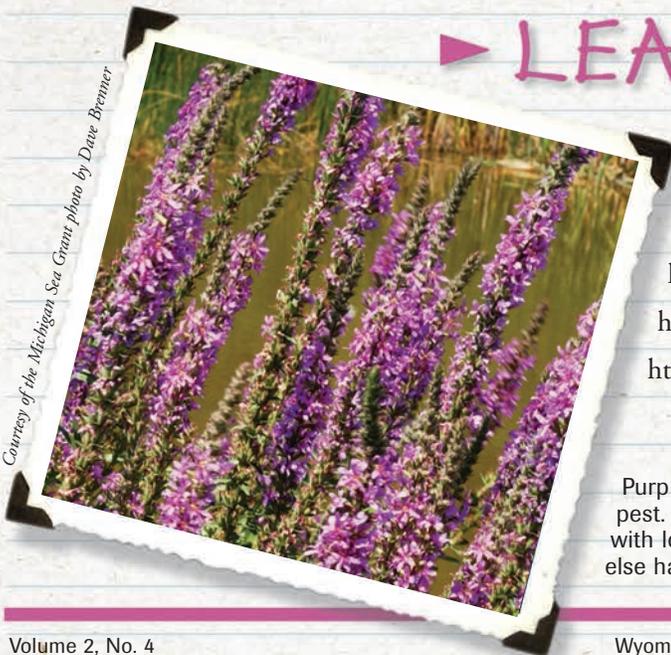


Lucy Parker



Don't forget to wash your boat and waders. Lots of invaders can stick to them!

# ▶ LEARNING LINKS ◀



Courtesy of the Michigan Sea Grant photo by Dave Bremner

Visit your library for books on weeds and invading animals.

### WEB SITES:

<http://www.sgnis.org/3drotate/kidsloos.htm>

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eeek/earth/aliens.htm>

<http://www.efieldtrips.org/invasives/index.htm>

Purple Loosestrife can be a real pest. When the soil is covered with loosestrife plants nothing else has room to grow.

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