

GET READY:

Invasion of the Rusty Crayfish and the Wild Pigs

The Yak has written hundreds of animal stories in our 20 years of publication.

In the beginning, we wrote mainly about exotic species, including the Chinese alligator, the South American Spectacled bear, and even Tibet's wild and domesticated yaks!

Eventually, we focused exclusively on Michigan native species, and for good reason: There was a lot to learn about the critters in wildlife areas and our own backyards, such as the Red-Winged blackbird, porcupine, black bear, and gray wolf.

In 2013, we expanded our focus to include the illegal pet trade and the dangers of buying pythons, monkeys, lions, and other exotic species.

Now, we've decided to kick off the New Year by further widening our coverage to include invasive species, animals that make their way to Michigan from other states or countries, often becoming a threat to native species.



Courtesy of Michigan Sea Grant

This is a Rusty crayfish, which looks like a very small lobster. Crayfish and lobster are both crustaceans.



Photo Courtesy of Michigan Sea Grant

Kaylee Rondeau (at left) and Jade Schultz got so excited about Rusty crayfish after a 2013 field trip that they helped Michigan Sea Grant write a poster on the invasive species. The girls attended Sanborn Elementary, in Ossineke, near Alpena, but are now in middle school.

It seems a long time ago that Zebra mussels topped Michigan's "most unwanted" list. The pesky mollusk was introduced into the Great Lakes in 1988 through ballast water from a transatlantic freighter. With females able to produce more than a million eggs a year, the Zebra quickly spread to all five Great Lakes and river basins in other states. Game over.

"Early detection is our only hope for eradication," said Sue Tangora, invasive species coordinator for the state Department of Natural Resources. "Most of the time when you get something as widespread as Zebra mussels, then you're looking at only control. There's no magic bullet."

You've probably also heard about two other successful aquatic invaders, the Quagga mussel and the Sea lamprey. There's no hope of getting rid of them, either, though various methods are being used to control them.

TUSK, TUSK!

But have you heard of the Rusty crayfish, an invader from southern Ohio that is overwhelming two natives, the river and the lake crayfish; or feral swine — wild pigs — some of Russian lineage with fearsome tusks? An estimated 1,000 to 3,000 of the swine are on the loose in more than 70 Michigan counties, including Wayne, Oakland and Macomb. We didn't know that and were shocked to find out. The pigs can carry diseases and be aggressive. Un-friend them immediately if you encounter one.

"The Rusty crayfish has largely taken over Michigan waterways right under everyone's notice," said Brandon Schroeder, northeast district coordinator for Sea Grant Michigan (www.miseagrant.umich.edu).

Lake crayfish live in lakes, but river crayfish prefer rivers, so the two don't compete, Brandon said. The Rusty crayfish

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