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The New Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management

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ABSTRACT: Since 1996, the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management (ICWDM) has provided a clearinghouse for research-based information on mitigating wildlife damage. In July 2006, the ICWDM underwent a major revision to better serve the needs of its visitors. The site received a new URL, <http://icwdm.org>, layout, architecture, and content. Plans for further site enhancements include creating an image library, expanding content to include non-North American species, and encouraging interested parties to join us in eXtension.

KEY WORDS: educational materials, eXtension, e-zine, wildlife images, Internet, online, research publications, vertebrate pest control

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ICWDM 1996-2004

The concept for an internet-based repository for research, educational and vocational materials on wildlife damage management (broadly defined) was identified and developed by Hygnstrom et al. (1998). They envisioned a site that would meet the needs of four key constituencies: property owners and managers; local, state, and federal wildlife managers and biologists; professional wildlife control operators and extension personnel; and policy makers. In 1996, after receiving a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture – Cooperative, State, Research, Education, and Extension Service – Integrated Pest Management Regional Grants Program (CSREES-IPM) for \$98,000, the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management (ICWDM) launched with the URL <http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu>. With Dallas Virchow of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as the webmaster, the ICWDM became recognized as the leading on-line resource for wildlife damage management with 4,500 visitors per month representing 80 countries.

During 1996-2004, the site grew, ultimately housing over 1,800 files with 963 internal and external links. Not surprisingly, the widely-regarded book *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage* (Hygnstrom et al. 1994), received 11% of the hits. Visitors were also drawn by the availability of other publications, including the Proceedings of the Wildlife Damage Management Conference, the Proceedings of the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop, the Proceedings of the Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference, and the Proceedings of the Bird Strike Committee USA/Canada Joint Annual Meeting.

ICWDM 2004-2006

By 2004, the site's founders determined that the ICWDM's future growth was hindered by its outdated and cumbersome architecture. The site also needed an overhaul to keep pace with changing technology. After receiving \$60,000 from CSREES-IPM for site improvements, the founders tapped Raj Smith of Cornell University to redesign the site. Smith converted the site from its database architecture to .ASP to be more compatible with current Internet standards. He also enhanced the functionality of the site by changing the page template and employing drop-down menus. This conversion made the site more accessible to disabled viewers, and it provided visitors the option of viewing *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage* in HTML or PDF formats. To better reflect the multi-institutional nature of the site, the founders decided to change the URL from <http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu> to <http://icwdm.org> and adopt a logo (Figure 1).

In September 2004, Stephen Vantassel became the new webmaster. Vantassel was given the responsibility



Figure 1. The logo for the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management, adopted in 2005.

to manage and expand the site's content. A top priority involved the scanning and uploading of publications on wildlife damage management previously unavailable in digital form. The publications include the:

- Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference (volumes 1-16),
- Proceedings of the Bird Control Seminar (all published proceedings),
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (various identification guides), and
- The Probe (National Animal Damage Control Association newsletter).

To assist researchers in using these documents, the ICWDM established a cooperative agreement with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln library to use its Digital Commons program. The Digital Commons allows Google®-like searches of the entire document collection or specific folders. As of this writing, 25% of the Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings, 88% of the Bird Control Seminar Proceedings, 100% of the donated Nebraska Game and Parks Guides, and 10% of all issues of The Probe were available through the Digital Commons. Work on the remaining portions is continuing and should be completed by the end of 2006.

A cooperative agreement has been developed with the managers of the wildlife control industry trade publication *Wildlife Control Technology*, which allows exclusive rights to sell digital copies of complete issues and individual articles from its first ten years, 1994-2003. Other items, including DVD's and reference guides, are also available through the ICWDM. A complete listing of products is available at <http://icwdm.org/credits/store.asp>.

We recognized that individuals and agencies lack convenient access to quality images on wildlife damage management. In cooperation with the National Wildlife Research Center, we embarked on the creation of a royalty-free image database. Through the generous donations of individuals and organizations (Table 1), the ICWDM has collected over 10,000 images. In the coming months, we will be making the images available online.

The ICWDM has also been creating educational material. A free, on-line inspection course is available to train people on the basics of inspecting property for wildlife damage (<http://icwdm.org/Inspection/Course/default.asp>). We are pleased that the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors has recommended the course for its members. To help property owners identify wildlife damage, an inspection decision key to guide people through the identification process has also been created (<http://icwdm.org/Inspection/Default.asp>). Since wildlife damage is so diverse, we welcome suggestions to make the decision key more thorough and usable. Other available educational materials include tips on wildlife damage prevention and trap setting instructions. With the increasing adoption of broadband, we are looking to increase the use of video as an educational medium, and making these courses available for college credit.

The ICWDM established service and product vendor lists to help consumers obtain professional assistance. More than 130 vendors are presently listed. Although no

endorsement of companies is stated or implied, we provide tips and suggestions to help consumers find responsible agents and companies. Along with the service vendor lists, we provide links to government agencies so that consumers can review the relevant wildlife control information and regulations in their area. Through our association with Cornell University, visitors can access the *Best Practices Manual for Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators in New York State* (Curtis et al. 2004).

As part of our outreach efforts, we created a free monthly e-zine and developed an "Ask the Expert" link to field questions. The e-zine provides around 90 subscribers with a quick, bulleted list, of improvements to the site. We know people are busy, so the e-zine is designed to be read in 2-3 minutes. "Ask the Expert," in both professional and non-specialist versions, provides personalized assistance to those needing individual help in resolving a particular wildlife damage management issue. Since being established in September 2005, "Ask the Expert" has answered over 100 questions and the rate of questions submitted continues to climb.

In July 2005, the updated version of Internet Center for Wildlife Damage was launched. We are gratified that

Table 1. Listing of contributors of wildlife damage management images to the ICWDM.

Name	Business/Organization
Kent Aden	The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District
Stephen Bis	http://www.floridaevergladesalligator.com
Justin Boner	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Kevin Clark	Critter Control Inc.
John Consolini	Northwest Nuisance Wildlife Control
Bob Gilman	Private citizen
Matthew Grady	http://www.BatGuys.com
Steve Hamm	Private citizen
J.P. Hansma	Muskrat Department of the Province of Groningen
Alaine Hudin	Private citizen
Alan Huot	Wildlife Control Supplies
Mark Jones	Amtech Pest & Nuisance Wildlife Control Inc.
Tim Julien	A & T Wildlife
William Krupicka	Private citizen
Kirk LaPierre	A1 Saver
E. Lunquist	Private citizen
Nebraska Game & Parks	NEBRASKAland Magazine
Jeff Norris	Nuisance Wildlife Relocation
Jerry Pickel	Pickel's Wildlife Services
Dave Purwin	Desert Wildlife Services, Inc.
Glen Robertson	Robertson's Wildlife Removal
Bill Rogers Jr.	Animal Damage Control
Robert Ryan	Ryan's Wildlife Control
Rick Shadel	S & S Professional Wildlife Control Services
Dirk Shearer	The Wildlife Control Co. Inc.
Kenton Shepard	Peak to Prairie Inspection Service
Ron Scheller	Nuisance Wildlife Control
Eric Stehlik	Private citizen
Gary Storms	Storms Wildlife Control
Michael Tucker	Wildlife Removal Services
Stephen Vantassel	ICWDM Webmaster 2004-present
Dallas Virchow	ICWDM Webmaster 1996-2003
Gary Watters	Private citizen
James White	http://www.animalcontrolsolutions.com

the site improvements have been well received. In February 2006, the site received 23,103 visitors (of whom 11,428 were unique) from every inhabited continent. Visitors were able to access approximately 300 external links and hundreds of internal links. Since its start in July 2005, the Digital Commons has housed over 600 articles and sustained almost 6,000 downloads. As news of the site's improvements continues to spread, we expect that the ICWDM will experience even greater success and recognition.

ICWDM's FUTURE PLANS

Although much has been accomplished, the ICWDM plans to further expand both its content and services in the following areas:

- 1) **Create non-English materials.** We need translators and reviewers. Spanish translation would be the logical choice, but we are open to translating documents into any language.
- 2) **Address international species/problems.** Historically, the ICWDM has focused on North American wildlife problems. We would like to broaden our scope to include wildlife damage management information on non-North American species, including both native and invasive species.
- 3) **Create additional learning modules.** The public needs understandable educational materials that explain the fundamentals of wildlife damage management. We believe that by addressing the public's most common wildlife damage problems, the ICWDM can reduce the workload of educators and biologists, allowing them to delve into other issues on wildlife damage management.
- 4) **Expand youth education.** We are planning to develop Flash and "Ag in the Classroom" learning modules. We will also provide information on the career opportunities available in the field of wildlife damage management.
- 5) **Expand wildlife disease information.** With emerging diseases, such as hantavirus, West Nile virus, and avian influenza, the public's need for factual information has dramatically increased.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The ICWDM needs your help to achieve its goal of helping people resolve wildlife damage problems in responsible ways. First, we always appreciate new content. Articles (both published and unpublished), PowerPoint files, videos, research summaries, extension fact sheets, bibliographies, worksheets, and reading lists are of great interest to us and to the site's visitors. Additionally, we would welcome images on all aspects of wildlife control, including damage, sign, human-interactions, control techniques, research, equipment, animals in their natural setting, and more. For more information on the types of images we desire, visit <http://icwdm.org/credits/photocredits.asp>. We will scan your slides and/or hard copy photos, create high and low resolution digital versions, and return the originals along with digital copies of all the images we use. We will also ensure that due recognition is provided for your generosity (Table 1).

Second, we desire your suggestions and criticisms. Do you know of a website that we should add? Is there a content area we have overlooked? Is a link broken or a page loading improperly? We want to hear your comments, good or bad. Our goal is to make the site as useful as possible.

Finally, we are looking for individuals and organizations who wish to partner with us.

The ICWDM has been selected as a Pioneering Community of Practice with eXtension, a recent national movement of the CSREES. We invite professionals to join us in developing wildlife damage Extension materials and information available to eXtension users. We believe eXtension will provide a marvelous way to provide services to the public. To learn more, please contact us via our website, <http://icwdm.org>.

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