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Endangered species list sees changes

In Ohio, there are positive, negative

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Doomsday might not arrive this week as the Mayan calendar suggests. Therefore, good reason remains to believe the trapping seasons for beaver and river otter will commence as scheduled on Dec. 26.

Even those anguished souls prone to pessimism should raise a brave cheer for beavers and otters. Both brands had been eradicated from the land within a short time after Ohio became a state more than 200 years ago.

Entirely on their own, beaver reappeared during the 1930s. River otters required help from the Ohio Division of Wildlife during a stretch from 1986 through 1993.

Each species has fanned out and thrived sufficiently to permit the limited taking of their fur, which they do not surrender voluntarily and so require catching, dispatching and skinning.

Whether the legal trapping or shooting of bobcats ever returns might depend on the future mating habits of bobcats, though the only remaining eastern U.S. wildcats depend on habitat to get the job done. At any rate, bobcats were removed from Ohio's endangered species list recently and designated as a threatened species, bringing their status a tad closer to about as well as can be expected on a countryside of corn fields, concrete and sprawl.

Also upgraded by the wildlife division from endangered to threatened were the Lake Erie watersnake, the trumpeter swan, the blue sucker and the mountain madtom, none of which is in demand for its body wrapping. Same for the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a type of woodpecker



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Bald eagles, like these spotted at Highbanks Metro Park, are no longer threatened or assigned to a watch list.

that made the great leap forward from endangered status to that of species of concern.

Species upgraded from threatened to special interest were dark-eyed junco, yellow-crowned night heron, hermit thrush and least flycatcher. The hermit thrush is considered one of the sweetest singers in North America, Nashville included.

No longer threatened or assigned to a watch list are osprey, bald eagle, bluebreast darter and rosyside dace. While habitat and water quality improvements have played a large part in their comeback, ospreys and eagles have benefited further by the elimination of the pesticide DDT.

Three birds — blue grosbeak, little blue heron and American widgeon — and three mussels — rock pocketbook, flat floater and fat pocketbook — were taken off watch lists.

On the negative side, designated as endangered were a bird, the upland sandpiper, and two fish, the Iowa darter and the gilt darter. The Eastern harvest mouse was put on the threatened list.

Species on watch lists include smoky shrew, deer mouse, prairie vole, woodland vole, southern bog lemming, silver-haired bat, red bat, hoary bat, evening bat, American black duck and variegated orange moth.

Extirpated from Ohio, as once were beavers and river otters, are several fish of little interest to anglers: spoonhead sculpin, blackchin shiner, blacknose shiner and Mississippi silvery minnow. The Southern red-backed vole, of interest to hawks and owls probably, is no longer found in the state.

Ohio's list of watched and/or protected species, which is revised every five years, was made public in August. In September, a report was issued by the Center for Biological Diversity about the future of 53 species, including six turtles, seven snakes, two toads, four frogs, 10 lizards and 24 salamanders found across 45 states.

The report accompanied a letter sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requesting that Endangered Species Act protection be given to the named species. More than 200 scientists signed the letter.

"There's broad scientific consensus that amphibians and reptiles face a profound, human-driven extinction crisis," said Collette Adkins Giese, a center biologist and lawyer. "The surest way to ensure our country's rarest turtles, frogs and salamanders have a future is to give them Endangered Species Act protection."

The center's list includes four species found in Ohio.

Three are turtles: Blanding's, spotted and wood. Wood turtles are a northern species that has never been common in Ohio, at least since the full retreat of the glaciers. Wood turtles, the center said, are in jeopardy across their range into the New England states.

The other Ohio species listed as in trouble is the green salamander, found in a few extreme southern counties along the Ohio River.

While species come and go, more than a few researchers say the current rate of extinction for some life forms on the planet is 10,000 times faster than natural because of human influence. At the same time, given that Earth is about 4.5 billion years young, humans haven't been around all that long and aren't guaranteed to be around for the duration.

So, perhaps, paying some attention to how nature is bearing up is merely prudent.

Had they heeded the signs, the astonished Mayans might have staved off the crash of their civilization. When they came up with their calendar, they doubtless figured they'd be riding it out until doomsday. And, lo, they did.