

ANOTHER EXOTIC SPECIES FOUND IN PA WATERS



Fish & Boat Commission officials recently confirmed the presence of northern snakeheads in 17-acre Meadow Lake, in Philadelphia's FDR Park.

Snakeheads are a diverse family of fish native to parts of China, Russia and Korea. All snakeheads are distinguished by their torpedo-shaped body, long dorsal and anal fins without spines, and toothed jaws.

Northern snakeheads



are typically identified by their flattened, pointy heads with long lower jaws.

The first report of snakeheads in Meadow Lake came in July when an angler caught two snakeheads, preserved them and contacted the Fish & Boat Commission. A total of eight northern snakeheads have now

been taken from the lake, including three captured by Commission biologists. The lake is part of a maze of interconnected embayments and tidal sloughs, and the Commission believes additional snakeheads are likely present elsewhere in the system.

The introduction of exotic species into areas beyond their natural range shifts the balance of an ecosystem. Exotics can introduce parasites, diseases and genetic pollution of closely related species. At the very least, even an otherwise innocuous exotic takes up space and food that might someday be used more beneficially by other species. Northern snakeheads are a predatory fish, and they will compete with other fish species for forage and habitat. It is too early to say what effect the presence of snakeheads will have on species already in Meadow Lake such as panfish, catfish, carp, gizzard shad, blueback herring, eels and largemouth bass.

Commission biologists have concluded that there is no practical method for eradicating snakeheads from Meadow Lake and that, given the nature of the system, snakeheads may have already reached adjoining waters like the nearby lower Schuyl-

kill and Delaware rivers. As a result, the Commission has decided that it will monitor the pond and surrounding waters, and will take no concerted effort to eliminate the species. "Based on the experiences of other states where northern snakeheads have been previously identified and become established, we believe that an aggressive approach to eradicating the species from Meadow Lake would be neither practical nor effective. Furthermore, efforts such as draining the lake or using fish toxins would likely do more damage to resident fish populations than the threatened competition for habitat and forage posed by the snakeheads themselves," said Dr. Douglas Austen, Commission executive director.

Anglers catching snakeheads should dispose of them properly. It is against Fish & Boat Commission regulations to possess any variety of live snakeheads. Anglers certain they have caught a snakehead are encouraged not to release it, but report it to the Commission by calling:

610-847-2442

or by emailing:

mkaufmann@state.pa.us

