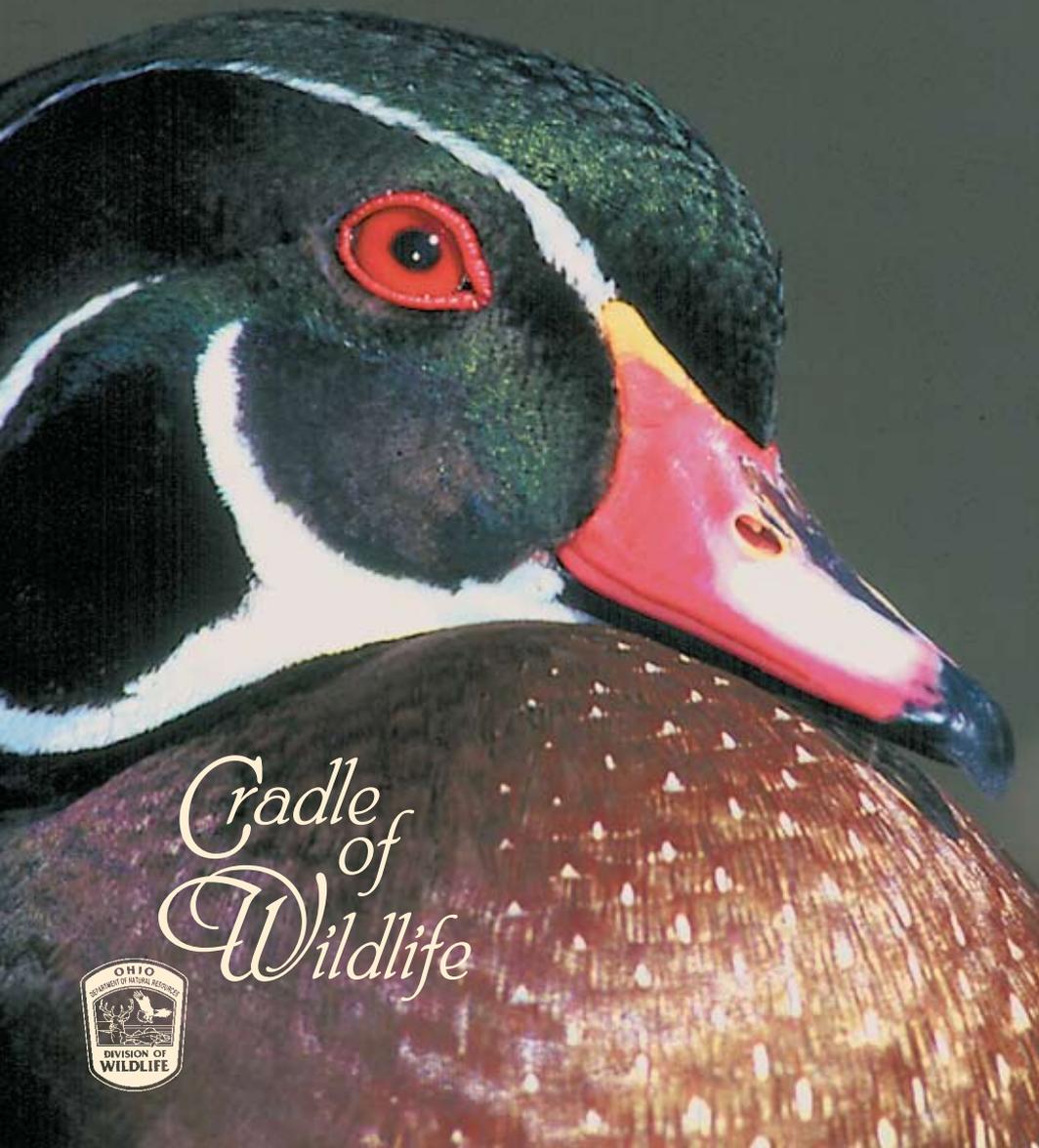


MAGEE MARSH



*Cradle
of
Wildlife*







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Introduction

Magee Marsh Wildlife Area lies in eastern Lucas County and western Ottawa County on the edge of Lake Erie. Its 2000 acres represent a distinctive type of land use formerly very common, but now scarce. As such, the area is worth seeing and studying. It has several claims to distinction.

First, Magee Marsh is extremely rich in animal and plant life. Visitors can often see multitudes of waterfowl and a wide variety of other wild animals, for wetlands are cradles of wildlife. Epic events such as the annual migration of waterfowl and other migratory birds are possible because the marsh provides an abundant supply of food and resting cover as they journey to their breeding or wintering grounds.

Then, there is the broad expanse of marsh vegetation. Large tracts of wild marshland are rare; to gaze upon an extensive marsh is a privilege that can be enjoyed at few other places.

In addition, Magee Marsh and the Sportsmen's Migratory Bird Center help to preserve the local heritage of pioneer America, as well as country arts and folklore that are disappearing all too rapidly.

Finally, this expansive marsh is next to Lake Erie, one of Ohio's greatest natural resources. By standing on the lake shore it is possible to look inland and view the marsh, or to look outward on Lake Erie with its rich recreational potential.



History of the Western Lake Erie Marshlands

Discovery and Settlement

Etienne Brule and his band of voyagers landed at the mouth of a Lake Erie tributary in what is now Ottawa County, on All Saints Day (November 1) in 1615. In honor of the day, Brule named the stream Toussaint Creek.

The sight that greeted Brule and his men is worth conjuring. Early records show that western Lake Erie, from what is now Vermilion, Ohio, to the mouth of the Detroit River in Michigan, was rimmed by 300,000 acres of marsh and swamp, teeming with wildlife. In Ohio the marsh averaged about two miles wide. In places it extended south into the Great Black Swamp, an enormous swamp forest which covered a former lake bed in northwest Ohio. The higher portions were wet prairie dotted with small groves of trees, probably bur oaks. These wider open areas were centered on the Toussaint Creek and Portage River region.

Brule and his men must have seen thousands of various kinds of waterfowl flying over the autumn marsh. Fur and game animals of many kinds were abundant. Such a sight must have inspired the woods couriers - all dedicated hunters and trappers - to stay long enough to harvest some of the wildlife windfall.

Later the French, perhaps descendants of the voyagers, settled in this marsh country, including what is now Magee Marsh. Attracted by the abundant wildlife, they made their living hunting, trapping, and trading with the Indians. They lived in bark huts for many years, doing little or no clearing.



Agricultural Development

The Germans who moved in later cleared and drained the land and established agriculture. The marshes were grazed in dry years. As early as 1825 large flocks of blackbirds had begun to damage the grain crops and had become a hazard to farming in this area, as they are yet today. As the human population grew, the abundant marsh wildlife became a greater asset and market hunting thrived. Interest in securing hunting rights on the better waterfowl areas was aroused in the 1820s, and the first duck hunting club was chartered in 1854.

Much of this land was drained for agriculture, but portions subject to Lake Erie overflow during periods of high water remained wet in spite of drainage efforts. By 1900 most of the swamp forest had been cleared and drained; the rich soil was cultivated to the edge of the marshes. Soon parts of the lake marshes were diked and drained for cultivation. But lake levels fluctuated constantly due to variations in watershed rainfall and to *seiches* (wind-blown tides). These inconsistent water levels made agriculture hazardous, for a broken dike meant a ruined crop. In time dike maintenance was abandoned and water once again dominated the “Pumpland,” as the inhabitants called it.



Marsh Management ...A Historical Perspective

Finally, marsh management was begun in response to demand for duck hunting by wealthy city dwellers. Four-dollar muskrat pelts in 1920 also encouraged marsh restoration. The dikes built to keep water off the land were repaired; water was pumped onto the land rather than off it, to create marshes which would produce muskrats and waterfowl. As a result of the demand for hunting and trapping, these marshlands are the only part of this area that remain relatively unchanged today. There are still about 30,000 acres of marshes in Ohio... and Magee Marsh is typical.

Wild celery and wild rice, both favorite duck foods, were eliminated by a combination of four influences: drainage, impoundment, siltation, and the introduction of exotic plants and animals (carp, for example). Wild rice was replaced by cattail in many areas. But there were gains as well as losses. Where wild rice and wild celery were lost, smartweeds, millet, and rice-cutgrass came in.

These changes influenced the composition of the waterfowl using the marshes. Formerly, diving duck species were important in the duck hunter's bag; with their favored foods gone, diving ducks became scarce in the marsh. Today surface feeding ducks, such as mallards and teal, make up most of the harvest.



Importance of Wetlands

Endangered Species

Today, wetlands are considered much more than wastelands, and the emphasis is now on preserving these beneficial habitats, not destroying them. Acre for acre, wetlands support more species of plant and animal life than any other habitat. In Ohio, wetland loss is the second leading cause of wildlife endangerment. One hundred twenty-nine species of wildlife are on Ohio's endangered list, and 60% of these species are wetland dependent. Over 30% of Ohio's endangered birds, including the bald eagle, common tern, and sandhill crane also rely heavily on wetlands. River otters, Blanding's turtles, and dozens of other aquatic animals need wetlands to survive. Despite the tremendous ability of wetlands to support a variety of wildlife, wetlands only constitute about two percent of Ohio's landscape.



Environmental Benefits

Besides being “cradles of wildlife,” wetlands have the natural ability to clean up our environment. These areas are often known as “natural sponges” because of their ability to absorb excess water from heavy rains and spring runoff. Wetlands are able to control and prevent floods and erosion by storing the excess runoff of rain water and allowing it to slowly percolate into the ground or evaporate.

Wetlands also filter out nutrients and harmful sediments from agricultural, residential, and roadway runoff. Many wetland plants and microorganisms can break down these dangerous chemicals into harmless nontoxic elements. In this manner, wetlands act as natural sewage treatment plants.



North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)

The continued loss of wetlands threaten the future of hundreds of wildlife species, including waterfowl, which are dependent on these critical habitats. In an effort to help restore declining waterfowl populations, the NAWMP was created to revitalize our wetlands. The Plan is an international agreement signed in 1986 by the U.S., Mexican, and Canadian governments to establish goals for conserving wetlands and restoring wetland wildlife populations through the year 2000. Passage of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act in December 1989 helped provide critical funding of NAWMP projects in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico.

Ohio is an active participant in the NAWMP as a member of the Lower Great Lakes Joint Venture. To date, Ohio has completed six projects on public land restoring nearly 6,000 acres of wetlands and cost-shared for the establishment of over 300 wetlands on private lands totaling over 2,500 acres. Funding made available through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the contributions of the Ohio Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, private landowners and other significant partners have resulted in over \$14 million being directed toward this effort in the past decade.

Wetland restoration projects have taken place in 60 counties in Ohio. Projects have ranged from the establishment of one-acre wetlands on private lands to the 908-acre Metzger Marsh coastal wetland and the 2,766-acre prairie-wetland restoration on Big Island Wildlife Area. Wildlife responses are almost immediate after restoration projects. The first year after the Turtle Creek restoration on Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, 185 different species of birds were observed using the site by members of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, another important Division partner.



History of Magee Marsh

From 1880 to 1903 the local area encompassed 4,000 acres of natural deep marsh and was known as the Crane Creek Shooting Club. Club hunters traveled by rail to Rocky Ridge, Ohio, from as far as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit. Club personnel met them at the Rocky Ridge Railroad depot with horse and buggy. Salted ducks were also shipped in wooden barrels to these same faraway cities by professional market hunters of this area.

The earliest significant artificial marsh construction in the northwest counties bordering Lake Erie took place on the Magee Marsh, in western Ottawa County, in 1903. These early efforts were not directed toward management of waterfowl or muskrats, but were intended to convert an agriculturally useless marshland into productive truck crop land.

The plan to drain the entire vast marshland was never accomplished because the waters of Lake Erie could not be prevented from inundating the newly drained areas during spring storms. Several such experiences convinced the marsh owners that the agricultural venture was much too costly; the lands were permitted to return to marshland to be utilized for waterfowl shooting and muskrat trapping.



Waterfowling was very productive on the Magee Marsh. From the late 1920s through 1950, the area was leased annually to a group of waterfowl hunters. Members of this private duck hunting club had a yearly kill of 2,500 ducks. Muskrat trapping helped offset the high cost of marsh maintenance. In the fur trapping seasons from 1939-40 through 1950-51, some 97,000 muskrats were trapped on the Magee Marsh. Trapping success has been lower in recent years due to water drawdown practices.

Increased maintenance costs resulting from higher lake levels, increasing damage to the barrier beach, and demands from the bank on mortgages made it possible for the Department of Natural Resources to purchase this once-private club in 1951. The Division of Parks and Recreation owns and administers one mile of shore area 400 feet wide, for bathing and picnicking; the remainder of the acquisition unit is owned and administered by the Division of Wildlife as a wildlife area.

Controlled waterfowl hunting was started almost immediately, and continues to provide high quality recreation to the outdoorsmen whose funds made it possible to purchase the marsh. Hunters average more than one duck per hunting trip, far above the national average success rate for public hunting areas.



Crane Creek Wildlife Research Station

In 1956, Crane Creek Wildlife Research Station was established on Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. Located on the second floor of the Sportsmen's Migratory Bird Center, the research station is responsible for statewide wetland wildlife research for waterfowl, furbearers, endangered wetland wildlife and other wetland species. The bald eagle nest monitoring program, the trumpeter swan and osprey reintroductions, and identifying and testing biological control agents for purple loosestrife are a few of the projects the research station is responsible for. Aerial nest and wildlife surveys, marking individual animals (for example Canada goose bands and collars), and interpreting data are ways the biologists institute these projects.



Sportsmen's Migratory Bird Center

The Sportsmen's Migratory Bird Center, built in 1970 by monies received from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, houses a comfortable lounge with fireplace, habitat display area, observation decks, and is surrounded by a display pond filled with fish, frogs, turtles, and snakes.

The history and lore of the age old tradition of waterfowl hunting is depicted in the Bird Center through an extensive collection of antique decoys, hunting/fishing licenses, and other hunting artifacts. A habitat display containing over 300 species of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians represent the animals that can be seen in or around the area throughout the year.

Just outside the Bird Center, visitors can enjoy a 42-foot observation tower. This tower provides a commanding view of the entire marsh region, along with an extensive view of Lake Erie. Visitors can also investigate some of the wetland wildlife up-close on a half mile walking trail located behind the Bird Center. Staff are on hand to answer questions and conduct tours and programs for organized groups. Special events are held throughout the year.

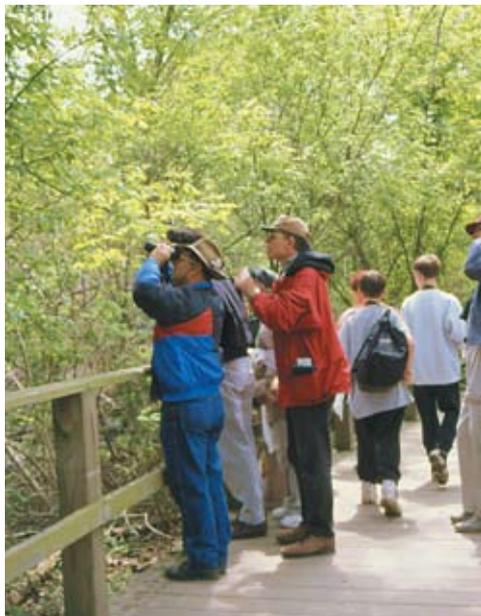


Magee Marsh Bird Trail



One of the hottest spots in Ohio, as well as the Midwest, to watch the spring migration of warblers and songbirds is the popular Magee Marsh boardwalk bird trail. Bird watchers flock to this boardwalk from late April through May to view more than 153 species of songbirds such as wrens, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, and orioles. As warblers make their way north, over 38 species of these brilliantly colored birds, like the yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, hooded, and Cape May warblers, provide a spectacular display for all

who meander the boardwalk. The 0.6 mile wheelchair-accessible boardwalk winds through seven acres of forested beach ridge and marshland. This remnant beach ridge habitat acts as an important concentration point for migrating songbirds. The birds take advantage of the abundant food and resting cover that is provided by the beach ridge. Here, they are able to rest and refuel before they continue on to their northern breeding grounds. The boardwalk, while allowing a safe haven for migrating songbirds, also allows visitors an up-close look at many of these species. Construction and maintenance of the boardwalk is made possible through contributions made to the “Do Something Wild!” Income Tax Checkoff program. Please keep in mind from mid-October through November access to the bird trail is limited to Saturday afternoons and Sundays due to the controlled waterfowl hunts on Magee Marsh Wildlife Area.



Opportunities for Recreation



Some epic sights can be recorded at this marsh area. If you arrive at the proper season - and are in luck - you may find a sky full of ducks and geese trafficking above the marshes. In March you may witness a flock of tundra swans in flight and hear the resonant clamor of a multitude of geese. Bald eagles, which nest on the area, can occasionally be observed. More rarely, the clarion call of a sandhill crane may sound from high in the sky. You might even see a peregrine falcon stooping to the kill at 175 miles per hour.



Wildlife of the Area - Past and Present

Plentiful wildlife determined the use of these marshlands in early times and lent them their peculiar character. Compared with other kinds of habitat, the marsh still supports more species of wildlife than any other habitat.

Waterfowl are the most noticeable kinds of wildlife, for the area is situated at the intersection of two major flyways. Twenty-nine species of ducks and four species of geese can be seen during the year. During the spring migration ducks, geese, and coots occur in large numbers. During the hunting season mallards, wood ducks, trumpeter swans, and Canada geese make up most of the waterfowl seen in the marsh. Open water and waste grain help to hold a wintering waterfowl population in this region.

During the warm season, marsh birds of many kinds are present. Herons and egrets of all kinds, bitterns, rails, gallinules, coots, an occasional glossy ibis and even white pelicans have been seen. Shorebirds are abundant in migration, adding a wild dimension to the marsh scene with their swift spectacular flight and striking calls.



Bald eagles, ospreys, peregrine falcons, and great horned owls are among the spectacular birds of prey. Short-eared owls and Northern harriers can be observed throughout the winter months. Sandhill cranes sometimes may be seen during the year.

A total of 307 kinds of birds have been recorded at Magee Marsh; 143 kinds have been found nesting here. Warbler watching is excellent when these tiny travelers concentrate at the lake shore during the May migration.

Mammals present on the marsh include muskrats, minks, raccoons, coyote, skunks, opossums, foxes, woodchucks, cottontail rabbits, and fox squirrels. White-tailed deer are abundant, and often easily seen in the winter.

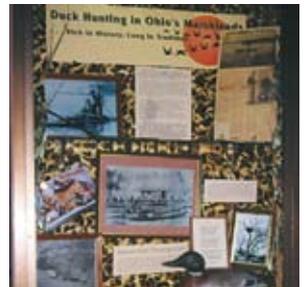


In the aquatic habitat turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, and fish are numerous.

The sight of an almost endless stand of swamp and wet prairie vegetation suggests a great abundance of life. The large marshes are especially colorful in July and August with many wetland plants in full bloom. Have you ever seen marsh waters bordering a bank of soft green marsh vegetation that is dotted with snow white egrets? Visit the marsh in July or August for this experience.

Over 70,000 people visit Magee Marsh annually. Magee Marsh, one of Ohio's finest wetlands, provides numerous recreational opportunities including bird watching, outdoor photography, wetland education and wildlife appreciation. These opportunities make Magee Marsh a good family recreation site.

Look through the Sportsmen's Center to learn of hunting methods used by Native American hunters and sportsmen in bygone days. Examine the collection of decoys and other equipment used in marsh hunting, and absorb some of the folklore of the region. Study the mounted waterfowl and other birds and mammals of the marsh area. Then hike the trails to see the plant and animal life of the marsh and learn their interrelationships.



An easy way to absorb some of the mood is to drive through the marsh on the road to the beach. Sense the life of the marsh and the suggestion of abundance it inspires. Then move on to Crane Creek State Park beach to swim and picnic in Lake Erie's fresh breezes. You can also fish or launch a boat in waters with access to Lake Erie at the Turtle Creek Access Site.

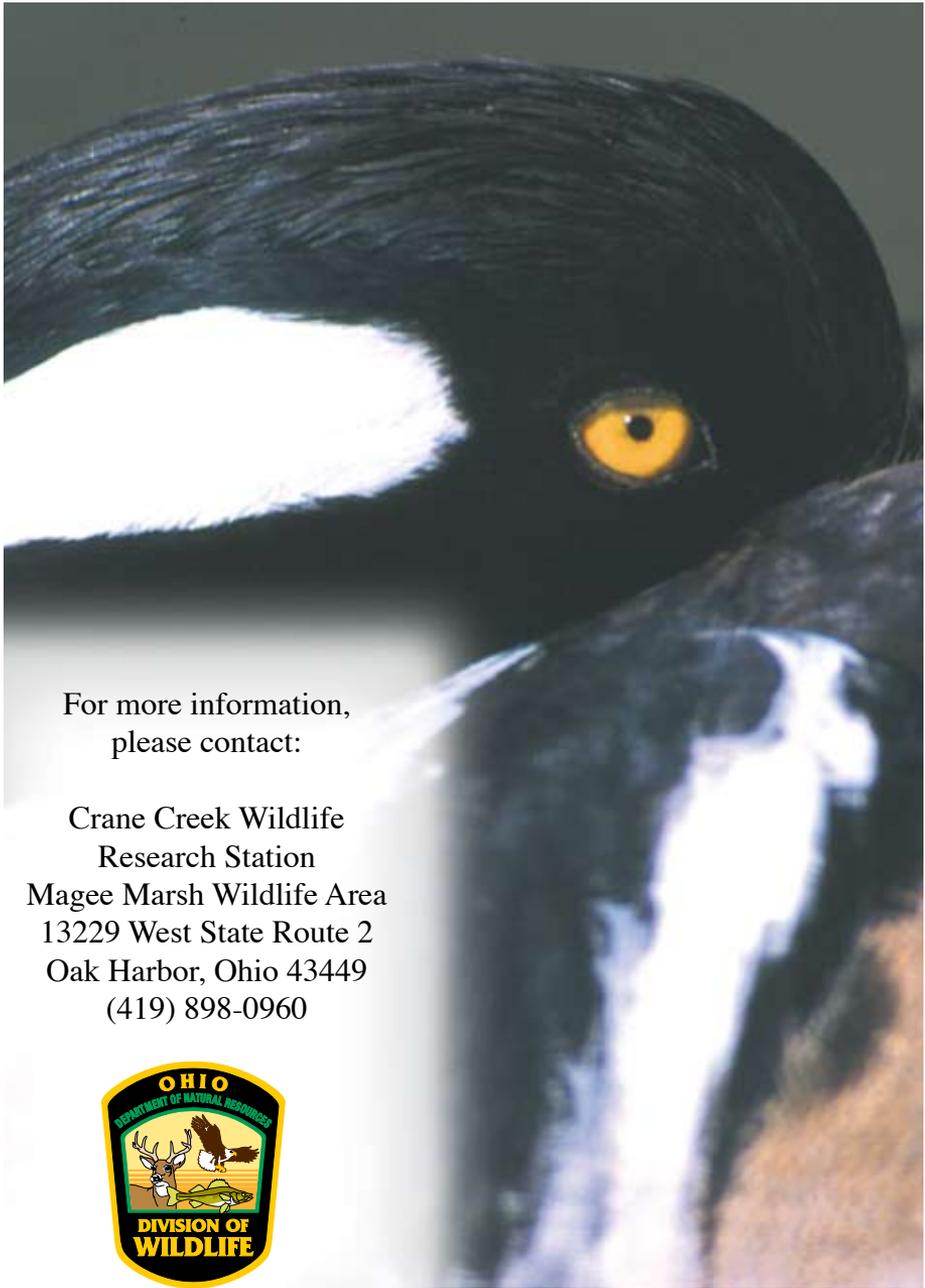


Show your support for Ohio's wildlife diversity by purchasing a cardinal or bald eagle license plate today.

For information on how to purchase the cardinal or bald eagle license plate, please call the BMV at

1-888-PLATES3

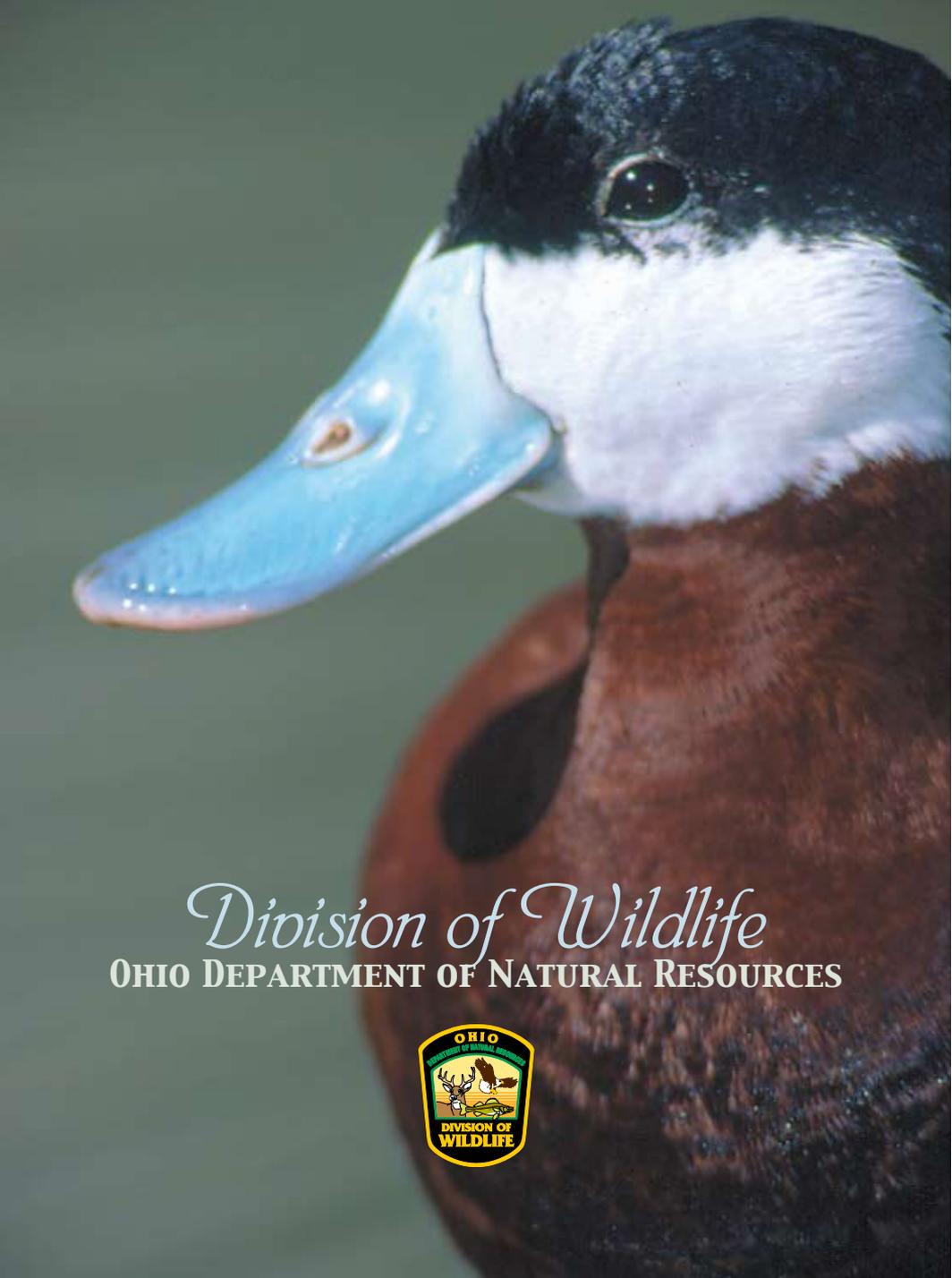




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Division of Wildlife
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

