

NEWS RELEASE

10,000 Calerucella Beetles have been released at two sites in the Pond Mills area – Saunders Pond on SJHC property and Tumbelsons Pond on WOF&GPA property – to try and control the heavy purple loosestrife infestation before it spreads any further.

These beetles eat only purple loosestrife, as proven over the past seven years by extensive testing at over 200 test sites in North America. The tests were funded in the beginning by the Canadian and U.S. governments and include the Royal Botanical Gardens and the Grand River Watershed. The beetles showed no interest in flowers, trees, shrubs, vegetables or your garden. Their diet consists of only purple loosestrife, and if it is unavailable, they die off.

Each loosestrife plant, if allowed to flower, produces over two million seeds, which can be airborne or float to spread this wetland growing plant. Natural plants have been forced out, and waterfowl have lost prime nesting areas to this highly invasive plant.

Manual removal over the past few years has proven inadequate, and the problem on these ponds has spread significantly. We are now trying to control the problem biologically with the beetle. They will not eliminate the problem but will bring it under control by eliminating the flower heads and stressing the main plant.

The beetles were supplied and released by Donna MacKenzie (biologist) from Ontario Beetles, based in Paris, Ontario.

Funding for the Project

Western Ontario Fish and Game
Ministry of Natural Resources
St. Joseph's Health Centre
Middlesex Stewardship Committee
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
London West Rotary Club

Other Involved Parties

Upper Thames Conservation Authority
City of London
McIlwraith Field Naturalists
Ducks Unlimited

The release sites will be monitored on a regular basis and the results available to any interested parties.

Ron Earle,
President,
Western Ontario Fish and Game
Protective Association

May 8, 2000

'Small army' of creepy crawlies enlisted against weed invasion

By Johanna Weidner
Free Press Reporter

Let the battle begin.

London is declaring war on purple loosestrife, the pesky weed clogging wetlands across North America and invading the city's treasured Westminster Ponds.

But the new warriors — at only two millimetres long, smaller than a lady bug — are unlikely heroes. They're galerucella beetles, natural predators of purple loosestrife.

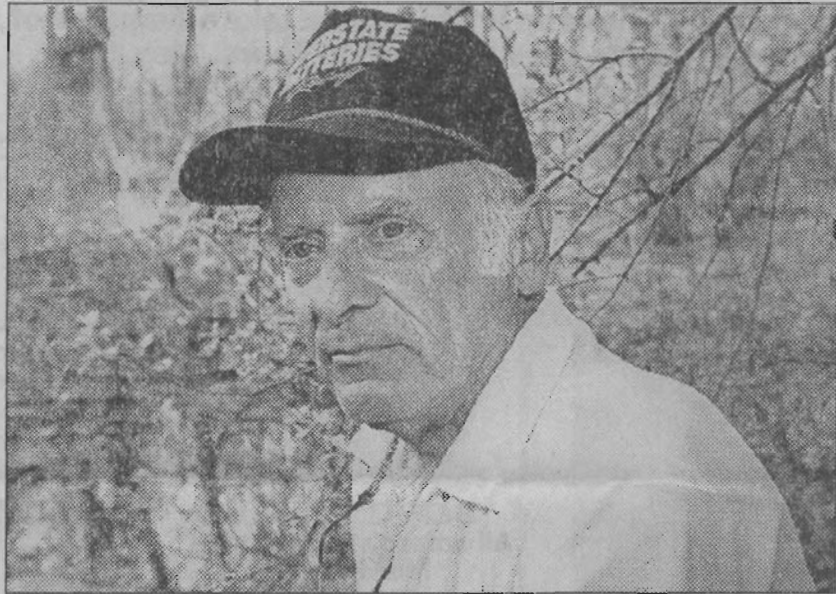
"We hope to see well-chewed plants this year," said Ron Earle, president of the Western Ontario Fish and Game Protective Association, which is leading the project.

"The beetle doesn't eliminate the problem, but it controls it."

Ron Earle of the Western Ontario Fish and Game Protective Association

Purple loosestrife, which grows to about two metres high and is topped by spikes of small, six-petaled flowers, was accidentally brought to North America from Europe in the 1800s and has spread to the point that it now chokes many wetlands.

In early June, 10,000 hungry beetles will be released in Saunders and Tumbleson ponds, east of Wellington Road in the Westminster Ponds area, where the loosestrife infestation is



DEREK RUTTAN The London Free Press

Ron Earle's environmental group plans to release 10,000 beetles early next month to fight the spread of purple loosestrife in the Westminster Ponds area.

concentrated.

Tested across Canada and the United States for almost a decade, the beetles take a noticeable bite out of the loosestrife problem within a few years.

But even with healthy appetites, the bugs can't beat the noxious weed's ability to reproduce. Each plant produces as many as three million seeds a year. "The beetle doesn't eliminate the problem, but

it controls it," Earle said.

And it's better than the alternative. In the past, Earle and members of the association tried digging the weeds out by hand, work that was both hard and ineffective.

"It's just impossible without a small army to keep it in check," Earle said.

And now he's got an army — thousands of tiny, hungry beetles looking for their next meal.

Trouble for 'strife



SUSAN BRADNAM The London Free Press

Ontario Beetles biologist Donna MacKenzie and Western Ontario Fish and Game Club president Ron Earle hold a plant bearing larvae of the loosestrife-eating galerucella beetle. More than 10,000 of the beetles were released on the weekend at the club and other conservation areas to help control Purple Loosestrife.