

Field Notes
May 31, 2012
Johnny Saichuk



On my way to the Southwest Area Field Day yesterday I stopped to photograph the field shown below. At first glance it looks like a normal rice field, but the presence of crawfish traps and areas of open water to permit their harvest tells us that it is an active crawfish pond, not a rice field. The rice growing in the field is probably rice that survived the winter and is behaving like a perennial grass rather than an annual.

So, what's the problem with this situation? In the past each time this has happened and farmers have decided to leave it and even harvest it the yields have not been worth the time or inputs. Furthermore, according to plant pathologist Dr. Don Groth, the outbreak of *Cercospora* leaf spot we experienced several years ago was likely aided by a similarly large acreage of rice having survived from the year before. This rice provided an ideal disease nursery which increased the amount of inoculum in the area. Normally *Cercospora* leaf spot is a significant second crop disease and a minor first crop disease because it takes time to build up enough inoculum and infect the crop. In years like this one and the winter preceding the earlier outbreak, the stubble from which this growth originated was likely already infected with the fungus. Ideal temperature for *Cercospora* growth and development is between 77° and 83°F. As temperatures rose and new growth started so did the fungus begin to grow and produce wind borne spores. In an earlier edition of Field Notes I mentioned this problem at the request of a grower who was concerned about the possible consequences. There are too many fields like this one scattered throughout the rice growing area. It concerns me too.





At left is a common, but usually insignificant problem encountered in many rice fields especially in south Louisiana. Numerous plants or actually only the upper portions of plants can be seen floating in the water. Most of the time in drainage ditches like the one shown at left or in small open areas adjacent to water inlets, drop pipes or other marginal areas of the field.

Close examination of the bases of these plants reveals a chewed or chopped off end. The first inclination is to blame rodents such as nutria or muskrats, but these critters are not the culprit. The animal causing the damage is a turtle. Over the years we have witnessed an extraordinary increase in the population of “yellow bellies” or “red eared sliders” in rice fields especially when the field is flooded in the winter for either waterfowl or crawfish.

I do not know if they eat the rice or if they are just clearing a pathway. In extreme cases I have seen large areas damaged, but most of the time the damage is cosmetic.

This photograph reveals the nature of the damage turtles do to rice. They chop the plants off just above the crown. I suppose I should have contacted a herpetologist (someone who studies reptiles) to ask about their diet before preparing this. I did not think about it in time.

The late Cecil McCrory, county agent in Vermilion parish introduced me to this problem around 1989 or 1990.



A couple of Saturdays ago Dr. Linscombe was checking on his breeding plots on the station when he saw these mallards circle and land in the plots. He was able to sneak up and take this picture. He had mentioned seeing what he thought were wild mallards in his rice, but was not sure because it was so late in the year. His brother, who holds degrees in wildlife biology, said they sometimes pair up with mottled duck (black mallard) hens. Clearly the hen is a mallard. A few days after this picture was taken I saw a group of five circle and land on the station. They sure looked wild to me, not some pen raised birds out for some exercise. The heat of the past several days seems to have caused all ducks to leave. Just makes me wonder what Mother Nature has in store for the rest of the year.

