

Jumping worms



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

As a kid raised by my grandparents, money did not exactly flow freely. I spent most of my free time, and some of my not so free time when I should have been in school, in pursuit of trout on the creeks near our place. While I would have loved to chase them with a 4-wt. fly rod and a book of custom tied English dry flies, I had to make do with an old Zebco outfit, hook, sinker, and live bait.

The usual bait of choice was the good old earth worm, or the occasional nightcrawler. I remember asking my grandmother for some money to go to town and buy a can of worms so I could go fishing. She laughed herself sick at the idea of actually spending hard-earned money on a can of worms so some lazy kid could go fishing. "Grab a shovel and go behind the wood lot. There are plenty of big nightcrawlers there, and in no time, you will have plenty to go fishing with," she ordered.

Over the next two hours, I spade up half an acre of ground looking for worms, and all I had was a blister. When I showed her the blister, she almost fainted. Apparently, she felt bad, and suddenly remembered there were plenty of worms over by the barn, where she was making a compost pile. Once there, I filled my

can with worms in just a matter of minutes. Strange that she didn't think of that compost pile first. The following day, she planted her tomato garden in the fresh ground I had dug up. One of life's mysteries that nag me to this day.

Not all worms are a good thing. Colorado and other states are being invaded by yet another interloper, the jumping worm, or *Amyntas agrestis*. In case you were wondering. They hail from Asia and are popping up at an alarming rate in a slew of different states. These jumping worms, aside from being highly invasive, ruin soil health by creating a granular, coffee ground like texture, that damages plant roots and forests.

They serve no real useful purpose in nature, something my grandmother said to me. These interlopers do not mix the soil as regular worms do, and the no mixing actually harms plant health. The coffee ground soil they create dries out very fast, killing any seedlings and damaging roots.

Jumping worms are an inch and a half, all the way up to six inches long. They thrash around wildly, worse than a red wiggler worm, and actually jump around as much as a foot into the air. These interlopers move and slither like a snake. Their clitellum band is a milky white or light gray in col-



The Asian jumping worm is invasive and not welcome here. (Photo courtesy of Tom Potterfield of USDA/Forest Service)

or, smooth and not raised, and it completely encircles the body closer to the head than other worms.

Jumping worms reproduce rapidly, without a mate, and will out compete all the existing worm populations. In short, if a few hit your garden, pretty soon that is all that will be in your garden. They have an annual life cycle, where adults die after the first hard freeze, but their microscopic cocoons or eggs will survive the winter, meaning they'll be back in force.

These Asian natives arrived in North America primarily through human activity, including the import of nursery stock, soil, and landscaping materials. They have been around since the 1800s, but recent

increased movement of potted plants, compost, and mulch has accelerated their spread, as those tiny little cocoons hitchhike in soil to new areas. The minuscule, soil-colored cocoons can survive the winter and are easily transported on gardening tools, footwear, tires, and through the movement of compost and mulch. A single worm is enough to start an entire new population.

Here are a few tips to help prevent an infestation:

Inspect New Plants: Before planting, wash soil off roots and inspect for tiny, poppy-seed-sized cocoons.

Use Clean Materials: Buy certified weed-free mulch and heat-treated

in your garden, first thing to do is to contact the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA). Next, you can use the mustard pour method for temporary control: mix 1/3 cup of ground yellow mustard seed with 1 gallon of water and pour slowly onto the soil. This will drive the worms to the surface for easy removal and disposal. This is not the cure all, but it will help until you get professional assistance from the CDA. Their phone number is 303-229-8144.

The process for removing them will require a combination of manual removal, solarization, and strict containment to stop their spread. There is currently no single

compost or soil.

Create Your Own: Make your own compost, which ensures you know its contents, or buy bagged soil/mulch, looking for heat-treated options

Bare-root Preferred: Purchase plants with bare roots rather than potted in soil to minimize the risk of transporting worms or cocoons.

Clean Gear: Thoroughly clean soil from shoes, boots, tools, and tire treads when moving between different landscapes or recreational areas.

Avoid Spreading: Do not move plants, soil, or compost from areas known to have infestations.

If you discover Jumping worms

pesticide approved for total eradication. The most effective methods include capturing them with the mustard solution, sealing them in bags to bake in the sun, and limiting the movement of soil and plants.

Currently, the CDA has confirmed the Asian jumping worms are here in Colorado, mostly along the front range. There have not been any confirmed sightings on the Western Slope yet, but the warm and dry conditions make it possible, so be alert.

Most people head to the bait shop and buy fishing worms in little plastic containers. That practice was forbidden by my grandparents, so I had to gather and dig my own. If you dig your own worms for fishing, make certain there are no jumping worms as you don't want to spread them around. Besides, in a world of "flies and artificial lures only," most fishers think fishing with worms creates a state of ignominy for the user. We need to all remember how we started fishing.

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife highlights wildlife safety following a moose attack in Winter Park on Sunday

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

On the afternoon of Sunday, May 24, Colorado Parks and Wildlife responded to a report of an adult who was attacked by a moose on Little Vasquez Road, near Winter Park.

The victim was walking two dogs on a leash when they encountered a cow (female) moose and her yearling. The cow moose charged at the victim, kicking them several times before turning and charging toward the two dogs. The victim let go of the leashes, allowing the dogs to run away.

Once it was safe, the victim left the area and called for help. They were transported to the hospital by ambulance with serious injuries to their chest and arms.

The victim and their family are asking for privacy while they recover.

Wildlife officers returned to the area but were unable to locate the female moose and her yearling. Signs have been posted at the trailhead to alert visitors to the moose activity in the area.

Although this was an unexpected encounter with the moose, this incident

is a good reminder to give moose plenty of space when recreating outdoors. Moose tend to inhabit areas near water with abundant willows, their primary food source. These locations are often beautiful for recreation, but the dense vegetation can make it hard to see what lies ahead. When recreating outdoors, select routes with clear visibility, exercise caution, and make noise when near willows, thick vegetation, or approaching corners. Always respect posted signs warning of aggressive moose behavior or calf

activity on trails.

Cow moose typically give birth to calves in late spring and early summer. During this time, they can become more aggressive toward perceived threats to their young. Cows will often hide their calves to protect them from predators while remaining nearby. If you spot a calf, it is best to turn back or leave the area.

Most moose conflicts involve dogs. When recreating near riparian or willow habitats, keep dogs on-leash to avoid startling moose that may be nearby. Off-leash dogs can venture

off-trail, surprising hidden moose calves or cows. Cows will, in turn, chase retreating dogs, which can bring the moose into contact with humans.

If you encounter a moose, give it space and time to move. Do not attempt to haze the moose out of the way. Not only is it dangerous, but this is also considered harassment and is illegal. If a moose has laid-back ears, pawing the ground, licks its snout, or changes its direction to face you, you are too close and need to back away. If a moose charges,

seek shelter behind large objects like trees or boulders to create an obstacle in its path.

While moose encounters with people are quite common, conflicts with moose are low. CPW understands that conflicts can arise even when adhering to best practices for living with moose. Please report any conflicts with moose to your local CPW office.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife thanks the Fraser Winter Park Police Department and the Grand County Sheriff's Office for their assistance.




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