Ohio Wildlife History Timeline

Ohio has a rich and varied history when it comes to its wildlife. Our state has seen wildlife species and habitat come and go for more than 200 years. Changes in the landscape, increasing human population and advances in wildlife management knowledge and technology have created a timeline that is both sad and successful. Please join us in exploring Ohio’s Wildlife History.

Each tree represents 1 million acres of forest land.
The Ohio Company builds a trading post near Piqua to trade items made in England for furs. Beaver are in big demand.
George Washington mapped Ohio lands given to soldiers who fought in the French and Indian War. Wolves, mountain lions, black bears, bison, and elk were found across the state.
Zane’s Trace (another name for a trail) is authorized by Congress. This led to the building of a horse trail that ran from Wheeling to Zanesville, Lancaster and Maysville, Kentucky. Before this, travelers used rivers or followed footpaths.
Ohio becomes a state. Last bison in the state was reported killed in Lawrence County. Bison will be eliminated from every state east of the Mississippi River.
Settlers who were eager for something to read started the Coonskin Library in Athens County. To raise money for books, they sold hides from bears, wolves and raccoons. $73.50 worth of furs purchased 51 books.
Squirrels were so numerous that a law was passed requiring taxpayers to kill them and turn their scalps in to the county clerk.
Athens County drops its bounty on wolves and mountain lions. Until then, their scalps could be turned in for money. The county paid $3 for young animals and $4 for adults. This is also the year of the Great Hinkley Hunt. Thousands of animals were killed around Hinkley, Ohio.
The first Ohio law was passed to protect a wild animal. The law made it illegal to kill muskrats from May 1 to October 15. This marked the first time Ohioans recognized that wildlife should be conserved as a valuable resource.
Ohio led the nation in wheat farming. Almost all the original forests have been replaced by the growing number of farms and small towns.
Elk, once found across the state, are now gone. The last report of these large (up to 800 pounds) members of the deer family came from Ashtabula County.
Ohio leads the nation in all kinds of farming. Most were small family farms producing wool, wheat, hay and corn. Ohio’s population soars to 2 million, the third highest in the county.
There are no final records, but by this time bobcats, wolves, and mountain lions have been eliminated from the state. Most farmers despised these animals because these predators preyed on sheep, pigs, and calves.
First law enacted for protection of fish. First nongame protection law passed, protecting songbirds.
1873
Ohio Fish Commission established.
The Great Black Swamp is drained after a decade of ditch work and draining. This enormous wetland in northwest Ohio was likely the last wilderness in the site. It now boasts some of the state’s largest farms.
The last known black bear reported in Ohio was killed in Paulding County.
Ohio’s original forest land covered more than 24 million acres. By now, only 4 million acres remain. Most of the trees up to this time were simply cut down and burned.
1886

Ohio Fish Commission becomes Commission of Fish and Game. First game wardens appointed.
A statute provided for a warden in every county and a chief warden.
First state fish hatchery opens in London, Ohio.

1896
Lacey Act is passed, prohibits the transportation of illegally killed game across state lines. This curbed trafficking in plumage and other wildlife products.
Commission of Fish and Game responsible for lakes and public parks.

1902
Wild turkeys and white-tailed deer are declared extinct in Ohio. Widespread loss of forests and uncontrolled hunting is blamed.
The last year that ospreys were reported nesting successfully in the state. The last nest to produce young was at Grand Lake St. Marys. First resident hunting license required.
“Martha,” the very last passenger pigeon in the world, died at the Cincinnati Zoo. Passenger pigeons were once thought to be the most numerous bird species in the world. Single flocks sometimes contained billions of birds.
Migratory Bird Treaty Act. First resident trapping license required.
First coyote is seen in Ohio. These animals have been spreading from the western states into new areas as forests were cleared and wolves were eliminated.
First Ohio wildlife area, the Roosevelt Game Preserve, is purchased with license dollars.
First resident fishing license is required.
Pittman-Robertson Act created. Federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition provides funding to states for management and restoration of wildlife.
Ohio allows deer hunting again. Deer, which had become scarce prior to 1900, have been making a slow comeback. Only three counties were open for hunting; Adams, Pike, and Scioto. 164 bucks were taken.
A survey of beaver populations turned up only 100 animals scattered across 11 counties.
1949
Division of Conservation becomes Division of Wildlife under the newly created Ohio Department of Natural Resources.
1952

Dingell-Johnson Act passed. Federal excise tax on sport fishing tackle provides funding to states for management and restoration of fish.
Last reports of native river otters come from Ashtabula, Monroe, and Coshocton counties. Polluted streams and riparian areas were a big problem for otters.
Wild turkeys are reintroduced. Wild birds are brought from other states and released into southeast Ohio, where forests are recovering. First statewide deer season.
First wild turkey season in limited counties. Endangered Species Preservation Act is established. It is modified for 6 years until the current Endangered Species Act is established in 1973.
1968

Fire on the Cuyahoga River spurs cleanup of Ohio’s waterways.
The National Environmental Policy Act established. Requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impact of their action.
Blue Pike extinct in Great Lakes.
1973
Ohio’s Endangered Species law passed.
Ohio’s bald eagle population is suffering from the effects of DDT and other pesticide poisoning, as well as the loss of wetland habitat. Only 4 pairs of eagles remain along Lake Erie.
The beaver population tops 10,000 for the first time in decades. Beaver have re-established across the eastern parts of the state. Blizzards this winter decimate Ohio’s bobwhite quail population.
Lake Erie declared “Walleye Capital of the World” by Governor Rhodes.
State income tax check-off for wildlife diversity established.

1983
Wallup-Breaux amendment to the Dingell-Johnson act to include import duties on yachts and a motorboat fuel tax on gasoline.
1986

River otters are reintroduced into 4 Ohio watersheds. 123 animals were released over the next five years into the Grand River, Killbuck Creek, Stillwater Creek, and the Little Muskingum.
Sandhill cranes return to Ohio. These large birds built a nest in a marsh near Wooster. This is the first nesting pair since 1926. They are still rare today.
1988

A pair of peregrine falcons adopts Toledo and begins nesting on an old hotel building. Ohio soon joins other states in establishing pairs in other Ohio cities as part of a regional effort to restore peregrine populations in the eastern U.S.
Ospreys return to Ohio and build a nest on an electrical tower located over the Ohio River. This was one year ahead of the Division of Wildlife’s plan to release 36 birds from Maryland into the wild in 1996. Deer herd estimated at 550,000.
Trumpeter swans are restored to Ohio when 15 birds are released at Magee Marsh in Ottawa county. These birds will be joined by more introductions in a project that will last 10 years.
1999

Snowshoe hares are reintroduced into Ashtabula and Geauga counties. Approximately 400 hares were brought from Michigan and released on wildlife areas.
After a successful reintroduction program, river otters are removed from Ohio’s Endangered Species list.
127 eaglets are fledged from a modern record of 108 bald eagle nests. Bald eagles are found in 55 of Ohio’s 88 counties.
2006

Bald eagle numbers continue to rise. Over 150 nests were produced this year. Black bears are currently an endangered species in Ohio, however resident black bear populations are growing with an estimated 20 to 50 bears living in the state. Bobcat sightings also continue to rise.
Ohio’s deer herd has reached 675,000 deer. There was another record year for bald eagle reproduction – 164 nests fledged 186 eaglets. Biologists are now monitoring osprey, black ducks, and sandhill cranes using radio transmitters.
Black bears are currently an endangered species in Ohio, however resident black bear numbers are growing with an estimated 30 to 60 bears living in the state.