

Researcher ‘cautiously optimistic’ weevil is eating salvinia

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BEFORE (photo left): The giant salvinia mat at Bird Roost, south of Goat Island on Caddo Lake, was lush and healthy before salvinia laced with the invasive plant’s natural predator, the giant salvinia weevil, was seeded into the mat last June.

Researchers at Caddo Lake are hopeful a mat of the invasive giant salvinia that’s been choking the lake is turning brown because the weevils they raised are doing their jobs.

Biologist Lee Eisenberg, of Texas A&M’s AgriLife Research and Extension Service, began growing

giant salvinia weevils six years ago in hopes the only known predator of the invasive weed would eat a lake full of the harmful plant.

Giant salvinia began invading Caddo, the state’s largest natural lake, in 2007. Imported in almost undetectable sprigs on boats that picked it up at other lakes, the plant swiftly spread in thick mats and led residents to mount a multi-front battle against the plants’ explosive spread. Those mats, sometimes four feet thick, block sunlight and consume oxygen needed by native plants, fish and other aquatic life. As they die off, silt builds up from the lake bottom, creating an essentially dead body of water.

The Cypress Valley Navigation District continues to regularly spray with herbicide and harvest the plant, particularly around the boat roads, while the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department opened its own front with the weevils.



“We do have the beginnings of establishment out here,”

Eisenberg said Tuesday, describing the possibly dying mat in Bird Roost. Eisenberg said he and others placed weevil-infused salvinia on the 500-acre mat near the lake’s northern edge in June. The tiny predator was grown in a greenhouse filled with giant salvinia at the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Returning recently to Bird Roost, Eisenberg was encouraged the weevils spent the past four months dining in. “You could see it was all browned out,” he said. “The mat was beat up in that area.”

The team also took samples showing the weevil population per kilo of salvinia had shot up since June. Still, the scientist was not prepared to announce a conclusion.

“I’m not saying the weevils have reduced it,” he said of the Bird Roost mat. “It’s just that we’ve got the beginning of an established (weevil) population. We are cautiously optimistic about what we are seeing.”