

July/August 2006

Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION

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From the Director

Over the past twenty years my wife Kate and I have taken a number of family vacations to unpeopled places of dramatic beauty. Nearly each trip has been punctuated by at least one unplanned wildlife encounter that has made the journey and our memories unique. As we traveled to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia this summer, we were hoping to see eagles, moose, whales and other majestic creatures in their natural habitat. We did. What we didn't plan on was a mink stealing the show.

July 8th: A dinner of native brook trout sounded preferable to the on-hand alternative of leftover steak, which had assumed an ominous green tint during its three days in the cooler. So after considerable exploring, we crossed a promising brook, parked the car and headed upstream. With no trails and thick underbrush along the streambanks, our only path was the stream itself. The further we went, the better it looked. The fishing was fast and furious, but most of the trout were small and released. Our goal of five pan-sized trout had nearly been attained when tragedy struck.

The "fisher" that 11-year old Jordan claimed to see on at least two occasions during the outing, turned out to be a mink. And a bold one at that. As we worked our way upstream, he had apparently followed. At one point, Kate briefly abandoned her role as keeper of the harvest to help Jordan untangle his line. When she returned, the alder stringer holding our beautiful speckled dinner had disappeared. A search of the rocky shoreline revealed wet mink tracks, but none of the four fish. Our dinner had become his. The bold little predator-turned-scavenger had hit the motherload at our expense.

We renewed efforts to procure our supper and upon delivering the first of our new keepers to Kate, she was encouraged to guard the catch at all costs. Not long after, the insatiable thief reappeared and she stared him down from a distance. A short time later, however, the mink conducted a sneak attack and amidst the screaming we looked downstream to see Kate attached to one end of the trout and the mink to the other. Fortunately, she won the brief tug-of-war and, like a lioness guarding her kill, assumed a heightened vigilance that deterred further raids.

As we cooked the trout that night at our campsite where the rugged highlands meet the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, we sighted pilot whales in the ocean, an eagle soaring overhead and a bull moose in the underbrush. But as we slept that night, I suspect we were all dreaming of the wily little mustelid who stole our fish and stole the show.

Dale W. May

Cover:

Charles Island in Milford and Duck Island in Westbrook are closed to the public until September 9, 2006, to prevent continuing human disturbance to several state-listed nesting birds at these islands, including this young great egret (see page 16 for more information).

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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Gina McCarthy Commissioner
Edward C. Parker Chief, Bureau of Natural Resources

Wildlife Division

79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127 (860-424-3011)

Dale May Director
Greg Chasko Assistant Director
Mark Clavette Recreation Management
Laurie Fortin Wildlife Technician
Brenda Marquez Secretary
Shana Scribner Office Assistant
Chris Vann Technical Assistance Biologist
Kenneth Metzler Natural History Survey
Dawn McKay Natural History Survey
Nancy Murray Natural History Survey
Karen Zyko Natural History Survey

Eastern District Area Headquarters
209 Hebron Road, Marlborough, CT 06447 (860-295-9523)

Robin Blum Habitat Management Program Technician
Ann Kilpatrick Eastern District Biologist
Carrie Pomfrey Habitat Management Program Technician
Paul Rothbart District Supervising Biologist
Jane Seymour Belding WMA Steward
Judy Wilson Private Lands Habitat Biologist

Franklin W.M.A.
391 Route 32, N. Franklin, CT 06254 (860-642-7239)

Paul Capotosto Wetlands Restoration Biologist
Michael Gregonis Deer/Turkey Program Biologist
Min Huang Migratory Bird Program Biologist
Howard Kilpatrick Deer/Turkey Program Biologist
Kelly Kubik Migratory Bird Program Technician
Andy LaBonte Deer Program Technician
Heather Overturf Office Assistant
Winnie Reid Secretary
Julie Victoria Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist
Roger Wolfe Mosquito Management Coordinator

Sessions Woods W.M.A.
P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 (860-675-8130)

Trish Cernik Secretary
Jenny Dickson Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist
Peter Good Supervising Wildlife Biologist
Jason Hawley Furbearer Program Technician
Shannon Kearney-McGee Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
Christina Kocer Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
Geoffrey Krukar Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
Dave Kubas CE/FS Program Coordinator
Peter Picone Western District Biologist
Kate Moran Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
Paul Rego Furbearer Program Biologist
James Koert Riley Field Assistant/Maintainer
Laura Rogers-Castro Education/Outreach Program
Laura Saucier Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
Jim Warner Field Assistant

Connecticut Wildlife

Kathy Herz Editor
Paul Fusco Media Designer/Photographer

Wildlands Habitat & Mosquito Management Crew
51 Mill Road, Madison, CT 06443

Steven Rosa Mosquito Control Specialist
Daniel Shaw Mosquito Control Specialist



The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program was initiated by sportsmen and conservationists to provide states with funding for wildlife management and research programs, habitat acquisition, wildlife management area development, and hunter education programs. Connecticut Wildlife contains articles reporting on Wildlife Division projects funded entirely or in part with federal aid monies.



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Bird Flu....What's Up in Connecticut?

Written by Greg Chasko, Assistant Director

Connecticut, along with other states and the federal government, is actively monitoring and preparing in the event that "bird flu" is discovered in North America. "Bird flu" (actually, the highly pathogenic H5N1 form of avian influenza virus), which has been found in some Asian and European countries, has not been detected in North America. Surveillance for HPAI H5N1 has been ongoing for several months in Alaska and Canada and began recently in the mainland United States, including Connecticut.

Surveillance efforts are focused on sampling live and dead birds for the presence of the virus. Nationwide, states are cooperating with federal agencies to test wild birds. Monitoring will concentrate on species likely to come in contact with birds from Asia or Europe where HPAI H5N1 has been detected in wild birds.

In Connecticut, a variety of water bird species have been selected for monitoring based on their migratory patterns and potential to carry the virus. The DEP Wildlife Division has already tested a sample of resident Canada geese and did not find any HPAI H5N1. Currently, the Division is trapping and testing shorebirds, focusing on semi-palmated sandpipers, dunlins, sanderlings, and black-bellied plovers. This effort will continue through the fall, when monitoring of several duck species will begin. The Division will be testing resident mallards when they are trapped and banded in the fall and also will be collecting hunter-killed greater scaup ("broad bills or blue bills"), brant, and long-tailed ducks (formerly known as old squaw). Waterfowlers wanting to donate birds for testing

can contact Min Huang, Migratory Game Bird Project Leader at min.huang@po.state.ct.us or 860-642-4869.

Sportsmen who hunt birds have expressed a variety of concerns to the Wildlife Division regarding bird flu. At this time, there is no need to be concerned about hunting and consuming wild birds or pheasants. Suggestions and common sense precautions that hunters should take when handling any dead birds can be found at the CT Flu Watch website (www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch). This site also provides information on the bird testing program, test results, and "everything you ever wanted to know" about bird flu.

Sportsmen, birders, and the general public can help the Wildlife Division monitor the health of Connecticut's wild bird populations by reporting any die-offs of birds that are observed. Keep in mind that waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans), wading birds (herons, egrets, etc.), and shorebirds (terns, gulls, plovers) are the most likely carriers of HPAI H5N1. Although other species of birds are not likely carriers of the virus, the Division is still interested in information about die-offs involving multiple birds of any species. If you observe several birds (5 or more) that have died at a location all at once or over several days, please report that information either by calling 211 or going to the Wild Bird Mortality Reports section of the CT Flu Watch website.

The DEP and other state and federal government agencies are closely monitoring bird flu. If H5N1 does arrive in the United States or Connecticut, there will be a prompt response to any bird die-offs and substantial efforts to contain its spread.

Questions Concerning Avian Influenza (AI)

Are humans at risk to contract H5N1 from wild birds?

There are *no* documented cases of human H5N1 disease resulting from contact with wild birds. The only documented cases of transmission to humans from birds are from poultry and direct contact with infected birds.

What types of wild birds are most commonly affected?

Waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans), waterbirds (egrets, herons, etc.), and shorebirds (terns, gulls, etc.) are the species that are most closely associated with any type of avian influenza, including the H5N1 strain. Other birds are not likely carriers of AI.

What is the difference between "low pathogenic" or "highly pathogenic" avian influenza?

There are over 100 known variations of "bird flu." The designation of low or highly pathogenic avian influenza refers to the potential for these viruses to kill domestic poultry. The designation of "low pathogenic" or "highly pathogenic" does not refer to how infectious the viruses may be to humans. Most strains of avian influenza are not highly pathogenic and cause few signs in infected wild birds. In poultry, however, low pathogenic strains can mutate into a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) strain that causes extremely contagious, severe illness and often death in poultry.

How could H5N1 arrive in North America?

H5N1 could be transported through virus-contaminated articles or by illegally imported birds or bird products. Wild birds could bring the virus into North America during migration. Migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds, cross the Bering Sea between Alaska and Asia during seasonal migrations to and from breeding and

wintering areas. While in Asia, migratory birds could become infected with H5N1 and then migrate to North America.

Are poultry flocks at risk?

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture maintains a monitoring system for AI in poultry. This system includes: inspection and testing of flocks, testing of sick poultry, required reporting by veterinarians and laboratories, and sharing information with neighboring states and the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Commercial poultry farms follow strict procedures to prevent contact between wildlife and poultry.

What are the symptoms of AI in wild birds?

Most strains of AI are asymptomatic in wild birds. There are no definitive symptoms of birds infected with H5N1 nor are there definitive gross lesions associated with wild birds.

How is H5N1 spread from bird to bird?

H5N1 can be spread through oral contact with fecal matter, saliva, and nasal discharges of infected birds.

Are pets or other animals at risk for H5N1 infection?

Pets and dogs used in bird hunting are not considered at risk because there have been no documented cases of the H5N1 virus infecting dogs. Dog owners should consult their veterinarian for more information about influenza in pets.

Handling or Disposal of Dead Birds

What should I do if I find dead birds on my property?

At this time the DEP is following its normal protocol for dead bird

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Maps for Listed Species Updated

Written by Karen Zyko, Natural Diversity Data Base

The DEP Natural Diversity Data Base recently updated the “State and Federal Listed Species and Significant Natural Communities” maps. These maps show areas of concern for endangered, threatened, and special concern species and significant natural communities in Connecticut. The locations of species and natural communities depicted on the maps are based on data collected over the years by DEP staff, scientists, conservation groups, and landowners. In some cases, an occurrence represents a location derived from literature, museum records, and specimens. These data are compiled and maintained by the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) program at the DEP (the maps are sometimes referred to as the Natural Diversity Data Base maps).

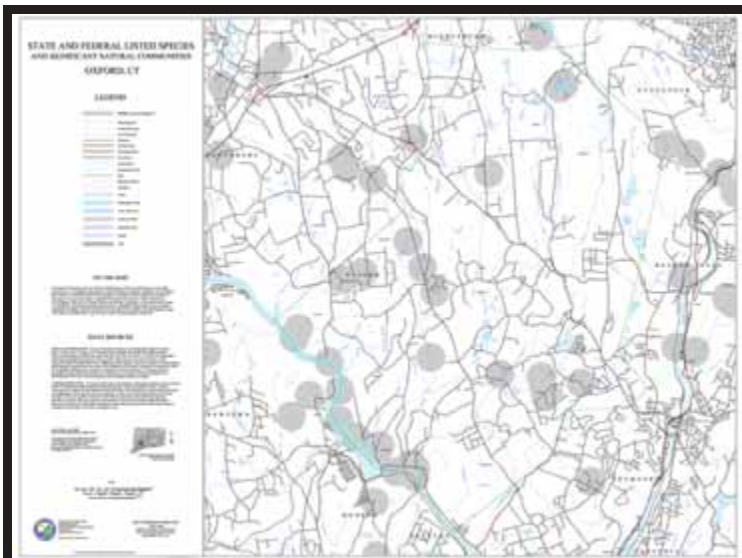
The maps are intended to be a pre-screening tool for those required through state or local permits to consult the NDDB for impacts to state-listed species. Private contractors, local land use officials, and landowners are encouraged to use the maps in the planning phase of any development projects. If a proposed project is in a sensitive area or is close enough to impact a sensitive area, you may contact the DEP to review the project for possible impacts to state-listed species. Requests can be made by mailing a request form or a letter, describing the proposed actions and including a map showing the site and the surrounding area. (More detailed information on environmental reviews is available on the DEP website, www.ct.gov/dep).

The maps do not identify areas that should be protected or areas that are suitable for development. The presence of listed species or significant natural communities in an area does not conflict with all land uses. Often minor modifications to a proposed plan will alleviate conflicts.

NDDB information also is used in state land acquisition assessments, biodiversity assessments, regional and national conservation efforts, species evaluations, and environmental reviews.



Areas of conservation concern for state threatened and endangered species, such as the barn owl, are shown on maps updated every six months by the DEP Natural Diversity Data Base.



Maps such as can be downloaded from the DEP website.

Endangered Species Legislation

State endangered and threatened species are protected by the Connecticut Endangered Species Act (Connecticut General Statutes Section 26-303 to Section 26-315). The purpose of the Act is to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance any endangered or threatened species. The Act requires that any action authorized, funded, or performed by state agencies cannot threaten the continued existence of any state endangered or state threatened species. For more detailed information on the Connecticut Endangered Species Act, please refer to the Connecticut General Statutes Section 26-303.

NDDB maps are updated every six months and may be downloaded in PDF format from the DEP website (www.ct.gov/dep) or purchased through the DEP Store. Call the DEP Store at (860) 424-3555 and request a NDDB map by town or by USGS quadrangle. Geographic information systems (GIS) data also can be downloaded from the DEP website.

Translocation of Puritan Tiger Beetle Larvae

Written by Laura Saucier, Wildlife Diversity Program

The Puritan tiger beetle (*Cicindela puritana*) is a medium-sized predatory beetle that inhabits sandy beaches along rivers. This beetle is listed as state endangered and federally threatened, mainly due to limited sandy beach habitat coupled with heavy human recreational use of this habitat. This species has two distinct and disjunct populations, one along the Connecticut River in Connecticut and Massachusetts and the other along the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

Connecticut's portion of the Connecticut River population (metapopulation) has been stable for a number of years. This stability has allowed the translocation of Puritan tiger beetle larvae to augment Massachusetts' metapopulation, which has been in decline. To prevent compromising the integrity of the source population, the number of third instar (stage) larvae to be moved was to be no more than 10% of the total adult population of the previous generation. This activity was approved, sanctioned, and properly permitted by the CT DEP Wildlife Division, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

In June, Chris Davis, a tiger beetle expert, joined together with wildlife technicians from the Connecticut Wildlife Division, biologists from USFWS Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge, and many volunteers and students, to translocate Puritan tiger beetle larvae from Connecticut to



L. SAUCIER

Puritan tiger beetle larvae are excavated from beach habitat along the Connecticut River in Connecticut for translocation to augment a declining population located along the Connecticut River in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts. Biologists began by finding third instar burrows in the sand (not as easy as it would seem!). A blade of grass was then placed into the burrow to mark it, and trowels were used to excavate around the burrow until the larvae were uncovered. The one-inch-long third instars were taken to Chris for verification that they were indeed Puritan tiger beetle larvae and not the similar looking *Cicindela repanda* (known as the common shore or bronzed

tiger beetle) larvae. The Puritan tiger beetle larvae were then placed in vials filled with sand and put in a cooler for the car ride north. The larvae were re-buried at a beach in Massachusetts later that same day to eventually molt into adult beetles. The adult beetles will then mate and females will place eggs in the sand among scattered plants. These eggs will, within a week, hatch into larvae that will dig a burrow into the sand to begin their two-year life cycle.

Connecticut Envirothon 2006 held at Rocky Neck State Park

Written by Peter Picone, Habitat Management Program

The waves of the waters of Long Island Sound broke gently along the beach of Rocky Neck State Park as high school teams were registering for the 2006 Annual Connecticut Envirothon. It was 15 years ago when the very first Connecticut Envirothon took place at Rocky Neck's picturesque pavilion. The weather this year was pretty close to perfect. There was the smell of salt water in the air, a clear blue sky, and the sight and sounds of high school students getting ready for the Connecticut Envirothon competition. All of the ingredients were coming together for a

great day for Connecticut's conservation-minded high school students.

The event is organized by a steering committee comprised of natural resource professionals from a variety of backgrounds, including soil scientists, wildlife biologists, foresters, research technicians, wetland specialists, environmental analysts, and educators.

What makes the Connecticut Envirothon event a unique educational experience is that the curriculum includes not only facts about wildlife, soils, forestry, aquatics, and the environment, but also how natural resource and

conservation principles are applied to real world issues by practicing professionals. At the Envirothon, student teams are tested on their environmental knowledge.

This year's first place team was Litchfield High School Team #1. Second place went to Housatonic Valley Agricultural Science Team and third place went to Housatonic Valley Regional High School. For more information on the Connecticut Envirothon, please see www.ctenvirothon.org.

Marsh Restoration Completed at Hammonasset Beach State Park

A marsh restoration project at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison was completed in June 2006 by the DEP Wildlife Division's Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management (WHAMM) Program. Sand was removed from this 6.3-acre site in 2005 for a beach replenishment project. In its place, the WHAMM crew created 2.7 acres of low marsh, 1.3 acres of high marsh, a large 0.2-acre pond, several potholes (about 0.05 acres each), and a large tidal channel. Funding for this restoration project was provided by Save the Sound (\$25,500), the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation (Duck) Stamp Program (\$33,000), and Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetlands Reserve Program funds (\$91,983). Monitoring will be conducted on this site to assess bird use, water quality, and vegetation colonization.



C. SAMORAJCZYK

BioBlitz Held at Brooksvale Park in Hamden

Written by Ryan Dibala and Erin Victory, Wildlife Research Assistants

What better way to document a site's biodiversity than to congregate wildlife enthusiasts in a race against time to find and identify as many species as possible? This is the mission of BioBlitz, a 24-hour event aimed at generating scientific data, raising public awareness, and exciting kids about science.

On the weekend of June 9-10, 2006, scientists, naturalists, and volunteers gathered for a BioBlitz at Brooksvale Park in Hamden. Encompassing just over 400 acres, Brooksvale Park contains a variety of habitats, including upland hardwood forest, riparian stream corridors, vernal pools, and hayfields.

The park holds the potential to support a large array of biodiversity as it is bordered to the north by a large, contiguous tract of land in the Naugatuck State Forest. Naturalist Tom Parlapiano and Park Ranger Vinny Lavorgna, along with the Friends of Brooksvale, recognized the park's importance and coordinated this event in an effort to document the park's natural resources. Experts throughout the state were invited to conduct an on-site species inventory.

The DEP was represented at BioBlitz by several teams of biologists from the Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions. Friday night, biologists from the Wildlife Division set up mist nets for bats and traps and track plates for terrestrial small mammals. Members of the public who attended the evening program were treated to up-close encounters with three species of bats:

the little brown, northern long-eared, and eastern pipistrelle. Rain overnight impacted small mammal trapping success, as traps were found empty and track plates were washed clean. Despite this, other evidence, including tracks found in the mud, mole hills, nibbled nuts, tunnels found beneath leaf litter, and brief sightings, indicated the presence of raccoons, opossums, gray squirrels, moles, and possibly shrews and voles.

On Saturday, there were a variety of programs and displays for the public to learn more about the biotic world around them. DEP Fisheries biologists talked about survey techniques and displayed electroshocking equipment and nets used to capture fish. Other groups, like the Connecticut Botanical Society and the Butterfly Association, set up displays. The Peabody Museum brought mounts of a variety of taxa and played bird songs. By 4:00 PM Saturday, teams turned in their species lists and the event was officially over. Although the results are still being tallied, to date 658 species were counted, representing taxa from mushrooms and invertebrates to bats and herpetofauna. Among these are such notables as the box turtle (a species of special concern), ring-necked snake, luna moth, and a painted turtle hatchling. These data are relevant to future park planning, highlighting areas of particular ecological importance. Future recreational use areas can be developed in a way that minimizes the overall ecological impact on the park.

Ruffed Grouse Heard During Drumming Survey

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

The Wildlife Division has been gathering baseline data on Connecticut's ruffed grouse population. A standard method for obtaining data on breeding populations is to conduct grouse drumming surveys, which assess changes in populations over time. Drumming is an activity exhibited by male ruffed grouse to attract females to their location during the mating season. Drumming noise is produced by the male beating his wings against his chest, making a sound similar to that of an old tractor starting up.

Grouse drumming survey routes have been established on private and state lands in 12 locations. Each route is 1.25 miles in length, with 10 survey points distributed about 225 yards apart. Participants walk the survey route and listen for four minutes at each point, recording the number of drum sequences heard and the number of birds heard. The 2006 survey was conducted in April and all routes were surveyed twice on different days, starting 30 minutes before sunrise.

Of the 12 surveys routes walked, grouse were heard drumming on half the routes. A total of 20 drummers were recorded. The actual number of individual males heard drumming was between 13 to 20 birds. Because surveys were conducted twice, participants may have recorded the same drumming male during each of the survey periods. The survey route that produced the highest number of grouse (5 individual drummers) was in Hartland. Survey information indicates that grouse continue to persist in pockets of habitat throughout Connecticut.

Participants reported several other unique wildlife observations during the survey period. One individual encountered a nesting pair of northern goshawks, which aggressively defended their nesting territory. A second participant found an area with abundant moose sign. Although, this information

2006 Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey Results

Route Name	Town	Total Drummers Heard
Aton Forest	Norfolk	0
Gillespie Tree Farm	Sharon	4
Hammonasset Fishing Assoc.	Madison	1
Housatonic WMA	Kent	0
Mansfield Hollow	Mansfield	0
Barkhamsted Res.	Hartland	8
Meshomamsic SF	East Hampton	2
Roraback WMA	Harwinton	0
Shenipsit SF	Stafford	3
Steep Rock	Washington	2
White Memorial	Litchfield	0
Wyantenock SF	Warren	0
Total		20

does not relate directly to Connecticut's grouse population, it does assist with the management of our state wildlife resources. A special thank you is extended to the volunteers who assisted with this survey; without their help this research would not be possible. The Wildlife Division is continuing to collect ruffed grouse observations. Please report any grouse observations to michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us or call the Wildlife Division's Franklin office (860-642-7239).

Have You Seen Any Wild Turkeys Lately?

The DEP Wildlife Division wants to know!

The Wildlife Division has put out a request for any interested individuals to keep an eye out for wild turkeys and record their observations from June 1 until September 15, 2006. (Even though readers of *Connecticut Wildlife* did not get this request before June 1, any observations you can record until September 15 are important!) If you are interested in participating in this effort, you may contact Wildlife Division biologist Michael Gregonis to receive an observation form or you can keep track on your own form. Information needed includes the date of each observation, town, specific location (road and intersecting road), and the number of hens, poult

(young of the year), and/or gobblers (toms and jakes) for each sighting. If you cannot determine the sex or age of the turkeys, record them as "unknown." This information is still needed. Observation forms (and any questions or requests for forms) should be sent to Michael Gregonis, DEP Wildlife Division, Franklin WMA, 391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254 (860-642-7239). Information also can be sent via email to michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us. **Observation forms must be submitted by September 25, 2006.** The Wildlife Division thanks you for your assistance in collecting this important information about Connecticut's wild turkey resource!

A Reader Survey May Be Coming to Your Mailbox Soon

The staff of Connecticut Wildlife tries to have a good mix of articles for each issue of the magazine so that all of our readers can find something that interests them. However, it also helps to know what our readers expect from the magazine and what kind of information they want. We also want to know who are readers are and why they like to receive Connecticut Wildlife. That is why we have developed a reader survey that will be sent to a random sample of subscribers. We would appreciate it if those who receive a survey take the short amount of time required to fill it out and return it to us. Let us know what you think. Your suggestions and comments mean a lot to us.

Connecticut State of the Birds

Written by Milan Bull, Senior Director of Science and Conservation, Connecticut Audubon Society

A lot of birders like me find it somewhat disconcerting that many of Connecticut's rarest species are found not in the unspoiled "wilderness" of undeveloped Connecticut, but on airport fringes and power line rights-of-way!

The immense, mature hardwood forest that once extended in a massive, unbroken swath from the Carolinas through Maine, in what some biologists have called the largest hardwood forest ecosystem on earth, has crept back in undeveloped areas of the Eastern seaboard after being totally stripped by the nineteenth century. Although gone for good are the perhaps billions of passenger pigeons whose wings once rolled like thunder through our forests, vacuuming up acorns and beech nuts in their wake, wood thrushes and wild turkeys now abound in Connecticut woodlands that were farm fields and pasturelands two centuries ago.

Thus, the Connecticut landscape has dramatically changed for birds, as well as humans. Gone are the "hen plains" of Greenwich; so too are the grassy sand plains of the Quinnipiac watershed that were once home to an array of shrubland and grassland birds, such as the now-

extinct heath hen (relative of the greater prairie chicken). Remnant populations of grassland birds are, for the most part, restricted to the only similar habitat that is left in Connecticut: grassy flats maintained along the larger airports, such as Bradley International Airport outside of Hartford. It is here that fractured populations of upland sandpipers and grasshopper sparrows hang on.

In an effort to help understand both past and present bird populations and trends, the Connecticut Audubon Society has published the first of what will be an annual report entitled Connecticut State of the Birds.

In the first issue, Connecticut Audubon asked leading experts in the field to document what is known about birds in Connecticut, what we need to know, and what we need to do in order to conserve our birds and the habitats they need to thrive.

The report dovetails with the Connecticut Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) and supports findings on the status of migratory birds in the state, as well as the conservation actions necessary to restore and protect birds and their habitats.

The authors of Connecticut State of the Birds have identified six key bird habitats in Connecticut: Forests (closed canopy), Inland Wetlands, Grasslands, Shrublands (early successional habitat), Tidal Marsh, and Shoreline.

Forests provide the most secure and increasing habitat in Connecticut, and birds dependant on this habitat appear to be stable. However, the fragmentation of our forests by roads and developments may soon take its toll on forest birds, as this development is quickly outpacing reforestation of farmlands. Studies have shown that forest birds avoid or abandon small forests (possibly less than 600 contiguous acres) because they cannot reproduce successfully at these sites due to predators and parasites (like brown-headed cowbirds) that are exceptionally abundant along the forest edge and in the zone of the forest close to the edge.

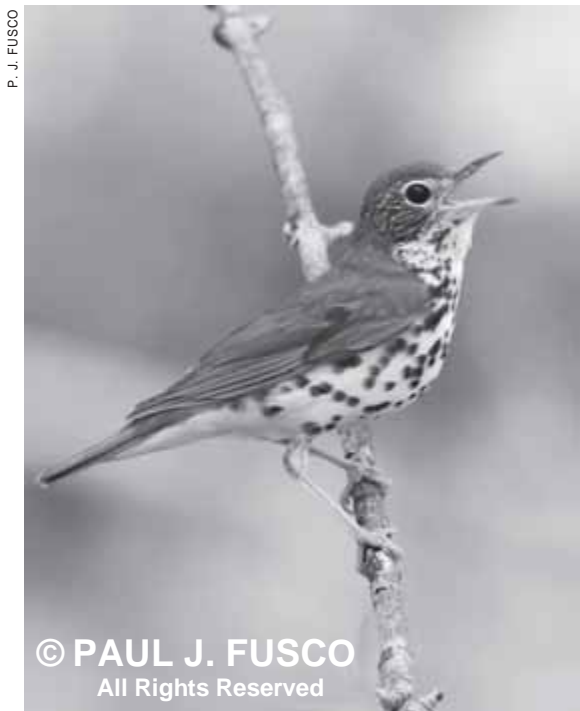
Inland wetlands represent about four percent of our landscape and are

currently protected by state statute. The state depends on local town Inland Wetland Regulatory Agencies to administer these statutes, and the filling and development of this habitat has slowed, but there is so little left that half of the birds dependant on inland wetlands are now listed in the CWCS as species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Grasslands historically were an important component of biological diversity in Connecticut. Large sandy coastal plains were naturally maintained by grass fires, whereas inland grasslands along rivers and streams were maintained by floods and beaver activity. Only about 2% of our landscape is now in grassland. Like birds that need large forests, many grassland specialists need large, unbroken expanses of habitat. Nine species of grassland birds are native breeders and all are listed by the DEP as endangered, threatened, or special concern. At least two species have been extirpated within the last century. Most of these birds were common nesters in Connecticut prior to the mid-twentieth century.

Shrubland birds are dependant on low, woody vegetation, such as shrub thickets or regenerating young trees, and they are among the fastest declining group of birds. Shrubland habitat reached exceptionally high densities during the 1800s after many farms were abandoned, but soon declined as young forests replaced old fields. Shrublands, like grasslands, need active management in order to hold off plant succession. Therefore, areas that are actively managed for these habitats are the last stronghold for the birds that depend on them. Now, powerline rights-of-way provide most of the remaining shrubland habitat for these birds, representing about 0.3% of our landscape.

Although tidal marshes comprise only about 0.5% of our total landscape, they are extremely important for a number of bird species, such as willet, saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow, and seaside sparrow. These specialized birds declined when many of the marshes were filled and developed or altered by the construction of ditches and restriction of natural tidal flow. Tidal marsh restoration is now a major priority for the DEP and other conservation organizations.



P. J. FUSCO

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The wood thrush, which nests in woodlands, has not shown a significant decline in Connecticut, but has been declining throughout other portions of the Northeast.



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P. J. FUSCO (2)

Tidal marsh habitat provides the only acceptable nesting areas for a variety of birds, such as willets, clapper rails, saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows, and seaside sparrows. They also provide critical feeding areas for other breeding birds such as herons, migrants such as shorebirds, and winterers such as waterfowl and raptors.

Waterfowl hunters across the state have funded the restoration of hundreds of acres of Connecticut wetlands through the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program (Duck Stamp), improving these habitats for all wetland-dependant species.

Finally, our shoreline habitats (bluffs, dunes, headlands, and beaches) that comprise only about 0.1% of our landscape are under pressure from competing uses during the warm months, at the very same time that dependant bird species, such as least terns and piping plovers, need these habitats to be “undisturbed” for productive nesting. Consequently, least terns have declined from about 1,000 pairs in the mid-1980s to 216 pairs in 2005.

All of us who live in Connecticut, birders and non-birders alike, need to be concerned about bird diversity. Clearly, birds are wonderful indicators of environmental health and their speciation and distribution are inextricably linked to our human quality of life. The landscapes we all enjoy — from Connecticut’s hills and meadows to its forests, streams, lakes, and Long Island Sound — are all important bird habitats. Conserving these habitats and the biodiversity they support are critical to the future of the state as an attractive place to live and work. Connecticut State

of the Birds both documents this and outlines those birds and habitats that are in serious decline and in most urgent need of our help.

This first report also describes the need for a concerted effort among all stakeholders to improve the quality and quantity of information that is being gathered about birds and their habitats, to inventory and map key bird habitats, and to work with and support the efforts of the Connecticut DEP to implement the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The CWCS documents the need and sets a road map for future federal matching funding of key wildlife conservation projects in Connecticut.

The last section of the report outlines specific recommendations that need to



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According to “Connecticut State of the Birds,” about 30% of the tidal marshes in Connecticut have been filled in for development, resulting in a major loss of habitat for species such as the seaside sparrow (above) and saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow.

be adopted and implemented in our state to ensure the diversity and productivity of these feathered jewels, which not only animate our lives but provide us with unmatched beauty, wonder, and a sound measurement of environmental health. A full copy of the Connecticut State of the Birds (in Adobe Reader) can be viewed on Connecticut Audubon’s website: www.ctaudubon.org.

Feisty Little Fireball - The Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Text and photos by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

Every year in late April and early May, forests and backyards across Connecticut come alive with the sounds from neotropical migrant songbirds arriving back to our state for their breeding season. Among the songs of warblers, vireos, and tanagers is the hum of the ruby-throated hummingbird. With their wings typically beating over 50 times per second, hummingbirds produce their namesake sound.

The ruby-throated hummingbird is whitish below and iridescent green above. Males have a fiery, metallic red throat patch, called the gorget, that glows brilliantly when the sun hits it.

These tiny birds are hardly bigger than some of the larger insects that may accompany them at flowers. They are 3 to 3.5 inches long from bill tip to tail tip, with a wingspan of about 4.5 inches. Ruby-throated hummingbird weights average between 2.5 and 4 grams, about the weight of one penny.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds winter from Mexico south to Panama. In order to get back and forth between their breeding range in eastern North America and their wintering areas, they must either travel along the Gulf Coast or fly across the Gulf of Mexico between Florida and the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Most will follow the Gulf Coast, but many take the 500-600 mile over-water route with little apparent difficulty. Like shorebirds, warblers, and other long distance migrants, hummingbirds must pack on fat reserves to make the trip. For their fall migration, they have been known to add 50% of their body weight in fat reserves to provide extra energy needed for the migration.

While Latin America and the western United States are rich with hummingbird species, the ruby-throated is the only hummingbird that breeds in eastern North America. Western vagrants sometimes show up in the east in fall and winter. The rufous hummingbird, which breeds in the western United States, is the vagrant hummingbird species that is most likely to be seen in Connecticut. However, it is still considered a rarity in our region.

Feeding

Hummingbirds have a high metabolism and require a high energy diet. They



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Male ruby-throated hummingbirds have a brilliant metallic red throat patch that gives the species its name.

feed on the sweet nectar from flowering plants. Besides nectar, ruby-throated hummingbirds also consume tiny insects and spiders, which make up an important part of their diet. Insects and spiders are gleaned from flowers, buds, or leaves. Hummingbirds also visit sapsucker sap wells where they feed on tiny insects that are attracted to the sap. Many backyard wildlife enthusiasts put out hummingbird feeders with sugar water to attract hummingbirds (see sidebars). Some also choose to encourage hummingbirds with plantings in their garden.

The hummingbirds' flower of choice is typically brightly colored, often

orange or red, and tubular. Hummingbirds have long, slender bills that allow them to reach deep into these flowers for the nectar within. While feeding, hummingbirds frequently show off their agile flying skills, darting and stopping in midair. They typically feed while hovering, and are the only birds that have the ability to fly backwards. They also can fly straight up or down.

Behavior

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are irritable, feisty, and pugnacious little birds. They have a low tolerance for the presence of other birds, especially other

Neotropical Migrants

Neotropical migrants are birds that live in the tropical areas of the New World (Central and South America, and the Caribbean), but migrate to North America for the breeding season. Most are songbirds, including warblers, vireos, thrushes, and tanagers. These birds make incredible journeys each year to take advantage of the massive food supply (mainly insects) that becomes available in North America at the time when they raise their young. By migrating to North America for their breeding season, these birds are not only taking advantage of the available food supply, but they also are able to raise more young and with less competition from other species than they would if they stayed in the tropics.

Many species of neotropical migrants, including hummingbirds, are dependent upon forested habitats to successfully reproduce. The loss and degradation of forest habitats can adversely affect neotropical bird populations. While many neotropical migrants are heavily dependant on forest habitat, hummingbirds will use backyards and gardens that have suitable habitat components.

hummingbirds. Sharp twittering vocalizations and excited sparring often occur at feeding stations when two males are present. Dominant males will watch over the feeder, sometimes from a distance, and keep subordinates away by aggressively chasing them off.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds build a small cup-shaped nest made with plant down, leaves, and silk from spider webs or caterpillar nests. They decorate the nest with lichen, which serves as camouflage, blending it into its surroundings. The nest is frequently built on small horizontal or downward sloping branches of deciduous trees about 5 to 20 feet off the ground. It is usually placed in a spot that is protected from heavy rain by upper leaves and branches.

Two small white eggs that are each about the size of a bean are typically laid. After about two weeks the eggs hatch. The young are born blind and naked and must be kept warm by the adult female. During the growth period, the young hummingbirds are fed by regurgitation. At about three weeks of age, the young are ready to fledge from the nest.

Occurrence in CT

Woodlands, forest openings, edges, and gardens are the preferred habitat of ruby-throated hummingbirds. They are most common in rural settings and avoid urban areas.

The ruby-throated hummingbird was once much more common in Connecticut than it is today. Its population has declined over the last 100 years with the spread of development and urbanization. The population is most numerous in the wooded uplands of western Connecticut. In other parts of the state, the populations are more scattered and local.

By creating wildlife habitat in your backyard, you can provide natural food sources and cover for a variety of species, including hummingbirds. Hummingbirds are attracted to a number of flowering plants. Bee balm and trumpet creeper are just two of the plants that will bring hummingbirds to your yard. If you are interested in learning more about how to

Hummingbird Plants

Flowers

Bee Balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i> *
Begonia	<i>Begonia</i> spp.
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> *
Coral Bells	<i>Heuchera sanguinea</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> *
Dahlia	<i>Dahlia merckii</i>
Fuchsias	<i>Fuchsia</i> spp.
Geranium	<i>Pelargonium</i> spp.
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens</i> spp.
Jewelweed*	<i>Impatiens pallida</i>
Milkweed, Common*	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>
Milkweed, Orange*	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>
Petunia	<i>Petunia</i> spp.
Sweet William	<i>Dianthus barbatus</i>
Verbena	<i>Verbena</i> spp.
Wild Bergamont*	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>

Shrubs

Azaleas	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.
Azalea, Swamp White*	<i>Rhododendron viscosum</i>
Butterfly Bush	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Honeysuckles	<i>Lonicera</i> spp.
Sweet Pepperbush*	<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>

Trees

Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus</i> spp.
Tulip Poplar*	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>

Vines

Morning Glory	<i>Ipomea</i> spp.
Trumpet Creeper*	<i>Campsis radicans</i>
Trumpet Honeysuckle*	<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>

* Indicates plants that are native to Connecticut and recommended by the DEP Wildlife Division.

Feeding Hummingbirds

To prepare food for your hummingbird feeder, use one part sugar to four parts water. Anything with a higher sugar content will be too sweet, and will run a high risk of fermentation. When preparing the nectar, heat the mixture to dissolve the sugar. Do not boil the solution. Boiling will concentrate the mix, making it too sweet.

Sweeteners other than sugar, including honey and corn syrup, should not be used.

Do not place your feeder in direct sunlight. Bacteria growth can contaminate feeders and will be accelerated by heat.

Be sure to clean your feeder thoroughly with each refill. It's best to use fresh sugar water when refilling your feeder.

Most hummingbird feeders have red parts for attracting birds, so adding red food coloring to the nectar is not necessary nor is it recommended.

If ants become a problem at hummingbird feeders that hang on a pole, try smearing Vaseline around the pole to prevent the ants from getting to the feeder.

Add plantings to your backyard that will provide hummingbirds with suitable nectar.



Female hummingbirds are a bit less flamboyant than the males. They have a white-ish underside with a metallic green back, and lack the male's red throat patch.

make your yard attractive to hummingbirds, contact the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office in Burlington (860-675-8130).

Beaver Complaints Continue to Flood the Phone Lines

Written by Carrie Pomfrey, Habitat Management Program

Rains pelted Connecticut this past spring. While rain in moderation is necessary and beneficial, the spring storms brought problems ranging from downed trees and power lines to flooded roadways and properties. Flooding caused by beaver activity was aggravated by the heavy rains. Every year, the DEP Wildlife Division receives numerous calls with concerns and questions about these industrious animals.

While beavers can create and enhance wetland wildlife habitat, their activities often conflict with human needs and desires. The majority of conflicts involve flooding and the killing of trees. Trees are killed by felling or girdling, or by the flooding of their root systems for long periods of time. These trees may fall near or on buildings, cars, roads, driveways, railroads, or powerlines. Flooding may affect buildings, roads, man-made dams and ponds, parking lots, driveways, agricultural fields, lawns, wells, and septic systems. One of the most common complaints in Connecticut is the plugging of culverts that can cause property flooding and road and driveway damage.

When people contact the Wildlife Division for help with beaver problems, they are encouraged to tolerate the beavers and take measures to manage conflicts. The Division can provide technical assistance to individuals experiencing problems associated with



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Beavers are efficient dam builders that can change a stream into a natural impoundment quickly.

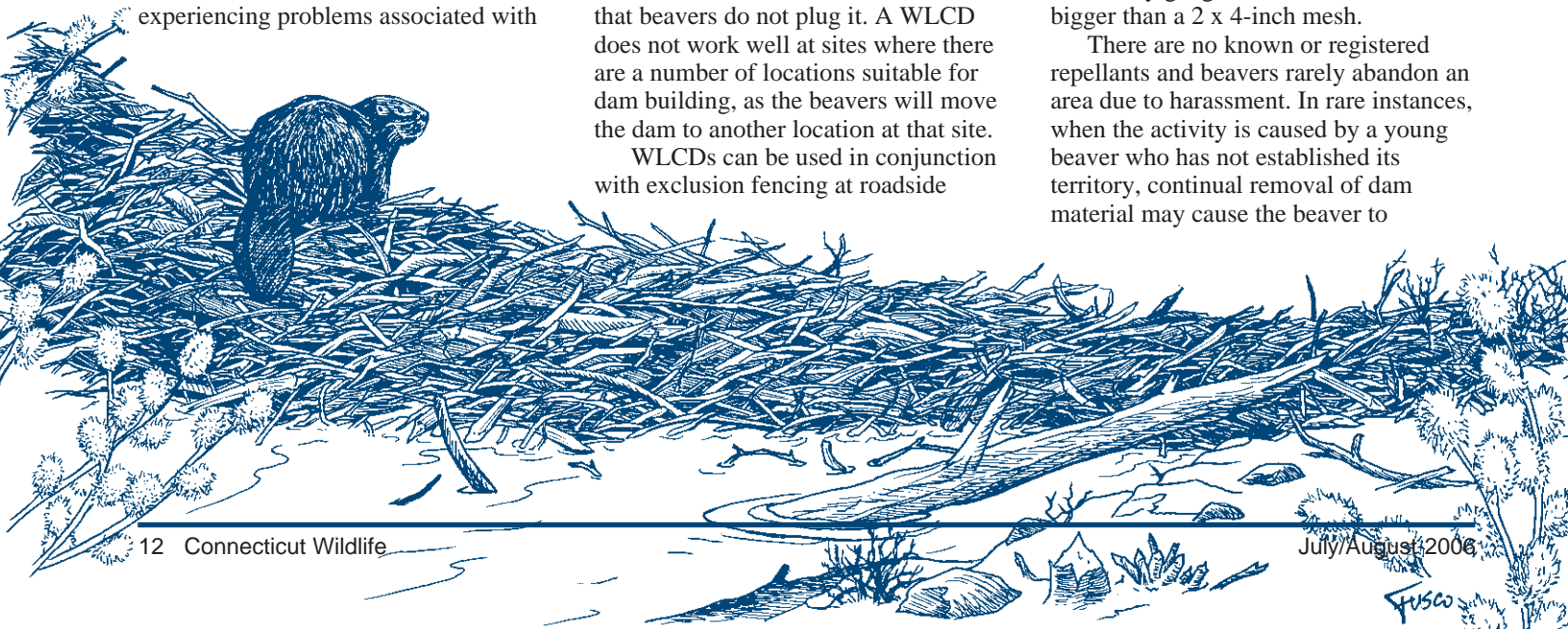
beaver activity. The options available depend on the time of year and the nature and severity of the problem.

Fortunately, there are several alternatives for reducing beaver/human conflicts. If the undesired activity involves flooding, a water level control device (WLCD) may be effective in reducing water levels. WLCDs require maintenance to remain effective. They work best when there is at least four feet of water. The device should reduce the sound and sensation of water flow so that beavers do not plug it. A WLCD does not work well at sites where there are a number of locations suitable for dam building, as the beavers will move the dam to another location at that site.

WLCDs can be used in conjunction with exclusion fencing at roadside

culverts. Exclusion fencing also can be used in ponds and lakes to prevent beavers from directly plugging outlet pipes and water level control structures. Exclusion fencing should be installed at the first sign of beaver occupation, using a heavy gauge hardware cloth, no bigger than a six-inch mesh. Exclusion fencing also can protect trees from chewing. The fencing should cover the bottom four feet of the tree, at least six inches away from the tree and staked on either side. The heavy gauge cloth should be no bigger than a 2 x 4-inch mesh.

There are no known or registered repellants and beavers rarely abandon an area due to harassment. In rare instances, when the activity is caused by a young beaver who has not established its territory, continual removal of dam material may cause the beaver to



abandon the site. Where beavers have been well established, dam removal will not be effective. Dams can be breached to relieve some flooding, but this must be done regularly, as beaver will rebuild overnight. Breaching and dam removal are regulated under the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act and a permit must be acquired through your local inland wetlands office.

While these tolerance measures may remedy site-specific beaver problems, they will not curb beaver population growth. Adult beavers have no natural predators. Coyotes, bobcats, otters, and mink may take young beavers, but this does little to control the population. Humans are the primary controlling factor for the population growth of beavers. Trapping removes a portion of the beaver population each year, stabilizing the population and reducing conflicts. Trapping season dates are established so that beavers are harvested at the time of year when the fur is of greatest value, ensuring the animal is used and not wasted. Trapping is prohibited during the kit rearing season. Trappers must obtain a Connecticut trapping license to participate in the regulated season, currently December 1 through March 15. Written permission is required from private landowners before trapping on private land. Season results are monitored through a mandatory pelt-tagging program.

To address the growing number of nuisance beaver concerns, statutes have been established to manage issues that absolutely cannot wait until the next trapping season. Nuisance beavers whose activities threaten public health and safety or cause damage to agricultural crops can be trapped outside of the regulated season. However, the licensed trapper needs authorization or a special permit from the DEP Wildlife Division. All trapping, in season or out of season, is kill trapping. There is no live trapping and relocation of beavers allowed in Connecticut. Beavers are widespread in Connecticut and moving beavers to other areas would only exacerbate problems.

Contact Wildlife Division Technician Carrie Pomfrey (860-295-9523 ext. 128 or 860-675-8130 ext. 113) for a site inspection to determine if you qualify for off-season trapping. You also may contact Carrie for more information on beavers, WLCs, and fencing.

A Closer Look at the Beaver

Beavers disappeared from Connecticut during the mid-1800s. However, with the regrowth of forest habitat and various small-scale reintroduction projects, beavers started to repopulate the state by the early 1900s. Today our beaver population is widespread, with approximately 8,000 individuals distributed throughout the state.

As North America's largest native rodent, the adult beaver averages between 30 and 65 pounds. It measures from 24 to 36 inches, not including the tail, which can measure 12 to 18 inches long. This heavy-bodied animal has powerful muscles and short legs and, while slow-moving on land, it is well-adapted for life in a semiaquatic environment. When underwater, thin membranes protect the beaver's eyes and internal valves automatically close within the ears and nose. The lips can seal tightly around the front teeth, preventing water from entering the throat and trachea and enabling the beaver to chew underwater. The large hind feet are webbed and clawed to help propel the animal through the water and provide stable footing on muddy ground. Beavers use their webless front feet to dig, carry materials, hold food, and comb their fur.

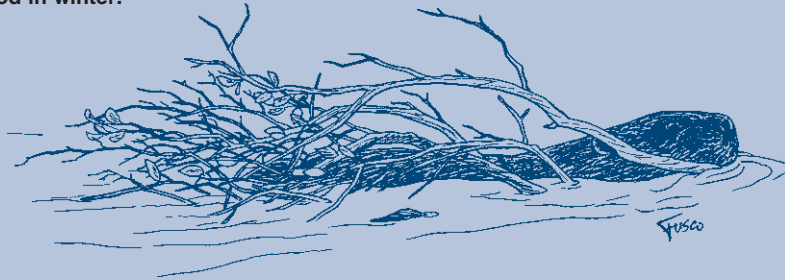
Beavers are prolific breeders, breeding from January to February and producing four to six young by May to early June. The young are forced to leave the colony their second year, traveling in search of suitable, unoccupied habitat where they can establish their own territory and start a new colony. This usually occurs in spring, and the young beavers generally move into the first suitable, unoccupied space they find.

Beavers are herbivores, feeding primarily on the outer and inner bark of trees, as well as leaves, twigs, shoots, and roots of woody plants. They prefer birch, willow, ash, aspen, and alder, but will use almost any tree species. A variety of aquatic plants, sedges, and grasses also are consumed by beavers. Branches and logs that have been stripped of leaves and bark for food are often used as construction materials for dams and lodges.

Beavers are extremely efficient dam builders, changing a brook or stream into a natural impoundment very quickly. They flood an area of trees and shrubs to improve access to food and dam-building materials and to minimize vulnerability to predation. The water in an impoundment also needs to be deep enough to ensure the underwater entrance to the lodge doesn't freeze over in winter. The length and height of a dam will vary based on topography and water flow.

Not to be confused with the dam spanning a watercourse, the lodge is a mound-shaped island of sticks and mud ranging from 20 to 40 feet at the base and rising four to eight feet out of the water. The lodge provides year round protection from the weather and predators. It has several underwater entrances leading to one dry chamber that is used for resting, feeding, grooming, birthing, and the care of kits. When beavers first move into an area, they may temporarily use a bank den until they become established and a suitable lodge can be built.

Beavers are extremely territorial and will not tolerate other beavers within their colony's home range. While territorial with other beavers, they are normally docile animals and generally do not pose a threat to dogs or people. Like most wildlife, they tend to avoid people, but an adult with young in the lodge may get agitated and swim back and forth slapping its tail if someone approaches the lodge. Beavers are typically nocturnal, but are sometimes observed during the day. They are active year round, although not noticed in winter as they remain in their lodge. Beavers store sticks and branches in the bottom of the pond adjacent to their lodge to access as food in winter.



More Information on Beavers and Beaver Problems . . .

Check the DEP's website (www.ct.gov/dep) to find a fact sheet on beavers, as well as the 24-page publication "Beavers in Connecticut, Their Natural History and Management." Printed copies of both publications also can be obtained by calling the Wildlife Division's Eastern District office (860-295-9523) or the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130) (Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

Mallards and Canada Geese Dominate Waterfowl Survey

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

Wildlife Division staff completed the annual breeding waterfowl surveys in April. Since its inception in 1989, biologists from Virginia north to New Hampshire have participated in this important survey. The survey is ground-based and targets randomly placed square kilometer plots. The spring breeding waterfowl survey provides part of the data that drives the Eastern Mallard Adaptive Harvest Management models. Outputs from these models determine season lengths and bag limits of duck seasons in the Atlantic Flyway. In addition to providing an estimate of the breeding population, the survey provides managers with an index to both habitat condition and waterfowl production.

Spring habitat conditions in 2006 were generally good for breeding waterfowl. Despite a statewide rainfall deficit that continued into late April, most wetlands had good water levels during the breeding season. A significant weekend rainstorm that brought up to eight inches of rain to parts of western Connecticut in late April appeared to not significantly impact most nesting waterfowl. Some drowned nests were apparent in low-lying areas adjacent to areas prone to quickly rising water levels. The month of May, however, was very wet and much cooler than normal. A major storm that dumped an additional four to six inches of rain on the state certainly impacted any re-nesting efforts.

Overall, breeding waterfowl numbers were similar to 2005, and generally similar to short-term (5-year) averages. As is typical, mallards and Canada geese dominated the survey. The mallard breeding pair estimate was 16,991. This is a 29% increase from 2005 and slightly above the five-year average. Mallards continue to be our most abundant breeding waterfowl species, having adapted well to the changing landscape. The Canada goose pair estimate was 10,982. This estimate of breeding pairs is nearly identical to 2005 and a nine percent decrease from the five-year average.



Mallards remain Connecticut's most common breeding duck species.

Wood duck breeding pair estimates were greater than in 2005. The statewide estimate was 6,924 pairs. This is a 12% increase from last year and greater than the five-year average of 6,063. The trend for breeding wood ducks since 2000 has been stable.

For the fifth straight year, black ducks were not observed inland. The coastal black duck estimate was 253 pairs. Breeding black ducks have likely declined throughout inland Connecticut due to increased disturbance from development pressures.

Rare Connecticut breeding species, such as gadwall and green-winged teal, also were observed during the survey. As has been the case in the past couple of years, common mergansers and hooded mergansers also were detected during the survey. Both common and hooded mergansers have been expanding their respective breeding ranges and their recent contributions to the breeding counts bear witness to that expansion.

Mute swans, an introduced and deleterious species, were observed in three plots. However, only one of the six coastal plots contained swans in 2006. This mirrors the results of 2005. Previ-

ously, however, in 2004, half of the coastal plots had swans.

Swan Breeding Survey

Due to the DEP Wildlife Division's concern about the inland proliferation of swans, a separate, statewide breeding survey for swans was initiated in 2004. This swan-specific survey covers approximately one-third of the state each year, providing more precise breeding pair estimates than the breeding waterfowl survey, which is tailored towards ducks. In 2006, the statewide breeding pair estimate from the specific mute swan survey was 216. This is less than the 234 pair estimate from 2005. The coastal breeding pair count of 120 was identical to last year's count. 2006 marked the end of the three-year inland survey rotation for breeding swans. The survey has documented the inland proliferation of breeding swans in the state. Breeding pairs have generally followed the major drainages (Connecticut, Thames, and Housatonic Rivers) inland and, from there, have spread across the landscape along the larger tributaries (Naugatuck, Shetucket, and Farmington Rivers).

Questions Concerning Avian Influenza (AI), continued from page 3

testing. That is, birds will be tested if several birds die at the same location at one time or over several days. You can submit information regarding dead birds to the state's Bird Mortality Reporting website at www.ct.gov/ctfluwatc. This site will be constantly monitored and if birds that you report warrant testing, you will be contacted.

What is the recommended method for disposing dead birds that will not be submitted for testing?

Avoid direct contact with dead birds. Wear gloves or use a shovel to place birds in a plastic bag. If you do not have gloves, put your hand inside a plastic bag, grab the bird through the bag and pull the bag back over your hand. Tie the bag, place into another plastic bag and tie that bag as well. Dead birds can be disposed of by burying or discarding in the trash. Always wash hands thoroughly after disposal.

Why isn't the state interested in testing one or a few dead birds?

Current knowledge of the effect of the disease on wild birds indicates that outbreaks detected in wild waterbird populations will likely involve the death of a large number of these species. Surveillance of dead birds as an early detection measure is best accomplished by focusing on significant mortality events in wild birds as opposed to individual birds people may come upon or find on their property.

If H5N1 is found in wild birds, will there be an effort to destroy them all?

No. The World Health Organization and Animal Health authorities throughout the world do not believe that culling wild birds is an effective means to control AI. The best way to curb the spread of the disease is to limit human contact with infected birds.

Contact with Birds

Are Canada geese a potential carrier of H5N1?

Yes. However, Canada geese are poor carriers of H5N1.

Is it safe to swim in areas where geese are congregated?

With regards to H5N1, there is no clear answer at this time. The state will continue to review new information on this issue and if H5N1 occurs in or near Connecticut, additional information will be provided to the public. Also, be aware that high concentrations of geese can cause elevated coliform bacteria counts resulting in temporary local closures of swimming areas. Always check to be sure the area has not been closed for swimming.

I regularly feed the ducks and geese at the local park. Should I stop doing this? Am I at risk for H5N1 if I continue?

Feeding of waterfowl is discouraged, regardless of any concern about H5N1. Feeding concentrates birds and increases the risk of disease transmission. The DEP Wildlife Division continues to discourage the public feeding of waterfowl. Several towns have passed no-feeding ordinances. People who continue to feed waterfowl are not at high risk for H5N1, but should thoroughly wash their hands following these activities.

Should I stop feeding the birds that come to my feeder?

No. H5N1 primarily affects and is carried by species associated with water. The types of birds that are attracted to backyard feeders are not considered at risk to carry or be affected by H5N1.

AI and Hunting

Are pheasants susceptible to AI?

To date, pen-raised or wild pheasants have not been implicated in AI outbreaks in the United States, although they are susceptible and could potentially play a role in disease transmission. Routine disease testing of pheasants has occurred for many years in Connecticut and has never detected AI.

Should pheasant hunters be concerned about birds they harvest this fall?

Pheasants encountered by hunters are commercially raised in large outdoor flight pens. These facilities are enclosed with netting that typically excludes interaction with migratory waterfowl or other

waterbirds most likely to carry HPAI. Hunters should always use standard precautions (see below) when field dressing and preparing game for consumption.

Will Connecticut continue to stock pheasants on public hunting areas this fall?

Yes. There is no reason to discontinue pheasant stocking at this time. All commercial suppliers will be closely monitored as part of the increased AI surveillance program in Connecticut. However, if H5N1 is discovered at any facility that provides pheasants for the DEP, the facility would be placed under strict quarantine and unable to supply pheasants for the stocking program.

Should waterfowl or turkey hunters be concerned? What precautions should they take when handling dead ducks and geese?

The following suggestions are common sense precautions that hunters should follow when hunting:

1. Do not handle birds that are obviously sick or birds found dead.
2. Keep your game birds cool, clean, and dry.
3. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while cleaning your birds.
4. Use rubber gloves when cleaning game.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes after dressing birds.
6. Clean all tools and surfaces immediately afterward; use hot soapy water, then disinfect with a 10% chlorine bleach solution.
7. Cook game meat thoroughly (165°F) to kill disease organisms.

How can hunters and the general public help?

You can help the DEP Wildlife Division monitor the health of Connecticut's wild bird populations by reporting die-offs (See earlier question on "What should I do if I find dead birds on my property?"). Also, during the upcoming hunting seasons, donations of certain species for testing (e.g., brant, greater scaup, and long-tailed ducks or "old squaw") will greatly assist in the monitoring efforts. Contact Min Huang at Min.Huang@po.state.ct.us or 860-642-4869, if you are interested in contributing harvested waterfowl.

More Information about Avian Influenza

National Wildlife Health Center: www.nwhc.usgs.gov

United States Department of Agriculture: www.usda.gov

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

Scientific Information on AI: www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/AvianFlu/WBAvianFlu.htm

The official U.S. government website for information on pandemic flu and avian influenza: <http://pandemicflu.gov/>

Quick Facts About Avian Influenza

Avian influenza (AI) is an infectious disease of birds. Low pathogenic forms of AI, which pose no problem to the birds, are common in wild bird populations.

Aquatic birds, such as waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds, are considered the natural reservoir of this virus. However, the AI virus usually does not cause disease in waterfowl or shorebirds.

A highly pathogenic form of this disease, HPAI H5N1 (usually referenced in the media as H5N1) has caused mortality in domestic poultry and some wild species of ducks, geese, egrets, herons, and gulls in Asia and Eastern Europe.

At present, H5N1 is a bird disease, and only rarely causes illness in people. As such, the human health risk from H5N1 under usual circumstances is extremely low. Transmission to humans has occurred principally from very close contact with domestic poultry. Highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza has not yet been found in North America. There is a concern, however, that H5N1 will be detected in North America in the future.

Wild birds are currently being monitored for the presence of H5N1 in the U.S. and testing of wild birds in Connecticut began in mid-July.



Charles and Duck Islands Closed to the Public During Heron and Egret Nesting Season

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Three great egret chicks huddle together in their nest at a Connecticut offshore island rookery.

Charles Island in Milford and Duck Island in Westbrook were closed to the public starting on **May 26 and will continue to be closed through September 9, 2006**. The closure is necessary to prevent continuing human disturbance to several state-listed nesting birds at these islands, including snowy egrets, great egrets (both state threatened species), glossy ibis, and little blue herons (state species of special concern).

“A tremendous amount of interference

with nesting birds has occurred on these islands in the past and has, at times, caused the DEP to close them on short notice,” said DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy. “Continued disturbance could result in abandonment of the nests, and possibly of the entire colony, which would have a tremendously negative effect on these sensitive bird populations. Because of that we decided to be proactive and close the islands at the start of the nesting season. We are

asking for the public’s help in obeying the closures and to report any observed violations.”

Both islands have been designated as Natural Area Preserves, primarily because of their importance as nesting habitats for herons and egrets. They also have been designated as Important Bird Areas by Audubon Connecticut.

Over the last several years, the DEP has worked cooperatively with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the nesting colonies (also known as rookeries), while also accommodating reasonable public access to the islands. Educational signs have been erected at access points used by the public to inform them about these rare birds and why they should not be disturbed. The rookeries are fenced and signs are mounted on the fence that read “Do Not Enter – Bird Nesting Area.”

Examples of disturbances to these rookeries include illegal camp-outs and bonfires, unleashed dogs roaming the island (which are perceived as predators by the birds), and human visitors entering the fenced, seasonally closed nesting areas.

Signs stating the closure of Charles and Duck Islands will be posted and DEP Environmental Conservation Police Officers will be patrolling the islands, particularly on weekends and after dark. Anyone caught trespassing on the islands will be arrested. Landing of watercraft on the beaches is prohibited. The public can help in this effort to protect the nesting birds by following the closure and reporting any observed violations at 1-800-842-4357.

Hike to Beaver Marsh Scheduled at Sessions Woods

A Beaver Marsh Hike will be held on Thursday, August 3, at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area. The hike will start at 4:00 PM and participants will walk to the beaver marsh to learn about this unique habitat. Meet in the exhibit area of the Conservation Education Center. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water.

The Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center is located on Route 69 in Burlington. Please preregister by calling the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (weekdays, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

Master Wildlife Conservationist Program Series Completed

The sixth Master Wildlife Conservationist Program (MWCP) series was completed this past May at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Fifteen enthusiastic volunteers attended the weekly classes, beginning in March. Participants were given lessons on wildlife ecology, conservation, management, natural history, and forestry. The group will now assist the Wildlife Division by supporting both research and outreach efforts. In addition, as part of their training, three Connecticut Environmental Conservation Police Officers participated in the weekly MWCP classes.

Upon completion of the classes, the new Master Wildlife Conservationists had great things to say about the program. Most enjoyed “learning from the professionals” and receiving such valuable information. Many felt the program was “too short” and will miss the weekly classes! A new MWCP series is slated for March 2007. Interested individuals can contact Laura Rogers-Castro (laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us or 860-675-8130) to be placed on a list to receive an application in November of this year.

Laura Rogers-Castro, MWCP Coordinator

National Audubon Society Announces Winners of its Prestigious Callison Award

The National Audubon Society recently announced the recipients of the 12th Annual Charles H. Callison Awards. The 2006 Callison Award for an Audubon Volunteer was given to Benjamin Olewine IV of Connecticut and the 2006 Callison Award for an Audubon Professional was awarded to two Audubon staff: Thomas R. Baptist, Executive Director of Audubon Connecticut, and David J. Miller, Executive Director of Audubon New York. The awards recognize individuals who have made remarkable contributions to conservation. Awardees were nominated by Audubon Chapter members and Audubon staff.

Few volunteers in recent memory have done as much to shape Audubon's conservation programs as Ben Olewine. His broad range of achievements at the international, national, state, and local levels has helped to guide Audubon on a course of sound environmental policy for the 21st century. Olewine, an avid opponent to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, has provided tremendous support to Audubon as a member and board leader at the national level and in several states, including Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Alaska. Ben also sits on the board of BirdLife International and the Connecticut Ornithological Association; and he has been active with The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary – reaching out to build strong coalitions with and between each organization.

Tom Baptist and Dave Miller have each achieved tremendous success in their respective state programs. For nearly two decades, Audubon Connecticut and New York have been actively involved in an effort to restore water quality and protect the important habitats throughout Long Island Sound. They have undertaken efforts to protect this Estuary of National Significance. Due to their strong and respected advocacy voice, they have been able to champion initiatives to reduce the amount of nitrogen in the Sound, as well as provide increased federal funding to restore the health of and advance new measures to protect and enhance important habitats across the Sound. Additionally, each has built a powerful state level Audubon program, with significant impact on environmental action and policy.

Under Tom Baptist's leadership, Connecticut's Greenwich Audubon Center has become a hub for local and regional conservation education. From deer management to land management, important



(Left to right): Tom Baptist, Benjamin Olewine, and Dave Miller were presented the Charles H. Callison Award by John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society.

Bird Areas (IBA) to Chapter relations, Baptist uses diplomacy, tact, and a deep understanding and respect for people and nature alike to achieve Audubon's conservation mission. "Tom Baptist has led his talented staff to develop a world-class network of Audubon Centers in Connecticut. In over nine years with Audubon, he has built the state program into a major force for advocacy in state politics and developed a comprehensive IBA program that works to conserve the areas most important to birds," said John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society.

The Charles H. Callison Award is named after a former executive vice president at Audubon, and was established in 1994 by the National Audubon Society to give special recognition to an individual or group for creativity, cooperation, persuasion, patience, and perseverance in promoting the Audubon mission at the local, state, or federal level. For more information about the Callison Award and its recipients, please contact Lynn (ltenefoss@audubon.org or 800-542-2748). For more information about the National Audubon Society, please visit <http://www.audubon.org/>.

Halloween in September

The Friends of Sessions Woods and the Wildlife Division will be sponsoring an open house celebrating Halloween and Halloween critters on September 24, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. This annual event at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center attracts families and children wearing their Halloween best! Participants can learn about wildlife, create animal-related crafts, and partake in traditional Halloween activities, such as bobbing for apples and eating donuts on a string. This year, visitors can search for insects and spiders in an outdoor "critter catch," play a game to learn about bats, and have a treat in the new outdoor pavilion. The exhibit area, featuring information on Connecticut's wildlife, also will be open for viewing during the event. If you would like more information or to preregister, please call the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130), Monday-Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Sessions Woods is located at 341 Milford Street (Route 69) in Burlington.

Landowner Incentive Program to Accept Applications Starting August 1, 2006

The DEP Wildlife Division's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) will open its second application period starting August 1, 2006, and ending October 31, 2006. During the first application period in 2005, the Division received 113 applications (70 from landowners, 4 from corporations, 9 from sportsmen's clubs, 17 from land trusts, 7 from non-governmental conservation organizations, and 6 from various private groups). Interested landowners need to apply to the Wildlife Division, using the LIP application form, which can be printed from the DEP's website (www.ct.gov/dep) or obtained from the DEP's Eastern District Headquarters in Marlborough (860-295-9523; ask for Judy Wilson or Robin Blum).

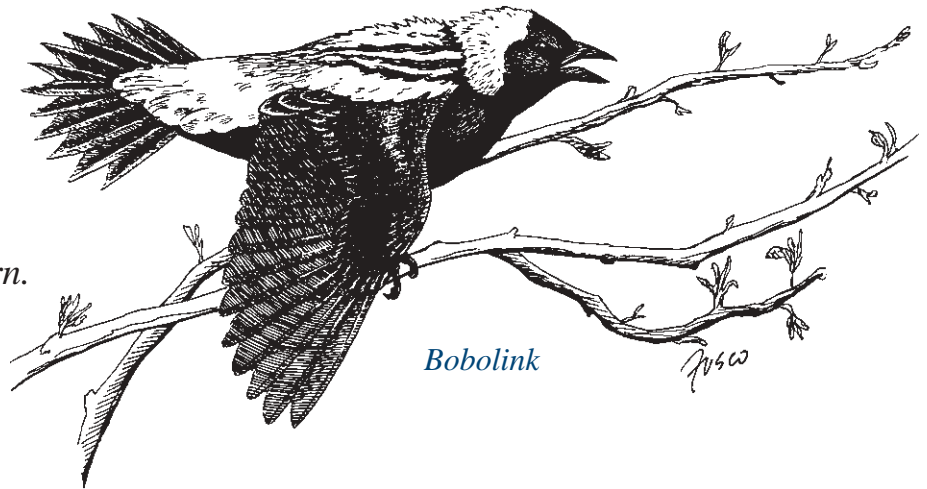
LIP provides technical advice and cost assistance to landowners for habitat management that will result in the protection, restoration, reclamation, enhancement, and maintenance of habitats that support fish, wildlife, and plant species considered at-risk. This program is made possible through grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which recognizes the need to help states with the stewardship of their at-risk species.

The LIP Coordinator will review all applications for program compliance. Applications will be ranked based on an on-site project/habitat evaluation conducted by the Wildlife Division. The evaluation will consider the current value of the property for wildlife and the potential of the proposed project to benefit LIP designated at-risk species, priority habitats, and imperiled natural communities. Funds will be committed based on rank, funding availability, and the recommendations of the LIP Project Committee. LIP can fund up to 75% of the cost of an approved project and the landowner and/or partnering conservation group must provide the matching funds and/or in-kind services.

Just for Kids

Bobolinks & Meadowlarks *Birds of Conservation Concern*

All animals need enough food, water, shelter, and space to survive. If they can't meet their needs, biologists become concerned about the animals. Bobolinks and meadowlarks are both birds of conservation concern.



Bobolink

Two Handsome Birds

The Eastern meadowlark has a brown back and black "V" on its bright yellow breast. Male bobolinks are known as "tuxedo birds," mostly white on their back and black on their breast. Female bobolinks (and males in winter) look like sparrows, brownish-yellow with dark streaks on their backs and heads.

Grasslands -- few and far between!

With the exception of beaver meadows, flood plains, and salt marshes, there are few natural grasslands in Connecticut. Bobolinks and meadowlarks need large fields for their habitat.

Delay the Hay!

When farmers hay their fields later in the season, young bobolinks and meadowlarks have time to grow! Eggs and young birds can survive if their habitat is undisturbed. More insects are available to eat, too, if the fields are hayed later.

Eastern
meadowlark



Insectivorous

Bobolinks and meadowlarks eat mostly insects during the breeding season. The bobolink's nickname, however, is "ricebird." During migration, bobolinks raid rice fields as they make their way south to the Tropics.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- Aug. 15-17 **2006 Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (NEPARC) Annual Meeting** will be held at the DEP Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center on Route 69 in Burlington. To view a tentative agenda and obtain registration information, go to NEPARC's website at www.parcplace.org/northeast.html.
- Aug. 20 **Trees and Wildlife**, at 1:00 PM, Join Master Wildlife Conservationist Frank Junga on this 2.5-mile hike on the "Tree Identificaion Trail" at Sessions Woods. Learn all about Connecticut's trees and their wildlife value. Meet at the flagpole in front of the building. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water.
- Sept. 1-4 Visit the Wildlife Division's booth in the Agricultural Building at the Woodstock Fair.
- Sept. 15 Report use of bluebird nest boxes by sending in a Bluebird Nest Box Network survey card to the Wildlife Division. Cards are available by calling (860) 675-8130.
- Mid September Peak of broad-winged hawk migration in Connecticut.
- Sept. 24 **Halloween in September**, from 1:00-3:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington (located on Route 69). (See page 17 for more information).
- Sept. 24 **National Hunting and Fishing Day** (To learn more, visit the National Shooting Sports Foundation website at www.nssf.org)
- Sept. 30 Report use of bat houses to the Wildlife Division. Call (860) 675-8130 for more information.
- October Most adult mosquitoes disappear after the first hard frost.

Hunting Season Dates

- Sept. 2006 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices (\$14 for 10 tags).
- Sept. 1 Early squirrel hunting season opens.
- Sept. 15-Nov. 14 First portion of the deer and turkey bowhunting seasons.
- Waterfowl season dates had not been finalized by the time this issue went to press. The 2006-2007 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide should be available at DEP and town clerk offices by mid- to late August. Also, check the DEP's website (www.ct.gov/dep) to view the guide.
- See the 2006 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for specific season dates and details. The guide is available at Wildlife Division offices, town halls, and on the DEP's website.

Step Up to the Plate for Wildlife...

and show your support by displaying a wildlife license plate on your vehicle.



There are two great designs to choose from: the state-endangered bald eagle or the secretive bobcat.

Funds raised from sales and renewals of the plates will be used for wildlife research and management projects; the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, and management of wildlife habitat; and public outreach that promotes the conservation of Connecticut's wildlife diversity.

Application forms are available at DEP and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at www.ct.gov/dmv.



Connecticut Wildlife

Subscription Order

Please make checks payable to:
Connecticut Wildlife, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013

Check one:

1 Year (\$6.00) 2 Years (\$11.00) 3 Years (\$16.00)

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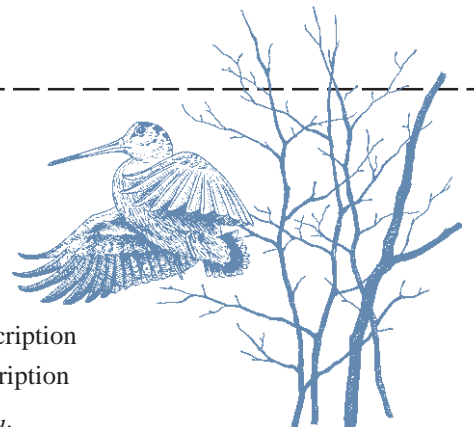
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An American oystercatcher pauses with a small mollusk on the Connecticut shoreline. The oystercatcher is listed as a state species of special concern. This bird has slowly been expanding its range in Connecticut over the past decade.

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