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Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



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Eye on the Wild

Dogs and Wildlife

Pet owners are passionate about their dogs. I know because I have a dog. When it comes to where dogs can be and what they can do, especially when it involves state parks and wildlife management areas, things get complicated. Many people believe that dogs should be allowed to roam free. They also may think their pet would never harm wildlife.

From a wildlife manager's perspective, dogs being walked by their owners should not be allowed to run free in areas that are important for the conservation of wildlife (wildlife areas, natural preserves, beaches, etc.). Free-roaming dogs wander into fields, forests, and wetlands. There is no doubt about it, and there is scientific evidence to support it – dogs can be a threat and disturbance to wildlife. They are perceived by wildlife as predators. Ground nesting birds are easily disturbed by dogs and may abandon or lose their nests if constantly disturbed. Dogs also chase wildlife, including their helpless offspring. Even though an owner may think he has control of his dog, once the dog is focused on the pursuit of a squirrel, rabbit, deer, or shorebird, it may be difficult to get the dog to stop before the damage is done. Dogs and wildlife can be a deadly combination unless responsible pet owners keep their dogs on a leash and refrain from bringing them into restricted areas that are posted for the protection of wildlife.

The DEP has rules regarding pets in parks and wildlife areas by posting rules on signs. Environmental Conservation Police Officers regularly patrol parks and wildlife areas. However, it really is up to dog owners to follow the rules and understand how devastating dogs can be to the wildlife. Most dog owners follow the rules. But, those who do not can have a profound impact on wildlife.

The majority of Connecticut state parks allow dogs on a leash. The shoreline parks (Hammonasset Beach, Harkness, Rocky Neck, Silver Sands, Sherwood Island) prohibit dogs on the beach at all times of the year. Dogs are not allowed at Sherwood Island State Park from April 15-September 30. The "no dogs on the beach" rule provides protection for beach-nesting shorebirds (i.e., piping plovers, least terns; see article on page 8). Although the shoreline parks are heavily used by the public over the summer, they also provide important habitat for a multitude of wildlife species.

A new regulation went into effect 2 years ago that requires dogs be on a "leash no longer than 7 feet and under the control of their owner or keeper" at all state wildlife management areas. The only exception is dogs in the act of hunting or training for hunting. Wildlife management areas have been set aside primarily for the conservation of wildlife populations and their habitat. Public use of these areas, including dog walking, is a benefit, but not the main reason for their existence.

Kathy Herz, Editor

Cover:

Tidal wetland restoration projects along the Connecticut coastline have benefited the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow and other wildlife. These projects are conducted by the Connecticut Tidal Wetland Restoration Team, which recently received the Coastal America Partnership Award (see page 16).

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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Survey Seeks to Find Long-eared Owls

Written by Jeremy Leifert

The long-eared owl is a member of the owl family Strigidae, which contains most of the world's owl species. Although widely distributed throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, the long-eared owl is listed in several Northeast states as endangered, threatened, or special concern due to dramatic drops in populations and loss of preferred nesting habitat. Connecticut currently lists the long-eared owl as endangered, with an extremely low number of confirmed nesting sites. Long-eared owls are seen or heard in the state during winter while roosting.

Long-eared owls often nest in dense coniferous forests, roost in open forests, and hunt over open fields for small mammals and other birds. Preferred nest sites are re-used stick nests of birds, such as crows, ravens, or hawks, among thick stands of hemlock and spruce.

The long-eared owl is 1 of 4 target species of the Wildlife Division's Night Bird Callback Survey Project. This project is part of a statewide initiative to more thoroughly assess the nocturnal avian species that breed in Connecticut.

Survey Methods

Throughout April 2010, Division staff conducted point-count callback surveys along 8 established nightbird survey routes in which long-eared owls were detected during the 2007-2009 surveys. Three additional point surveys were conducted in areas with historical nesting records of long-eared owls. These surveys were conducted to confirm the presence of long-eared owls and identify locations for future nest searches.

The 11 routes were surveyed twice during April, with 3 survey points per route. The points were chosen by selecting existing nightbird survey points with past long-eared owl detections, as well as the nearest points before and after along their respective routes, creating a survey radius of more than 1 mile around each detection. Survey routes near areas with older historical records were created by placing 3 points within 1 mile of the historical detection point.

Survey protocols for winter nightbird surveys were used, with each survey beginning at midnight. A 10-minute callback recording was used at each point to elicit responses from owls in the area.

This recording contained an eastern screech owl call at the 3-minute mark, a long-eared owl call at the 6-minute mark, and silence for the last 4 minutes. Any owls detected were recorded individually on the data sheet by indicating the species and which time period during the survey that the owls were detected. For any long-eared owl detections, subsequent daytime nest searches were performed to confirm nesting activity in the vicinity of the calls.

Survey Results

Over the course of the surveys, 1 long-eared owl was detected. Division staff returned to this site and performed a nest search in mid-May 2010. During the search, 2 separate ideal stick nests were found in areas of thick hemlock and spruce, but no long-eared owls were seen. It was difficult to determine if these were long-eared owl nests (as the owls often re-use nests of other species) and if they were recent, active nests. Continued monitoring of this area will be necessary during future breeding seasons to confirm the use of the nests.

The Future

Many factors could be contributing to low populations of long-eared owls in Connecticut. Loss of preferred habitat and encroaching development are two intertwined threats to this species. Many of the survey sites that were visited are already suffering from pressures, such as noise pollution from nearby roads and industrial buildings, as well as new housing developments. In addition, many of the survey points with records of long-eared owls contained an abundance of barred owls, which can be ferociously territorial. Barred owls, along with great horned owls, pose a direct threat to long-eared owl territories and nests.

Identifying and concentrating future



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P. J. FUSCO

The long-eared owl was a common Connecticut resident in the late 1800s, nesting in thick evergreen stands and in low brush along the coast. Populations began to decline around 1900. Long-eared owls are now uncommon winter visitors along the coast and the Connecticut River valley from November through mid-April; they are seldom seen inland. This endangered species now rarely nests in the state.

survey efforts near larger tracts of hemlock and spruce that are adjacent to open fields will be necessary to gain a clearer understanding of the distribution of long-eared owls in Connecticut, along with the long-term health of the habitats.

If you observe a long-eared owl, please report your observation to the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM). A fact sheet on the long-eared owl is available on the DEP Web site at www.ct.gov/dep/wildlife. More information about the long-eared owl also is available at: www.owlpages.com www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Long-eared_Owl/lifehistory

Jeremy Leifert is a seasonal research assistant for the Wildlife Division

New England Cottontail Projects Making Strides in CT

Written by Travis Goodie

The Wildlife Division has been studying the New England cottontail for the past decade. It is the only species of rabbit native to Connecticut. It occupies areas with dense shrubs and thickets. Populations have been declining throughout the state and New England due to habitat loss and fragmentation and competition from the introduced eastern cottontail.

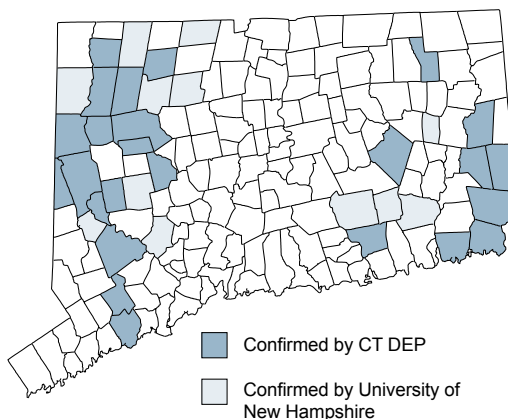
The Wildlife Division is working in cooperation with the University of Connecticut Department of Natural Resources and the Environment and other New England states to keep New England cottontail populations healthy to help prevent the species from being listed as endangered. The New England cottontail is currently considered a species of greatest conservation need in Connecticut and a Northeast species of regional conservation concern. It also has been designated as a candidate for federal Endangered Species Act protection.

Several projects are currently under way in Connecticut, including an ongoing distribution study; a telemetry study looking at habitat use, movement, and survival; a cooperative project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to conduct habitat work on town and private land; habitat restoration projects on 5 state-owned properties; and sampling of imperiled habitats to assess use by New England cottontails.

Distribution of Cottontails

Since 2000, the majority of distribution data has been collected from hunter harvest data, roadkill specimens, DEP

New England Cottontail Confirmed Towns in Connecticut



Research Assistant II Travis Goodie is about to release a cottontail that was live-trapped as part of a project to study the statewide distribution of New England and eastern cottontails.

live-trapping efforts, and fecal pellet collections. To date, New England cottontails have been documented in 38 Connecticut towns. This past winter, 8 new towns were sampled via live trapping, resulting in the capture of 19 rabbits (species confirmation through DNA analysis is pending). Additionally, 10 other towns were sampled via fecal pellet collection (129 pellets). DNA analysis of live-trapped rabbits and fecal pellets is being conducted by the University of New Hampshire, with results expected by the end of summer. Based on pelage (fur) characteristics of two rabbits captured in Southbury and Washington, they are likely New England cottontails. These results will increase the statewide distribution this year. Those who would like to donate roadkilled rabbits or harvested rabbits for species identification should contact the Division's Franklin Wildlife office at 860-642-7239.

Radio Telemetry Study

The Division initiated a 2-year telemetry study in 2008 at 5 sites in eastern (North Stonington, Salem, Scotland) and western (Kent, Morris) Connecticut. In the first year of the 2-year study, no New England cottontails were captured in Salem. Efforts were moved to a new location in Scotland where the species was

known to exist.

Over 2 years, 129 cottontails (48 New England, 81 eastern) were live-trapped and outfitted with radio telemetry collars. All collared rabbits were monitored during the day and at night for at least a year unless they experienced mortality. Telemetry data have been collected and are being analyzed to quantify home range and core area size, habitat preferences, and mortality rates for the 2 species.

Creating Habitat for Cottontails

The largest problem New England cottontails are facing is the loss and modification of their habitat due to the natural process of succession and alterations made by human activities. Because the New England cottontail is considered a habitat specialist and thrives in large areas of early successional habitat and shrub thickets, it is imperative to provide such habitat so that they can survive and flourish. Quality New England cottontail habitat is achieved when there is a minimum of 20,000 stems/acre. This can be accomplished by clearing areas of larger trees and promoting the regeneration of stems that are less than 3 inches in diameter.

Currently, there are 5 areas on state land where habitat projects are underway, providing 157 acres of new habitat for

existing populations of New England cottontails. A 13-acre site has already been cut at Roraback Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Harwinton, with 24 more acres to be added before the end of the year. Habitat management also has been initiated at Camp Columbia State Forest in Morris where a 5-acre area has been cut and an adjoining 3 acres will be added over the winter. Other locations where habitat work will be conducted include Goshen WMA (Goshen; 71 acres), Housatonic River WMA (Kent and Cornwall; 38 acres), and Zemko Pond WMA (Salem; 3 acres). Before each area is cut, stem density counts and presence/absence of cottontails will be recorded to help with the future assessment of the project. New England cottontails currently exist at 4 of the 5 project sites. In addition to the work being implemented by the DEP, the USFWS has plans to conduct habitat projects with Old Lyme Open Space and Avalonia Land Conservancy in Ledyard.

Searching Imperiled Habitats

Several habitat types in Connecticut are imperiled, including white cedar swamps, red cedar swamps, coastal headlands and bluffs, and grasslands. Some of these habitats were sampled this past winter via pellet collections to see if

New England cottontails were using any of these imperiled habitats. The white and red cedar swamps that were visited seemed to be void of any cottontails, only yielding 1 pellet from 1 of the 10 visited sites. Most of the cedar swamps were inundated with water and lacked a thick understory growth that is needed by cottontails. The coastal sites seemed to be the most promising locations visited, with a total of 92 pellets collected from 9 of 14 coastal sites. A healthy population of New England cottontails has already been documented at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve in Groton, which is the largest undeveloped coastal peninsula between Boston and New York City. All of the samples collected will be sent to the University of New Hampshire for analysis this summer.

With several projects well underway, it seems like Connecticut may have a

light at the end of the tunnel for the New England cottontail. Persistence and continuous work to provide habitat for the New England cottontail will play a large contributing role in the future of the species. The Division will continue its efforts to monitor New England cottontails in the state and to try to provide them with what they need to persist.

Travis Goodie is a Research Assistant II for the University of Connecticut's Natural Resources Department



B. EMBACHER, DEER PROGRAM

An eastern cottontail exhibiting a white spot on its forehead is fitted with a radio-collar to track its movements.

The 19th Annual Connecticut Envirothon a Huge Success

Written by Peter Picone

Envision a warm, sunny spring day next to a crystal clear lake surrounded by woods — that was the backdrop for the 19th Annual Connecticut Envirothon held at Deer Lake Boy Scout Reservation in Killingworth on May 20, 2010. Teams from several Connecticut high schools and one home-schooled team competed in the event by taking exams that covered the subjects of wildlife, forestry, soils, aquatics, and water resource planning. Each team consisted of 5 students who studied the 5 subject areas throughout the school year to prepare for the Envirothon. The students had the option to attend 5 training seminars prior to the competition and to download study materials from the Connecticut Envirothon Web site (www.ctenvirothon.org) to sharpen their knowledge of natural resources. Teams registered 5 students and 2 alternates to participate. The five exams are taken as a team. A portion of the testing involved giving an oral presentation on this year's special topic, Water Resource Planning.

The Litchfield High School team earned first place and will travel to California State University in Fresno, California, to compete in the Canon Envirothon competition in early August.

Peter Picone is a Wildlife Biologist with the Division's Habitat Management Program



P. PICONE, HABITAT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Litchfield High School team earned first place at the 19th Annual Connecticut Envirothon. The team will travel to California State University in Fresno, California, to compete in the Canon Envirothon competition. The team consists of 5 students, 2 alternates, and a team advisor.

The 2011 Connecticut Envirothon will be held at Rocky Neck State Park, in East Lyme, in May.

2009 Disease Surveillance in White-tailed Deer

Written by Paul Lewis

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a degenerative neurological disease that affects cervids, such as deer, elk, and moose. First documented in Colorado in the late 1960s, CWD has since been documented in 19 states, 2 Canadian provinces, and the Republic of Korea.

CWD in the Northeast

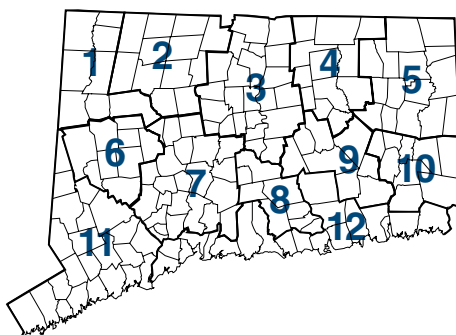
The first case of CWD in the Northeast was documented in 2005 when the disease was confirmed in 5 captive bred deer and 2 wild deer from New York (Oneida County). Since discovering CWD in 2005, New York has been collecting about 1,500 deer a year and all tests suggest that the disease was discovered early and eradicated.

Two other states in the eastern United States have confirmed the presence of CWD (Hampshire County, West Virginia and Fredrick County, Virginia). In West Virginia, 3 free-range deer tested positive for CWD in 2005. Surveillance efforts conducted by West Virginia have resulted in a total of 74 deer being confirmed positive for CWD in Hampshire County as of spring 2010. Virginia's first positive case of CWD came from a deer harvested in 2009. Over 200 deer were tested in this active surveillance area; only 1 came back positive and it was harvested less than a mile from the West Virginia state line.

New Cases of CWD

North Dakota (2009) and Missouri (2010) have recently discovered CWD within their states. In Sioux County, North Dakota, a sick-looking mule deer harvested in fall 2009 tested positive for CWD. Since 2002, more than 14,000 deer, elk, and moose have been tested in

Connecticut Deer Management Zones



A total of 623 testable samples were collected from deer harvested during the 2009 archery, shotgun/rifle, or crop damage seasons and from deer killed on roadways throughout the state. All samples tested negative for CWD.

North Dakota and were negative for the disease. In Linn County, Missouri, a captive-bred white-tailed deer tested positive for CWD in 2010. The disease has not been documented in free-ranging deer in Missouri.

CWD Testing in Connecticut

The fact that CWD was documented in New York only 150 miles from the Connecticut border, Connecticut deer management zones (1, 6, 11) that border New York have been designated as "high risk areas" and surveillance efforts were intensified. The rest of the deer management zones throughout the state have been designated as "moderate risk." The DEP, in cooperation with the University of Connecticut Wildlife Research Center, established an objective to collect 298 deer from both the high and moderate risk areas.

During the 2009 CWD surveillance period, 623 testable samples were collected from deer harvested during the archery, shotgun/rifle, or crop damage seasons and from deer killed on roadways throughout the state. Over 350 deer came from taxidermists and meat processors who generously offered to participate in CWD collection efforts. A total of 287

samples were collected from the "high risk" area and 336 were collected from the "moderate risk" area. Samples were submitted to the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for testing and all tested negative for CWD.

Harvest reporting requirements changed for the 2009 shotgun/rifle season from the previous years. Biological check stations were only open for the first 4 days of the 3-week season. These 4 days are considered peak harvest days. After the 4-day check station period, all deer were required to be checked by phone or online. Reducing the number of days check stations were open made it difficult to collect enough samples for CWD surveillance. Additionally, warm weather during the first 4 days of the season and a large mast crop (acorns) led to a 30% decline from 2008's shotgun/rifle harvest. To collect the required samples, hunters in certain areas were contacted directly and asked to donate samples. This was made possible by the new reporting system that compiles the harvest data quickly and efficiently, allowing hunters to be contacted before they disposed of the deer carcass. Collecting samples from butchers and taxidermist has been instrumental in data collection.

Parapoxvirus Detected

In addition to CWD sampling, deer from the town of Lebanon were tested for parapoxvirus in 2009. Parapoxvirus causes skin diseases in sheep, goats, and cattle. Recently, a hunter in Connecticut and one from Virginia were believed to have been exposed to the virus while processing a harvested deer. Both patients reported having open cuts on their hands while handling deer carcasses about 2 weeks prior to the onset of symptoms. Parapoxvirus symptoms in infected animals generally include lesions, scabs, and blisters around the mouth, lips, and muzzle, sometimes showing up on other body areas that animals may rub against each other. The case of human parapoxvirus in Connecticut was believed to have been transmitted by a deer harvested in Lebanon in 2008. Nine samples were collected from deer harvested in Lebanon (7 males, 2 females) in 2009. All tests were conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and were negative for parapoxvirus. Hunters also were asked questions

about whether they had observed deer showing signs of parapoxvirus. Of 9 hunters surveyed, none reported observing the characteristic lesions on a deer or themselves.

Parapoxvirus should be of little concern to hunters. However, the same general precautions should be applied to all deer harvested: avoid shooting, handling, or consuming any animal that is behaving abnormally or appears to be sick, and wear latex or rubber gloves when field dressing and processing deer. Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed. Instruments should be placed in a bleach-water solution (1:1 ratio) for an hour and left to air dry before reusing.

Testing to Continue in 2010

The Wildlife Division and University of Connecticut Wildlife Research Center thank all hunters, butchers, and taxidermists for their assistance in making the 2009 CWD surveillance season successful. Anyone who shares an interest in deer

is strongly encouraged to participate in this ongoing surveillance program. The Department will continue collecting deer heads for CWD testing throughout the state during the 2010 fall deer hunting season. Those interested in donating deer heads for testing should call 860-424-6060 or the Wildlife Division's Franklin office 860-642-7239 so a pickup can be arranged (typically the next day). Heads should be stored in a cool place or refrigerated. Anyone who observes deer displaying symptoms associated with CWD (abnormal behavior, staggering, lowered head and ears, and emaciation) or parapoxvirus (lesions, scabs, and blisters around the mouth) should contact the Division of Law Enforcement (860-424-3333), the Franklin Wildlife office (860-642-7239) or the Division's Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130).

Paul Lewis is a Seasonal Research Assistant for the Division's Deer Program

CT Duck Stamps to Be Valid for Calendar Year

The hunting privileges associated with the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp (Duck Stamp) are changing to a calendar year, January 1 through December 31. To facilitate this change, for the remainder of calendar year 2010 and 2011, the DEP will issue a 2010-2011 Duck Stamp with privileges that begin on July 1, 2010 and end on December 31, 2011. Connecticut Duck Stamps purchased earlier in 2010 are considered equivalent to the new 2010-2011 stamp. Starting in 2012, duck hunting privileges will be for a calendar year, January 1 through December 31. This change is due to legislation passed in April 2010 by the Connecticut State Legislature. The legislation also increased the cost of the Duck Stamp to \$13.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund also has been recreated, meaning that all money collected from the sale of stamps will once again go directly toward wetland conservation projects and improvement of waterfowl hunting access in Connecticut. Over \$1.1 million have been raised and spent on wetland habitat conservation in Connecticut since 1993, when the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program was initiated. These funds have been provided, in large part, by hunters. A substantial portion of the \$1.1 million also was raised through sales to Duck Stamp collectors and to collectors of artistic prints from 1993 until 2002, when the production and sale of prints was discontinued.

Hunters 16 years of age or older are required to purchase a Connecticut Duck Stamp every year if they plan to hunt waterfowl in Connecticut. However, anyone who has an interest in wetland and waterfowl conservation

can purchase and collect stamps. The stamps feature a different waterfowl species each year. The 2010-2011 stamp features an illustration of the common goldeneye by Clint Herdman, a wildlife artist from Beacon Falls, Connecticut. Mr. Herdman is an avid conservationist and the current Vice President of the Connecticut Waterfowlers Association. He and several other sportsmen worked with the State Legislature to help recreate the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

Duck Stamps can be purchased at town halls, select DEP facilities, outdoor equipment and bait and tackle stores, the DEP's License and Revenue office at 79 Elm Street in Hartford, or on the DEP Web site (www.ct.gov/dep/sportsmenlicensing).



Don't wait until the last minute! Sign up for a Conservation Education/Firearms Safety course today. Check the DEP Web site (www.ct.gov/dep/hunting) for class times and locations or call the Division's Franklin Wildlife (860-642-7239) or Sessions Woods (860-675-8130) offices during business hours.

Many Helping Hands Protect Piping Plovers and Least Terns

Written by Kathy Herz

Over the past 24 years, the Wildlife Division has been challenged with trying to protect undisturbed sandy beach areas along the Connecticut coastline so that piping plovers and least terns are able to nest and raise their young. The plight faced by these threatened shorebirds is discussed every year in *Connecticut Wildlife* and in press releases. Yet, the birds just don't seem to get a break.

Every spring, staff from the Wildlife Division and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with several Master Wildlife Conservationists and other volunteers, head to the coastline to fence off beach nesting areas. The string fencing

needs to be erected before the arrival of hot summer days when people come out in droves to lay on the beach, go fishing, or enjoy the outdoors. Once these critical areas are fenced off, workers and volunteers, known as plover monitors, check the beaches every day to locate nests, protect them from predators and human disturbance, and monitor nesting success.

In April, when string fencing and warning signs are first placed around large sections of plover and tern nesting areas, the beaches are quiet and largely empty of people. Only a few anglers or walkers may be encountered. The plover pairs have arrived from their spring

migration and can be seen darting across the sand as they attempt to establish a nesting territory. Least terns arrive at the nesting areas in May, shortly after the fences are erected. It's hard to imagine what these birds will have to face when warm, sunny weather arrives.

Just as the

birds seem to settle on the eggs in their nests, the chaos begins. The beaches become filled with people. And, with these people comes garbage, which attracts raccoons, rats, gulls, and other predators. The people also bring along their dogs, which are not allowed on most beaches but are often seen running off the leash and either trampling a nest or scaring away the birds.

Most beach visitors respect the fencing and heed the signs that say "Please Keep Away." People are usually even more cooperative after a plover monitor explains the importance of the string fencing and of not disturbing the birds. However, it just takes a few people who ignore the signs and fences to ruin a nesting season for these small birds. The plover monitor's job is to either try to prevent disturbances from happening or to minimize their effects. Unfortunately, every year, nesting plovers and terns have to contend with trash on the beaches, crowds of people, bonfires, racing ATVs, loose dogs and cats, fireworks displays, predators, and people who just don't care. It's amazing that these birds are able to successfully rear their young at all.

Efforts to protect shorebird nesting areas and nest sites are making a difference. Although numbers have fluctuated over the years, the 44 pairs of piping plovers that bred along the Connecticut coastline in 2009 is above the federal recovery goal of 30 pairs. To be considered a recovered population by the USFWS, 30 or more pairs would have to breed in Connecticut for 5 consecutive years. 2009 was the ninth consecutive year that the state has had 30 or more breeding pairs. Results are still pending for the 2010 nesting season. Although exclosing nests is a time consuming and labor intensive task, in areas with high predator populations or human and dog activity, it is very effective.

The number of least terns observed throughout the southern New England/New York region has remained stable since 1990. However, the number of least terns nesting in Connecticut continues to decrease; in 2009, the lowest number of nesting least tern pairs was recorded. The low number of chicks being fledged by this species in recent years has been a concern. In addition, some traditional

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Top photo: Master Wildlife Conservationist and volunteer plover monitor Maria Stockmal scans the beach in search of plover and tern nests. **Bottom photo:** Shorebird beach nesting areas are roped off with string fencing and marked with informational signs.

Annual Breeding Waterfowl Survey Completed

Written by Kelly Kubik

Staff from the Wildlife Division completed the annual breeding waterfowl survey in April. Each state in the Atlantic Flyway from Virginia north to New Hampshire participates in this survey. The survey began in 1989 and became fully operational in 1991. The data derived from this survey are used in the Eastern Mallard Adaptive Harvest Management models. The results of these models are used to set duck hunting regulations in the Atlantic Flyway.

Survey Methods

In Connecticut, this ground based survey targets 56 randomly selected 1-km² plots in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Because these plots are randomly selected, they fall on both private and public property. The plots are distributed within 3 ecological strata: Litchfield highlands, central lowlands, and coastal saltmarsh. The majority of the plots are located in the central lowlands strata because this physiographic area constitutes the greatest percentage of habitat in the state. The coastal saltmarsh stratum was added in 1993 because it was not well represented by the initial statewide random plot selection. Salt marshes are important to black ducks in Connecticut and these plots help provide an index to the coastal breeding population of black ducks.

This survey is timed to coincide with peak breeding activity in the state. All 56 plots were surveyed between April 21-30, 2010. Surveys were conducted by ground checking all water bodies and any suitable terrestrial habitat where waterfowl could be found within the plot boundary. Per survey protocol, 20% of the plots were checked at either dawn or dusk.

A drake index (drakes/pairs+drakes) was calculated for each species to determine if survey timing was appropriate. A high drake index indicates good survey timing. It shows that local ducks have begun nesting and most migrants have moved north to their breeding grounds. A low index shows the survey was conducted too early and paired migrants may still be present. A drake index between 0.50 and 0.75 is indicative of a well-timed survey.

The breeding waterfowl survey not only provides an index of waterfowl breeding populations, but also provides managers with an idea of current habitat



conditions in the state. While most of Connecticut received record rainfall prior to this year's survey, low water levels were noted in some of the surveyed plots. This was primarily due to the breaching of beaver dams or drainage associated with construction activities. Even though these types of habitat changes are inevitable over the years, they are one of the major factors that affect breeding waterfowl populations.

Survey Results

Mallards continue to dominate the survey in Connecticut. The mallard estimate for 2010 was 18,038 pairs. This result is less than a 1% decrease from 2009 and a 7% increase from the 5-year average. The mallard drake index was 0.71. Mallards are adaptable, regularly nesting in a variety of habitats and tolerable of human disturbance.

The Canada goose estimate for 2010 was 12,415 pairs. This represents a 29% increase from 2009 and a 23% increase from the 5-year average. The greatest densities of breeding Canada geese were seen in plots that occurred in urban areas. Connecticut's resident goose hunting seasons are having an impact on goose populations, though primarily in rural areas where hunters have access to the birds.

The wood duck estimate for 2010 was 7,989 breeding pairs. This is a 34% increase

from 2009 and a 1% decrease from the 5-year average. The wood duck drake index was 0.50.

Black ducks were observed in an inland survey plot for only the third time since 2001. The breeding black duck estimate for 2010 was 604 breeding pairs, representing a 151% increase from 2009 and a 60% increase from the 5-year average. Large fluctuations in breeding pair estimates for black ducks is likely attributed to ever changing habitat conditions and particularly the birds' secretive nature. Black ducks that breed in inland areas prefer forested wetlands where it is difficult for surveyors to detect them. The 2010 black duck drake index was 0.60.

Connecticut's wetlands are essential for continued biodiversity in the state. As the state continues to experience residential and commercial development, it is essential that the continued acquisition, enhancement, and protection of remaining wetland ecosystems occur.

Kelly Kubik is a technician with the Division's Migratory Gamebird Program

Connecticut Breeding Waterfowl Pair Estimates for Major Species

Species	2009	2010	5-Year Avg.
Black Duck	241	604	377
Canada Goose	9,620	12,415	10,053
Mallard	18,112	18,038	16,850
Wood Duck	5,946	7,989	8,063

Bird of Stature - The Great Egret

Article and photography by Paul Fusco

Connecticut's salt marshes are highly productive environments. They are dynamic systems that filter pollution, reduce flood damage, serve as nursery areas for fish and shellfish, and provide critical habitat for many wildlife species. The importance of salt marsh habitat to migratory birds cannot be under-

stated. These marshes are critical stopover areas for thousands of shorebirds, ducks, geese, herons, egrets, rails, and songbirds that depend on this habitat to rest safely and build up fat reserves before continuing on their enduring migrations. Over the last 100 years, Connecticut has lost 35% of its original salt marsh habitat due to filling and dredging activities. It has become increasingly important to protect the remaining salt marshes in the state. Since the 1970s, tidal wetland protection laws and, more recently, wetland restoration projects have helped to maintain quality salt marsh habitat that benefits both wildlife and people.

The salt marsh is the best place to look for one of Connecticut's most striking birds. Standing over 3 feet tall, with a wingspan approaching 5 feet, the great egret is elegant and graceful. Its snow-white plumage and long, flowing breeding plumes, together with long black legs, slender body, and long neck, give this bird its stately appearance.

Moving slowly and purposefully in the marsh, an egret stalks its prey. When a potential meal is seen, the egret will slowly lean forward, zeroing in on the target before striking with lightning speed to grab the prey in its long, pointed bill. Small fish make up the majority of their diet, although the birds also will take small snakes, frogs, mice, and crabs.

Great egrets are primarily found along the coast during the breeding months in spring and summer. Post-breeding wanderers in late summer and fall may be found throughout the state. Egrets are hardy birds, with some individuals being found in Connecticut salt marshes well into winter, especially in mild years when marshes remain partially open.

In typical heron fashion when in flight, the great egret holds its neck folded backwards with its head between its shoulders, and long legs trailing behind. The wings are broad and rounded. Seen at a distance, the wingbeats are not as rapid as the smaller snowy egret and their flight is more buoyant than the larger great blue heron.

Great egrets are the largest egret in North America. Their North American breeding range extends from southern Canada south to Florida, the entire Gulf Coast into Mexico, the Mississippi River Valley, and parts of the western United States, including the Pacific Coast from Oregon into Mexico. They also are found in South America, the Caribbean Islands, and warmer parts of the Eastern Hemisphere. In winter, great egrets retreat from northern parts of their range, with most of the eastern population wintering from Virginia south.

Conservation

The first modern documented nesting of great egrets in Connecticut was in 1961 in the Norwalk Islands. Starting in 1977, the Wildlife Division, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been conducting surveys every 3 years to estimate the number of egrets and other colonial nesting birds that breed in our state. The first survey yielded a count of 20 pairs of birds. The great egret population slowly grew during the 1980s. Since the early 1990s, estimated numbers increased to an average of over 100 pairs per survey, including a high of 134 pairs in the 1998 survey.

The Colonial Waterbird Survey represents an approximate total for breeding birds, providing the DEP with a



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Great egrets hunt with their neck extended, feeding on small fish that they catch by striking out with their long neck and bill.

general trend for species populations. The next survey is scheduled to take place in the summer of 2010, so look for the newest count results for great egrets and other colonial waterbirds in a future issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*.

While great egrets are fairly common throughout their range, the population is still recovering from past market hunting. The great egret is listed as a threatened species in Connecticut because breeding areas are few and vulnerable. The population is fairly stable.

Great egrets breed in colonies, called rookeries, on offshore islands where they build loose stick nests in the taller trees. Rookeries must be relatively free from human disturbance and predators to be successful. Threats have the potential of causing total nesting failure of whole rookeries and abandonment of the colony if the situation is severe enough. Nesting areas are protected with signage and fencing, and public access is restricted during the breeding season at several offshore islands in Connecticut. For example, Charles Island in Milford and Duck Island in Westbrook are closed to the public every year during the nesting season. The Wildlife Division encourages people to help reduce threats by



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staying away from fenced nesting areas and not leaving food scraps behind when visiting coastal areas. Litter and food scraps attract predators, such as raccoons, which can have devastating effects on colonial waterbird rookeries.

If nest predation becomes too severe, the birds will be forced to abandon their rookery and may not return the following year. Raccoons have been responsible for this situation in Connecticut in the past. For this reason, it is important to protect both potential island rookery habitats and the rookeries currently being used. If one island becomes unsuitable for nesting, the birds need to have an alternate place to go. Offshore islands that are suitable breeding areas for egrets are few in Connecticut and need to be protected on a continuing basis to maintain healthy egret populations.

Paul Fusco is the Art Director and Wildlife Photographer for the Division's Outreach Program

The Plumes

Egrets get their name from the French word *aigrette*, which means ornamental plume. Grown during the breeding season, these long showy feathers almost led to the species' demise as plume hunters wantonly killed egrets to supply plumes for use in women's hats. This sparked one of the most significant grassroots conservation initiatives in United States history. The initiatives resulted in landmark bird protection laws, the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge system, and the formation of the National Audubon Society, which has used the great egret as its symbol ever since.

Connecticut Hunting and Fishing Appreciation Day, Sept. 25

September 25, 2010, is Connecticut Hunting and Fishing Appreciation Day at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington. This free event, which is sponsored by the Friends of Sessions Woods and the Wildlife Division, celebrates the contributions of hunters and anglers to the conservation of Connecticut's natural resources.

Fun activities for all ages are planned for the event, along with educational programs and workshops about hunting and fishing. There also will be drawings and door prizes for a variety of hunting, fishing, and outdoor equipment. Anyone interested in fish and wildlife, not just hunting and fishing, is encouraged to attend this fun and informative event. Best of all, the event is free to attend!

So, mark your calendar. Come practice your shooting and casting skills. Talk to DEP biologists about wildlife and fisheries. Learn some tips about getting that big buck or hooking that monster bass. Be sure to bring the kids and grandkids. Older children will be able to test their skills on the pellet gun and archery ranges and perhaps win some prizes. Younger children will be able to enjoy playing games, learning about wildlife,

and making crafts. Food will be available for sale. But, if you want, bring your own picnic lunch to enjoy. Activities will begin at 10:00 AM and continue throughout the day until 4:00 PM.

A list of specific activities and presentations, as well as a schedule for the day, will be posted on the DEP Web site at www.ct.gov/dep/HuntFishDay as the date approaches. You may also contact the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (Monday-Friday,

8:30 AM-4:30 PM) for more information. The Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area is located at 341 Milford Street, in Burlington.



Thank You Connecticut Hunters and Anglers!

Hunters and anglers have been at the forefront of the conservation movement for over 100 years. They showed their support for conservation by requesting taxes and special fees on hunting and fishing equipment to help pay for wildlife and fish management, habitat restoration, and other conservation programs. Through carefully planned research, management, and habitat protection, the public continues to have the opportunity to enjoy the fish and wildlife resources of Connecticut. It is important to recognize the outstanding contributions that hunters and anglers have made and continue to make towards wildlife conservation.

Project to Benefit the State Endangered Variable Sedge

Written by Judy Wilson

Edward and Kathleen Tessman live at the end of a cul-de-sac in a comfortable residential development in Clinton. Their neatly trimmed yard bordered by a strip of woods and adjacent to wetlands is typical of many residential areas. What is not typical is that their property is host to the state endangered variable sedge (*Carex polymorpha*). This sedge, which looks like coarse grass, is known to occur at only a handful of other sites across the state. The Tessmans were interested in providing stewardship for this plant, which previously had been identified by soil scientist Rich Snarsky. The Tessmans understood that the variable sedge represented a small and fragile, but important part of the state's biodiversity, so they applied to the Wildlife Division's Landowner Incentive Program and were approved for funding. The Landowner Incentive Program was designed to not only benefit at-risk wildlife, but also at-risk plants, which includes state-listed plant species found in priority habitats, such as early

successional habitats and wetlands.

One of the unique aspects of the Landowner Incentive Program is that the expertise of the Division staff is applied to the approved projects as needed. Once Division technician Robin Blum gathered all the existing data regarding plants at the site and visited the Tessmans, she immediately called upon the expertise of the Division's Natural Diversity Data Base Ecologist Ken Metzler. Ken, who retired a year ago, was instrumental in designing a plan to help the variable sedge.

This sedge thrives in semi-open, early successional conditions where there is adequate sunlight. It does not grow well in forest understories. The woodland edge at the site was rapidly growing over into a completely closed canopy. Due to the sensitivity of the endangered plant, the small area involved, and the logistics of working so close to the Tessman's residence, Ken proposed that small saplings, invasive shrubs, and certain trees be selectively removed by hand.

Because the project was small scale and no specialized equipment was needed, it was decided that the most efficient and effective way to provide stewardship of this sedge was to carry out the project using Division staff.

Five Division staff members used hand loppers and brush cutters to cut small saplings, shrubs, and lower limbs on larger trees. Invasive shrubs and plants were pulled up by hand when possible. Much to everyone's surprise, Ken documented approximately 25 plants. While this effort greatly improved growing conditions, the variable sedge still faces an uphill battle because the plants are growing in a small and isolated area. However, with conscientious stewards like the Tessmans, these plants will stand a much better chance of perpetuating into the future.

Judy Wilson is the Division's Private Lands Program Biologist

American Kestrel

Falco sparverius

Background

The American kestrel is a small, slender falcon that is about the size of a robin. It is found in open habitats that have plenty of nesting cavities and hunting perches. Kestrels can be seen in the state throughout the year. They are considered uncommon residents in winter and somewhat common migrants in fall and spring. Migrant populations increased during the early 1900s but breeding populations were comparatively low. Kestrels were more numerous when agriculture was at its peak in Connecticut. Currently, with the disappearance of agriculture, along with the regrowth of forests and an increase in suburban development, open, grassy areas are in short supply. This change in Connecticut's landscape has caused many wildlife species that rely on open areas, including the kestrel, to experience long-term declines. Kestrels also were negatively affected by the use of organochlorine pesticides, such as DDT. DDT was banned from use nationwide in 1972.

The American kestrel was listed as threatened on Connecticut's Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species List in 2004, primarily due to a lack of information, coupled with a perceived decline in nesting and migrating numbers and diminishing habitat.

Range

American kestrels are found throughout most of North and South America. Most of the kestrels that breed in North America overwinter in the United States and Mexico, although a small proportion migrate as far south as northern South America.

Description

The American kestrel is the smallest falcon found in North America. Like most falcons, kestrels have long, pointed wings and long tails. The birds are easily recognized by two vertical black lines on the cheeks and a rufous-colored back and tail. The female has rufous-colored wings while the male has black-banded, bluish-gray wings. This species is the only falcon in which the male and female show such a marked difference in plumage.

The kestrel ranges in size from 9 to 12 inches long with females being larger



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than males.

Habitat and Diet

Kestrels prefer open grassy or shrubby areas with short vegetation in which to hunt for their prey. In Connecticut, kestrels are usually seen around agricultural areas (hay fields, orchards, pastures), airports, large parks, and power line rights-of-ways. Meadows, grassy fields, and old fields also may be inhabited. It is not unusual to find kestrels using urban and suburban areas and even buildings (barns, silos, cornices) for nest sites. Kestrels require natural tree cavities or nest boxes for nesting, along with perches in the form of trees, shrubs, or telephone poles.

The kestrel's diet varies seasonally and consists mainly of insects, including grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, dragonflies, butterflies, moths, and cicadas. Mice, voles, shrews, small snakes, frogs, and small birds also are eaten. Kestrels typically hunt from a conspicuous perch, although they occasionally hover over an open area when perches are lacking.

Life History

Connecticut's nesting kestrels begin courtship in late March to early April. An average of 4 to 5 brown-spotted eggs are laid by the end of April in a tree cavity or man-made nest box on little or no nesting material. They are incubated, primarily by the female, for 29 to 31 days. Males catch most of the food for the brooding female and, later, for the developing young. Usually 3 to 5 chicks are hatched and will grow quickly. The chicks are ready to fledge (reach flying stage) about a month after hatching. After fledging, the young stay with the adult birds for several weeks. In Connecticut, American kestrels will usually have 1 brood per season and will renest if the first nest fails.

Interesting Facts

Another name for the kestrel is the sparrow hawk, although

birds are not a main prey item.

Kestrels have a habit of pumping their tail feathers up and down when perched, especially after landing. They are known for their rapid flight and have been recorded to fly between 22 and 39 m.p.h.

Kestrels are quite vocal. Their call is a loud, repeated “killy, killy killy” when they are excited or alarmed.

American kestrels do not need to drink freestanding water. They get all the water they need from the moisture of their prey.

Some of the predators that hunt kestrels are great-horned owls and red-tailed hawks. Other predators that have been known to attack raptors include coyotes, bobcats, skunks, raccoons, crows, and ravens.

Populations of the larger Cooper’s hawk increased throughout northeastern North America from 1976-2003, and studies at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, in Pennsylvania, and elsewhere have suggested this species preys on kestrels.

Kestrels are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 26-92 and Sec. 26-311 (threatened and endangered species legislation).

Conservation Concerns

According to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, data from raptor migration counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, and Christmas Bird Counts indicate that American kestrel populations have declined in much of northeastern North America (including Connecticut) since 1974. Loss of habitat is most likely the cause of the kestrel decline in Connecticut. The number of farms in the state has been decreasing, many old agricultural fields are returning to forest, and suburban development has replaced suitable habitat. A lack of available nest cavities also can limit the number of kestrel breeding pairs.



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What You Can Do

Because kestrels do not excavate their own nesting cavities, they seek out ready-made homes, such as abandoned woodpecker holes or nest boxes provided by people. Specially-made nest boxes have helped kestrels throughout the country in areas where there are few natural cavities. Nest box programs for kestrels enable populations to increase in locations where nest sites are limiting. If you live near suitable habitat, you should consider providing and maintaining nest boxes for kestrels. Box plans are available by sending an E-mail to the Wildlife Division at dep.wildlife@ct.gov. To be successful, nest boxes should be placed in open field habitat. Preferred habitats are large grasslands, pastures, orchards, and hay fields with cover at about 10 inches high. Nest boxes require continuous maintenance and should be monitored to prevent non-native starlings from using them. A program to promote natural nest sites (cavities in snags) should occur along with a nest box program.

Counting Kestrels in Connecticut

One of the methods used to monitor trends in raptor populations is a hawkwatch at key locations where large numbers of raptors pass over during fall migration. A hawkwatch is a systematic and organized effort to collect standardized migration count data about raptors. Records include species identities (including color morph, sex, and age classes, when possible), quantities, and behaviors of seasonal migrant hawks. Data also are collected on weather and observation conditions. Observations at a hawkwatch are conducted on a regularly repeated basis (daily or nearly daily) from a single monitoring site.

Several hawkwatch sites are located throughout Connecticut, but Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven is one of the best known. It is a coastal plain watch site with a 360 degree view of Lighthouse Point Park, East New Haven Harbor, and Long Island Sound. Data collected at hawkwatch sites show that the kestrel population decline has been particularly large and statistically significant at coastal hawk migration count sites in the northeastern United States, including Lighthouse Point Park (-3.1% per year from 1974-2004). From 1994 to 2004, statistically significant declines in kestrel numbers were recorded at Lighthouse Point (-9.2% per year). Population indices suggest that population declines for kestrels have accelerated since 2000 at Lighthouse Point. Continued population change at the 1994-2004 rates would lead to a 50% decline of American kestrel source populations in approximately 8 years at Lighthouse Point, the quickest decline compared to other hawk watch locations in the Northeast. (Data provided by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, www.hawkmountain.org, and Northeast Hawk Watch, www.battaly.com/nehw.)



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School Children Visit the Woods

Written by Laura Rogers-Castro

Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington was a busy place this past spring. Several school groups from Hartford, Bristol, Terryville, and Farmington visited the site for guided programs on Connecticut's wildlife and wildlife habitat. Every student received a copy of the 36-page booklet *Exploring Wildlife at Sessions Woods* and some of the classes were reimbursed for bus transportation fees. A few of the classes discovered how to draw by observing nature with Burlington artist Judy Bird. Master Wildlife Conservationists assisted Wildlife Division staff with the guided wildlife programs. The booklet, bus transportation fees, and nature drawing classes were made possible by a grant to the Friends of Sessions Woods from Newman's Own Foundation, Inc.

The children enjoyed a 2-mile round



P. J. FUSCO (2)

Students from Noah Webster School in Hartford enjoy the interpretive wildlife hike presented by the author at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington.

found at each location. The children were told about the return of wild turkeys and black bears to Connecticut's forest habitats. While at the beaver marsh, the children were shown several lodges and dams constructed by beavers and discovered how this created habitat was now home to a variety of different animals.

Some of the children had never been in a

woodland environment before and the feedback was encouraging. Two fourth graders stated, "This is the best place I have ever been in my life" and "I love

it here and wish I could stay all day and forever."

The importance of showing children the outdoors, teaching them how to observe nature, and demonstrating how to become good conservationists is a rewarding experience. All children would benefit by having this opportunity. Any adult in the position to mentor a child should value the time shared outdoors and do their best to help a child become an informed environmental steward for the future.

For additional information on school trip visits to Sessions Woods, please contact Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro at 860-675-8130 or laura.rogers-castro@ct.gov.

Laura Rogers-Castro is a Natural Resource Educator for the Wildlife Division. She would like to extend her appreciation to the Friends of Sessions Woods, Newman's Own Foundation, and Master Wildlife Conservationist volunteers for providing the opportunity for school children to visit Sessions Woods.



This enthusiastic fourth grader loved the nature drawing workshop led by Burlington artist Judy Bird. Each student had the opportunity to increase their observational skills while spending time outdoors.

trip hike to the beaver marsh located on the Sessions Woods property. The hike provided visits to forest, wetland, and field habitats and focused on the wildlife



CT Partners Receive Coastal America Award for 30 Years of Wetland Restoration

The Connecticut Tidal Wetland Restoration Team was presented with the Coastal America Partnership Award at a ceremony held at Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme in May. This national award for public, private, and corporate partnership efforts recognizes outstanding efforts to accomplish coastal restoration, preservation, and protection projects.

In a letter of recognition to the team, U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Gary Locke wrote, “Your team’s long-term, dedicated efforts and thoughtful collaboration streamlined the process, conserved resources, and ultimately resulted in the restoration of over 1,148 acres of tidal flow at 71 different sites. Even more impressive, as one of the first such groups to work in concert, your team helped establish Connecticut as a national leader in collaborative salt marsh restoration.” At the heart of this partnership is the site plan review committee, the group that actively participates in restoration design. Important to the success of the program are the participants that help with securing funding and on-the-ground construction.

The Coastal America Partnership is an action-oriented, results-driven collaboration process dedicated to restoring and preserving coastal ecosystems and addressing critical environmental issues. The Partnership brings together people and resources from federal agencies, state and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to collaboratively address our nation’s coastal environmental challenges. With a goal of better management of coastal resources, the partnership coordinates the statutory responsibilities and combines the resources and expertise of 16 federal agencies, 23 Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers, and hundreds of corporate partners. As a result, the Coastal America Partnership maximizes the environmental and economic benefits—and minimizes the costs—of addressing complex watershed, coastal, and marine problems.

The Technical Services Section of the DEP’s Office of Long Island Sound Programs (OLISP) was presented with the large partnership plaque for its role as team leader since 1980. Other team members include, but are not limited to: DEP Division staff (Inland Fisheries, Wildlife, Agency Support Services, and OLISP); U.S. Fish and Wildlife SNE-NY Coastal Ecosystems Program; NOAA Northeast Restoration Center; National Marine Fisheries Service; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Connecticut College; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Save the Sound; The Nature Conservancy; Ducks Unlimited; and the Connecticut Chapter of the Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership.



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PHOTO BY P. J. FUSCO

2010 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

Despite the chilly weather, 202 volunteers headed outdoors to conduct the 2010 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey on January 8-9, 2010. The volunteers surveyed 85 sites statewide to document the presence of wintering bald eagles in Connecticut. Survey results indicated that 108 eagles were counted – 67 adults and 41 immatures. Eagles were observed at 24 of the survey locations.

Results for this survey have varied over the years. The first survey in 1979 yielded 20 eagles, followed by only 11 in 1980. The highest number of eagles observed during the survey occurred in 1996 when 128 were counted, followed by 114 seen in 1997. Bald eagles migrate south from the northern states during winter to areas of open water where they are able to catch fish. Cold weather conditions, which keep most waterways to the north covered with ice, mean that higher numbers of eagles will be counted in Connecticut.

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is not a complete census of the entire wintering population in Connecticut, but an index of the species’ use of the state, which can be compared from year to year. The target date for next year’s survey will be January 7-8, 2011. Those interested in participating in the 2011 survey should contact Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria by E-mail only (julie.victoria@ct.gov) and provide a name and mailing address.

Thanks are extended to all of the volunteers for their time and efforts to survey the eagles.

2010 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, January 8-9, 2010

Location	Adults	Immatures
Connecticut River*	24	15
Housatonic River	14	7
Lake Gaillard	1	2
Lake Saltonstall	0	1
Bantam Lake	0	1
Candlewood Lake	1	0
Farmington River	1	1
Quinnipiac River	2	1
Pomperaug River	0	1
Barkhamsted Reservoir	2	0
Groton Reservoir	2	0
Congamond Lakes	4	0
Leander Pond	1	0
Quinebaug River	4	2
Pocotopaug Lake	1	3
Alexanders Lake	1	2
Morris Reservoir	1	0
Thames River	1	1
Saugatuck Reservoir	2	0
Naugatuck River	1	0
Burlington Hatchery	2	3
Willimantic Reservoir	1	0
Lake Whitney	1	0
Hockanum River	0	1
Total	67	41
Statewide Total = 108 bald eagles		

*Old Saybrook to Massachusetts Line

Eastford Students Install Bluebird Nest Boxes

During April and May, 2010, 7 sixth-grade students from Eastford Elementary School participated in making bluebird boxes in celebration of Earth Day as part of the school's After School Program. Under the leadership of science teacher Candice Mead, the students used pre-cut wood from the Wildlife Division's Bluebird Restoration Project to construct the boxes. Roger Wolfe, from the Division, brought tools and posts for the students to use to build and mount the boxes. The boxes were placed around the school's athletic field, which is adjacent to the George M. Askew Nature Trail. All students are now aware of the boxes and are encouraged to help monitor activity by posting sightings on the school's Web site. As an added bonus, 6 of the students also helped install a wood duck nest box, provided by the Connecticut Waterfowlers Association and the Wildlife Division, at an old mill site in the Still River that runs beside much of the trail.

The Town of Eastford received a grant through The Last Green Valley Institute in 2009 to upgrade the nature trail, which included trail maintenance, producing a trail map, installing interpretive signs, purchasing two backpacks (complete with binoculars, compass, and field guides) that visitors can check out of the town library, installing custom-made natural-looking benches, and creating an outdoor classroom along the river.

Roger Wolfe, Mosquito Management Program



R. WOLFE, MOSQUITO MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Students at Eastford Elementary School built and installed bluebird nest boxes and a wood duck nest box on school property to encourage bird use and provide viewing opportunities.

Your Questions Answered

Do you have a wildlife question you would like to have answered?

Please send it to: Your Questions Answered, DEP - Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013; Email: dep.ctwildlife@ct.gov

Odd Robin

I receive your publication and enjoy hearing about local wildlife very much. Recently I noticed a very bright white bird that acts like a robin. I cannot identify it. I'm attaching a picture. It hangs out where the robins are, but flies away when robins get close to it. It bops around in the grass picking up worms just like a robin, but it is bright white with grey on its wings. Can you help me identify this bird? Thank you, Bette Jane Haskell, Harwinton.

Your initial suspicion is correct. This bird is indeed a robin. It doesn't happen often, but once in a while there are robins whose genetics produce feathers that are white or mostly white and sometimes even albino. Because this bird has black primary feathers on the wings and its eyes are the normal color for a robin, it isn't a true albino. It is definitely among the most uniformly white of any of the varied robins I've seen over the years. It may fly off when the "regular" robins arrive because it has been harassed or attacked by them previously. Unfortunately, white robins tend to be a lot more obvious to predators and often do not survive too long in nature. Every now and again though, there are birds that beat the odds and live a full life span. This one may fit that category as it has already survived at least one fall and



winter as a juvenile and has reached adulthood.

Thank you for sharing your wildlife observation and photographs.

Jenny Dickson, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

Plovers and Terns

continued from page 8

least tern nesting areas have been completely abandoned by the birds in recent years. This whole situation has biologists

concerned. Human disturbance may not be the only reason why plovers and terns are struggling, but disturbance should be much easier to control than predators, weather, tides, and the loss of habitat. All it takes is a little effort from everyone

who uses Connecticut's beaches to give these birds the space they need.

Kathy Herz is a biologist with the Wildlife Division and Editor of Connecticut Wildlife



Do you have an interesting wildlife observation to report to the Wildlife Division?

Please send it (and any photos) to:
Wildlife Observations, DEP Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013, or email: dep.ctwildlife@ct.gov

“Snake Ball” in Cromwell

Jeff Feldmann, of West Hartford, submitted this photograph and interesting wildlife observation:

“On the first day of spring (Vernal Equinox) for the past 10 years or so, a group of my friends and I canoe and kayak the Mattabessett River, in Cromwell. Some years, the river is flooded and there is a chill in the air. Sometimes there is snow on the ground with patches of ice. This year’s paddle was quite different. The temperatures were in the 70s. As we got close to the mouth of the river, before it entered the Connecticut River, we stopped for a break to celebrate this year’s arrival of spring.

Someone noticed that a bush on the bank of the river looked like it was moving. I took a look with my binoculars and shouted out “snakes!” I moved in for a closer look. Sure enough, it was a gathering of garter snakes. I would say there were at least 10-15 of them. As I always carry my camera with me, I proceeded to take some photos.

When I got home that afternoon, I searched the Internet to get as much information as I could about what I had seen. One site said that if the “conditions are right,” the males and females will come out of their winter dens and look for mates. I suspect that is what we saw. It was an awesome sight and the first time I had photographed this species of snake.”



According to Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria, what Jeff witnessed was a “breeding ball” or “mating ball” of mating common garter snakes (previously called eastern garter snake). This usually happens when the snakes come out of hibernation. There usually are a few females in the mix, although the majority are males that were waiting for the females to come out of hibernation.

Peregrine Nest Box at Millstone Power Station

2010 marks the third successful nesting season for a peregrine falcon pair at the Millstone Power Station in Waterford. The pair raised 3 young in a nest box at the mid 200-foot level of a 385-foot stack. The young hatched around May 16, a little later than last year. The peregrines have dominated over the other species of interest at the site – osprey. There are 5 active osprey platforms in the vicinity of the peregrines and the ospreys have learned to give the peregrines plenty of space as they pass by in order to avoid their aggressiveness.

Greg Decker, Biologist at the Millstone Environmental Lab and a Master Wildlife Conservationist, mounted a wireless/solar camera just outside the nest box to monitor the reproductive success of the pair. Because peregrines are attracted to industrial stack landings for nesting, the pair was not hard to attract. The nest box is made of a honeycomb lightweight fiberglass material to ensure longevity in the salty environment on the coast.



This peregrine nest box sits 200 feet up on an industrial stack landing at Millstone Power Station in Waterford. The box is made of a honeycomb lightweight fiberglass material to ensure longevity in the salt water environment.

Sharon Audubon Festival: August 14-15

The 43rd annual Sharon Audubon Festival takes place Saturday and Sunday, August 14-15, at the Sharon Audubon Center, located on Route 4 in Sharon. The festival features 2 days of various nature programs and hikes throughout the Audubon property, live animal presentations, musical performances, vendors, food, and more. Gates are open from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM on Saturday and 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM on Sunday. Admission is \$7 for adults and \$5 for children age 12 and under. For more information, contact the Audubon Center at 860-364-0520 or www.sharon.audubon.org.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- May-August..... Respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas when visiting Connecticut beaches. Also, keep dogs and cats off of shoreline beaches to avoid disturbing nesting birds. Herons and egrets are nesting on offshore islands in Long Island Sound. Refrain from visiting these areas to avoid disturbing the birds.
- Dispose of fishing line in covered trash containers or specifically marked recycling receptacles. Improperly discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife.
- Sept. 15 Report use of bluebird nest boxes by sending in a Bluebird Nest Box Survey card to the Wildlife Division. Cards are available by calling 860-675-8130.
- Sept. 25 National Hunting and Fishing Day

Programs at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center

Programs are a cooperative venture between the Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods. Please pre-register by calling 860-675-8130 (Mon.-Fri., 8:30 AM-4:30 PM). Programs are free unless noted. An adult must accompany children under 12 years old. No pets allowed! Sessions Woods is located at 341 Milford St. (Route 69) in Burlington.

- August 3 **Nature Walk and Drawing Workshop**, starting at 6:00 PM. The Friends of Sessions Woods is sponsoring a special workshop, focusing on wildlife habitat observation and nature drawing, with artist Judy Bird and Wildlife Division Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro. Laura will lead an interpretive walk, weather permitting, followed by Judy providing a lesson on personal observation and expression of nature. This workshop is funded through the generosity of the Newman's Own Foundation. Participants should dress for both indoor and outdoor activities.
- August 24 **Midsummer Evening Hike at Sessions Woods**, starting at 6:00 PM. Visit the beaver marsh at Sessions Woods during a late summer's evening. Learn about beavers and wildlife habitat on this 2-mile round trip, educational walk led by Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro of the Wildlife Division.
- Sept. 25 **Connecticut Hunting and Fishing Appreciation Day** (see page 12 for more information).

Hunting Season Dates

- Sept. 1-30 Early squirrel season
- Sept. 15-Nov. 16 First portion of the deer and turkey bowhunting season on state land.
- Sept. 15-Dec. 31 Deer and turkey bowhunting season on private land (private land bowhunters in deer management zones 11 & 12 may hunt deer until January 31, 2011).
- Consult the 2010 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for specific season dates and details. The guide is on the DEP Web site (www.ct.gov/dep/hunting), and also is available at town halls, DEP facilities, bait and tackle shops, and outdoor equipment stores. Go to www.ct.gov/dep/sportsmenlicensing to purchase Connecticut hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as all required deer, turkey, and migratory bird permits and stamps. The system accepts payment by VISA or MasterCard.

CORRECTION to article in May/June 2010 issue: Because of space limitations, text was mistakenly omitted from the article "CE/FS Instructors Awarded with Governor's Proclamation" on page 6 of the May/June 2010 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*. The text should have read "Planning and development of the meeting with Lieutenant Governor Fedele was arranged by Gary Bennett and Stan Esposito. Ray Hanley, Bob Crook, Chas Catania, Warren Speh, and several other instructors were helpful in making contacts with the instructor corps on the date and time of the meeting." Apologies are extended to those individuals who did not receive recognition for their efforts in the original article.



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A pair of day-old least tern chicks find shelter and cover under a sea rocket plant on the Connecticut shoreline.