

July/August 2020

CONNECTICUT
Wildlife



From The Director

This issue of Connecticut Wildlife reflects the stewardship component of protecting our unique natural resources in a variety of different ways. You do not have to be a trained forester or fisheries or wildlife biologist to contribute to



conservation. You do not have to have a huge amount of space. You do have to care. Often the best way to protect our amazing wildlife and the places they live comes down to getting involved and making choices.

On its surface, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) might seem like just another survey — we all get plenty of those from time to time. It is more. MRIP is a way states all along the Atlantic seaboard obtain important information about what is being caught by recreational anglers and it helps fill a gap in information that biologists can then use to manage fish populations. By participating in the survey when asked, you are choosing to contribute to conservation. If you want to participate more actively, the Volunteer Angler Survey Program is another great option; you can learn how to get involved in this issue.

Whatever your favorite outdoor activity is, you can choose to practice #ResponsibleRecreation. If you like to hike with your four-legged friend, take a minute to learn the rules before you head out — and bring a leash. When you choose to leash your dog, you are again choosing to contribute to conservation and practicing responsible recreation. If hunting is what you love, take time to look at our online hunting area maps. Not only will you know where you are, you will learn which activities are permissible in your selected area and you will be practicing responsible recreation. If gardening is more your style, consider landscaping your yard for wildlife. When you choose native, non-invasive plants for your yard, or even your patio or window box, you are choosing to contribute to conservation. If you need some tips on which plants provide the best wildlife benefits, read on!

Is active conservation more your style? Do you want to learn more about and simply explore nature? If so, join us virtually to Discover Outdoor Connecticut. Everyone is welcome to join us as we try to discover as much as we can about the plants and animals found across our state. Through the iNaturalist Program, you can engage with our biologists, Master Wildlife Conservationists, and other experts to learn more about the many species all around us. We would love it if you chose to contribute to conservation through community science.

If you have any doubt about how even a small action you choose to take can have a big impact on conservation, consider the conservation success we have experienced with ospreys or how the Governor's Council on Climate Change is working — one small action at a time — to address a threat that impacts our air, water, health, economy, and very directly the natural resources we treasure.

Make a choice for conservation — together we can make a difference.

Jenny Dickson, Director, DEEP Wildlife Division

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Fiddler crabs are part of the food chain in Connecticut salt marshes, as this willet knows. PHOTO BY P. J. FUSCO

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White-tailed deer buck in summer velvet. Some of the highlights from the 2019 Connecticut Deer Program Summary are on page 22.

Photo courtesy Paul Fusco



Recreational Marine Angler Data: *Critical for Managing CT's Marine Resources*

Written by David Molnar, DEEP Fisheries Division, Marine Fisheries Program; Photos provided by DEEP Marine Fisheries Program

Long Island Sound is home to a variety of fish species, including striped bass, bluefish, summer flounder, black sea bass, and scup, that are popular with recreational and commercial fishermen. The annual changing of some of the regulations related to daily limits, size limits, and seasons may seem a bit mysterious to some; it is anything but. As many of these species swim across state boundaries, stewardship of the resource in maintained by multi-state commissions and regional fisheries management councils. For Connecticut, these are the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council (state waters) and the New England Fisheries Management Council (federal waters). The goal of these councils and commissions is to prevent overfishing and maintain self-sustaining fisheries. Management decisions, including setting recreational fishing regulations, are based on the best scientific information from the monitoring of fish population abundance and structure, as well as harvest (commercial and recreational). Because of this process, marine regulations are often finalized after the start of the calendar year, which is why the Connecticut Fishing Guide is not ready for distribution on January 1.

Recreational fishing is a major component to manage these species and the Marine Fisheries Program is out and about conducting in-person surveys at



In memory of Alison Varian -- an avid angler and advocate of the marine fisheries angler survey/marine fisheries management.

key shore-based fishing locations and on-for-hire fishing boats. One of our staff carrying a long measuring board and clipboard/tablet may have approached you. In Connecticut, fisheries are managed using data collected by Connecticut DEEP Marine Fisheries, as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The people you see at boat launches, state beaches, local marinas, and other public-access fishing sites are surveyors. These staff are the ones who collect vital fisheries data that Connecticut needs to make informed decisions about our natural marine fisheries resources. These surveyors are collecting data for a number of different surveys, including the

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).

MRIP surveys of recreational marine anglers have been conducted along the entire U.S. Atlantic coastline since 1981. The goal is to collect state and coast wide recreational fisheries data, such as trip details and catch and size data along with catch and effort estimates. The MRIP catch and effort estimates help assist U.S. coastal states to manage fisheries resources by combining commercial catch data, biological research, and direct observation of a fishery. When a surveyor comes across an angler who has finished fishing for the day, the angler can volunteer to take a survey to provide catch and fishing trip



DEEP Seasonal Resource Assistant Melina Metaxas measuring a scup during a day of field sampling.

information. Questions asked include, “How many hours have you spent fishing today?”; “What species were you primarily fishing for today?”; “Did you catch any fish that are not here for me to look at; for example, released fish?”; and “Did you catch any fish that I might be able to look at?” All of the information collected from anglers who participate in the survey helps determine how many fish are caught and released all

along Connecticut’s coastline each year. After collecting all of this information, the data are sent to NOAA, and catch and harvest estimates are created for states to use.

Want to contribute but do not want to wait for a random MRIP chance meeting? Do you love to fish? Do you enjoy the outdoors and want to be a part of protecting Connecticut’s fisheries for years to come? Well, the Volunteer Angler Survey (VAS) Program is just for you! The Connecticut VAS Program is designed to collect fishing trip and catch information from recreational anglers like yourself along Connecticut’s beautiful coastline. When anglers volunteer for this program, they



CT Fisheries Technician Kailey Balducci measuring a bluefish during a day of field sampling.



DEEP Seasonal Resource Assistant Melina Metaxas entering fish size data on her tablet during a day of field sampling.



DEEP Seasonal Resource Assistant Karli Drda weighing a scup during a day of field sampling.



Connecticut Fisheries Technician Ashley Frink, measuring a scup (center) and interviewing an angler for the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) at a local boat launch (right).



receive a logbook in the mail where they can keep track of how many fish they catch for each of their fishing trips, along with the size of each fish caught. Any recreational (hook and line) angler can volunteer for the survey, whether you are fishing from the shoreline or a boat. The logbook is very easy to fill out and, at the end of the fishing season, all you have to do is simply tape the pre-postage paid logbook shut and drop it off in the mail. Each angler that sends in a logbook is rewarded with a VAS hat and license holder, along with their own personal results (report) of the program. Logbooks are returned for each angler's own personal records.

This program is a great opportunity for both first-time anglers and experienced anglers of all ages. By participating, you not only help protect Connecticut's precious fisheries, but you can also explore the state and visit many incredible saltwater fishing spots. Use Connecticut's interactive Saltwater Fishing Resource Maps at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/Saltwater/Saltwater-Fishing> to find out where to fish.

The critical fishing information collected through the VAS Program is extremely vital in helping maintain important fisheries, such as striped bass, black sea bass, summer flounder, bluefish (snappers), scup, tautog, and other

important finfish. All in all, recreational anglers are essential to help maintain healthy marine fish stocks, enhance recreational fishing opportunities, and protect our cherished marine ecosystems for years to come. Please join our team by contributing your fishing information via an MRIP staff or through our VAS program.

For More Information

MRIP, including links to other types of recreational fishing surveys, how recreational fishing data are used, and the list of all the public-access fishing sites assigned to MRIP samplers can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/public-fishing-access-site-register>.

VAS: If you would like to volunteer your fishing trip information to help maintain fishing for generations to come, please contact David Molnar



CT Fisheries Technician Kailey Balducci interviewing a group of anglers on a headboat trip to collect information for the Marine Recreational Information Program.

of the DEEP Marine Fisheries Program at 860-434-6043 or by email, David.molnar@ct.gov to receive your logbook for the fishing season! Best wishes and good luck fishing.

Photos accompanying this article were taken before the COVID-19 pandemic.



Fisheries Technician Kailey Balducci (left) and DEEP Seasonal Resource Assistant Karli Drda measure and record fish lengths while on a headboat trip (left photo) and interview anglers on the trip for the Marine Recreational Information Program (right photo).

Governor's Council On Climate Change (GC3)

Adapted from the GC3 section of the DEEP website; Photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

On September 3, 2019, Governor Ned Lamont issued Executive Order No. 3, re-establishing and expanding the membership and responsibilities of the Governor's Council on Climate Change, also known as the GC3. The GC3 was originally established in 2015 by Governor Dan Malloy. In addition to continuing to address mitigation strategies to reduce greenhouse gases, the newly-expanded GC3 will also consider adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change impacts. The executive order strengthens Connecticut's ongoing efforts to combat the effects of climate change and ensure that the state's communities are as resilient as possible to rising sea levels and increasingly powerful storms.

When he signed the order, Governor Lamont said, "Climate change is an urgent, existential threat that must be tackled immediately, and under the leadership of this administration I am going to see to it that Connecticut remains a national leader on climate action. The effects of climate change are impacting our air, water, health, natural resources, economic [sic], and the quality of life of every current and future citizen of Connecti-

cut. We have an obligation to act now."

Governor Lamont's Executive Order No. 3 directs the following:

1. Expands the responsibilities of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3):

- Created in 2015 by Governor Daniel P. Malloy's Executive Order No. 46, the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) has been meeting for the last several years to develop strategies that will ensure the state meets its mandatory greenhouse gas reduction targets created by the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act and the 2018 Act Concerning Climate Change Planning and Resiliency, both of which were adopted

by the Connecticut General Assembly and signed into law. The council's strategies presented in a 2018 report entitled Building a Low Carbon Future for Connecticut: Achieving a 45% GHG Reduction by 2030.

- To see that the recommended strategies from the GC3's December 2018 report are being implemented, Governor Lamont's Executive Order No. 3 expands the responsibilities of the council and requires it to monitor ongoing progress in the execution of the strategies. The council will be required to provide the governor with a report on these implementation efforts by January 15, 2021 and annually thereafter.



Renewable energy generally refers to electricity supplied from renewable sources, such as wind and solar power, geothermal, hydropower, and various forms of biomass. These energy sources are considered renewable because they are continuously replenished on Earth. Renewable energy is a clean source that can replenish itself for thousands of years to come. Fossil fuels on the other hand are finite, create harmful greenhouse gases and other emissions, and can require dependency on countries outside of the United States. Renewable Energy is important to lower our carbon footprint, lessen our dependency, and also helps to create jobs within the U.S.

• In addition, the council's scope has been expanded and – working in consultation with every state agency – it will be required to develop a climate adaptation strategy that assesses and prepares the state for the impacts of climate change in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, natural resources, and public health. This includes conducting an inventory of vulnerable assets and operations and incorporating resilience into state operations and investments. It will be required to present the governor with a revised statewide Adaptation and Resilience Plan for Connecticut by January 15, 2021.

2. Increases membership of the GC3:

• To ensure a diversity of voices are represented on the GC3, Executive Order No. 3 added several seats to the council that will represent municipal government, health, equity, affordability, and environmental justice advocates, and previously unrepresented

state agencies. They join a number of state agency commissioners and non-government representatives of the insurance industry, Connecticut's business community, and other advocacy organizations as members of the council.

3. Directs DEEP to evaluate pathways to transition to 100 percent clean energy grid by 2040:

• In order to accelerate achievement of the goals in the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act and the 2018 Act Concerning Climate Change Planning and Resiliency, spur innovation in carbon-reduction strategies and economic development throughout the state and region, and ensure that strategic electrification strategies for decarbonizing the transportation and buildings sectors will result in real emission reductions, Executive Order No. 3 requires DEEP to analyze pathways and recommend strategies for achieving a 100 percent zero carbon target for the electric sec-

tor by 2040.

GC3 Working Groups

The GC3 includes seven working groups whose membership includes representatives from state agencies, quasi-public agencies, businesses, local governments, and nonprofits. The working groups are:

- Progress on Mitigation Strategies
- Working and Natural Lands
- Public Health and Safety Adaptation
- Infrastructure and Land Use Adaptation
- Financing and Funding Adaptation and Resilience
- Science and Technology
- Equity and Environmental Justice

DEEP is working closely and engaging with other state agencies, communities, and stakeholders to implement Executive Order No. 3. Accurately

Diverse forests and other natural areas that provide ecosystem services are necessary for maintaining public health, such as drinking water, control of insects that carry vector-borne diseases, mental health, clean air, reducing heat stress, among others.





The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is a cooperative effort among the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont (RGGI states) to cap and reduce power sector CO₂ emissions.

assessing and strengthening Connecticut's preparedness and resilience to the expected impacts of climate change in the coming decades will require the inclusion of stakeholders who bring a diversity of knowledge, perspective, and expertise to the process.

Two subcommittees have been formed to accomplish the work of the GC3 – a Climate Change Mitigation subcommittee and Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency subcommittee. Meetings of the two subcommittees are announced in public notices, open to the public, and include opportunities for public comment.

Ad hoc working groups may also be established as needed and tasked with a time-limited scope of work on specific areas to serve the mission of the subcommittees. Working groups will coordinate with the subcommittees to achieve specific objectives and deliverables.

Working and Natural Lands Working Group

Of the seven working groups established in the GC3 effort, the Working and Natural Lands Working Group is the one that focuses on fish and wildlife, habitats, and ecosystems. This working group will evaluate the role of nature-based solutions (e.g., scaling up the preservation and restoration of forests, inland and coastal wetlands, rivers,

In its 2018 report, Building a Low Carbon Future for Connecticut: Achieving a 45% GHG Reduction by 2030, the GC3 recognized natural and working lands as important carbon sinks that could help mitigate emissions from the electricity generation, transportation, and building sectors, which together produce almost 60% of Connecticut's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

and agricultural and working lands) in climate change mitigation and adaptation and how to best incorporate the economic, social, and environmental co-benefits of these solutions into Connecticut's climate change planning strategies. There are four subgroups within this working group who regularly meet:

- Wetlands Subgroup
- Forests Subgroup
- Rivers Subgroup
- Agriculture/Soils Subgroup

A record of meetings and meeting minutes can be found on the DEEP website at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change/GC3/Subcommittee-and--working-groups>.

More information on the other 6

working groups and the GC3 in general can be found on the DEEP website at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change/GC3/Governors-Council-on-Climate-Change>.

Next Steps

The GC3 launched a series of public forums at the end of September, which will continue into October. During these forums, the working groups for the GC3 will present their draft reports and seek input from the public on recommendations to keep Connecticut on track to meet its goal of a 45 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and how to adapt and become resilient to the impacts of climate change.

The entire series of forums will be virtual. The working groups will present the reports and provide opportunities for public participation over the course of the public review period. Detailed agendas for each forum will be posted on the GC3 website. Reports for each working group have been posted to the website.

General information on Connecticut's climate change objectives and programs is available on the DEEP website at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change/Climate-Change>. Inquiries may be directed to deep.climatechange@ct.gov.

Hunting Area Maps on DEEP Website

Written by Will Cassidy, DEEP Wildlife Division

Knowing where you are is an essential skill when it comes to being outdoors. Knowing where you can legally hunt or fish in Connecticut is also very important. Choosing a new spot to hunt or fish can be a challenge, especially for outdoor enthusiasts who are new to these activities. Properties are not always clearly marked, and finding a new favorite spot may feel overwhelming. Today, there are many user-friendly options available to help find your way, including Google Maps, OnX, and the Connecticut Hunting Areas Application that is available through the DEEP website. This suite of maps contains extensive hunting-related information on all lands (state forests, wildlife management areas, and state parks) managed or leased by DEEP that are open to hunting, as well as waterfowl closure areas.

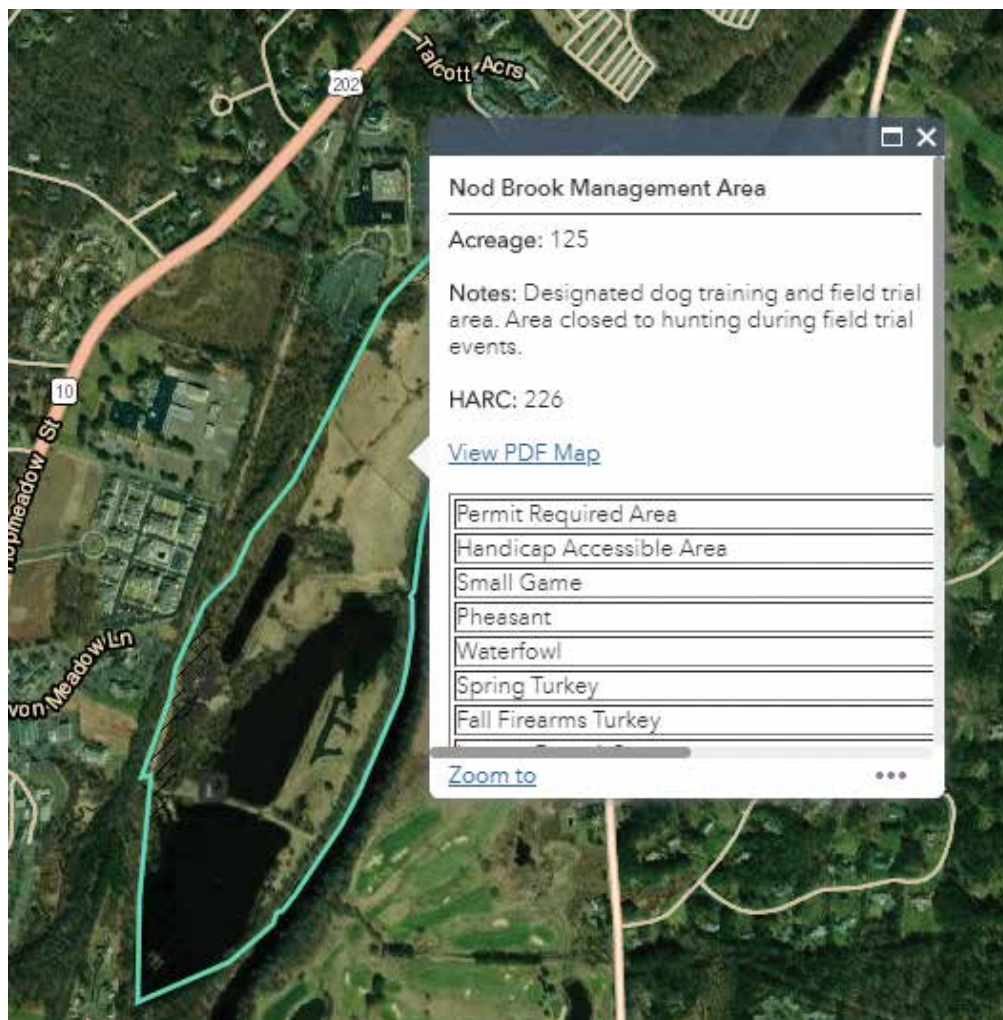
The DEEP Hunting Area Maps excel over other freely available products by conveying hunting specific information. By searching and selecting an area, and then expanding the window, the full list of permissible hunting activities is available, along with a link to an 8.5"x 11" map that can be printed. Within the map window, there is a basic introduction to the capabilities of the map application. Of note within the description is the "Basemap Selector", which gives the user the ability to select the previous generation USGS Topographic maps or satellite imagery, proving to be much more useful than the default when scouting or at-

tempting to orient oneself.

None of these tools immediately address your location in the field alone, often a concern for firearms hunters who are required to maintain buffer distances from structures, unless otherwise authorized. For those with a smart phone, ESRI, the company that hosts the geospatial data used to create the map, has a solution. Available on both Apple and Android, with basemaps and measurement tools included, as well as built-in location and user's choice of coordinate system, is ArcGIS Explorer.

While the nuances of ArcGIS Explorer are beyond the scope of this article, one can download the map and "Continue without Signing In" to then search for the Connecticut Hunting Areas Map to view. Using these tools, hunters and any other outdoor users should have much of the information needed to enjoy Connecticut's public lands.

The Hunting Area Maps and more information on how to use them are on the DEEP website at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Public-Hunting-Areas>.



The Big Comeback

After 100 Years the Willet Has Boldly Returned

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

Connecticut's salt marshes are home to one of our largest sandpipers, the willet. About the size of a crow, willets are highly visible and easy to identify. Once extirpated from our region, this flashy bird has been making a gradual recovery over the last 100 years since protections were enacted by passage of the landmark and important Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. Passage of the Act ended the days of unregulated market hunting, which had victimized the willet, among many other birds.

In the breeding season, the willet's body and wing plumage are marked with dark brown barring, while the belly is white. The bill is long, straight, and somewhat stout, and the legs are medium-long and blueish-gray in color. Their feet are partially webbed, allowing them to swim fairly well. Willets may appear to be a nondescript brown and gray sandpiper at times, but when they raise their wings and

particularly fond of fiddler crabs and small shellfish.

Look for willets in coastal salt marsh habitats in and around the marsh grasses and creeks. The birds also can be seen feeding in intertidal areas or resting on beaches. Their loud, repetitive call of *pill-will-willet* carries for quite a distance and gives the bird its common name. The alarm call is a loud, sharp "*kleep-kleep*".

Willetts are generally found in Connecticut during summer. Birds start arriving on their breeding territories in southern New England in late April and into May. They will typically nest on the back side of coastal sand dunes under thick clumps of beach or marsh grass or under low shrubs that border a tidal marsh. The nests are well hidden and usually close to marsh and shoreline feeding areas.

Four olive-colored eggs are laid within a grass-lined depression or on bare sand. Incubation typically lasts from 24 to 26 days. Young are flying after 28 days.

Willetts are loud and noisy on their breeding grounds. If an intruder gets too close to their nesting territory, one or more willets will fly up from the marsh, actively circling and loudly scolding the intruder. They will not settle down until the threat has passed, whether it be a human with a dog or a patrolling gull. The birds' loud alarm calls and flashing white wing patches help to disorient and drive away any potential predators.

There are two variations of willet, eastern (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus semipalmatus*) and western (*C. s. inornatus*), which may represent two distinct species. Eastern willets are found breeding in marshes along the Atlantic coast, while western willets breed in the prairie region of the

north central United States and southern Canada. Westerns are taller, grayer, and have a longer bill than their eastern counterparts. In late summer, some westerns migrate to the East coast and can be found along the Connecticut shoreline in mid-summer into fall.

Most eastern willets leave their East coast breeding

take flight they show a bold white wing stripe set off against darker wing feathers, making identification unmistakable. Nonbreeding birds are plain gray but also have the flashy and distinctive white wing pattern.

The long bill is used for probing and grabbing crustaceans, marine worms, small fishes, and insects. Willets are





Willetts are bold and sometimes noisy. They can be seen at most Connecticut salt marshes during spring and summer.

grounds by early September, flying directly over water to South America for the winter. Flocks may alight on the water to rest while migrating at sea. Eastern willets are not found in the United States during winter.

Conservation

Willetts have undergone a dramatic population change in Connecticut over the last 50 years. With the establishment of Connecticut’s Endangered Species Act in 1992, the willet was listed as a threatened species due to low numbers and a widely dispersed population. Since the initial listing, the population has grown and expanded. In 1998, the willet was reclassified as a species of special concern. As the population continued to grow, the species was delisted in 2004 and is now a regular breeder, raising young along our entire shoreline.

According to documented records, the willet last nested in Connecticut in 1873 in Madison, and then disappeared from our state until 1978 when nesting was once again observed. Connecticut salt marshes now have a more complete complement of their natural history with the return of the willet.

Although their population has been growing, willets are still vulnerable to the impacts of habitat loss and degrada-

tion. The ecological functionality of salt marsh habitat is continually at risk from encroaching development, various recreational activities, and perhaps most of all by climate change. Rising sea levels are widely recognized as the biggest threat to not only the birds that nest within the salt marsh, but to the marshes themselves. Increasingly frequent flooding in marshes is happening today, impacting the reproductive success of a number of birds, including saltmarsh sparrow, clapper rail, willet, and others.

Marsh habitat restoration projects undertaken by the DEEP Wildlife Division benefit many types of marsh birds, including willets. People can help by staying away from marsh birds during the breeding season, not disturbing roosting shorebirds, and keeping pets, especially dogs, away from sensitive areas where birds are nesting, raising young, or roosting.

Willetts are energetic and fun to watch as they interact among themselves and with other wildlife. They can be seen at most sizable salt marshes in the state, including Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Milford, Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area in Old Lyme, and Barn Island WMA in Stonington.



Make Your Backyard an Oasis

Written by Kyle Testerman, Wildlife Management Institute

In the last issue, you were introduced to backyard habitat improvement projects that can be completed in a few hours. This next installment highlights projects that increase the wildlife value of your yard, as well as help you appreciate the work you have completed.

Plant Native Fruit-producing Trees or Shrubs

A similar project was outlined in the last issue, focusing on pollinator-friendly plants. This time, the focus is on planting a native shrub or tree for its valuable fruits and seeds that are produced after pollination. Just as you would aim to have a variety of plants that bloom throughout the warm season, it is smart to have plants that offer fruits and seeds at different times throughout the year. Native plants that produce fruits in summer include highbush and lowbush blueberry, raspberry, and serviceberry (a small tree when mature). In fall, northern spicebush, elderberry, and



K. TESTERMAN

Growing wildflowers in a window box provides the perfect opportunity to observe pollinating insects, like this native leaf-cutter bee on a flowering cosmos.

chokecherry are among the many species to produce fruits of high value for birds and others. In winter, when conditions can be harsh for some wildlife, fruits produced by eastern red-cedar, bayberry, winterberry, inkberry, American holly, and more can be an especially important source of natural food and cover. Check with a local native plant nursery for the ideal time to plant. Some wildflowers, shrubs, and trees can be planted well into fall.

More information on native fruiting shrubs and trees is in DEEP's "Enhancing Backyard Habitat for Wildlife" publication, or use an interactive search of bird-friendly plants at: <https://ct.audubon.org/plants-for-birds>.

Keep Cats Away

After creating a special place for native wildlife in your yard, the last thing you want is to have turned it into a killing field for outdoor cats. Researchers estimate that free-ranging cats in the U.S., both owned and unowned, kill 1.3-4.0 billion birds and 6.3-22.3 billion mammals (including native mice, shrews, voles, squirrels, and even rabbits) every year. About 30% of this predation is from owned cats that are let outside. Recent research has also shown that entire reptile populations may be declining due to predation by cats. Much of the overall predation from pet cats is not for food since most kills are not consumed. Cats account for far more bird deaths each year than window/building strikes, powerlines, wind turbines, and cars combined. While habitat loss and degradation remain a critical threat to species-wide survival, cats roaming around your yard put a strong and consistent pressure on birds, small mammals, reptiles, and insects living there.



P. J. FUSCO

Planting shrubs, like winterberry, provides flowers for pollinators in spring and summer. Female winterberry plants produce brightly-colored berries, which serve as an important food source throughout winter for birds, like this male pine grosbeak.

For some perspective, many of the migrating birds that come to Connecticut travel thousands of miles from wintering grounds in Central and South America. Surviving this journey each season is no easy task, but studies of banded birds show that many birds return to the same breeding grounds, and even nest in the exact same territory year after year. Can you imagine a scarlet tanager going through all that effort each year, only to be ambushed at your bird bath by a neighbor's cat?

While it is best for wildlife and the health and safety of pet cats to stay indoors, there are some things you can do to make your backyard wildlife habitat a safer place from cat attacks.

- Take your cat outside using a harness or leash.
- Do not feed cats outside.
- Set motion-activated sprinklers near places you want to prevent cats from accessing.
- Some scent deterrents may be effective at repelling cats.
- Scare away cats seen in your yard.

More information about the impact of outdoor cats on native wildlife is available from *Cats and Birds* - American Bird Conservancy and *Outdoor Cats and their Effects on Birds* - Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Observe Your Success

Watch for hummingbirds, bees, moths, and butterflies; listen for more bird songs, or set up a game camera or bird cam near the brush pile or bird bath. Part of creating and improving wildlife habitat is evaluating how well the plants and animals have taken to the changes you have made. Observing what species of birds, frogs, salamanders, butterflies, and mammals are using your yard is a great reward for the work you put into the improvements. Because some animals are only going to be in your yard



K. TESTERMAN (2)

Bee balm blooming in mid-summer provides opportunities to watch hummingbirds, bumble bees, and butterflies, like this eastern tiger swallowtail shown here.

for a short period of time each year, take note of when wildflowers bloom so you can look for new species of butterflies or even a ruby-throated hummingbird. Listen for frogs and toads calling in the evenings during spring and summer. Take a few minutes each week to listen to the birds at different times of the day. Some animals will be more active or noticeable in spring, while others are more active in summer, fall, or even winter.

Setting up motion-activated trail cameras around a brush pile, rock wall, tree, or bird bath can capture photos or videos of animals using your yard, day or night, throughout the year.

Lastly, share your observations and the results of the work. You can add your observations to DEEP Wildlife Division projects on iNaturalist, share on our Facebook page, or tag us in your Instagram posts (see <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEPWildlife> for links).

When planned properly, you can transform your backyard into a year-



Taking a few minutes each day to watch what is blooming in your yard is a great way to appreciate the improvements you have made, as well as to view unique species like this sphinx moth, called a hummingbird clearwing.

round oasis for native species. Improving backyard wildlife habitat can create exciting new opportunities to watch wildlife, without needing to travel. No matter how small your backyard is, you can create a valuable natural area with only a few hours of effort. Stay tuned for more projects that can be planned or completed in fall and winter.

The full list of projects can be found at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Wild-Activities/Family-Friendly-Projects-to-Improve-Backyard-Habitat>.



In Outdoor Spaces, Leashes Protect You, Your Dog, and Wildlife

Pet owners are passionate about their dogs. When it comes to where dogs can be and what they can do, especially when it involves state parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural areas preserves managed by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), dog owners need to know and observe the rules.

While many people may think their

dog would never harm wildlife, or be harmed by wildlife, it is important to remember that natural instincts can override training and that any animal that feels threatened will react. For their protection, and to also protect wildlife, dogs being walked by their owners should not be allowed to run free in areas that are important for the conservation of wildlife, such as wildlife management areas, natural area preserves, wetlands,

and state parks and forests. Scientific evidence supports the fact that dogs, intentionally or unintentionally, are a threat and cause disturbance to wildlife. They are perceived by wildlife as predators, no different than foxes or coyotes. 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 owners may think they have control of their dogs, once the dogs are focused on the pursuit of a squirrel, rabbit, deer, or shorebird, it may be difficult to get the dog to stop before an accident occurs. Dogs and wildlife can be a deadly combination unless pet owners act responsibly and keep their dogs on a short leash and refrain from bringing them into areas that are posted for the protection of wildlife.

The DEEP has rules regarding pets in parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural area preserves that are posted at each location. Connecticut Environmental Conservation Police Officers regularly patrol parks and wildlife areas and enforce all regulations; however, it is the responsibility of dog owners to know and follow the rules for the areas they visit. Unfortunately, the actions of those who choose not to follow the rules can have a profound negative impact on wildlife. Before bringing your dog to one of the state parks, check “Related Information” on each individual park webpage on the DEEP website (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP>) to read the rules for pets.

Many Connecticut state parks allow dogs, but according to state regulations the dogs must be on a leash no longer than 7-feet and under the control of the owner or keeper at all times. Dogs are



Bears use forest trails just like humans do. Although encounters with bears while hiking are not common (but they can occur), it is best to think ahead and be prepared for the unexpected when hiking with your dog. A dog that is leashed and in control will allow a bear to go on its way without feeling threatened and enable you to pull your dog in a safe direction. The DEEP receives reports of bear-dog conflicts every year. In 2019, 16 conflicts were reported with 13 resulting in the dog being injured or killed. The best way to prevent conflicts is to make noise while hiking and keep dogs under your control and on a leash.

PHOTOS BY M. RUSZCZYK



Dogs are not allowed in sensitive nesting areas for good reason. Beach-nesting birds are of conservation concern in Connecticut and require intensive management to ensure their survival. Dogs are perceived by the birds as predators, such as foxes, and the presence of dogs in these areas may cause state-listed birds to abandon their nesting sites, whether the dogs are leashed or not.

Depicted above is a woman walking her dog in a sensitive beach nesting area on the Connecticut shoreline. While the dog is on a leash, they are walking next to a piping plover nest enclosure and a sign that says “NO DOGS”.

PHOTO BY P. J. FUSCO

prohibited on beaches year-round at Harkness, Rocky Neck, Silver Sands, and Sherwood Island State Parks, as well as anywhere in Sherwood Island State Park from April 15-September 30. Leashed dogs are allowed on the beach at Hammonasset Beach State Park ONLY from September 30 through April 1. The “no dogs on the beach” rule provides protection for beach-nesting shorebirds, like piping plovers and least terns.

Wildlife management areas are very different from state parks and thus, leash laws can matter more. A state regulation specific to wildlife management areas, such as Sessions Woods and Barn Island, requires dogs to be on a leash no longer than 7 feet and under the control of their owner or keeper, and the person responsible for the dog must hold the

leash at all times. The only exception to the leash rule is dogs in the act of hunting or training for hunting on field trial areas like Flaherty and Nod Brook. 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.

It also important to become familiar with dog and leash regulations for town properties, land trusts, and other organization properties, such as those owned by Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, and others, as dog walking policies can vary widely.

Perhaps even more importantly, leash rules also provide protection for dogs and their owners. Leashed dogs are less

likely to have negative interactions with other dogs on trails, as well other hikers and walkers who may also have a fear of dogs. Leashed dogs are less likely to be harmed by unexpected encounters with wild animals, such as black bears and coyotes. If your dog is hiking with you, it is imperative that you keep the dog on a SHORT leash and DO NOT let it roam free – this is for the safety of your dog, yourself, and wildlife.

All dog owners should clean up after their dogs when visiting outdoor spaces. Not only is it part of being a responsible dog owner, but it also reduces human, dog, and wildlife exposures to potentially harmful bacteria, parasites, like tapeworms, and even skin ailments like mange, which can compromise immune systems.



Jack of All Trades, Master of Many

Spotlight – Rick Napierski and Kevin Lamy

Written by Paul Benjunas and Judy Wilson, DEEP Wildlife Division

The Wildlife Division's Habitat Management Program consists of a mix of biologists, research assistants, and maintainers. The Program's responsibilities are many, but one of the most important is managing and maintaining the 110 state-owned wildlife management areas (WMAs) across Connecticut that encompass approximately 34,000 acres. WMAs have unique or outstanding wildlife habitat, both terrestrial and aquatic, that are managed primarily for the conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife. They provide habitat for many of Connecticut's 335 bird species, 169 fish species, 84 mammal species, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, and thousands of species of invertebrates. These areas are also managed to provide wildlife-based recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife viewing and are open to the public for walking.

Diverse Responsibilities

Many of the maintenance and operational responsibilities at the WMAs, including the Wildlife Division's field offices at Sessions Woods WMA in Burlington and Franklin Swamp WMA in North Franklin, along with several other buildings, fall primarily on the Wildlife Division's two full-time maintainers, Rick Napierski and Kevin Lamy. Working in coordination with the Eastern and Western District Habitat Biologists, they work hard to help ensure that the Division's habitat management and infrastructure maintenance objectives are met, and people have a positive first impression and experience when they visit the WMAs located throughout the state.



Many of the maintenance and operational responsibilities at state wildlife management areas (WMAs), including the Wildlife Division's field offices at Sessions Woods WMA in Burlington (pictured in background) and Franklin Swamp WMA in North Franklin, along with several other buildings, fall primarily on the Wildlife Division's two full-time maintainers, Kevin Lamy (left) and Rick Napierski (right) (Photo taken before the COVID-19 pandemic.)

For many, especially sportsmen and women, their first point of contact with the Wildlife Division is visiting a WMA to go hunting. Hunters and the general public need safe and reliable access to these areas, which should be clearly identified as wildlife management areas. Maintaining the infrastructure to support public use and DEEP management includes maintaining 78 parking lots, 74 miles of service roads, numerous kiosk and shield signs, and 150 gates that limit vehicular access into the interior of most WMAs, along with a wide variety of other infrastructure, including shooting and archery ranges, boardwalks, bridges, and wildlife viewing blinds. Rick and Kevin also assist with habitat management efforts, including mowing, planting, tree and

brush cutting, and invasive plant control. Depending on the day, season, and Division priorities, they can be plowing snow; mowing lawns, fields, and road sides; planting warm season grasses; conducting minor maintenance and transport of equipment; filling in parking lot potholes; repairing buildings, fences, and signs; painting; and even responding to building alarms after hours. They bring years of experience, and a multitude of skills and talents to all of these tasks and responsibilities.

Marking Boundaries

Boundary marking on WMAs is critical to ensuring that visitors can determine where state lands meet private lands and abutting private landowners do not encroach onto state lands.

Rick and Kevin spend a majority of their time refreshing over 500 miles of existing WMA property boundaries during winter, as well as marking new boundaries for recently-acquired properties. Visibility in the woods is greatest in winter when there are no leaves on the trees and understory vegetation has died back, and ideally, 50 miles of boundaries are refreshed each year during this time. Trees along boundary lines are marked with metal state land tags and painted rings approximately every 50 yards.

Reestablishing property boundaries when paint has faded and signs are no longer visible requires knowledge about A-2 survey maps, use of GPS technology, and skill with a map and compass. Despite these tools and experience, sometimes boundaries cannot be verified or adjacent landowners have encroached onto state property with sheds, fences, or stone walls. These issues are documented in the field and the Habitat Program works with the DEEP Land Acquisition and Property Management Unit to resolve them.

Leading Staff

One of Kevin and Rick's most important tasks is providing daily supervision to the cadre of research assistants that help maintain the Division's offices, workshops, and infrastructure, and also conduct habitat management. In addition to all required DEEP training for research assistants tasked with field work, the maintainers provide support staff with additional training in the safe operation of basic shop equipment, lawnmowers, brush cutters, tractors, and various specialized equipment used by the Habitat Management Program.

The Habitat crew, led by the maintainers, covers a tremendous amount of ground each year and provides a host of valuable services for the Wildlife Division. Their hard work helps support wildlife conservation and habitat enhancement and the safe use of state lands by the public. Some examples



P. J. FUSCO

Much of the summer is spent combatting major infestations of non-native invasive plants, such as autumn olive, mile-a-minute vine, tree of heaven, and bittersweet, to name a few. Non-native invasive plants degrade the overall quality of wildlife habitat, often do not provide habitat for native insect populations, and generally reduce overall biodiversity on a site. The Division employs mowing (if applicable) followed by targeted application of herbicides to control non-native invasive plants. Pictured is Rick Napierski.

of recently completed projects include a foot bridge that was recently refurbished at the Belding WMA in Vernon; a fence that was repaired at Flaherty Field Trial Area in East Windsor; gates and kiosks that were installed at several WMAs; and many miles of marked boundaries.

Controlling Invasive Plants

Much of the summer is spent combatting major infestations of non-native invasive plants, such as autumn olive, mile-a-minute vine, tree of heaven, and bittersweet, to name a few. Non-native invasive plants degrade the overall quality of wildlife habitat, often do not provide habitat for native insect populations, and generally reduce overall biodiversity on a site. Regular control is needed to ensure that native plants can flourish and ecologically diverse habitats are maintained across WMAs and other state properties. The Division employs mowing (if applicable) followed by targeted application of herbicides to control non-native invasive plants. Biological controls have been deployed on an experimental basis at a

small number of WMAs for the control of a specific invasive, but effectiveness varies with the targeted species and site conditions. Mowing is useful on annuals before they go to seed and for reducing the size of species, such as autumn olive shrubs. Larger plants are mowed one year and then the much smaller regrowth is treated the next year with an herbicide.

Rick and Kevin have years of experience with invasive plant control operations and provide direct day to day oversight to the Division staff who conduct the spraying. All staff engaged in this activity are trained and certified in the application of non-restricted herbicides and all work is planned and carried out under the technical supervision of a Habitat Program staff Environmental Analyst with a Supervisory License. Using backpack sprayers, trucks with slip on tanks, and utility type vehicles mounted with small tanks, they methodically move through grasslands, reverting fields, shrublands, and forest understories to treat targeted non-native invasive plants with herbicides. The herbicides used are specific to the

particular habitat being managed to ensure a minimal impact on native fauna and flora. Certain properties, such as Suffield WMA, for example, are not visited for invasive control until later in August to avoid disturbing nesting grassland birds.

Removing Hazard Trees

As a result of oak defoliation by gypsy moth caterpillars, along with drought conditions, hundreds of trees have died or were dying near parking lots, service roads, shooting ranges, boardwalks, trails, and other infrastructure in WMAs. The DEEP responded to this hazard tree situation which has impacted all state lands by identifying the trees that needed to be removed using DEEP contractors and various DEEP staff. Rick and Kevin have carefully worked with chain saws to safely cut down over 100 of these trees on WMAs and the work continues as additional hazard trees are identified.

Helping Wherever Needed

In addition to more routine maintenance work, Rick and Kevin are often called upon to assist with major events, such as Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day, which was last held at Hammonasset State Park in Madison in September 2019. Thousands of people attended this very popular event and it took an immense amount of work on the part of many DEEP staff from the Wildlife, Fisheries, Forestry, Law Enforcement, and Parks Divisions. The maintainers, with assistance from research assistants, played a major role in the planning and set up of the demonstrations, tables, chairs, and equipment needed to hold the event, and assembled hundreds of bluebird box “kits” that were put together by kids on the day of the event. When it was all over, they worked with other DEEP staff to clean up and return



P. J. FUSCO

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all equipment and supplies to various offices across the state. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Discover Outdoor Connecticut will not be held in 2020, but DEEP anticipates holding the event again in the future when the health situation improves.

On any given day, the maintainers and Habitat Management Program staff may be working together, plowing snow, assisting with pheasant stocking, painting, repairing a trailer, fixing or installing gates, mowing roadsides and parking lots, picking up trash and bulky waste, and conducting mowing to maintain wildlife habitat at WMAs across the state. Along with these maintenance activities, Rick and Kevin order supplies, help with the vast inventory of equipment at various sites across the state, and provide technical input and specifications and services needed by the Habitat Management Program.

They may meet with contractors to get quotes for repair services at the various facilities and often closely coordinate and work with DEEP Field Support Services staff, who provide highly-skilled carpentry, plumbing, and electrical services at all DEEP facilities.

Rick and Kevin, along with their crew of dedicated, talented research assistants, perform a myriad of tasks to ensure that the Wildlife Division has safe and functional buildings and workshops, and that its system of WMAs is maintained and open for the use and enjoyment of the public for wildlife-based recreation. The Division is grateful to these two “Jack of All Trades, Master of Many” for all of the talents and skills they bring to help fulfill the Wildlife Division’s critical conservation mission.



Rick and Kevin, along with their crew of dedicated research assistants, perform a myriad of tasks to ensure that the Wildlife Division has safe and functional buildings and workshops, and that its system of WMAs is maintained and open for the use and enjoyment of the public for wildlife-based recreation.

MAKING IT LAST



P. BENJUNAS



The osprey, an iconic Connecticut resident, nearly disappeared from our state. From a low of three successful nests in 1973 to nearly 800 nests statewide today, ospreys have become one of our greatest wildlife conservation successes. The banning of DDT and creation of diverse partnerships to build and install artificial nest platforms helped this species rebound. Ospreys are off Connecticut's Endangered Species List and once again thriving.



iNaturalist Project - Discover Outdoor Connecticut

Discover, track, and share your observations of Connecticut's wildlife alongside our DEEP Wildlife Division biologists, Master Wildlife Conservationists (MWCs), and other dedicated volunteers as we try to identify as many plants and animals as possible from across the State. The purpose of the Discover Outdoor Connecticut iNaturalist Project is to engage every level of naturalist across Connecticut and help residents learn more about the plants and animals that share the land, water, and air with us. We will also be sharing information about other collection projects, events, and volunteer opportunities throughout the year!

Not sure what you have found? Post your photo of an unknown species to the project, and everyone else taking part can help identify what you have found. Learn more at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Community-Science-Volunteer-Opportunities-CT-Wildlife-Division>.



2019 Deer Hunting Season Highlights

Harvest Total	10,908
Archery Harvest	5,738
Shotgun/Rifle Harvest	3,550
Archery Permits	16,428
Shotgun/Rifle Permits	16,477
Success Rates	
Archery	31.3%
Shotgun/Rifle	24.6%
Muzzleloader	8.4%

Sex Ratio	
Males per Female	1.5:1

Top Harvest Towns	
Lebanon	213
East Haddam	201
Ashford	184
Thompson	179

Top Archery Harvest Zone	
Zone 11	1,049
Reported Roadkill	480
Crop Damage	520

More specific details are in the 2019 Connecticut Deer Program Summary at: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/wildlife/pdf_files/game/deersum2019.pdf



New Electronic Newsletter for Hunters

Hunter Highlights is a free, quarterly electronic newsletter for anyone interested in hunting, trapping, and the outdoors in Connecticut!

The newsletter will provide:

- Tips and updates on hunting seasons and hunter safety;
- Updates on habitat and hunting areas;
- News from the State Environmental Conservation Police Division;
- Game recipes;
- Updates and schedules for hunter and trapper education class, and so much more.

Sign up to receive the newsletter at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Hunter-Highlights>.



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Order on-line with a credit card through the DEEP Store at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Connecticut-Wildlife-Magazine>

Conservation Calendar

2020 Hunting and Season Dates

Sept. 15 Opening of the Fall Archery Deer and Turkey Season

Oct. 3 AND Oct. 31 . Junior Waterfowl Hunter Training Days. Learn more at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Junior-Hunting>.

Oct. 10 Junior Pheasant Hunter Training Day

Oct. 17 Opening Day of the Small Game and Pheasant Hunting Season. Learn more details about pheasant hunting and stocking at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Hunting/Pheasant-Hunting>.

Nov. 7-14 Junior Deer Hunter Training Days (excluding Sunday).

Nov. 18 Opening Day of the Firearms Deer Hunting Season on state and private land.

Dec. 9 Opening Day of the Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Season on state and private land.

Consult the 2020 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide, 2020-2021 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide, and 2020 Connecticut Fishing Guide for specific season dates and details. Guides are available at town halls and outdoor equipment stores, and also on the DEEP website (portal.ct.gov/DEEPHunting; portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/CT-Fishing). Go to www.ct.gov/deep/sportsmenlicensing to purchase Connecticut hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as required permits and stamps. The system accepts payment by VISA or MasterCard.

Hunter Safety Education Classes

Firearms and Bowhunting Safety Classes are now being held. Students are required to complete all online prerequisites **PRIOR** to registering for a modified field day event. The modified field day meets safety requirements of social distancing and all participants must wear a mask. For registration details and prerequisites, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Hunting/CEFS/Hunter-Education-Modified-Field-Days-COVID-19>.

Connecticut Aquatic Education Classes

To help mitigate the community spread of COVID-19, Connecticut Aquatic Education (CARE) fishing courses have moved online. The DEEP Fisheries Division has developed a schedule of the very popular "Introduction to Fishing" courses, starting with online ZOOM sessions. For more details and to register, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/CARE/COVID-19-Updates-CARE-Program>.

Sign up to receive Wildlife Highlights, a free, electronic newsletter for anyone interested in Connecticut's wildlife and the outdoors! portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Wildlife-Highlights



CONNECTICUT Wildlife

PERIODICALS
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AND ADDITIONAL
OFFICES

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Bureau of Natural Resources / Wildlife Division
Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area
P.O. Box 1550
Burlington, CT 06013-1550



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Firearms and Bowhunting Safety Classes were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but have started up again. Students are required to complete all online prerequisites PRIOR to registering for a modified field day event. The modified field day meets safety requirements of social distancing and all participants must wear a mask. For registration details and prerequisites, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Hunting/CEFS/Hunter-Education-Modified-Field-Days-COVID-19>.