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Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



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From the Director

“Conservation is a state of harmony between man and land,” wrote Aldo Leopold more than 50 years ago in a wonderful economy of words. However, as one flies over the eastern seaboard and views our imprint on the Earth, it is plain to see that such harmony has not been attained. The ethical relationship that Leopold espoused between society and the land that sustains us is as elusive today as it was more than 50 years ago when he wrote that “the land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges, but not obligations.” For the most part, land is still viewed as private property which, in many cases, is subjected to abuse in return for short-term economic gains.

In the 50 years since Leopold, we have made some advances through the passage of environmental laws and efforts on behalf of the state, municipalities and land trusts to preserve open space. But the routine mistreatment of land continues and the “relationship” that most of us have with it is more distant than ever. I recall my grandfather telling me the Great Depression passed nearly unnoticed on the family farm. Today, how many of us grow our own food? How many of us live on the same land from generation to generation? As much as we cannot afford to become “disconnected” from the land, we continue to do so.

During these modern times, we should stop to appreciate those whose deeds promote Leopold’s land ethic. For example, in 1981, Maxwell Belding gifted nearly 300 acres in Vernon to the State. Even then, this land had tremendous economic potential if developed. Luckily, the land had something more; a spiritual meaning to Mr. Belding. Featuring a stream with pure, cold water that supported a healthy population of trout, the property was a quiet oasis of nature that provided a wealth of memories for the Belding family. Not only did he choose to preserve the area, he also chose to share it with Connecticut’s residents.

Chapter two of the Belding story began a couple of years ago when Mr. Belding contacted the Department about establishing a trust that would provide stewardship for the land in perpetuity. We had the opportunity to revisit his wishes for the property, which are relatively simple: to maintain the ecological integrity of the area, to maintain the area as a place where visitors can enjoy and interact with nature, and to teach our young people about our relationship with nature. Thanks to his vision and generosity, Maxwell Belding and his family have fulfilled Leopold’s land ethic on their property for the benefit of us all. (See article on Belding WMA on page 9.)

Dale W. May

Cover:

A piping plover broods its young on a Connecticut beach. Find out how you can help protect these threatened birds from the pressures of living close to high levels of human activity by becoming a volunteer. See page 8 for details.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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Coyotes Are Moving In

More and more, Connecticut residents are contending with coyotes in their yards. Reports received by the DEP Wildlife Division range from instances of coyotes occasionally travelling near houses to animals seen on a daily basis and often exhibiting brazen behavior. Coyote complaints from homeowners in residential areas are most common in spring and summer when the animals spend more time searching for food to meet the high energy demands for raising young. However, complaints about coyotes can occur at any time of year (see sidebar).

Why have coyote reports and problems escalated in recent years? Growth of the coyote population and an increased number of houses built in once rural and undeveloped areas have increased the opportunity for coyotes and humans to interact. Coyotes are notoriously adaptable and have learned to live near human development. Restrictions on hunting and trapping in developed areas may contribute to coyote habituation and limit the options to address coyote problems.

Interactions between humans and coyotes are inevitable because they share the same landscape. With knowledge about coyotes, people can take precautions to reduce these contacts and prevent problems. Knowledge may also reduce human concerns and increase people's tolerance of living near coyotes.

Homeowners frequently report that some coyotes show no apparent fear of people, cars or dogs. Although such habituated behavior is common, aggressive or threatening behavior toward humans is exceptionally rare. However, coyotes will often attack pets, with cats at greater risk than dogs. Every year, the DEP receives calls from homeowners whose pets have been killed by coyotes.

Coyotes can carry rabies; however, instances of rabies in coyotes are relatively rare in Connecticut. Anyone who observes a coyote that is exhibiting obvious signs of rabies (uncoordinated movements, seizures, extreme lethargy or overly aggressive behavior) should contact local police or animal

continued on page 13



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Growth of the coyote population in Connecticut and an increased number of houses built in once rural and undeveloped areas have increased the opportunity for coyotes and humans to interact.

Public Meeting on Coyotes Held in Greenwich

In February 2003, DEP Wildlife Division director Dale May and Furbearer Program biologist Paul Rego attended a public meeting in Greenwich to discuss concerns about coyotes with local residents. A series of coyote attacks on pets in the area had already resulted in the deaths of two dogs.

Coyotes regularly prey on house cats, but it is less common for them to kill dogs. Attacks on dogs are usually caused by one or two dominant animals that are aggressively territorial. The coyote sees a dog as competition for territory, but usually the fear of people overrides that instinct. However, a coyote that has lost its fear of humans may attack an older or smaller dog.

Several recommendations to reduce or discourage coyote problems were made to residents by DEP staff at the meeting. Fencing, scare tactics, supervision of pets and the elimination of food attractants in yards, among other topics, were discussed (see sidebar on page 13). Legal options for removing problem coyotes, including their limitations in an urban setting, were also presented. These legal options included having a licensed trapper or a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator (NWCO) set traps for overly bold coyotes. Cage traps are notoriously ineffective for trapping coyotes, so foothold traps are often the only practical option. However, state laws and regulations governing the use of foothold traps are very restrictive. If a problem coyote were trapped, it could not be relocated and therefore would be euthanized. Another option would be to hunt for the coyote with a gun. However, firearms cannot be fired within 500 feet of an occupied building and the restriction can only be lifted if landowners or municipal officials agree and act together.

Coyote problems are becoming more common as the coyote population continues to grow and people encroach on wildlife habitat. There is no easy answer for addressing coyote problems. Residents will have to take extra efforts to discourage coyotes from regularly visiting their properties, to protect their pets and to learn how to live with the animals that share their landscape. Also, in anticipation that coyote problems will continue to increase in suburban areas, the DEP is developing an advanced training program for NWCOs that emphasizes coyote life history, behavior, and lethal and non-lethal deterrence.

Mallard Count Up in Annual Midwinter Waterfowl Survey

Written by Min Huang, Waterfowl Program Biologist

Staff from the DEP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted the annual Midwinter Waterfowl Survey on December 30, 2002. The survey is conducted throughout the Atlantic Flyway, and is used as an index of long-term wintering waterfowl trends. In Connecticut, the survey is conducted from a low-flying airplane where observers take a census of all waterfowl seen along the coast, major rivers and selected reservoirs and lakes.

Waterfowl were not concentrated in most of the survey area due to the relatively warm weather that preceded the survey. Most inland lakes and reservoirs were ice-free during the survey period. The warm weather resulted in waterfowl being widely dispersed throughout the state, not just along the immediate coast. When inland waterbodies freeze, waterfowl concentrate along the coast.



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Continuing a trend observed during the waterfowl breeding surveys, this year's mallard count was much higher than last year's.

Connecticut Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Results for Major Species*

Species	2003	2002	Five-year Average
Atlantic Brant	100	500	200
Black Duck	1,000	900	3,000
Bufflehead	1,100	300	300
Canada Goose	2,600	2,100	2,900
Canvasback	100	0	700
Mallard	1,000	500	700
Merganser	900	1,300	1,200
Mute Swan	1,200	700	900
Long-tailed Duck	100	0	100
Scaup	2,400	300	2,800

* rounded to nearest hundred

Continuing a trend observed during the waterfowl breeding surveys, this year's mallard count was much higher than last year's and approximately 50 percent above the five-year average. The black duck count was slightly higher than last year but well below the five-year average. Due to open water inland, black ducks were distributed throughout the state during the survey period, not just along the coast. Incidental

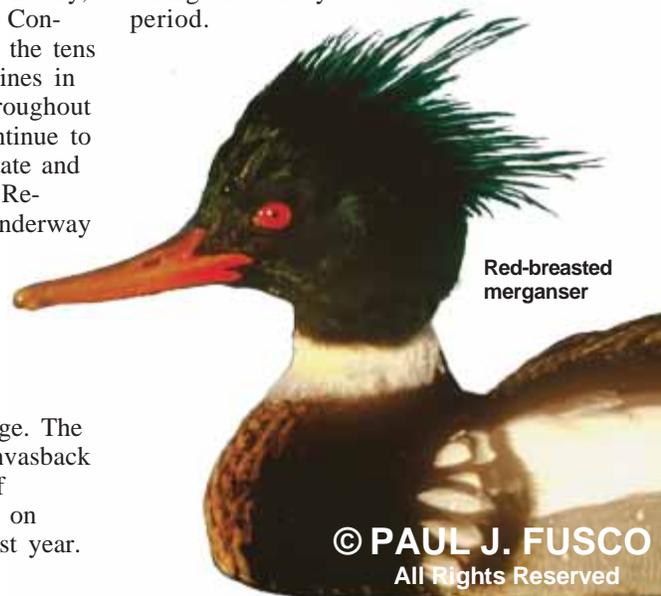
counts of other puddle ducks, such as widgeon and gadwall, were also made during the survey.

Scaup, which have experienced a significant decline over the past 30 years, had a significantly higher count than last year but still below the five-year average. Historically, scaup wintering in Connecticut number in the tens of thousands. Declines in scaup numbers throughout North America continue to be of concern to state and federal biologists. Research currently underway

will hopefully provide some much needed answers.

Continuing a recent trend, few canvasbacks were observed. The count of just under 100 canvasback was 10 percent of the long-term average. The declining North American canvasback population also is a concern of biologists. The hunting season on canvasback was closed this past year.

An interesting observation of 40 black scoters was made during the midwinter survey. Scoters have not been detected on the survey route in 10 years. Another interesting observation was of a large group of ruddy ducks. These small ducks are usually found further south by midwinter, but recent warmer winters have led to their continued presence in Connecticut during the survey period.



Red-breasted merganser

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Harvest Results for the 2002 Wild Turkey Seasons

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program Biologist

Connecticut's wild turkey population continues to grow and expand, offering some of the best spring and fall turkey hunting in North America. The challenge of harvesting a turkey has lured residents and non-residents in record numbers to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in our state. Connecticut turkeys were harvested by hunters from Florida, Montana, California, New Mexico and all the New England states, as well as the Canadian Provinces of Prince Edward Island and Quebec.

Spring Turkey Season

During the 2002 spring season, hunters reported harvesting 1,894 turkeys, a decrease from the record harvest of 2,067 in 2001. A total of 7,632 turkey hunting permits were issued, with 1,536 hunters harvesting at least one bird. Statewide hunter success rate was 20%. The harvest may have been lower in 2002 due to poor weather conditions on Saturdays, the most popular hunting day. Poor weather conditions reduce hunter participation and may reduce turkey

gobbling activity, making it more difficult to harvest a bird.

At least one turkey was harvested in 149 of 169 Connecticut towns, with Lebanon reporting the highest harvest (70), followed by Woodstock (52) and Colchester (45). State land hunters reported the highest harvest in Cockaponset State Forest (24) and Naugatuck State Forest (19). On a regional basis, the highest harvest was reported in turkey management zones 5 (307), 9 (264) and 1(186). Highest harvest levels were consistent with areas of Connecticut that contain the best quality turkey habitat. Private land hunters accounted for 90% of the total harvest (1,696) and 73% of the permits issued (6,013). Total reported spring harvest consisted of 593 jakes, 1,287 toms and 14 bearded hens.

Fall Firearms Turkey Season

The fall firearms season had a reported harvest of 188 birds, representing a 35% decrease from the 287 birds taken in 2001. Overall, 3,981 firearms permits were issued and 146 hunters took at least one turkey, for a



3.7% success rate. Private land hunters (3,295) harvested 176 birds, whereas state land hunters (686) harvested 12 birds. Hunters reported harvesting at least one bird from 69 of 169 Connecticut towns. Warren (8) and Woodstock (8) recorded the highest harvest. The highest state land harvest was reported in Cockaponset State Forest (4) and turkey management zones 5 (33) and 4 (32) reported the highest overall zonal harvest. Of 188 birds taken, 108 were males and 80 were females; 65% were adults.

Fall Archery Season

During the fall archery season, 2,706 permits were issued and 64 birds were harvested (a 12% decrease from the 73 birds harvested in 2001). At least one bird was taken by 59 archers, and the statewide success rate was 2.2%. Turkeys were taken from 47 towns, with Cheshire (4), Lebanon (4) and Voluntown (3) reporting the highest harvest. Turkey zones 7, 9 and 11 recorded the highest harvest, with nine birds taken from each of these zones. Of 64 birds taken by archers, there were 37 males and 27 females; 58 percent were adults.

With cooperation between hunters, conservation groups and landowners, as well as wise management, wild turkeys will be heard and seen throughout Connecticut for many years to come.

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Connecticut's wild turkey population offers some of the best spring and fall turkey hunting in North America.

Studying the American Woodcock in CT

Written by Min Huang, Waterfowl Program Biologist

American woodcock are highly prized by bird enthusiasts and upland game hunters throughout the eastern United States. Woodcock present a challenging quarry for hunters and their spring breeding display is truly a wonder of nature. Woodcock are dependent upon early successional habitats, frequenting young-aged stands of timber and overgrown fields. Over the past 30 years woodcock populations throughout their range have been declining. This long-term decline has led to much concern among resource managers (see article on pages 14-15).

Reasons for Decline

Widespread habitat changes on both their breeding and wintering grounds are the likely cause for the widespread decline. However, what effect do other factors, such as hunting, contaminants and predation, have on woodcock populations? Recent research in Maine and current research in the Great Lakes area have indicated that hunting mortality plays a negligible role in the status of woodcock populations. Prior work in the 1960s indicated that earthworms, the woodcock's primary food source, were susceptible to accumulation of certain contaminants, namely PCBs. Current research in Canada and Wisconsin indicates that lead contamination may play a role in woodcock survival and reproduction rates. Other research points to predation as playing a large role in the woodcock decline. More work throughout the woodcock's range, however, needs to be conducted to provide definitive answers to the current downward trend.

Surveying the Population

Woodcock population status has traditionally been assessed through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) singing ground surveys. These surveys, conducted throughout the range of woodcock in the United States, provide an index of singing males along survey routes. Each year, in Connecticut, between three to six survey routes are run. The limited sample size, however, does not provide a reliable index of woodcock status within the state. Over the past 50 years, Connecticut has lost

hundreds of thousands of acres of early successional habitat to development, forest maturation and changing land use. In just the past 13 years, over 100,000 acres of farmland and 300,000 acres of forested land have been lost to development in the state. This long-term loss in habitat has likely resulted in declines in woodcock numbers that are not evident through the limited surveys that are conducted.

Four-year Study Initiated

There are numerous questions that need to be answered concerning woodcock in Connecticut. In order to answer some of these questions and develop a long-term management strategy for woodcock, the DEP Wildlife Division is collaborating with the USFWS-Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge and the Wildlife Conservation Research Center at the University of Connecticut, on a four-year woodcock study. This study will assess current woodcock population status, survival rates, habitat use and current habitat condition in Connecticut. Ultimately, it is hoped that a long-term management plan for woodcock in the state will be developed.

There are plans to assess both current and potential woodcock

habitat in the state using a Geographical Information System (GIS). Assessment of current and potential woodcock habitat will allow for the formulation of a long-term habitat plan. State-owned lands likely represent the best long-term habitat management opportunities for woodcock enhancement. As human populations increase and building space becomes more limited in the state, more pressure will be exerted upon private lands for development, rather than for conservation. Large tracts of protected private land in the state, however, may provide some excellent opportunities for habitat management.

Current population status will be assessed through singing ground surveys. There are plans to establish approximately 30 new routes throughout the state. Surveys will be stratified by high, medium and low quality habitats. Comprehensive singing-ground surveys of current woodcock habitat in the state will provide managers with an index of breeding populations and facilitate an analysis of existing habitat quality. If habitat is the limiting factor for woodcock in Connecticut, managers expect to find woodcock in quality habitats and a decline in numbers as habitat quality declines.



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Over the past 30 years woodcock populations throughout their range have been declining. This long-term decline has led to much concern among resource managers.

P. J. FUSCO

There also are plans to capture and radio-tag locally breeding woodcock. Monitoring radio-tagged birds will provide information on survival rates and cause-specific mortality, and allow for an assessment of woodcock habitat use in the state. Woodcock rely upon early successional habitats; however, what specific habitat types do woodcock favor in Connecticut? A better understanding of these factors will help guide future habitat management. Information from other parts of woodcock range indicates that predation may be the biggest source of mortality for woodcock. Anecdotal evidence from peregrine falcon eyries in Connecticut indicates that woodcock constitute a large percentage of prey items. Connecticut has a large population of

mammalian predators, such as raccoons, skunks and both domestic and feral cats. What effect does mammalian predation have on breeding woodcock?

As part of this study, woodcock will be analyzed for contaminants, specifically lead, PCBs and organochlorines. Previous work has demonstrated woodcock susceptibility to contaminant loading. Additionally, lead contamination is a potential factor in the population decline. Contaminants analysis will provide information on potential limiting factors to fitness and reproduction of locally breeding woodcock. In conjunction with the contaminants analysis, food habits, overall condition and parasitic loads of harvested woodcock will be analyzed as well.

Help Is Needed

This study is slated to begin in the spring of 2003. The funding needed to begin the survival analysis, population assessment and part of the contaminant analysis is currently available. Efforts are underway to secure monies for the other aspects of the study. Another immediate need is for highly motivated volunteers to assist with some of the population surveys. In order to maintain consistency of results, we hope to find people willing to conduct one or two survey routes for three years. If you might be interested, please contact the Wildlife Division's Waterfowl Program at 860-642-7239.

The Wildlife Observer



Visitor Through the Chimney

Margaret Adamec, a wildlife rehabilitator from Granby, sent in the following "Interesting Wildlife Observation" and photograph:

"As a wildlife rehabilitator in Connecticut, I get some pretty interesting calls, but the most unusual this year was from a friend who just happened to know I work with animals a lot. My friend Marty came dashing into my post office just at

closing time on a Saturday to tell me there was a really big bird in his living room. He'd just gotten home to find it flying around and smashing into the picture window, after having apparently fallen in through the chimney.

I hurried over there, and he pointed to the couch the bird had finally fallen behind. The first thing I saw was a long, slender beak, kind of pointed at the tip, and a snaky gray neck. Great blue heron? Impossible. It was much too small. I was stumped. Marty tossed me a towel, which I dropped over the stressed bird and used to wrap it up and bring it out from behind the couch.

By this time, Marty was snapping pictures while I unveiled a duck-like bird, with a pointed bill, gray coloring and a chestnut crest on the back of its head and upper neck. We walked it outside, examined it for injuries, and when we found only a couple of minor nicks (from smashing into furniture, I suspect), released it. Judging from the way it flew clear across a half-mile of open field and over the treetops, it was fine.

Only later, upon reaching home and dragging out my field guide, did I determine it to be a common merganser. I'd never seen one of these beautiful diving ducks before, and consider it a rare treat to have had the chance to help one out of tight spot. Marty is capping his chimney, so I doubt I'll have

another such experience. Hopefully, the next one I see will be in its natural watery habitat."

Editor's Note: Thanks to Margaret for sending in her "Interesting Wildlife

Observation." As interesting as it is, finding a common merganser in a chimney is not completely surprising. Common mergansers nest in tree cavities and even wood duck nest boxes. The chimney may have appeared to be a great cavity. Unfortunately, this merganser found out otherwise. The common merganser, which prefers large freshwater lakes and reservoirs and wooded rivers, is one of the largest ducks found in Connecticut. The northwestern part of the state supports a small nesting population of common mergansers; however, this species becomes more common during winter when large numbers move into Connecticut from their breeding grounds farther north.

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

Email:
katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us

(submitted photos will be returned at your request)



Volunteer at Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge

By Paul Donoski, Sara Williams, and Jennifer Brown, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Milford Point Unit

If you would like to spend your summer bird watching on a warm coastal beach or feel rewarded knowing that you helped protect a federally threatened bird species, then you should volunteer at Milford Point.

Every summer, Connecticut citizens play a vital role in the protection of the state and federally threatened piping plover and the state threatened least tern. The Connecticut Audubon Society, the DEP, The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) work together to enlist volunteers to monitor bird and predator activity, identify nests and newly hatched chicks, and educate beach visitors. These volunteers patrol the beaches of Milford and Stratford each day and report their findings to biologists. Plovers and terns are protected by closure of the most productive beaches above the high tide line using string fencing and signs. The beach closures allow plovers to select their territories, incubate eggs and raise their young undisturbed, thereby increasing breeding success. Once a nest is located and at least four eggs have been laid, authorized DEP or Refuge staff erect wire mesh enclosures around

the nest for protection against foot traffic and predators.

The monitoring program in 2002 was composed of 25 volunteers who helped identify nests, monitor incubation and watch chicks until fledging. Milford Point and Long Beach combined produced 24 chicks that survived at least until they were able to fly. The volunteer program is integral in ensuring successful nesting at these sites. While the current program is focused on Milford and Stratford beaches, volunteer opportunities exist on all sandy beaches in Connecticut.

A Plover Monitoring Volunteer Training Session for the 2003 season will be held at the Connecticut Audubon Center at Milford Point on **April 5, 2003**. For more information, contact the Refuge at (860) 399-2513. Volunteers will be trained to recognize piping plovers and least terns. They also will learn about these species' life history and breeding behaviors, as well as about monitoring procedures.

Outer Island Unit

Would you like to spend your summer relaxing on a gorgeous pink granite island? How about educating

people on the importance of island ecology and undisturbed habitats? If so, Outer Island is the place for you. Most outdoor enthusiasts recognize Outer Island as one of the Branford Thimble Islands. Outer Island was donated to USFWS in 1995 by the late Mrs. Elizabeth Hird in honor of her deceased husband, Basil Rauch. She desired that Outer Island remain a wildlife refuge and a place for public appreciation of the island's beauty, as well as be used for marine education.

Since 1995, the island has been closed to public use (except for structured environmental education classes and during open houses). Last year's formation of the Friends of Outer Island allowed the refuge to open for visitation on weekends during the summer. The Friends of Outer Island is a group of volunteers that works with the McKinney National Wildlife Refuge to open the island for visitation, educate visitors and maintain the island.

This past season, visitors traveled to the island in small boats, kayaks and on the ferry from Stony Creek. During a public visitation day it is necessary to have two or more Friends volunteers on the island. One person has to remain at the landing to monitor the number of visitors, while the others may guide visitors to the island's highlights and scenic vistas. If time permits, volunteers pick up flotsam that washes up on the island shores. Some days visitor traffic may be light and a kickback Robinson Crusoe existence abounds.

Now that the Friends group has survived the first year, it needs more members to accomplish the projects for this year and beyond. More volunteers are needed to continue island access and help with necessary improvements. If you are interested in volunteering, there will be a new member information and sign-up meeting for Friends of Outer Island on March 12, 2003, in Branford at the Canoe Brook Senior Center. The meeting is open to all individuals who have an interest in volunteering on or for Outer Island. Contact Paul Donoski (pdonoski@aol.com) or Lynn Dorsey (ldorsey@quinnipiac.edu) for more information.

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Volunteers are needed to help patrol beaches where the state and federally threatened piping plover lays its eggs.

Explore a Wildlife Management Area: Belding



Written by Paul Rothbart, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

The DEP's Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 282-acre state-owned parcel, located in the town of Vernon. The area has a diverse array of habitats, including mixed hardwood and conifer forestlands, open fields, agricultural land and riparian stream corridors. Wildlife using such habitat types include white-tailed deer, woodcock, ruffed grouse, eastern bluebird, cottontail rabbit, mink, river otter, hawks, owls, woodpeckers and a wide variety of amphibians, reptiles and arthropods.

The property was gifted to the State of Connecticut by Maxwell M. Belding in 1981 under a multi-year process. The Department of Environmental Protection assumed 100 percent ownership in 1984. The Belding WMA serves as a means to promote conservation of wildlife habitat and foster an understanding and appreciation of the value and role of such lands to society. Specific management goals for the area are:

- **Promote natural resource education.** Conservation education is critical to the future of wildlife and its habitat. Outreach efforts will include the development of a self-guided trail system, individual outdoor tours and classes on vernal pools, dendrology (trees), wildlife ecology and forest management. The agricultural lands on the property will serve to define the role of farming in the ever-expanding urban character of Connecticut and the need to balance agricultural practices with the needs of wildlife. The DEP will develop cooperative programs with the local school system and the University of Connecticut, and use Belding WMA as an outdoor education site.

- **Maintain and enhance diverse habitats to improve the biological values of the area.**

- **Enhance public enjoyment of the property consistent with the natural resource values and environmental education goals.** Emphasis will be on low impact uses, such as birdwatching, hiking, fishing and photography.

Over the past decade, various management activities have taken place on the area. Forty-one acres of agricultural lands are managed through a statewide lease program.

Through this process, the DEP assures that all best farming practices are followed, including soil nutrient management, riparian buffer establishment and maintaining areas of food and cover for wildlife. A forest inventory and subsequent harvest were conducted as part of an ongoing effort to maintain a healthy and diverse forest ecosystem. Belding WMA has been designated as a "Wild Trout Management Area" and, as such, has provided increased opportunities for Connecticut anglers to enjoy a quality wild trout fishing experience. In cooperation with the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, a section of hiking trail was developed on the Belding property to connect a gap within the Shenipsit Trail and the town-owned Valley Falls Park. Other site enhancements have included marking six miles of boundaries, mowing fields, developing a public access site and installing gates to control unauthorized access.

Although some accomplishments have been achieved over the past decade, many activities that are required to meet overall site goals have not been completed due to funding constraints. Through the continued generosity of Mr. Belding and his family, the DEP is anticipating



Directions: Belding WMA can be found in Vernon on Bolton Road. From Interstate 84 take exit 66 to Bolton Road.

dedicated funds for the management of Belding WMA to soon be made available. This funding will allow the DEP to conduct fisheries and wildlife inventories, develop educational outreach programs, improve trail systems, improve stream and pond water quality, construct a fish passage way on the Tankerhoosen River and provide for staffing that will develop a management plan and provide stewardship of the property.

This area has long served as a place for people and wildlife to coexist within a rapidly changing landscape. The DEP extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Belding family for sharing their conservation land ethic with the citizens of Connecticut. As ongoing activities are developed on the area and more individuals have a chance to visit, it is hoped that they too will share in this appreciation.

Read "From the Director" on page 2 to learn more about Maxwell Belding, who donated his land to the State.

Connecticut's Two Freshwater Herons

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Unit

Of the nine species of herons and egrets that occur in Connecticut, only two species are regularly found at inland locations. These two are also our most widespread herons, the great blue heron and the green heron. Both of these species are associated more with interior freshwater wetlands than the other members of their family. They are frequently hard to see because they blend into their surroundings. Look for them as they forage in marshes and shallow ponds, and along the banks of rivers and streams.

Heron are opportunistic hunters that will consume a variety of food. While fish is their primary food source, they will also eat small mammals, such as shrews and mice; frogs; lizards; salamanders; invertebrates, such as crayfish, dragonflies, grasshoppers and other large insects; and occasionally snakes and smaller birds. They do most of their hunting by either the stand-and-wait style or by stalking.

Do these Herons Migrate?

Both the great blue and green heron are migratory in our region. Most of the migrants typically move through Connecticut from April through May in spring, and September through October in fall on their way to and from their breeding and wintering grounds. Migrating individuals may be found at coastal, as well as inland wetland locations. Their migrational movements frequently occur at night. Patient observers on a fall night with a north-west wind may be rewarded with the sight of a great blue heron as it flies high up in front of a full moon.

Most great blues will move south of Connecticut for the winter, but a few hardy individuals may be found at places with open water, such as coastal salt marshes or near dams with flowing water. In winter, the less hardy green heron is an extremely rare occurrence in Connecticut, with most of its population wintering south of Virginia.

Great Blue Heron

The first time a person gets a good look at a great blue heron, it is a thrilling experience. Long legs, long neck and long, pointed bill give these birds an elegant appearance. As majestic as they can be at first glance, when they begin to take flight, their low-pitched croak, slow-flapping wings and gangly takeoff give them a prehistoric look. This labored takeoff will gradually settle into a smooth powerful flight, with long, broad wings propelling them high into the air. With a length of approximately 45 inches and a wingspan of over six feet, the great blue heron represents the largest of our heron species.

Uncommon breeders in Connecticut, great blues normally nest in rookeries that can number from a few pairs to well over 100. Their highly visible, large stick nests are frequently built high up in standing dead trees within a secluded beaver marsh or wooded wetland. Great blue herons are wary birds and nest colonies are highly sensitive to human encroachment and disturbance.

Green Heron

At 18 inches in length, about the size of a crow, the green heron is our smallest heron. This bird has short legs and a more compact body than most of the other herons. At first glance it appears to have a short neck, but the green heron is able to stretch its neck out to an amazing length. When excited, a green heron may be seen raising the feathers of its bushy crest.

Although widely distributed in Connecticut, the green heron is not a common breeder. The population is thought to have declined over the last century due to a



The smallest heron found in Connecticut is the green heron. Its small, compact size can be deceiving to potential prey, as the bird is able to stretch out its neck to an amazing length when hunting.

P. J. FUSCO

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Tall and statuesque, the great blue is the largest member of the heron family to be found in Connecticut. Great blue herons typically feed on small fish and amphibians.

significant loss of shallow water wetland habitat.

The nest of the green heron is typically well hidden in thick vegetation near a body of water. Shrubs, small trees and vine tangles can all provide adequate cover for the loosely-built stick nests. Connecticut's green herons are typically solitary nesters as opposed to most of the other herons that routinely nest in colonies called rookeries.

Green herons are known to sometimes exhibit a remarkable foraging behavior. They will use a fish baiting technique: picking up a small twig or flower petal, and dropping it into the water to attract fish. This fish baiting behavior is noteworthy because it makes the green heron one of the few species of birds that is known to use tools.

Conservation

Herons require quality habitats in which to feed, as well as habitats that provide low-disturbance opportunities

for them to nest and raise their young. Great blue herons, in particular, are highly sensitive to development pressures that encroach upon their rookeries. Entire rookeries may be abandoned if human disturbance is too significant.

As with all wetland-dependant birds, conservation and preservation of wetland habitats are critical to maintaining healthy populations. By continuing to monitor and manage



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Great blue herons nest in rookeries, usually within secluded wooded wetlands, such as beaver marshes. Nesting birds are highly sensitive to disturbance.

many of Connecticut's freshwater wetlands, the DEP Wildlife Division is working to ensure a future for the freshwater herons of our state.

Deer Hunting: Harvest from 2002 and Changes for 2003

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program Biologist

A preliminary evaluation of the 2002 deer hunting season indicates that harvest totals (about 11,500) will be lower than last year's by about three percent. Much of this decrease is due to very wet or windy conditions, which prevented some hunters from going into the field on many Saturdays during the archery deer hunting season and on the first Friday and Saturday of the firearms deer hunting

season. For example, the deer harvest on the first Saturday of the 2002 shotgun season (639) was 39 percent lower than on the first Saturday of the 2001 shotgun season (1,043). Saturdays are typically high harvest days because many hunters are afield on Saturdays.

The abundant acorn crop in fall 2002 also partially contributed to reduced hunter success rates. Success

rates in the past have been influenced by the amount of acorns available for deer to consume during the fall. During years of acorn abundance, deer do not need to travel far to find acorns. Reduced movements by deer make them less visible and less vulnerable to hunting. Although an abundant acorn crop reduces hunter success rates, acorns are a valuable source of energy for deer and should contribute to deer surviving the winter period in good physical condition. Snow cover late during the shotgun and muzzleloader seasons boosted harvest levels within a few percentage points of 2001's harvest of 11,950.

Permit issuance was similar for most permit types. The biggest decrease in permit issuance was for the archery deer season. Total number of archery deer permits dropped

from an average of about 13,800 down to about 12,600 (8% decrease). This decrease mostly was attributed to the new requirements mandating that all bowhunters complete the state-certified bowhunter education and safety course before purchasing an archery permit in 2002.

Looking Ahead to 2003 Season

Several new changes will be in effect for the 2003 deer hunting season. The cost of archery permits in 2003 will increase by \$8 for residents and \$56 for non-residents. However, the number of deer tags on archery deer permits will increase from four to six and the season has been extended to include the month of January. Two of the six tags will be valid only during the extended January season. The extended archery deer season will be open on private land only in deer management zones 11 and 12. Hunters should consult the current 2003 *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide* because some zones were redelineated. Also, hunters are reminded that a valid consent form for the current year will be required to participate in the January archery season.

In the past, replacement antlerless tags were available to hunters who harvested an antlerless deer on private lands in deer management zones 11 and 12 during the shotgun/rifle and archery deer seasons. In 2003, replacement tags also will be available to muzzleloader hunters who harvest antlerless deer in zones 11 and 12.

A Junior Deer Hunting Training Day has been established on the Saturday before the regular three-week shotgun deer hunting season. In 2003, the Junior Deer Hunting Training Day is scheduled for November 15. The Junior Hunting Day was initiated to provide junior hunters with a special opportunity to learn safe and effective hunting practices from experienced adult mentors.

To learn more about the 2003 deer hunting season, hunters should consult the 2003 *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*, available at town clerks' and DEP offices, or on the DEP website at www.dep.state.ct.us.



Starting in 2003, the archery deer season was extended through the month of January on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12.

Plan Ahead for the 2003 Hunting Season! Sign up for a Conservation Education/Firearms Safety class now! Classes for firearms, bowhunting and trapping are offered. Call 860-642-7239 (eastern CT), 860-675-8130 (western CT), or find a class schedule on the DEP website: www.dep.state.ct.us.

Coyotes,
continued from page 3

control authorities. If local authorities cannot be reached or are unable to respond, the DEP can be contacted at (860) 424-3333.

There are many reasons why the DEP does not allow problem coyotes to be relocated. Coyotes are difficult to capture. Even if a coyote could be captured and relocated, it probably would not stay in the area in which it was released. Furthermore, most suitable habitat already has established coyote territories. Relocated animals are also subject to high mortality rates. Problem animals that are relocated often repeat the unwanted behavior in new locations and may continue to cause problems.

There are established hunting and trapping seasons for coyotes in Connecticut. The 2003 hunting season runs from January 1 to May 6, then from May 28 to October 3, and from October 18 to December 31. The 2003 trapping season

runs from January 1 to March 15 and then again from November 2 to December 31. All coyote pelts must be properly tagged before they are sold, exchanged, given away, disposed of or retained for personal use. For more details on hunting and trapping seasons, consult the 2003 *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*, available at DEP offices, town clerk offices and on the DEP's website: www.dep.state.ct.us. A fact sheet on coyotes can also be obtained by visiting the website or contacting the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130).

Tips for Dealing with Coyotes

Homeowners can take the following steps to discourage coyote activity near their homes:

- Eliminate food attractants, such as outdoor pet food, table scraps on compost piles, garbage, fruit fallen from trees and bird seed (which attracts rodents, a favored prey item for coyotes).
- Attempt to harass or frighten away coyotes with loud noises. In the case of bold individuals, the use of strong, unnatural odors (e.g., deodorant soap) may discourage animals from restricted areas or trails or from establishing dens in yards or near houses.
- Trim low branches of conifer trees and remove low brush cover in or near yards that may serve as cover.
- Install yard lights or lights with motion detectors.

Pets can be protected by:

- Limiting their time outdoors, especially at night.
- Supervising pets while outdoors.
- Enclosing pet areas with fencing or a kennel.

These Boxes Are for Bluebirds...and Tree Swallows and...

Connecticut's Bluebird Restoration and Wood Distribution Project was initiated by the DEP Wildlife Division in 1980. Through this project, the Division has provided educational materials on bluebirds, as well as materials, plans and assistance to community service organizations, school groups and others for the construction and installation of bluebird nest boxes. Since the bluebird project started, nearly 2,000 groups have helped build over 42,000 nest boxes for bluebirds and other cavity-nesting songbirds.

During the 2002 nesting season, tree swallows continued to be the most common nest box user statewide. Bluebirds were a close second with over 1,000 fledglings reported. Other box users this year included house wrens, house sparrows, chickadees, tufted titmice and a roosting downy woodpecker. Overall numbers of birds appear to be up from 2001 when numbers hit a five-year low.

The most active bluebird project group participants in 2002 were scout troops. Schools and community

groups were also quite involved. Participation by individuals reporting on the boxes in their yards continues to be the key element in monitoring the success of Connecticut's nesting bluebirds.

You Can Help Bluebirds!

There are many ways that you can help bluebirds and maybe even encourage them to nest nearby.

- **Build nest boxes and place them in appropriate habitat.** The Wildlife Division has published a fact sheet on bluebirds that contains nest box plans, life history facts, tips and other helpful information. Call 860-675-8130 to request the fact sheet or find it on the DEP website at www.dep.state.ct.us. If you belong to a service or conservation group (scouts, 4-H, school, etc.), you can sign up to receive free, rough lumber for building bluebird nest boxes. The lottery selection process for obtaining wood is usually announced in November and the wood must be picked up in January. For information on this project, call the above phone number.
- **Plant for bluebirds in your yard.** You can make your yard more attractive for bluebirds and many other wildlife species by adding food and cover plants. The Wildlife Division has published a booklet that can help you, *Enhancing Your Backyard for Wildlife*. The booklet is available for \$3.00. Send checks (payable to the Urban Wildlife Program) to DEP Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013.
- **Clean out and maintain existing nest boxes.** Bluebird nest boxes should be cleaned out and repaired, if necessary, every winter before bluebirds return in the spring.
- **Let us know about your bluebird boxes.** If you have bluebird boxes that you monitor, we'd like to hear from you! Please fill out a Connecticut Bluebird Nest Box Survey card and let us know which birds used your boxes. To obtain a postage-paid survey card, please call 860-675-8130 or write to: Sessions Woods WMA, Attn: Bluebird Restoration Project, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013.

A “Consensus Statement” on American Woodcock

Many wildlife and plant conservationists are concerned for the future of native plant and animal populations which depend upon grasslands, shrublands and other forms of pre-woodland habitats. These so-called “early successional” species include chestnut-sided warblers, whip-poor-wills, killdeer, ruffed grouse, American woodcock, New England cottontails and many others. Their populations are linked to the extent, distribution and quality of early successional habitats. Unfortunately, as farming declines as a widespread land use in Connecticut and farmlands typically revert to forest or are converted to housing or other urban uses, early successional habitats continue to disappear.

A pro-active statewide initiative to address concerns for early successional species and their habitats is summarized in a consensus statement (following). The statement is the result of input by participants at a workshop entitled “Woodcock: an early succession workshop,” held in Killingworth, Connecticut, on 28 July 2001. The meeting was sponsored by the Pharmedica Corporation, the Hammonasset Fishing Association and the Wildlife Management Institute, and moderated by University of Connecticut Extension Wildlife Specialist and professor John Barclay. More than 40 people representing 29 agencies, organizations, municipalities, landowners, elected officials and educational institutions heard excellent presentations by Robert Askins (Connecticut College), Dan McAuley (U.S. Geological Survey, Orono, ME), Scot Williamson (Wildlife Management Institute) and John Lanier (New Hampshire Fish & Game Department). The talks were followed by three working group sessions. The working groups included “habitats and land management” (DEP Wildlife Division Habitat Specialist Paul Rothbart, chair), “education and research” (UConn Extension Forester Tom Worthly, chair), and “funding needs and strategies” (Middlesex landowner and Coverts Project participant James Matchulat, chair).

Recommendations from each working group were compiled for use by the workshop steering committee.



J. BARCLAY (2)

One of the key recommendations was for the development of a group consensus statement, which summarized the workshop findings and recommendations. The consensus statement is to be distributed to sportsmen, conservationists, landowners and resource managers throughout the state. Many drafts later this consensus statement was approved by more than a two-thirds majority of those who attended the workshop and received final unanimous approval by the workshop steering committee in October 2002. We present the results of this workshop consensus statement to you, the readers of *Connecticut Wildlife*, for your consideration.

We recognize that some of these activities already occur or are being implemented. However, additional activities, support and participation are needed. Our recommendation is that these or similar practices be adopted on undeveloped lands wherever appropriate. It is our intent



Connecticut’s population of woodcock (above) is linked to the quality and distribution of early successional habitats (top).

that the spirit of this document be widely embraced, **not** at the expense of other wildlife, forestry or land conservation programs, but in recognition of the need to maintain a healthy diversity of native flora and fauna in productive natural ecosystems throughout Connecticut.

John S. Barclay, Chairman
Ad hoc Woodcock and Early Successional
Wildlife Committee
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Storrs 06269, 860-486-5896
email: jbarclay@canr.uconn.edu

CONSENSUS STATEMENT from Woodcock: an Early Succession Workshop Killingworth, CT 28 July 2001

Whereas . . .

. . . early successional habitats¹ are vital components of open space biodiversity, organic productivity, human quality of life, societal tradition and well being; and are essential for the health, diversity, and abundance of wildlife populations;

. . . early successional habitats and associated wildlife species have been declining throughout the eastern United States, particularly Connecticut, since the nineteen-sixties²;

. . . declining early succession species include American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse, Northern Bobwhite, Upland Sandpiper, Killdeer, American Kestrel, Whip-poor-will, Yellow Breasted Chat, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, New England Cottontail, and other species linked to loss and deterioration of early successional habitats;

. . . concern over the population status and trends of American Woodcock in North America precipitated development of the 1990 American Woodcock Management Plan (AWMP), and subsequent regional plans by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service;

. . . the Northeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency Directors³, the Wildlife Management Institute, the Ruffed Grouse Society, and others have determined that restoration of American Woodcock populations is a wildlife conservation priority;

. . . the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies appointed a Woodcock Task Force in 2001 to address the decline in American Woodcock populations with a goal to restore the species to 1980 levels;

. . . the 41 assembled sportsmen, landowners, conservationists, biologists, scientists, elected representatives and other knowledgeable participants in "*Woodcock: an early succession workshop*" on 28 July 2001 in Killingworth, Connecticut, representing 29 organizations, agencies, institutions and other viewpoints, concurred that a grassroots initiative to conserve American Woodcock and associated early successional species is essential if conservation efforts are to be enacted before such species are lost;

and whereas . . .

. . . losses and deterioration of early successional habitat can be reversed through proven management practices, conservation policy, sound decision making, and significant funding;

. . . the American Woodcock is an easily recognized symbol of early succession wildlife, and a useful bio-indicator species that has significant social, economic and recreational values, for which substantial scientific information and management expertise already exists;

. . . proven management practices plus innovative, scientifically based strategies directed at American woodcock will benefit other early successional plant and animal species;

. . . the combined efforts of sportsmen, farmers, other landowners, agencies, resource managers, elected representatives, and other conservationists are needed to focus attention and undertake a sustained cooperative effort to restore Woodcock and associated species through conservation⁴ of early successional habitats . . .

Now, therefore, be it resolved that . . .

. . . a new cooperative effort in conservation to help focus, develop, educate, research, support and promote a statewide strategy for halting and reversing the decline in American Woodcock and associated early successional species be initiated through:

1. *Creating an entity* to acquire, manage, and convey financial aid and other resources in support of the restoration and conservation of American Woodcock and other associated early successional species and habitats;

2. *Establishing wildlife habitat-improvement technical assistance and financial incentive programs* to assist private landowners in management efforts to improve early successional habitat;

3. *Generating public awareness of the importance of farmland and other working lands* in the maintenance of American Woodcock and other wildlife using early successional edges and habitats within farm and forest ecosystems;

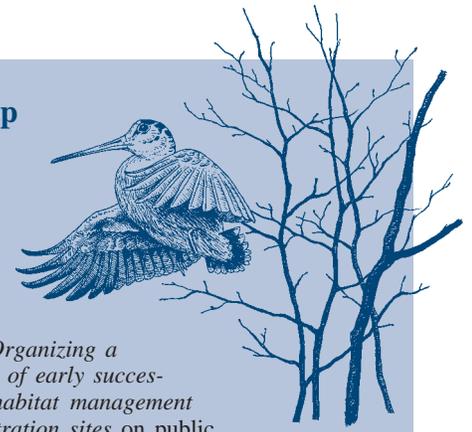
4. *Fostering public support* for conservation of American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse, and other early successional wildlife through distribution of this statement and other materials to media, education programs (e.g., Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Wildlife Habitat Incentives, Coverts Project, Master Wildlife Conservationist Program, Land Trust Service Bureau, Tree Farm Program, others), agencies, non-government organizations such as Farm Bureau, sportsmen's groups, land trusts, vocational high schools, colleges and others;

5. *Integrating appropriate habitat management activities* for American Woodcock, grouse and other early successional species with other science based land and multiple resource management plans when feasible;

6. *Conducting periodic statewide early successional species and habitat inventories* including but not limited to:

a. American woodcock habitat status, trends and conservation needs,

b. expanded Connecticut DEP American woodcock and ruffed grouse population surveys using trained volunteers;



7. *Organizing a network of early successional habitat management demonstration sites* on public and private lands, with funding to help develop, maintain, and evaluate results;

8. *Encouraging* USFWS Refuges, CT DEP Wildlife and Forestry Divisions, municipalities, land trusts and other *land managers to feature and publicize conservation of American woodcock, ruffed grouse and other early successional species on their lands*;

9. *Developing early successional conservation education packets* for use in primary and secondary school programs, including 4-H, Vocational Agriculture and Natural Resources, Envirothon, Project WILD and others; consider adopting an American Woodcock logo as representative of early successional conservation efforts;

10. *Sanctioning development of information and education materials, e.g., newsletter*, to facilitate knowledge, understanding and networking by media, resource professionals, sportsmen, conservationists and the public.

. . . whereby we solemnly declare:

. . . our determination to encourage, promote and support these and similar activities on behalf of American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse and other early succession species to the best of our abilities as stewards of wildlife resources for the benefit of this and future generations.

¹ Typically wetlands, croplands, grasslands, pasture, old fields, orchards, shrublands, young forests and forest openings.

² Fish & Wildlife Service. 1990. American Woodcock management plan. U. S. Dept. of the Interior. Wash., D. C.

³ Issued in 1999 by vote and written statement of the Association of Northeastern State Agency Directors.

⁴ In the best modern sense of Theodore Roosevelt (Pinchot 1947:326. Breaking New Ground. Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, NY. "Use of the natural resources for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time"), and Leopold 1933:17. Game Management. Charles, Scribner's Sons, New York, NY. (Roosevelt Doctrine of Conservation which: 1. "recognized all outdoor resources as one integral whole, 2. recognized their "conservation through wise use" as a public responsibility, and their private ownership as a public trust, 3. recognized science as a tool for discharging that responsibility.")

Wood Duck Population Monitoring

With the onset of a cold winter and thick ice, DEP Wildlife Division field personnel were able to collect wood duck population breeding data from most of the approximately 600 wood duck nesting boxes on state property. Wood duck nest boxes are located throughout the state, many in extremely remote wetland areas. Thick ice, safe enough to walk on without breaking, enables field staff to gain access to many of the boxes. Staff visited box locations and inspected the contents of the boxes. The presence of unhatched wood duck eggs, egg fragments and egg membranes in the boxes helped staff members determine breeding success rates from the 2002 breeding season. In addition to collecting data, many of the nest boxes are also being replaced or upgraded, and their exact locations are being recorded in a Global Positioning System.

Wood duck nest boxes provide ideal nesting sites and improve the breeding success of the species. Since the 1950s, when the wood duck nest box program began, records have shown a correlation between the number of nest boxes and the increase in the wood duck population statewide. This population monitoring effort helps biologists make decisions on wood duck management.

Jim Warner, Field Assistant

“Friends of Sessions Woods” Receives Grant

The “Friends of Sessions Woods” received a \$2,236 grant from the Bristol Main Street Foundation and the James R. Parker Trust to publish “A Guide to Sessions Woods.” The author, Tess Bird of Burlington, has written this guide to provide more detailed information about the biology, history and geology of Sessions Woods. Tess is a youth member of the Board of Directors for the “Friends of Sessions Woods.” The new guide should be available soon at the Sessions Woods office, in Burlington.

Steve Jackson, Wildlife Supervisor



Wildlife Division field assistant James Warner inspects one of approximately 600 wood duck nest boxes located in wetlands throughout the state.

Experimental Chestnut Planting Does Well

Twenty of the 22 experimental American chestnut hybrids that were planted at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington, in the spring of 2002 have fared well. The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, with assistance from the DEP Wildlife and Forestry Divisions and the “Friends of Sessions Woods,” planted the chestnut seedlings and watered them throughout the summer. The planting site was a 14-acre clearcut covered with slash. Getting water to the site during the dry summer was difficult, but necessary for the trees to survive.

The purpose of this long-term project is to have the blight resistant, hybrid chestnut trees eventually crossbreed with native American chestnut trees that naturally occur in the planting site. It is hoped that blight resistant trees with the qualities of the American chestnut will develop. Sandra Anagnostakis, a researcher from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, has been working toward this goal for many years.

Steve Jackson, Wildlife Supervisor

A comprehensive study to better understand the distribution and habitat needs of the New England cottontail in Connecticut was initiated in October 2000 by the DEP Wildlife Division. The New England cottontail is the only native rabbit species in Connecticut, and, although it was historically distributed statewide, populations now appear to be declining in Connecticut and throughout New England.

New England and eastern cottontail rabbits were live-trapped in winter 2002 at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve, in Groton, and marked with radio transmitters. The radio-collared rabbits were monitored to assess their movements, habitat use and mortality. Since February 2002, six to eight radiotelemetry locations have been collected (3-4 day and 3-4 night locations) each week for all animals. A preliminary evaluation of radio telemetry data indicated that a typical home range size for eastern and New England cottontails was 9.7 and 10.5 acres respectively. Areas within home ranges where animals spend most of their time are called core areas of activity. The core area of activity for eastern and New England cottontails was 1.3 and 1.4 acres respectively. Home ranges and core areas were similar for both species. Home range overlap occurred between species; however, core areas were separate.

In winter 2003, additional rabbits were captured at other sites in eastern Connecticut and fitted with radiocollars and ear tags to assess habitat use and movements in a variety of habitat types. As of February 6, 16 rabbits had been captured on private and state land in southeastern Connecticut.

Periodic updates will be provided in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*. The DEP Wildlife Division is still collecting rabbit specimens statewide to document the distribution of New England cottontails in Connecticut. Hunters and the general public can submit rabbit carcasses or heads to the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington or the Franklin Wildlife Management Area in North Franklin. This project is partially funded by the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund and the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP).

Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program Biologist

Correction: On page 3 of the January/February 2003 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*, the New England cottontail was **incorrectly** referred to as a species of special concern in Connecticut. The New England cottontail is actually considered a species of regional conservation concern in the Northeastern United States.

National Wildlife Week -- April 21-27, 2003

National Wildlife Week--a celebration of wildlife and wild places since 1938--encourages kids and adults across the country to learn and experience nature, starting in their own community. The myriad of annual outreach efforts by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and state affiliates includes online activities and games, a Nature in Your Neighborhood Fun Book and Poster, articles and activities in NWF's children's magazines, special events and contests. All these pieces combine to teach students about the environment.

The goal of National Wildlife Week is to educate participants about wildlife conservation issues. By learning about wildlife and conservation efforts in their community, students and adults learn how they can become a positive influence on the environment. National Wildlife Week has tackled many important environmental issues like pollution, endangered species and water quality. By focusing on the theme of "Exploring Nature in Your Neighborhood," National Wildlife Week will emphasize these important topics and many more.

For more information on National Wildlife Week, please email wildlife@nwf.org or call 800-822-9919. You can also visit NWF's website (www.nwf.org) or call Connecticut's NWF affiliate, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, at 860-346-2372.

Compass Courses Established at Sessions Woods

Through the cooperative efforts of the Boy Scouts, the "Friends of Sessions Woods" and the DEP Wildlife Division, a series of four compass courses have been developed at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington. For his Eagle Scout project, Jeffrey Saraceno developed the compass courses by locating 30 stations around the property and marking them with posts, each identified by a unique symbol on top. The compass courses have been designed for different skill levels.

The "Friends of Sessions Woods" provided funding to purchase compasses and print a "Sessions Woods Compass Courses" guide that people can use when trying out the courses. The funding was provided through a grant from the Burlington Fund and the James R. Parker Trust. The DEP Wildlife Division developed the guide and oversaw the course development. The guide should be available by spring. Those interested in using the compass courses now should contact Steve Jackson at the Sessions Woods office.

Steve Jackson, Wildlife Supervisor

International Migratory Bird Day--May 10, 2003

Set on the second Saturday in May, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is an invitation to celebrate and support migratory bird conservation. Like any day of recognition, IMBD exists to focus attention on a valuable resource--the nearly 350 species of migratory birds that travel between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding

grounds in South and Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Migratory birds are some of the most beautiful, observable and remarkable wildlife that share our world. They are also an important economic resource, controlling insect pests and generating billions in recreational dollars.

Unfortunately, research has shown that many migratory bird species are in decline, facing a growing number of threats on their migration routes and in both their summer and winter habitats. Thus, IMBD, in addition to being a day to foster appreciation, is a call to action.

In 2003, IMBD, will be celebrated on May 10. Each year IMBD draws attention to a particular issue or topic. The 2003 theme, "Catalysts for Conservation," explores how birds have been the inspiration for many of the most significant conservation actions in the Americas. Thanks to birds, people have been motivated to improve conditions for all wildlife...and ourselves. For example:

- The extinction of the passenger pigeon helped ignite the conservation movement, waking society up to the permanent damage caused by unregulated harvest. The last wild individual of one of the most numerous bird species on Earth was killed in 1900.
- Many other species, such as the snowy egret, were slaughtered for fashion in the late 1800s. Bird plumes and skins were used to adorn ladies' hats. In response to this overconsumption, bird lovers called for the formation of bird sanctuaries, including the



The common yellowthroat, which occurs in Connecticut, is just one of nearly 350 species of migratory birds that travel between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding grounds in South and Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. International Migratory Bird Day exists to focus attention on the conservation of the birds and their habitats.

first U.S. National Wildlife Refuge in 1903: Pelican Island, home to colonies of brown pelicans. One hundred years later, there are now over 500 National Wildlife Refuges, many founded for birds and all of which set aside land purely for the needs of wildlife.

- Responsible sportsmen recognized the need for regulated hunting of migratory waterfowl. The purchase of hunting licenses and duck stamps has funded the acquisition and management of millions of acres of wetlands, providing benefits to waterfowl, nongame wetland birds, many other kinds of wildlife and humans.
- When populations of osprey, brown pelican, and other top-of-the-food-chain birds crashed in the 1960s, society realized the far-reaching effects of environmental contaminants and reassessed our controls on pesticides and other toxins. Thanks to these "canaries in a coal mine," our environment is cleaner for wildlife and people alike.

IMBD is the hallmark outreach event for Partners in Flight, a unique, diverse consortium of individuals and groups who share a vision of healthy bird populations. Since 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation have shared the principal responsibility for national coordination of IMBD. To learn more about IMBD and upcoming events, visit <http://birds.fws.gov/imbd/>.

Just for Kids

If You Care, Leave It There!

Sometimes people do more harm to wildlife when they think they are helping. Wild animals can appear injured or abandoned but most times are usually fine.

Did You Know?

A young bird, which has just grown its flight feathers, is called a fledgling. Fledglings leave the nest about the time they can fly. They may not look like they can fly, but they can!

A mother deer only visits her fawn four to six times a day to feed it. She is usually nearby but doesn't want to lead a predator to her fawn. It is not only illegal to remove a fawn from the wild, but it reduces the chance that the fawn will survive.

*It takes years for a turtle to be old enough to have young. And, once a turtle is taken from the wild, it is often non-releasable. **If you care, leave it there!***



It is normal to see a fawn alone in the grass. Its mother is most likely nearby waiting to feed the fawn.

Danger! Don't Touch!

If you touch a wild animal, you could be putting yourself in danger. Some animals have rabies and can give it to you. Often it is hard to tell if an animal is sick. Only biologists, animal control officers and wildlife rehabilitators should handle injured animals.



Because raccoons could have rabies, only wildlife rehabilitators who have taken special training from the DEP can care for orphaned or injured raccoons.

What's for Breakfast?

Should you feed wildlife? Just like you, wild animals need good things to eat. People food is not good wildlife food! Bread is bad for ducks and geese because it does not give the birds the nutrition they need. If too many ducks and geese stay in one area because they are getting fed, they can pass diseases to one another very easily.

Is it OK to feed songbirds? People usually feed birds seed during winter. The seeds are fine for the birds. But people have to remember to keep bird feeders clean so the birds don't get sick. People should also remember to take down their birdfeeders in late winter in areas where black bears are found to keep bears away from their homes. It is not a good idea to feed other wild animals!

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- March Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2002 CT Income Tax form.
- March 29 **Wild Turkey Hunting Seminar**, starting at 9:00 AM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. You won't want to miss this presentation if you plan to hunt the elusive wild turkey. DEP wildlife biologist Mike Gregonis will discuss the natural history and management of the wild turkey, while Conservation Education/Firearms Safety instructors Gary Bennett, Ray Hanley and David Sanford will talk about turkey hunting techniques and safety. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.
- April 5 **Plover Monitoring Volunteer Training Session** (see page 8 for details).
- Mid-April Dispose of fishing line in covered trash receptacles. Discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife.
- Late-April Respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas when visiting Connecticut beaches from late-April until late summer. Also, keep dogs off of shoreline beaches to avoid disturbing nesting birds.
- April 21 **Nature Photography Techniques**, at the DEP's Kellogg Environmental Center, in Derby, from 7:30 PM-8:30 PM. Photographer Ian Bornarth will share how to capture nature on film. Cosponsored by the Naugatuck Valley Audubon Society. Please preregister by calling 203-734-2513.
- April 21-27 **National Wildlife Week** (see page 17 for details).
- April 22 **Earth Day**
- April 26 **Family Walk: Birds, Bugs and Blooms**, at the DEP's Kellogg Environmental Center, in Derby, from 9:30-11:00 AM. Discover the many signs of spring as you explore the meadows and forest of Osbornedale State Park. Cost: \$3.00. Please preregister by calling 203-734-2513.
- April 27 **Backyard Wildlife Habitat**, starting at 1:30 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. DEP wildlife biologist Peter Picone will discuss techniques, plantings and resources for attracting wildlife to your backyard. Find out how to register your backyard with the DEP as a "Wildlife Habitat." The program will be held both indoors and outdoors. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.
- May Rabies Awareness Month -- Is your pet vaccinated?
- May 7-31 **Spring Turkey Hunting Season** (See the 2003 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide or visit the DEP website www.dep.state.ct.us for more information. Because of a new regulation passed at the end of 2002, the 2003 spring turkey season has been extended by four days. This change is not reflected in the 2003 hunting guide because it was printed before the change was made. The date has been updated on the DEP website).
- May 10 **International Migratory Bird Day** (see page 17 for more details).
- June 7 **National Trails Day**. The Wildlife Division is working cooperatively with the Connecticut Forest and Park Association to sponsor hikes leaving from the flag pole in front of the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. These guided walks will vary in length and difficulty from an interpretive walk to a hike of several miles. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.
- **Guided Walk through a Clearcut**, starting at 9:00 AM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. This walk, postponed from November 2002, will be led by DEP forester David Irvin. Take a tour of a one-year-old clearcut and learn about the wildlife and forestry benefits of this forest management technique. A brief tour of a prescribed burn, American chestnut plantings and a 10-year-old clearcut that has regrown will be included. Dress for the weather and wear suitable footwear for stepping through woody debris. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.

*Look for the **Wildlife Challenge** in the next issue of Connecticut Wildlife. A new question, the answer to January/February's question and the latest winner will be revealed.*

Connecticut Wildlife

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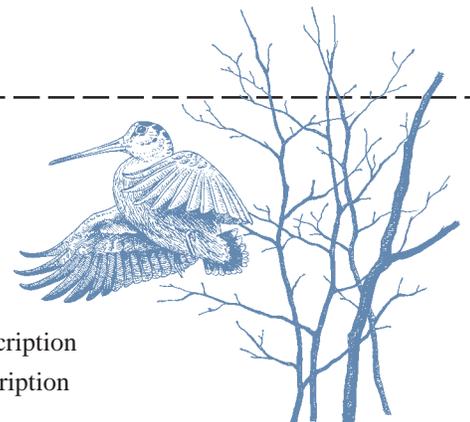
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Could spring be in the air? These two red-tailed hawks were photographed on Valentine's Day as they looked for a new place to nest. Red-tailed hawks usually establish nesting territories by March into early April. The eggs are laid sometime in April.

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