

March/April 2005

# Connecticut Wildlife

PUBLISHED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



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# From the Director

*Like most other Divisions at the DEP, the Wildlife Division has been in a downward manpower spiral over the past 20 years. Escalating costs of salaries and benefits, the loss of general fund support, and an increasing reliance on Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds have basically put us in the position of balancing the budget through personnel attrition. Many of the positions vacated by retirements and resignations over the years have been eliminated. The result of this downsizing has been the consolidation or elimination of programs, an increased workload on the remaining staff, and an overdependence on seasonal workers.*

*The successes of wildlife management over the past century can be attributed to the practice of sound science. Trained professionals are needed to collect, analyze, and monitor information about wildlife populations and their habitats in order to develop policies and programs that will safeguard our wildlife heritage. Despite the dedication of our current staff, the continued trend of shrinking manpower represents a serious threat to our stewardship mission by: (1) affecting our ability to conduct good science, and (2) preventing us from pursuing emerging opportunities to address the needs of wildlife.*

*In the summer of 2004, we developed a hiring plan to retool the Wildlife Division. The plan created 10 new wildlife technician positions with no impact on existing state funds. Four of the technicians will be paid for with federal funds under the State Wildlife Grants program, allowing us to conduct surveys and initiate projects to benefit species most in need of conservation. One of the new hires will be paid from federal funds to help administer the Landowner Incentive Program that will enhance wildlife habitat on private lands. Another will serve as the steward of the Belding Wildlife Management Area funded through a trust established by Maxwell Belding. The remaining four technicians will work on existing programs (deer, furbearer, waterfowl, habitat) and will be paid for by eliminating the majority of the federally funded seasonal positions that have supported these programs in the past.*

*We conducted a very thorough hiring process and had the opportunity to interview a number of candidates with strong academic backgrounds and a diversity of field experience. The quality of these candidates bodes well for the future of wildlife management. In the end, we hired those who best fit our needs. These folks bring a lot to the table and we have high expectations of them. Their hiring will allow us to practice good science and to take advantage of opportunities presented by new partners and new sources of funding. I am certain that this infusion of new talent will reap short and long-term benefits for the citizens of Connecticut and their wildlife. Please join me in saying to each of them: "Welcome aboard. Now let's get to work!" Dale W. May*

## Cover:

*The Wetland Callback Survey is conducted annually by the Wildlife Division, with the help of volunteers, to document the presence of secretive wetland birds, like the American bittern. Volunteers are needed for several other bird surveys. Read the article on page 6 to find out how you can help!*

*Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco*

# Connecticut Wildlife

Published bimonthly by

State of Connecticut

Department of Environmental Protection

www.dep.state.ct.us

Gina McCarthy ..... Commissioner  
David K. Leff ..... Deputy Commissioner  
Edward C. Parker ..... Chief, Bureau of Natural Resources

## Wildlife Division

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

Dale May ..... Director  
Greg Chasko ..... Assistant Director (Assessment)  
Mark Clavette ..... Recreation Management  
Laurie Fortin ..... Wildlife Technician  
Brenda Marquez ..... Secretary  
Shana Scribner ..... Office Assistant  
Chris Vann ..... Technical Assistance Biologist

## Eastern District Area Headquarters

209 Hebron Road, Marlborough, CT 06447 (860-295-9523)

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

## Franklin W.M.A.

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

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

## Sessions Woods W.M.A.

P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 (860-675-8130)

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

## Connecticut Wildlife

Kathy Herz ..... Editor  
Paul Fusco ..... Media Designer/Photographer

## Wetlands Habitat & Mosquito Management Crew

51 Mill Road, Madison, CT 06443

Steven Rosa ..... Mosquito Control Specialist  
Daniel Shaw ..... Mosquito Control Specialist



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



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# The Other Nocturnal Insect Eaters...the Nightjars

Written by Laura Saucier, Wildlife Diversity Program

Connecticut is home to two birds from the nightjar (also known as Caprimulgidae) family, the common nighthawk and the whip-poor-will. There are approximately 67 species in the nightjar family worldwide, seven of which are found in North America. The name “nightjar” is actually the English family name for birds such as the European nightjar, which has a “night-jarring call.”

Nightjars also are referred to as goatsuckers. This odd term may stem from the superstition that the birds took milk from goats. Nightjars were often observed flying low over pastures. People may have assumed that the birds were taking milk from the goats when they were actually feeding on insects swarming over livestock. The Latin words “capri” and “mulgus” literally mean goat milker, which is where the family name Caprimulgidae comes from.

Nightjars are nocturnal insect eaters with large eyes, small bills, and very large mouths. When the mouth is open, it spans nearly the width of the bird’s head. Nightjars use their large mouths to scoop insects from the air. These birds can be found resting on tree branches during the day.

## Whip-poor-will

On summer evenings just after dusk, you may hear the distinctive call “whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will...” This call may last for minutes or even hours. Most likely, you are hearing a male whip-poor-will broadcasting his presence.

The whip-poor-will is a cryptically colored, forest-dwelling bird. Its mottled coloration provides camouflage in the bird’s forest habitat. Males have a white throat band and white patches on the tail, while females have a buff-colored band and no white on the tail. Their preferred habitat is young, mixed hardwood forests or mature, mixed hardwood forests, with saplings that have regenerated following a disturbance (logging, tree blow-downs, ice storms).

Whip-poor-wills are most active at dusk, dawn, and on moonlit nights. Because they use their sense of sight to locate prey, these birds rely on moonlit nights for foraging. Therefore, the breeding cycle is in sync with the lunar

cycle. Females lay one to two eggs in the leaf debris on the forest floor. The eggs will hatch as the amount of moonlight increases. This allows for maximum opportunities for the female to find food for the chicks.

The whip-poor-will’s range is from southern Canada throughout the eastern United States. It overwinters in the southeastern United States to Central America.

Historically, the whip-poor-will was considered a common breeder in most of Connecticut (with the exception of Fairfield County). It is currently listed as a species of special concern under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act (CT-ESA) and a species of regional conservation concern by the Northeast Endangered Species and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee, due to a perceived population decline. These birds are poorly covered by existing surveys, so very little accurate population data exists. Also, these birds have a relatively low reproductive potential and, because they are ground nesters, they experience higher rates of predation.

## Common Nighthawk

Common nighthawks (which are not related to hawks at all) are characterized

by long, bent wings with white patches near the tips and a slightly forked tail. Their bodies are a mottling of browns, blacks, and grays, which helps camouflage them from predators. The nighthawk’s erratic flight patterns, while foraging for flying insects, can make it appear like a large bat.

Male nighthawks make a nasal vocalization that sounds much like the breeding call of the male American woodcock (“peent”). During the mating season, males also will execute very elaborate aerial displays for courtship or defending a territory. They fly up high in the air and then dive toward the ground. A few feet from the ground the birds turn upward, flexing the wings downward, thus creating a loud, booming sound as air rushes through their wings.

Common nighthawks are found throughout the lower 48 states and into Canada. During fall migration, these birds move through Connecticut in large numbers. They overwinter in South America.

Nighthawks do not build a nest but usually lay two eggs on bare ground or in rocky, open areas. These birds have adapted to living in urban areas and

*continued on page 19*



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The whip-poor-will is currently listed as a species of special concern under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act due to a perceived population decline.

P. J. FUSCO



## Meet the New DEP Commissioner, Gina McCarthy

In December 2004, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) welcomed a new commissioner after the retirement of Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr. Although DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy is new to the state of Connecticut and the Department of Environmental Protection, she is no stranger to New England or the environmental field. She comes to the DEP from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where she had been in public service for the last 25 years, working on environmental issues at the local and state level.

Just prior to joining the Connecticut DEP, Commissioner McCarthy served as the Deputy Secretary of Operations within Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney's Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD). The OCD coordinates the policies, programs, and investments of the state's environmental, transportation, energy, and housing agencies. As Deputy Secretary of Operations, Commissioner McCarthy oversaw the formulation and implementation of major initiatives by the state's primary infrastructure agencies to promote smart growth and the development and implementation of the Commonwealth's first Climate Protection Action Plan. Before OCD, Commissioner McCarthy served as Undersecretary for Policy at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, an agency similar in scope to the Connecticut DEP.

Commissioner McCarthy has an extensive list of notable accomplishments at the local and state level and has served on numerous state and national committees, including the Massachusetts Low Level Radioactive Waste Management Board, the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust Advisory Board, and the New England Governor's Environment Committee. She is married with three children.

The *Connecticut Wildlife* staff recently presented Commissioner McCarthy with several questions to answer in her own words so that our readers can get to know her better.

*What are some of your major accomplishments in the environmental field that you are most proud of?*

I am proud of the more than 25 years I have spent in public services at the state and local levels, working to preserve, protect, and enhance natural

resources. In Massachusetts I was fortunate to work with many smart, talented, and committed individuals and together we accomplished many things. For example, we led the effort to clean up the state's oldest and dirtiest power plants, to develop a five-year plan to manage solid waste by increasing waste reduction and recycling, to develop a comprehensive climate change action plan, and to implement a zero mercury strategy. I also helped to permanently protect thousands of acres of open space for wildlife habitat, recreation, and drinking water protection, including the creation of bioserves at the Massachusetts Military Reservation in Cape Cod and Fall River.

*Do you have any special talents or experiences that you look forward to bringing to the DEP?*

I have had a wealth of experiences in the environmental field but perhaps the greatest asset I bring to this job is my love and respect for public service. It is an honor to be given the responsibility of being a steward of the state's environment, an honor that I will not take lightly. Over the years I have learned to listen carefully to the needs of the communities I serve and to find ways to align environmental and economic interests.

*Do you have any personal interests or hobbies?*

My personal life revolves around my family. I have been married for over 25 years and have three children; my oldest are away in college and my youngest is a junior in high school. Taking this job presents a real challenge for me – trying to balance work and family. So far, I have been doing OK, getting home one weeknight and on the weekends, but my “downtime” so far seems pretty scarce. I do love to hike with my golden retriever named Tyson, to play tennis and golf, and to swim. So, I need to find ways to get outside more and exercise – endorphins are great to keep the stress in check.

*What is your favorite wildlife species and why?*

I would have to say that deer are my favorite wildlife species. They are beautiful and graceful creatures and I hate to see the impact that sprawl has had on their habitat. As we lose our



precious open spaces, deer are increasingly being confined to smaller and smaller areas, making it more and more difficult to manage the deer population. As we set our environmental agenda, the preservation of open space must be one of the critical priorities if we are to effectively manage wildlife and mitigate sprawl.

*What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the DEP and also the Wildlife Division?*

Perhaps the greatest threat to the environment in Connecticut is sprawl. What is sprawl? It's uncontrolled, poorly planned growth. It eats up open spaces, destroys wildlife habitat, and threatens the character of our communities. It places a constant and growing strain on the state's transportation, energy, water, and sewer infrastructure. It contributes to the emission of greenhouse gases that lead to global climate change. Sound planning, zoning, and infrastructure investments, as well as comprehensive conservation and preservation efforts are the tools we need to combat sprawl and protect the state's natural resources.

*What do you hope to accomplish during your first year with the DEP?*

Given my extensive background in environmental protection, I hope to “hit the ground running” in this new position. As a first step, I am getting to know all the great people who work at DEP and

meeting with environmental advocates, legislative and municipal leaders, and members of the business community. Together we will set an aggressive environmental agenda for the state that is sure to include the protection of Long Island Sound, improvements in air quality, taking action on climate change,

open space preservation, and the restoration and maintenance of our state parks and forests.

*Do you plan to support efforts to acquire more open space properties?*

Permanent protection of open space will continue to be a major initiative in this state. Governor Rell and I are

committed to this effort and we are currently exploring ways that we can work creatively with the nonprofit community to leverage state investments in open space and address the on-going land management challenge.

## Bluff Point Deer Management Activities Completed for 2005

*Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program*

Deer management activities were completed by the DEP at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve in Groton in February 2005. Wildlife Division staff culled nine deer as part of an ongoing effort to restore the ecological balance at the Reserve. Over the past 10 years, the DEP has successfully reduced the deer population at Bluff Point to an ecologically sustainable level from about 222 deer per square mile to about 20 deer per square mile. Periodic removals are required to maintain the deer population at levels that can be supported by the habitat at Bluff Point.

Based on data collected in 2004, about 34 deer resided on Bluff Point. The goal of the 2005 deer removal program was to remove nine deer to reduce the population to about 25 deer (20 deer per square mile). Based on a post-removal aerial deer survey con-

ducted in March, about 30 deer remained at Bluff Point.

In 2003, the Connecticut General Assembly authorized the DEP to use wildlife management techniques, such as noise suppressed firearms and spotlights, to conduct deer removal efforts. By using these techniques, the DEP was able to reduce the deer herd with fewer DEP resources and without infringing upon the public's daytime use of the park, which differs from past management efforts. Over the past two years, the Bluff Point deer herd has been maintained at low levels by removing deer at night. These tactics have allowed the Reserve to remain open to the public during the day and helped DEP staff be more efficient at removing excess deer.

Biological data collected from deer removed in February 2005 continued to show overall improvements in deer herd

health since management measures were initiated in 1996. As the population was reduced from over 220 deer to about 25 deer, fat indices, body weight, and reproductive rates have all improved, reaching levels consistent with deer taken statewide. Of the nine deer removed in 2005, six were females and three were males. Mean dressed weight for three adult females was just over 100 pounds. On average, adult females had two fetuses per doe. The age structure of the Bluff Point deer herd has successfully been lowered over the past 10 years, which is indicative of a population under intense deer management.

Venison from all deer removed was donated to local food charities, totalling approximately 425 pounds. About 9,725 pounds of venison have been provided to charities since deer management was initiated at Bluff Point in 1996.

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### Report Ruffed Grouse Observations

Wildlife Division biologists are concerned about the continuous decline in Connecticut's ruffed grouse population and they want to know what the causes may be. A research project was launched in 2004 to help provide answers.

The Wildlife Division needs your help in collecting information. Whether you are out hunting or hiking, if you observe a ruffed grouse, please report it to the Wildlife Division. The information needed includes the date, town, specific location, what was heard, and the actual observation. Send this information to Deer/Turkey Program biologist Michael Gregonis at the Division's Franklin office (391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254; 860-642-7239; send email to [michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us](mailto:michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us)).

### Spring Turkey Hunting Season Around the Corner

The 2005 spring turkey hunting season opens May 4 and runs through May 28. Hunting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise until 12:00 noon. On state land, hunters may harvest two bearded birds, while private land hunters may harvest three bearded birds. More detailed information on the hunting season and regulations can be found in the current Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide, available at town clerks' offices, Wildlife Division offices, or on the DEP website, at [www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us).

### Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day

Junior Hunter Training Days are scheduled before the opening of various regular hunting seasons (deer, turkey, waterfowl, and pheasant) to provide an opportunity for licensed junior hunters (ages 12 to 15) to learn safe and effective hunting practices from experienced hunters. On these designated days, junior hunters may hunt when accompanied by an adult hunter 18 years of age or older. The adult mentor may not carry a firearm.

The 2005 Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day has been scheduled for Saturday, April 30. Both the junior hunter and adult mentor must have a valid spring turkey permit for either private or state land. If hunting on private land, both must also have written consent from the landowner. While hunting, the adult mentor may assist in calling turkeys. For more information on this special day, consult the current *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*.

# Volunteers Being Sought for Bird Surveys

Written by *Laura Saucier and Shannon Kearney, Wildlife Diversity Program*

Dust off those binoculars and find your bird guide...the DEP Wildlife Division needs your help!

The Division is seeking volunteers for several new bird surveys being conducted this upcoming field season. The surveys, which range in skill-level from beginner to advanced, are part of a three-year initiative to more thoroughly assess certain avian populations in Connecticut.

season and they can be hard to detect in thick foliage. The woodland raptor surveys will help determine the population status and habitat requirements of six species of breeding raptors in Connecticut.

**What's involved?** Participants will select census points in forested areas and visit each point six times during the survey season (March–July) to search for hawks, look for evidence of successful nesting, and note the habitat characteristics of the study site. All visits involve the limited use of recorded calls to aid in the response of the birds. Visits may be combined with surveys of other forest nesting species.

This project is suitable for paired birders or those wishing to fly solo. Surveys should be conducted in the morning hours after sunrise until 11:00 AM.

## State-listed Passerines (intermediate to advanced)

The majority of these species are listed as endangered, threatened, or special concern under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act. Many of these birds also are experiencing dramatic declines on a regional basis.

**What's involved?** Each survey will encompass multiple species, but you may focus on particular groups of birds based on the habitat in which you conduct your survey.

- Cuckoos (yellow-billed cuckoo and black-billed cuckoo)
- Flycatchers (alder flycatcher, olive-sided flycatcher, and willow flycatcher)
- Warblers (cerulean warbler, golden-winged warbler, prairie warbler, and northern parula)
- Other birds of concern (eastern towhee, brown thrasher, yellow-breasted chat, and purple martin)

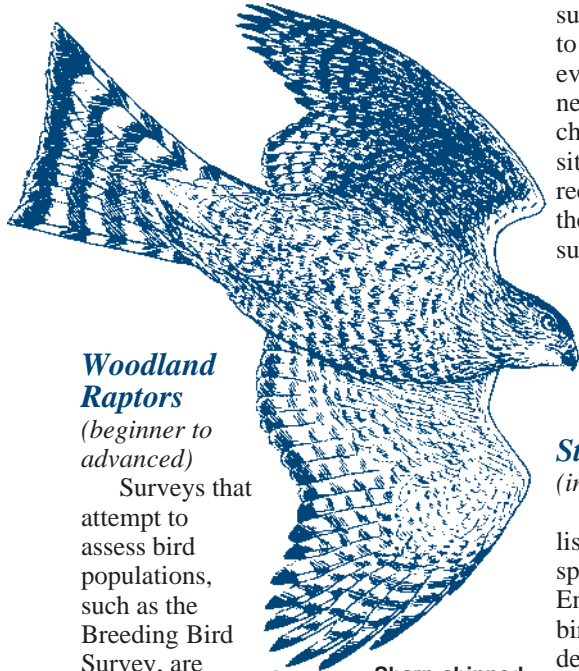
## Nightjars

(beginner to intermediate)

Very little information exists on the distribution and critical habitat features of the common nighthawk and whip-poor-will in Connecticut. Both species are experiencing dramatic declines on a



Common nighthawks have been declining as a nesting species in Connecticut for years.

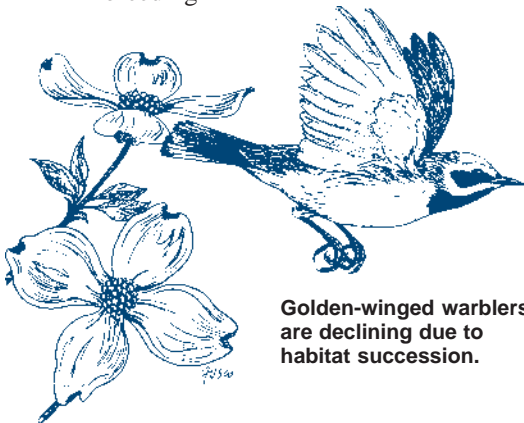


## Woodland Raptors

(beginner to advanced)

Surveys that attempt to assess bird populations, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, are useful for some species but have limited application when studying woodland raptors. Assessing breeding populations of woodland raptors can be a difficult task because these birds are often very secretive during the breeding

Sharp-shinned hawks are listed as a state endangered species.



Golden-winged warblers are declining due to habitat succession.

regional basis and are listed under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act. The status of the common nighthawk was recently changed from threatened to endangered and the whip-poor-will is listed as special concern in Connecticut. Surveys will be conducted at dusk.

## Chimney Swifts

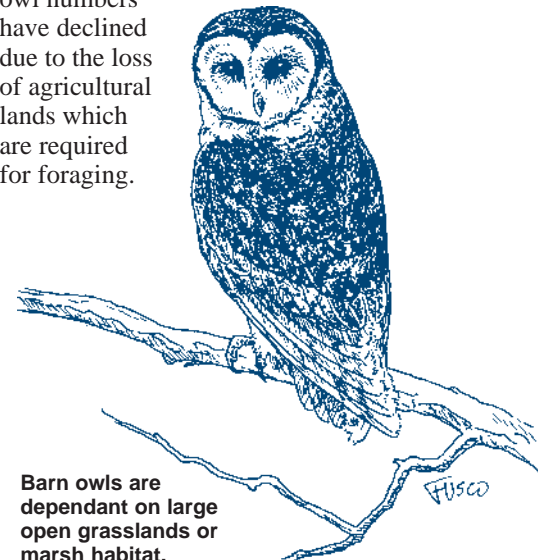
(beginner)

This project aims to improve existing information on the distribution of this species in Connecticut, as well as document the critical habitat features used by chimney swifts, to aid in conservation and land-use planning efforts. Surveys will be conducted at dusk.

## Barn Owls

(intermediate)

Common barn owl numbers have declined due to the loss of agricultural lands which are required for foraging.



Barn owls are dependant on large open grasslands or marsh habitat.



This project aims to collect baseline population data and determine the characteristics of the barn owl's nesting habitat. The barn owl is listed as endangered under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act.

**Who to contact:** Those interested in participating in the above mentioned surveys should contact Wildlife Diversity technician Shannon Kearney at the Division's Sessions Woods office (P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013; 860-675-8130; or [shannon.kearney@po.state.ct.us](mailto:shannon.kearney@po.state.ct.us)).

Additionally, the Wildlife Division is continuing to monitor grassland and wetland birds through the following two surveys:

### **Grassland Birds** *(advanced)*

Grassland bird surveys have been conducted since 1997 to more thoroughly inventory Connecticut's grassland bird populations. This survey uses techniques that have been standardized by Partners in Flight for grassland bird research projects throughout the Northeast. This project is important for bird conservation



**Horned larks are fairly common in winter, but rare as a nesting species in Connecticut.**

efforts as the majority of species considered "grassland birds" are already listed as endangered, threatened, or special concern under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act. Many of these birds also are experiencing dramatic declines on a regional basis.

#### **What's involved?**

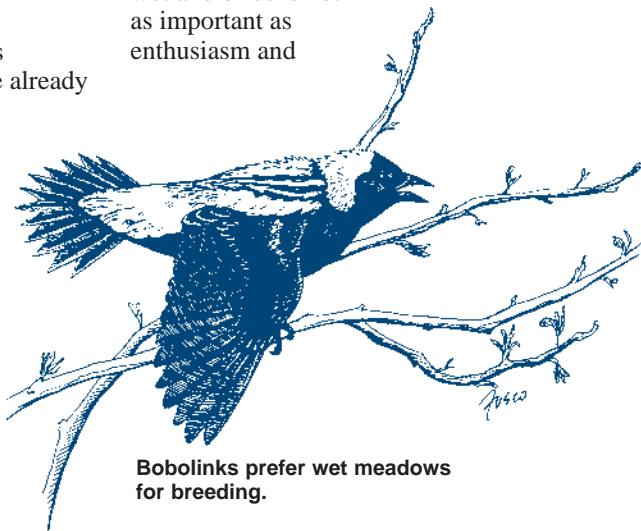
Participants will be asked to conduct point count surveys of grassland birds in various areas throughout the state. The surveys will require participants who are familiar with grassland bird

calls and identification as this group of birds can be very challenging to identify at times. Participants also should be able to readily detect sounds in the upper frequency range of human hearing. The surveys will be conducted from late May through mid-July and will likely involve four site visits.

### **Wetland Birds** *(beginner)*

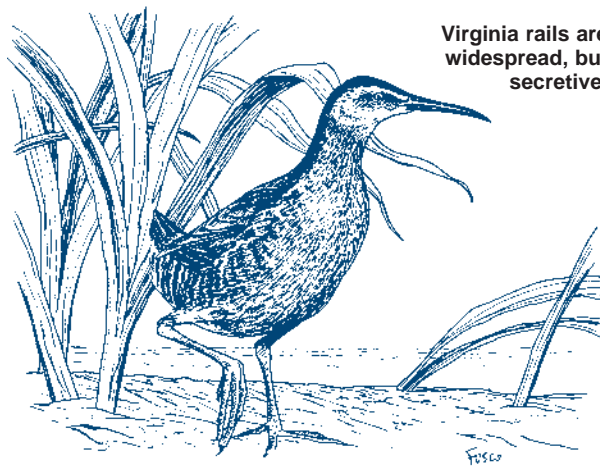
The wetland callback survey project was developed to inventory state-listed birds that prefer wetland habitats. These birds are secretive by nature and are often missed by standard surveys like the Breeding Bird Survey. The wetland callback survey helps pinpoint likely nesting locations for wetland birds, such as the pied-billed grebe, American and least bitterns, common moorhens, and rails. Knowing where these birds occur will aid in the conservation of their important wetland habitats.

**What's involved?** Participants will survey wetland locations statewide, twice in April, twice in May, and once in June, either during peak morning or evening activity periods. A recorded tape of wetland bird calls is played and responses to the taped calls are noted.\* Surveys can be done on foot or by canoe or kayak, and can be done by one person or as a team of two to three people. Having a portable tape player, canoe, kayak, or pair of waders is helpful, but not essential. Detailed knowledge of wetland birds is not as important as enthusiasm and



**Bobolinks prefer wet meadows for breeding.**

**Virginia rails are widespread, but secretive.**



an enjoyment of wetland areas.

**Who to contact:** Those interested in participating in the grassland bird and/or wetland callback surveys should contact Wildlife Diversity technician Geoffrey Krukar at the Division's Sessions Woods office (P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013; 860-675-8130; or [birds-surveys@po.state.ct.us](mailto:birds-surveys@po.state.ct.us)).

Survey participants will be provided with materials and assigned an appropriate survey location in their area if they are not sure where they would like to survey.

*\* It is important to remember that call-response surveys involve creating a territorial response by breeding birds and should only be used on a limited basis in a coordinated way. It is not an appropriate technique for general bird watching.*

*You can still help the Wildlife Diversity Program, whether or not you participate in the bird surveys. If you have observed nesting activity for any of the bird species being targeted in these surveys, possibly along a survey route, at an area where you go hiking, or even in your own backyard, contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130).*

# An Update on Falconry in Connecticut

Written by Laurie Fortin, Wildlife Division Technician

Although the specific origin of falconry is unknown, evidence suggests that it may have been practiced for as many as 15,000 years. When falconry originated it provided people with an alternative means of acquiring food. Today, falconry focuses on the art of training birds of prey to hunt wild quarry for the trainer, as well as practicing a unique tradition.

Falconry got its start in America in the early 1900s and has grown to where it is practiced by nearly 7,000 individuals across the country. In 2005, Connecticut is expected to join 48 other states in the U.S. that allow falconry. Connecticut regulations governing falconry were approved at the state level in February 2004 and federal approval is expected in spring 2005. Connecticut cannot officially implement a falconry program until a Final Rule is published in the Federal Register identifying that Connecticut's falconry regulations meet or exceed federal standards. Once Connecticut's program is approved and the state is formally added to the federal list of approved falconry states, individu-

als can apply to become recognized as falconers (see sidebar for instructions).

Becoming involved in falconry requires a considerable amount of knowledge, skill, time, and money. Individuals are expected to have adequate housing for the birds that meets or exceeds standards established by regulation; they must purchase appropriate equipment; and be willing to spend time each day caring for, training, and hunting with their bird. In the first few years, all falconers must work under the direct supervision of an experienced falconer, keeping in constant contact with this sponsor to learn the finer details of this complex activity.

The DEP has been busy preparing paperwork and gaining expertise to prepare



Calvin Jones and his red-tailed hawk, Luna, prepare for hunting at the Massachusetts Falconry Meet.

## Requirements to Become a Falconer

**Before submitting an application to obtain a state permit**, an applicant should:

- Take the written examination administered by the Connecticut DEP. A score of 80% or higher is required to pass.

**Once the exam requirement is satisfied**, the applicant is also required to:

- Submit an application and a nonrefundable fee of \$175 for a three-year permit.
- Submit written documentation from the zoning enforcement officer of the municipality that verifies that the possession of a raptor and construction of a raptor housing facility complies with local zoning requirements.
- Certify that all required equipment, such as leather gloves, leashes, Aylmeri jesses, perches, grommets, swivels, a scale, outdoor and indoor perches, and water bowls, has been obtained.
- Construct housing facilities and certify that the facilities comply with Connecticut's falconry regulations.
- Verify possession of a valid Connecticut firearms hunting license.
- Obtain a General or Master Class Falconer to serve as a sponsor (Apprentice Class only).
- Certify that they have NOT been convicted of violating any federal or state falconry laws or regulations within the last five years.
- Pass a field examination (General or Master Class Only).

**Once a state permit and a federal license are obtained**, apprentice class falconers are then authorized to:

- Capture a juvenile red-tailed hawk from the wild in another state with the help of their sponsor.
- As an apprentice, falconers in Connecticut are only authorized to possess one wild caught red-tailed hawk.

to administer a falconry program. In January 2005, Wildlife Division technician Laurie Fortin had the opportunity to work with and learn from several Massachusetts falconers, as well as Tom Early of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, while attending a falconry meet in Sandwich, Massachusetts.

The DEP Wildlife Division has also established dates when individuals can take the apprentice class examination and, to date, five individuals have passed this exam. While waiting for the program to be implemented, these individuals are working toward securing an out-of-state sponsor, as well as working with their local towns to ensure that they can legally build a structure and possess a bird of prey.

Individuals thinking about applying to become a falconer should visit the DEP's website at [www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us) for a copy of the state regulations. In addition, you may contact Laurie Fortin at (860) 424-3963 or [laurie.fortin@po.state.ct.us](mailto:laurie.fortin@po.state.ct.us) for more information.



# Big Plans for Belding WMA

Written by Jane Seymour, Belding WMA Steward

Maxwell Belding gifted 282 acres in Vernon to the State of Connecticut to provide natural resource educational outreach, maintain diversity of wildlife and fisheries habitats, and provide opportunities for public use and enjoyment in a manner that is low impact to the environment and consistent with sound natural resource management. To achieve these goals, Max Belding set up the Belding Wildlife Management Area Charitable Trust, which funds the management of the property. A Board of Trustees, which includes Max's daughter Ruth, was established to oversee program activities at Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

In 1993, the section of the Tankerhoosen River that runs through the Belding WMA was designated by the DEP as a Wild Trout Management Area, the first of its type in Connecticut. The Tankerhoosen River is a spring fed system. The cold springs and the shade provided by mature trees along the river, mostly conifers, keep the water cold enough to sustain wild populations of brook and brown trout.

A natural resource inventory was conducted in 2003 at Belding WMA that identified plants, animals, and habitats. Most of the property is mature forest with approximately 37 acres of agricultural fields. A 100-foot vegetative buffer provides protection to Railroad Brook and the Tankerhoosen River, which flow through these fields. Warblers use this riparian corridor on their spring migration. Eighty-two species of birds were documented during the inventory, along with 29 moth, 15 butterfly, 19 fish, 11 amphibian, four reptile, and 18 mammal species.

Spring-fed wetlands on the property provide habitat for dusky and two-lined salamanders and floodprone areas of the Tankerhoosen River and Railroad Brook provide breeding pools for spotted salamanders, wood frogs, and spring peepers.

A dam was constructed on the Tankerhoosen River before Maxwell's father acquired the property in 1920. The pond created by this dam provides angling opportunities and a serene environment for visitors to stop and rest. Two other dams were constructed on Rickenback Brook, a tributary to the Tankerhoosen. The upper pond has been filling in and the dam on the lower pond has breached, creating unique wetland habitats.

This year, the DEP Wildlife Division plans to host a formal dedication to the Belding family. The Vernon Garden Club has offered to plant a butterfly garden at the dedication site. There also are plans to develop an interpretive trail, remove invasive plants, conduct a forest inventory, develop silvicultural recommendations, monitor wildlife populations, provide educational programs, and develop grassland demonstration plots. Plans are being reviewed by the DEP Inland Fisheries Division to construct a fish passage at the dam.

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## New Steward Hired for Belding WMA

*The Wildlife Division is excited to have recently hired Jane Seymour as the full-time steward of the property. By working together with the Board of Trustees, the Division looks forward to the challenges of fulfilling Mr. Belding's vision for this unique property as an actively managed wildlife management area and conservation education facility.*



Spring-fed wetlands at Belding WMA provide habitat for two-lined salamanders (bottom photo) and floodprone areas of the Tankerhoosen River and Railroad Brook provide breeding pools for spotted salamanders (top photo), wood frogs (middle photo), and spring peepers.

A natural resource inventory was conducted in 2003 at Belding WMA that identified plants, animals, and habitats. Eighty-two species of birds were documented during the inventory, along with 29 moth, 15 butterfly, 19 fish, 11 amphibian, four reptile, and 18 mammal species.

# The Warblers of Early Successional Habitats

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

While most species of warblers are forest birds, there are many warblers that use and depend on early successional habitat during the breeding season. What is early successional habitat? Old fields, grasslands, overgrown meadows, and reverting swamps are just a few examples. These open habitats usually have thick ground cover with scattered small trees, vines, and shrubs. Many of these warblers nest in thick cover, either on the ground or close to the ground. They are normally not found in areas with heavy forest cover or development.

Most of the early successional habitat warblers had increased in distribution and population in our region over the last century as agricultural lands went fallow and gradually succeeded into young forest. More recently, most of that early successional habitat has become forest, leaving fewer areas of preferred habitat for these birds. This habitat succession has put pressure on many of these warblers by limiting their available breeding areas. With more and more of their habitat being lost, some of these species are now declining, which is a concern for wildlife biologists and habitat managers in Connecticut.

## Blue-winged Warbler

A common species with a statewide distribution, the blue-winged warbler benefitted from the succession of agricultural fields in Connecticut over the last 150 years. Blue-winged warblers use shrubby fields, forest openings, and open edge habitats. They also will use habitats that are reverting to forest, such



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Blue-winged warblers are common throughout the state.



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Chestnut-sided warblers are fairly common breeders in some parts of Connecticut. They can be found in shrub/sapling habitat close to forest edges.

as fields with saplings and second growth trees.

## Golden-winged Warbler

The golden-winged warbler is a localized breeder in Connecticut. Its use of early successional habitat is more specialized than that of its close relative, the blue-winged warbler. Golden-winged warblers nest in open herbaceous areas with few shrubs or saplings. Such habitats are short-lived and, unless managed, quickly succeed into second-growth habitat with saplings and shrubs taking over the fields. The golden-winged warbler is listed as an endangered species in Connecticut. It also is subject to hybridization with the much more common blue-winged warbler.

## Chestnut-sided Warbler

A fairly common species in Connecticut with uneven distribution, the chestnut-sided warbler breeds in deciduous edge habitat with shrubby undergrowth. This bird can be found along the edges of forest openings, beaver marshes, fields, and power line cuts. The population is most dense in the northwestern part of the state.

## Prairie Warbler

At the northeastern edge of its breeding range, the prairie warbler is a fairly common early successional bird in Connecticut. During the breeding season, it is found in dry, shrubby areas with scattered low trees that may include young conifers, such as pine and cedar.

The prairie warbler is not a bird of the Midwestern prairie at all. The heart of this species' breeding range is in the southeastern United States. It gets its name from the dry prairie regions of central Florida where it is common. A more appropriate name for the prairie



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Typically found in dry, shrubby areas, the prairie warbler is at the northeastern edge of its range in Connecticut.



warbler would be the fire warbler because its preferred habitat has historically been perpetuated by regularly occurring fires.

### **Yellow Warbler**

The yellow warbler is common and widespread in Connecticut. It also is one of the most widely distributed birds in North America, with a breeding range reaching from the southeastern United States, across the continent and north to the Arctic Circle in Alaska and Canada.

In Connecticut, yellow warblers are most frequently found in brushy habitat close to wetlands, such as beaver marshes and along the edges of ponds and watercourses. They are especially prevalent in willow habitat. Yellow warblers also can be found in young, second growth habitats and forest edges in upland areas. Often seen singing from an elevated perch in spring, the yellow warbler is sometimes referred to as the wild canary.

### **Nashville Warbler**

An uncommon breeder in Connecticut, the Nashville warbler is found most frequently in the northwestern hills where it breeds in overgrown fields and agricultural lands with small trees. This species is at the southern end of its breeding range in Connecticut.

Within the heart of its range to our north, the Nashville warbler is found in cool, open habitats with undergrowth, such as along forest edges and in bogs. Nashville warblers are not likely to become a common breeding species in Connecticut because early successional, as well as cool, open habitats are limited in the state.

### **Common Yellowthroat**

One of our most common and widespread warblers is the common



A bird of dense cover, the common yellowthroat is one of our most widespread early successional warblers.

yellowthroat. It is a bird of dense thickets and edges with heavy undergrowth, including shrubs, briars, vines, and other thick cover. Frequently found in close association with wetland habitat, common yellowthroats also will use dry areas with suitable vegetation and cover.

### **Yellow-breasted Chat**

The yellow-breasted chat, which is listed as an endangered species in Connecticut, is a rare and localized breeder. It is at the northeastern edge of its breeding range in the state. Chats frequent low, thick, scrubby habitat that is short-lived and in short supply in Connecticut. Their highly specialized habitat requirements are found mostly near the shoreline, especially in southeastern Connecticut where most of the recent breeding records have occurred. Because there are few suitable habitat areas for chats, improving their population status in Connecticut would require some level of periodic management to maintain low, thick, scrubby habitat.

### **Conservation**

Some of these warblers are declining in Connecticut because of habitat loss, which is due to several different factors. Those factors include the succession of Connecticut's landscape from old field/agricultural areas into forest. This change in natural areas benefits forest species at the expense of early successional species. Early successional habitat also has been lost to the fast-paced development of preferred open areas, like hayfields and meadows, for suburban homes and shopping centers.

Historically, natural fires played a role in maintaining early successional habitat in Connecticut. Today, the DEP uses controlled burns on select state lands to maintain open habitat. Early successional habitat is being created to a certain extent by the state's burgeoning beaver population. Most beaver swamps are created in the forest and are eventually abandoned once the food supply is exhausted. The swamp then gradually dries out, leaving a young meadow in its place.

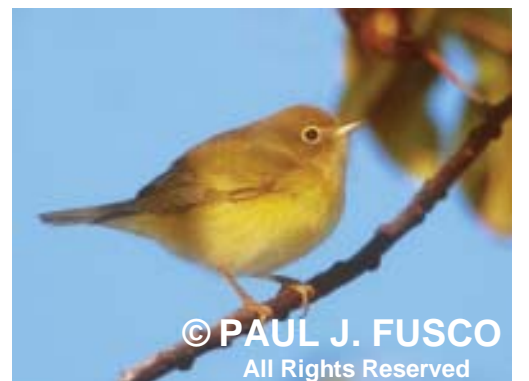
All of these warblers are Neotropical migrants and, as such, are subject to a wide range of survival pressures during migration, including habitat loss along migration routes, predation, and the physical demands of long distance migration. Stopover areas for migrating birds to rest safely and refuel are



The yellow-breasted chat is listed as a state endangered species.



One of Connecticut's most common and familiar warblers is the yellow warbler.



The Nashville warbler is an uncommon breeder in Connecticut.

critically important habitats to protect and conserve. Some stopover sites may be enhanced for migrants, especially at coastal locations, by adding native plants to the existing habitat to provide increased cover and food sources.

The key to protecting early successional warblers is to conserve and maintain their habitat. Through monitoring and active management, the Wildlife Division has been working on multiple projects across the state, using a variety of techniques to restore, enhance, and maintain these critical habitats. Continued improvement of early successional habitats will help to ensure a future for these birds in our state.

# Weather Influences Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Results

Written by Min Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

Staff from the DEP Wildlife Division conducted the annual Midwinter Waterfowl Survey in January. The survey is an important part of the annual and long-term waterfowl population monitoring program on both a flyway and continental scale. The midwinter inventory has been conducted since the 1940s and represents the longest running operational survey in North America. The original intent of the survey was to provide an index to duck populations, and to relate winter distribution and habitat use. Recently, however, the overall utility of the survey has come into question. Many species, such as mallards, are now censused through the use of breeding surveys, which provide a better population index. Regulations for most waterfowl species are now developed based upon breeding populations, rather than wintering populations. However, until a more complete breeding survey is developed and made operational for black ducks, the midwinter survey will continue to provide critical population data for the management of black ducks.

In Connecticut, the survey is conducted from a low-flying airplane. Poor weather conditions and aircraft problems delayed the timing of the survey in 2005. Temperatures in the days preceding the survey were abnormally warm, with highs in the low 60's. As a result of the mild weather, ice cover was virtually nonexistent, and survey conditions were generally poor. Waterfowl are more widely distributed when there is a lack of ice inland. Therefore, counts of waterfowl along the coast were generally poor. Several species, however, were relatively abundant during the survey.

Continuing a recent trend, Atlantic brant numbers were above the long-term average, as was the mallard count. American black duck numbers, however, were below the five-year average. Of interest was the observation of common eiders during the survey. This is the first time that eiders have been observed during the midwinter survey.

The scaup count was the second lowest in the past 50 years. The scaup population has been declining significantly during the last 30 years. Large rafts of scaup, however, were observed this year on the New York side of Long Island Sound. This could have been a temporal shift in distribution during the survey period. Historically, Connecticut wintered scaup in the tens of thousands. Declines in scaup numbers throughout North America continue

## Connecticut Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Results for Major Species\*

Species	2004	2005	Five-year Average
Atlantic Brant	1,600	1,400	500
Black Duck	2,200	1,000	1,900
Bufflehead	1,700	800	700
Canada Goose	4,600	3,000	2,700
Canvasback	0	100	300
Mallard	1,000	1,000	800
Merganser	500	400	1,100
Mute Swan	1,000	800	900
Old Squaw	50	100	100
Common Goldeneye	1,200	700	600
Scaup	1,900	400	1,400

\*rounded to nearest hundred



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Only 800 buffleheads were counted in the 2005 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey compared to 1,700 last year. However, the 2005 count is higher than the five-year average for the survey.

to worry state and federal wildlife biologists. Current research will hopefully provide some much needed answers.

Canvasbacks were observed in several locales during the survey. The counts for other diving ducks, such as common goldeneye and bufflehead, were above the five-year average but lower than last year's count.





## 2004 Fall Turkey Season Results

### Join the Plover Patrol

Every year the DEP joins forces with the Connecticut Audubon Society, the Friends of Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide protection for nesting pairs of piping plovers and least terns. Part of this effort involves the training of volunteers who then spend the summer monitoring piping plover and least tern nesting areas at coastal beaches. Volunteers also educate beach visitors about the plight of these threatened birds and how visitors can avoid disturbing their nesting activities. A seasonal training session is held every April for volunteers who want to join the Plover Patrol. This year, the training session will be held on Saturday, April 2, from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM, at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center, in Milford.

Volunteers are trained to recognize piping plovers and least terns. They also learn about these species' life histories and breeding behaviors, as well as about monitoring procedures. Those interested in the training session or who want more information should call the McKinney Wildlife Refuge office at 860-399-2513.

### Help the Plover Patrol

If you are unable to commit to the Plover Patrol, you can still help nesting shorebirds and waterbirds on your own by taking the following precautions when visiting Connecticut beaches and offshore islands this summer:

If you encounter educational signs or protective fencing at bird nesting areas, please



Piping plover

respect these important areas, keep your distance, and help the birds have a successful nesting season.

Take garbage, food scraps, and fishing line home with you, or discard them in properly covered trash receptacles. Garbage left on the beach attracts predators, like raccoons and free-roaming housecats, which may then prey on young shorebirds. Birds and other animals can get tangled in discarded fishing line and eventually die.

Keep pets off nesting beaches and offshore islands. Dogs on beaches are a major disturbance. The birds perceive dogs as predators, whether or not dogs are on a leash, and will flee their nests and young when a dog is nearby. Unleashed, free-roaming dogs cause further damage by running through nesting areas, harassing the birds, and crushing eggs and young.

Contact the DEP's TIP Hotline (1-800-842-HELP) or local authorities to report any violations or instances when nesting birds are being harassed.

### Wildlife Division Educator Workshop Scheduled

The DEP Wildlife Division will be holding a wildlife educator workshop on Neotropical Migratory Birds on Thursday, May 5, from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM. The workshop will be held

at the Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center on Route 69 in Burlington. Workshop participants will learn about Connecticut's migratory birds during a field walk, and also discover ways to teach about birds in the classroom. Educators will earn .3 CEUs while having fun. The workshop is free, but a preregistration application is required (call 860-675-8130 and ask for Laura Rogers-Castro or email Laura at [laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us](mailto:laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us)).

Registration deadline is two weeks prior to the workshop. In case of bad weather, the raindate for the workshop will be May 6.



Rose-breasted grosbeak

During the 2004 fall wild turkey seasons, hunters reported harvesting 302 birds from Connecticut woodlands, an increase from the 2003 harvest. This increase in the harvest may have been due to the relatively warm and dry spring weather conditions, which probably resulted in higher hen and poult survival rates and, thus, more birds being available during the fall seasons.

Permit issuance declined from 2003 to 2004. However, both the archery and firearms harvests increased. Permit issuance may have declined due to a license fee increase in 2003. Firearms hunters reported a harvest of 234 birds, representing a 75% increase from the 134 birds harvested in 2003. Overall, 3,060 firearms permits were issued and 168 hunters took at least one turkey for a 5% overall success rate. Private land hunters (2,520) harvested 212 birds and state land hunters (540) harvested 22 birds. Fall firearms hunters reported taking at least one bird from 77 of the 169 Connecticut towns (46%). The towns of Woodstock (10), Goshen (9), and Lebanon (9) recorded the highest harvest. The highest state land harvest occurred at Cockaponset State Forest (3), Colebrook Reservoir/Hogback Dam (2), Natchaug State Forest (2), and Naugatuck State Forest (2). The harvest included 62 adult males, 53 adult females, 55 juvenile males, and 64 juvenile females.

During the fall archery season, 2,173 permits were issued and 68 birds were harvested. Overall, the 2004 turkey harvest increased by 17% from 2003 (58 birds) and permit issuance declined by 6%. Fifty-six archers harvested at least one bird. The statewide success rate was 2.6%. Wild turkeys were taken in 48 of the 169 Connecticut towns, with Ledyard (4), Redding (4), and Stratford (4) reporting the highest harvest. Of the 68 birds taken by archers, there were 39 males and 29 females; 72% were adults.

As Connecticut's turkey population has increased, so have opportunities to harvest these birds. Continuing this trend, regulation proposals have been made to expand the fall firearms framework. The proposed regulations change would increase the fall firearms season length by two weeks and allow hunters to obtain both a private land and state land permit. Be sure to read the current Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide or check the DEP's website ([www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us)) to keep up-to-date with all hunting regulations and new hunting opportunities.

*Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program*

## Wildlife Division Staff Grows

The DEP Wildlife Division recently welcomed 11 new employees to its staff (see "From the Director" to find out how these positions are being funded and why the Division was able to hire some much needed help). Some are new faces, but most have worked for the Wildlife Division at some point in time as a seasonal employee or general worker. This issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* will introduce you to six of the new employees. The other five new employees will be introduced in the May/June issue.

### **Laura Saucier, Wildlife Technician, Wildlife Diversity Program**

For the past five years, Laura has worked for the Wildlife Division's Habitat Management Program as a



Laura Saucier

general worker. During that time she assisted with habitat management projects and wildlife surveys, as well as

provided technical assistance to the public concerning beaver problems. As a full-time technician, Laura will be changing hats to work with the Wildlife Diversity Program, assisting with many different projects, especially ones that involve reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.

Laura's interest in wildlife and the outdoors started early and her experience in the Vocational Agriculture Program in high school reaffirmed her desire to pursue a career in natural resources. After graduating with a B.S. degree in Ecology and Evolutionary biology from the University of Connecticut, Laura worked several seasonal positions to gain valuable field experience and knowledge about wildlife management. From her seasonal work, Laura has learned two valuable lessons the hard way: 1) when to use a four-wheel drive vehicle, and 2) always carry your camera in a drybag (waterproof

bag) when traveling by canoe! Laura looks forward to getting out "in the field," learning new things, meeting new challenges, and helping with many of the wildlife projects and surveys conducted by the Division.

In her free time, Laura likes to travel (with binoculars in hand), hike with her dog Phoebe, and canoe.

### **Kate Moran, Wildlife Technician, Wildlife Diversity Program**

After working for the Wildlife Diversity Program for several months as a seasonal resource assistant, Kate was hired as a wildlife technician to continue



Kate Moran

her work with the Program. Initially, she will be spending her time working on the Division's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and the Connecticut Birding Trail website.

Kate graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a B.A. degree in Zoology. She is currently a Master's candidate in geography at Central Connecticut State University where she is concentrating in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Natural Resources. She brings to the job experience in GIS capabilities and computer cartography, database and applications development, and website development. In her free time, Kate enjoys bird watching, mushroom hunting, hiking, orienteering, and cross country skiing.

When asked why she chose a career in wildlife, Kate answered "My interest in biology was initially inspired by a dynamic high school biology teacher. In college, I majored in zoology and especially enjoyed studies in ornithology and invertebrate zoology. My professional experience began in the environmental field and later morphed into computer technology. Returning to school to study Geographic Information

Systems and natural resource geography was an exciting development for me, pulling together my background in zoology and my professional experience in environmental science and computer technology. I am now happy to apply all that experience toward the purpose of wildlife conservation in my new position with the Wildlife Division."

### **Robin Blum, Wildlife Technician, Landowner Incentive Program**

Robin started her career with the DEP in 1998 when she was hired as a contracted researcher on a timber rattlesnake project. From there she went on to work as a seasonal employee for the Wildlife Division's Piping Plover/Least Tern Recovery Project, and then as a general worker for the Deer/Turkey Program and the new Landowner Incentive Program. As a full-time technician, Robin will continue her work with the Landowner Incentive Program, assisting in establishing and administering this new private lands habitat management program. She looks forward to

working with private landowners and seeing habitats improved to benefit wildlife.

Robin has a B.A. degree in English from the University of Connecticut.

However, her

interest in the natural sciences prompted her to work toward a B.S. degree in Wildlife Biology and Management at the University of Rhode Island. In her free time, Robin enjoys reading and working on puzzles of all kinds.

### **Kelly Kubik, Wildlife Technician, Waterfowl Program**

Kelly will be working for the Waterfowl Program on a multitude of research projects dealing with Canada geese, ducks, mute swans, and wood-



Robin Blum



cock. Kelly started working for the Wildlife Division as a seasonal employee in 2002 and then as a general worker before being hired as a wildlife technician. During that time, Kelly banded ducks and Canada geese, designed and built waterfowl traps, conducted Canada goose necropsies, designed surveys, conducted sampling of lead shot and telemetry for Atlantic brant, checked and maintained wood duck boxes, assisted in



**Kelly Kubik**

writing reports and creating presentations, and participated in waterbird call response surveys, woodcock surveys, brood

surveys and a molt migration study that involved the attachment of satellite neck collars to resident Canada geese. Kelly received a B.S. degree in Wildlife Management from the State University of New York at Cobleskill. He chose a career in wildlife biology because he thought he would enjoy the unique challenges that arise from working with animals. He looks forward to bringing enthusiasm and a strong work ethic to the Wildlife Division and he hopes to make a positive impact on all aspects of his involvement at the Wildlife Division. Being able to work on numerous projects primarily dealing with waterfowl has been very rewarding for Kelly and he is excited to have a job he truly enjoys. One such experience was when he was given the opportunity to participate in the leg banding of Canada geese in Puvirmituq, Nunavik in northern Quebec.

Kelly spends his free time fly-fishing, fly tying, and waterfowl hunting.

### **Andrew LaBonte, Wildlife Technician, Deer Program**

Andy is quite familiar with urban deer management in Connecticut, as he has worked for the Division's Deer Program since 1998 as a resource assistant, general worker, and independent contractor. As a full-time technician for the Deer Program, he looks forward

to taking on new challenges and broadening his experience.

Andy will be busy conducting hunter and public opinion surveys, capturing deer and moose using chemical immobilization equipment, monitoring deer and moose using radiotelemetry, collecting biological data at deer check stations, conducting deer population estimates by helicopter, developing and presenting slide presentations, and preparing manuscripts for publication.

Andy received a B.S. degree in Environmental Science with an emphasis in Wildlife from Unity College in Maine. As a follower in his father's footsteps, he learned early in life to appreciate wildlife, the outdoors, and everything it had to offer. His fascination with nature was the reason why he chose a career in wildlife biology.

The accomplishments he is most proud of have been presenting research findings for five consecutive years at the Annual Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conferences and preparing and publishing four manuscripts for *The Wildlife Society Bulletin*, a publication of the professional organization, The Wildlife Society. He enjoys hiking, camping, bird watching, fishing, and hunting.

Andy welcomes the opportunity to work with a the Wildlife Division staff and plans to continue working on exciting research projects, where he will have the opportunity to collect, analyze, and interpret data, prepare manuscripts, and present scientific findings in national publications and at regional conferences.

In the first article Andy ever wrote for *Massachusetts Wildlife*, the state magazine published by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, he gave some advice to future natural resource managers: "Anyone who has an interest in working in the wildlife field should start as early they can, teach themselves about the outdoors, seek out people who can teach them more, and



**Andrew LaBonte**

apply themselves in high school and college." In addition, Andy stress that one should strive to work their hardest to gain as much hands on experience as possible.

### **James "Koert" Riley, Maintainer/Field Assistant, Outreach Program**

For the last five years Koert has been involved with all kinds of Wildlife Division projects as a general worker. Based at the Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, he has worked with the Outreach Program to build and develop

informational exhibits for the Education Center. His responsibilities also include maintenance of the Sessions Woods



**James "Koert" Riley**

property and other state wildlife management areas. As a permanent, full-time maintainer, Koert will continue working on similar projects. He wants to make sure that Sessions Woods forever remains a beautiful and inviting location to visit.

Koert's original goal, when he first started with the Wildlife Division, was to combine his work experience with a degree in criminal justice to eventually qualify for a position with the DEP's Environmental Conservation Police. While working 40 hours a week for the DEP, Koert has been attending Manchester Community College, where he consistently makes the Presidents List every semester and recently accepted an invitation to join the International Scholastic Society's local Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. He will graduate with an A.S. degree in Criminal Justice in May 2005, with a 3.9 GPA and high honors.

When he has free time, Koert enjoys fishing, hunting, mountain biking, photography, and gardening. Being outdoors as much as possible and staying close to nature has always been important to Koert.

# The Wildlife Observer



*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](mailto:katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us)

*(submitted photos will be returned at your request)*

## *A Bear Encounter of the Close Kind!*

Noreen Marchand, of Winchester Center, sent in the following photograph and description of a close encounter she had with a black bear:

*"April 4, 2004, was the first warm, sunny day after our long winter. The dog was lying on the front porch sunning herself and watching for squirrels. I was trimming the dead wood on the rose bushes in the front yard. Fifteen minutes later, I was several feet away from the house and the front door where the dog was lying when I heard the dog bolt off the front porch, barking frantically. When I*

*furry paws with long exposed nails could injure "my baby," I came out from behind the huge evergreen, running toward both the bear and the dog. By now, the bear was retreating, looking over his shoulder*

*while this little dog was nipping at him and a half-crazed human was charging toward both of them, screaming incoherently. They both disappeared around the corner of the house, but I kept pulling the long dog chain until I could grab Rocky by his collar and drag him into the house. Thankfully, it was only the dog I roped in. The second the door closed, the bear returned.*

*For the next 15 minutes or so, I watched this magnificent animal tear apart the bird feeder which resulted in a shower of black oil sunflower seeds. He then proceeded to lie down under the feeder, facing the house, covered with seeds on his black, furry head. Chewing and scooping the seeds with his paws, he resembled a family pet. Lying with his paws crossed and turning his head leisurely side to side, I photographed him from the safety of the living room window about eight feet away. He appeared to be settling in, but he really needed to leave before the Sunday guests arrived!*

*I attempted to interrupt his afternoon feast using the unpleasant sound of clanging metal pans. That sound had some effect and he would start to retreat. But the minute the noise stopped, he would return again. After several minutes of this banging, he finally lumbered up the hill, but not before he slurped down a large glob of suet that had been hanging in the metal basket for weeks. We now take in the feeders when mild weather starts and, so far, we don't believe he has ever returned, but we are always on the alert. This story had a happy ending, but in retrospect, so many things could have changed the outcome, especially when dealing with wild animals."*



*turned toward the noise, I saw a big, burly bear approaching the island where the bird feeders were stationed. Rocky, our 28-pound cocker spaniel, was not only still barking, but lunging at and biting the right back furry thigh of the Big Guy! Realizing a swipe from his big,*

## *Lessons Learned About Bears*

There are several lessons that can be learned from this wildlife observation, and spring is the perfect time of year to review the precautions people should take to prevent encounters with bears. We should all be reminded that as Connecticut's bear population continues to grow, encounters between bears and people are expected to become more frequent.

Just as the writer mentioned in her article, the ending could have been quite different. It was fortunate that the dog was not injured by the bear. The bear could have easily swiped back at the dog with its strong paws and sharp claws. To guarantee the safety of pets, owners must supervise their pets at all times and not let them roam freely. Pet food should not be left outside as it can attract bears and other wild animals to the yard.

The writer also discovered what so many other Connecticut residents have...that bird feeding should be discontinued from late March through November. The Wildlife Division receives numerous complaints every spring about bird feeders being destroyed by bears. Some people may welcome the chance to see a Connecticut bear in their yards, but care should always be taken. Take refuge in a vehicle or building to observe the bear and wait for it to leave the area. Those who do not welcome a visit from a bear can attempt to scare it away by making loud noises, such as clanging together pots and pans or yelling.

The most important advice the Wildlife Division can give about interactions with bears is: DO NOT FEED BEARS! Bears that become accustomed to finding food near your home, whether it is left out intentionally or made available through improperly stored garbage, may become "problem" bears. Bears that continuously cause problems may eventually have to be destroyed by the DEP.

Remember, aggression by bears toward humans is exceptionally rare. Bears need not be feared, just respected. Residents are encouraged to report bear sightings by calling the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130; Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM) or the DEP's 24-hour hotline (860-424-3333), or by visiting the DEP's website ([www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us)).

*Report bear sightings to the DEP Wildlife Division by calling 860-675-8130 (Mon.-Fri., 8:30 AM-4:30 PM) or 860-424-3333, or by visiting the DEP's website ([www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us)).*



# Have You Gotten Your Wildlife License Plate Yet?

Several Connecticut Wildlife readers have “stepped up to the plate” to show their support for our state’s wildlife. Their license plates are pictured here to applaud them for their commitment. Join them today by ordering your own wildlife license plates.

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

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

Application forms are available at DEP and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at [www.ct.gov/dmv](http://www.ct.gov/dmv).



## Enter the Wildlife Division’s License Plate Contest!

We want to know if our readers have wildlife license plates on their vehicles. Please send us a photograph of your license plate, along with your name and address. Every two months, we will pick a name and that lucky person will receive a one-year subscription (new or extended) to *Connecticut Wildlife*. Photographs may be published. However, those who do not want their photograph published should indicate otherwise. Send photos to *Connecticut Wildlife*, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 or email to [katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us](mailto:katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us) (type “license plate photo” in subject line).



Don Hopkins, a *Connecticut Wildlife* reader and avid volunteer for the recovery of bald eagles in Connecticut, sent us this letter about his wildlife license plate:

“My four children who are subscribers to *Connecticut Wildlife* found the perfect gift for my birthday this past June when they got the May/June issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*. On the cover was (Wildlife Division biologist) Jenny Dickson holding the wildlife license plates. They immediately ordered one with the alpha-numeric BESG-1. The BESG stands for Bald Eagle Study Group, which assists (Wildlife Division biologist) Julie Victoria in monitoring and banding Connecticut’s bald eagles. In the photograph, you can see our decal on the spare tire. My children thought that as the founder of the group, it was appropriate that the number “1” be on the plate. It is one of the nicest birthday presents I have received and I thank my children, Julie, Joyce, Hank and Scott.”



**Order your wildlife license plates today and ...  
Show your support for Connecticut’s wildlife!**

Application forms are available at Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at [www.ct.gov/dmv](http://www.ct.gov/dmv).

# Just for Kids

## Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)

### *What Is a WMA?*

*Land that is managed for wildlife. In other words, land that is taken care of to create good wildlife habitat.*

### **What can you do at a WMA?**

Hike  
Birdwatch  
Hunt  
Fish  
and more!

### *Management Menu*

*Burning  
Mowing  
Planting  
Seeding  
Mulching  
Cutting  
Adding nest boxes  
Buying land  
and more!*

### *Take a Wild Guess!*

**How many WMAs do you think are found in Connecticut?**

*The answer is more than 90!*

**What is the biggest WMA?**

*Barn Island in Stonington!*

**Which WMA is home to a Conservation Education Center?**

*Sessions Woods in Burlington*



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### **Wildlife Challenge!**

How many WMAs have you visited?

Here's some more for you to try:

Visit Goshen WMA if you like meadows and old fields!

Try Babcock Pond WMA in Colchester for canoeing

Bird watching is great at Wheeler WMA at Milford Point.

Learn about wildlife on the trails at Sessions Woods WMA.



# Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- Jan-April 15 ..... Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2004 Connecticut Income Tax form.
- Late April-August ... Respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas when visiting Connecticut beaches. Also, keep dogs off of shoreline beaches to avoid disturbing nesting birds.
- April 6 ..... **Connecticut Wildflowers**, starting at 7:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. The Connecticut Master Gardener Association is sponsoring this lecture by Walter Landgraf, the curator of the Stone Museum at Peoples State Forest in Pleasant Valley. He is a naturalist, historian, and award-winning lecturer. Walt's lecture will focus on the identification, pollination, and ecology of colonial and native woodland flowers.
- April 17-23 ..... **National Wildlife Week**, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Visit NWF's website for more information: [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org).
- April 22 ..... Earth Day
- April 24 ..... **Friends of Sessions Woods Annual Meeting**, starting at 12:00 noon, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. All are welcome to attend! This year's special presentation will feature a program on coyotes and bobcats by Wildlife Division biologist Paul Rego. A potluck luncheon precedes the presentation. Please bring a side dish to share. This meeting also will feature music by local singer Josh Black.
- April 30 ..... **Spring Bird Walk**, starting at 7:30 AM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Warblers and other birds are on their way back to Connecticut to take advantage of healthy insect populations that are emerging this time of year. Join Paul Fusco of the Wildlife Division for a two-mile walk in search of early migrants. Paul also will provide bird identification tips. This walk is suitable for adults and children over 12. Bring binoculars and meet at the flagpole in front of the building. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.
- April 30 ..... Junior Hunter Training Day for the Spring Turkey Season (see page 5 for more information).
- May ..... Rabies Awareness Month--Is your pet vaccinated?
- May 4-28 ..... Spring turkey hunting season (Consult the 2005 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for more information. The guide is available at town clerk and DEP offices and on the DEP's website: [www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us).)
- May 14 ..... International Migratory Bird Day
- May 22 ..... **Sessions Woods Hike**, starting at 1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Join Wildlife Division educator Laura Rogers-Castro on a hike of the trails at Sessions Woods. Learn all about this wildlife management area and some of its special features. Meet in front of the Conservation Education Center. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.

## Nightjars,

*continued from page 3*

nesting on flat, gravel-roofed buildings. It is thought that the graveled roofs mimic the open rocky areas nighthawks prefer to nest on. Unfortunately, gravel roofs are being replaced with newer roofing materials and this surrogate habitat also is being lost.

The breeding population of common nighthawks is currently declining in

many parts of the bird's range, including Connecticut. In the mid-1800s, the common nighthawk was considered a common breeder in the state. There are many unanswered questions about the bird's breeding success in our state. Its status has recently been changed from threatened to endangered on CT-ESA and also is considered a species of

regional conservation concern by Partners in Flight. If you believe that you may know of a place where common nighthawks are nesting, or if you are interested in participating in a nightjar survey, please call the DEP Wildlife Division's Wildlife Diversity Program at (860) 675-8130, or email [birdsurveys@po.state.ct.us](mailto:birdsurveys@po.state.ct.us).

# Connecticut Wildlife

## Subscription Order

Please make checks payable to:

**Connecticut Wildlife, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013**

Check one:

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

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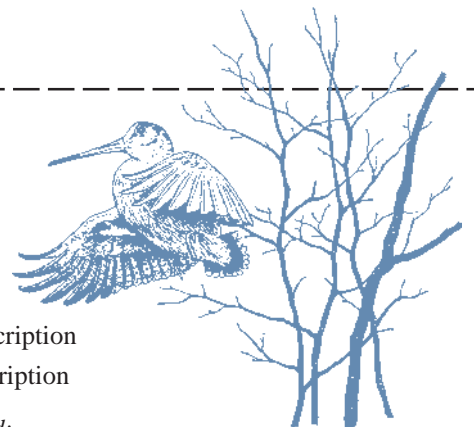
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Great blue herons nest in rookeries that can number from a few pairs to well over 100. Their highly visible, large stick nests are frequently built high up in standing dead trees within a secluded beaver marsh or wooded wetland. Heron rookeries are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

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