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Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



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From the Director

“Oh, how I wish I had my camera.” Anybody who has encountered wildlife while afield has certainly repeated that lament on numerous occasions. My mental scrapbook is filled with awe inspiring images that no one will ever see. My eyes have captured and my memory has enhanced these visions so they are clear, colorful, and spectacular – front page material for the finest magazines. From diving eagles to charging bears, frolicking otters to bugling elk, and so many more wildlife wonders. These are all things I have witnessed, but cannot share. All because I didn’t have a camera.

If it were only that simple. Because on many other occasions, I did have my camera. The results of my lifetime’s worth of wildlife photography are albums largely filled with blurry, grainy photographs of vaguely identifiable animals. The lack of quality is certainly not due to a lack of effort, but rather a series of pitfalls, such as dim light, long distances, unexpected appearances by fast moving creatures, and poor equipment. How many times have I sent off a roll of film with breathless anticipation only to have my hopes dashed by photographs that do not match the quality of my memories?

I’ve drawn several conclusions from years of attempting to photograph wildlife. The bottom line is that it’s very challenging because it is unpredictable. Unlike families who can be posed and landscapes that do not move, photographing animals in their natural habitat is difficult. Every now and then, Nature throws us a gift in the form of a cooperative subject with just the right lighting and a scenic background. But these are the rare exceptions. I have been humbled. I have lowered my expectations. But most of all, I have a greater appreciation for the miraculous way my vision and my memory work in tandem to capture images that I cannot duplicate with technology.

Then, there are the professionals. The Wildlife Division is very lucky to have a great one working among us. Paul Fusco does, on a routine basis, things that mere mortals dare not dream. Yes, he has some fine equipment. But, he also has the knowledge and experience to be in the right place at the right time and, most importantly, if he is only given a millisecond to take the shot, his photo will be perfect. I can only wonder what that supreme confidence must feel like, but I certainly can appreciate his talent and dedication. I think we all can.

Dale W. May

Cover:

Painted turtles are often collected from the wild to be brought home as pets. Find out why that is not a very good idea by reading the article on page 12.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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



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Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy Approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Strategy aimed at reversing decline of wildlife populations and key habitats

P. J. FUSCO



DEP Deputy Commissioner David K. Leff speaks about Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy at an event held on February 1, 2006, to announce federal approval of the strategy. Several hundred supporters attended the event at the DEP Headquarters in Hartford.

On February 1, 2006, the DEP announced to several hundred supporters and members of the media that Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) had been approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The event was held at the DEP Headquarters in Hartford.

Over the past two years, the DEP, with the assistance of numerous scientific experts and conservation organizations throughout Connecticut, worked to develop the CWCS. This strategy aims to reverse the decline of wildlife populations and the loss of key habitats in the state. Federal approval of the CWCS creates a road map that will guide the state's approach to protecting wildlife species and habitats for the next decade. In addition, the state remains eligible to receive continued federal funding for wildlife management and conservation projects.

"Connecticut is a state of great diversity in landscapes and wildlife species," said DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy. "From any part of this state, you can drive just a short distance to view spectacular forests, fields, wetlands, or coastal areas with an impressive variety of animal life."

"That is part of what makes Connecticut such a special place – and why we must work so hard to strike the right balance between our continued growth and development and the protection of wildlife habitat and wildlife itself," Commissioner McCarthy continued. "The wildlife strategy we have put in place will help us accomplish that important objective."

The goals of Connecticut's CWCS are to:

- Reverse the decline of wildlife populations and the loss of key habitats.

- Minimize the need to list additional species as endangered or threatened by "keeping common species common."
- Initiate landscape-level stewardship for key species and habitats.
- Provide science-based data on species distribution and abundance and the location of key habitats to local land-use decision makers (e.g., planning and zoning boards, conservation commissions) that will help municipalities make sound land use decisions in the future.

Since 2001, Connecticut has received more than \$3.6 million in federal funds under the State Wildlife Grants program. These funds – along with money allocated by the state and dollars raised through the sale of a special wildlife license plate and a state income tax check-off – have been used to support programs aimed at protecting declining species. To maintain eligibility for the federal wildlife grants, all of the states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia were required by Congress to develop and obtain U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval of a

comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy.

The CWCS notes that Connecticut's wildlife is remarkably diverse for a small state. It documents the presence of 84 mammal species, 335 bird species, 49 reptile and amphibian species, 168 fish species, and an estimated 20,000 invertebrate species. This diversity is due to the state's wide range of landscapes, waterscapes, and habitats, from the coastal plain and Long Island Sound to the northwest hills.

During the development of Connecticut's strategy, scientific experts and stakeholders reviewed the best available scientific information on the status of wildlife species and identified those species with the greatest conservation need. The strategy identifies 475 species of "Greatest Conservation Need," including 27 mammals, 148 birds, 30 reptiles and amphibians, 74 fish, and 196 invertebrates. In addition, 12 key habitats and 43 sub-habitats related to the species of greatest conservation need were identified as priorities for conservation. These habitats include several types of forests, wetlands, and other unique communities, such as sparsely vegetated areas, caves, and coastal beaches. These wildlife species and habitats will be the focus of conservation efforts guided by the strategy.

Conservation actions to address threats to Connecticut's wildlife will be coordinated with key partners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Office of Policy and Management, The Nature Conservancy, Partners In Flight, Connecticut Audubon, Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Forest and Parks Association, many

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Glastonbury Shooting Range Renovated

Written by Mark Clavette, Recreation Management

The Glastonbury Public Shooting Range, located in the Meshomasic State Forest in Glastonbury, reopened on September 24, 2005, after being renovated. The range was open for public shooting opportunities on Saturdays and Sundays through November 27, 2005 (20 days), from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, with two separate shooting periods. A total of 282 shooting enthusiasts were able to use the range by making an advance phone reservation through the DEP Eastern District Headquarters in Marlborough or on a walk-in basis as space was available. All firearms, except fully automatic weapons were permitted; however, shooters were restricted to the use of paper targets only. The range was closed for the winter, but will reopen in April 2006.

The Glastonbury Range is one of three firearms ranges located on DEP property. The Wooster Mountain Range, located in Wooster Mountain State Park in Danbury, and High Rock Range, located in the Naugatuck State Forest in Naugatuck, are cooperative ventures which are leased to private shooting organizations that agree to provide operational support, maintenance, and public access to the sites.

The Glastonbury Range has been in operation since 1980 and was originally restricted to the use of rifles and shotguns with rifled slug ammunition only. Permits for use of the range were issued from the DEP's Eastern District Headquarters in Marlborough on a phone reservation basis. Preference for reservations was given to licensed hunters as a place to sight in their firearms prior to the regulated firearms deer seasons. Range supervision was accomplished using a combination of permanent and seasonal DEP employees and volunteers.

The recent improvements to the Glastonbury Shooting Range came about as a result of a dedicated source of federal funding and a commitment and cooperative effort by the DEP Environmental Conservation Police, Wildlife Division, Eastern District Operations, and State Parks Division. The primary interest in a major range renovation project was to offer the general public improved opportunities for shooting rifles and pistols, enhanced accessibility



M. CLAVETTE (2)



(Above) The newly-renovated Glastonbury Shooting Range has a 10-position shooting platform with access ramp (right) and a spectator/registration building (on the left). (Left photo) Benches at this shooting station are removable to accommodate wheelchair access.

improvements of public target and shooting ranges. The Glastonbury Range is one example of the many opportunities that have been made possible by the availability of these federal

funds. The Wildlife Division has used the Section 10 funds in the past to hire seasonal staff, upgrade and modernize program materials and equipment, renovate the Franklin training facility/range, and assist with the development of alternative hunter safety course delivery methods, including home study and use of the Internet.

Improvements to the Glastonbury Range included the construction of a 10-position covered shooting platform, construction of a building for spectators and registration behind the firing line, access and parking development, increased berm/impact zones, and new signage. Construction and site work was completed using quality craft workers and maintainers from the DEP Operations Crew, who should be credited for

by handicapped persons, and provision of an alternate site for conducting field activities associated with the Wildlife Division's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program.

Funding for this project was provided by Section 10 of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program. Federal funds available to the states through this program are derived from an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. The funds can be used for a variety of projects, including wildlife research, habitat management, and hunter education programs. The CE/FS Program receives a supplementary allocation of federal funding (Section 10) that is intended for use in program enhancements, including the construction, operation, maintenance, and

improvements of public target and shooting ranges. The Glastonbury Range is one example of the many opportunities that have been made possible by the availability of these federal

Construction and site work was completed using quality craft workers and maintainers from the DEP Operations Crew, who should be credited for

their meticulous attention to detail. Portable target stands also were purchased to provide shooters the flexibility of placing targets at 25, 50, 75, and 100-yard distances. A specially-designed shooting bench was constructed to accommodate those who may be confined to a wheelchair.

Three seasonal range safety officers were hired by the Division to supervise

range operations during the fall of 2005. The employees all have credentials as Certified Range Safety Officers and worked variable part-time shifts to provide coverage of two range attendants at all times. Federally-funded positions have been approved to rehire seasonal staff when range operations resume in April and continue through November 2006. The range will **ONLY** be open

during authorized operating hours when the area is staffed by the DEP. Reservations to use the range can be made by contacting the DEP Eastern District Headquarters in Marlborough at (860) 295-9523, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM. Walk-in shooters are welcome and will be accommodated for unreserved positions as space becomes available.

Preliminary Results for the 2005 Deer Hunting Seasons

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

Preliminary results from the 2005 deer hunting season indicated that the overall harvest (11,915 deer) was about 12% below harvest rates in 2004. Harvest rates decreased for all hunting seasons. This decrease likely is attributed to distribution of acorns, a decrease in permit issuance, and mainly the poor weather experienced during most of the deer hunting seasons. October was one of the rainiest months ever in Connecticut. Many Saturdays during the archery season were wet or windy. Deer movement is restricted during poor weather conditions. Opening day of the shotgun-rifle season, which is one of the highest harvest days, was warm and wet. The harvest on opening day was 38% below harvest on opening day in the 2004 shotgun-rifle season. The January archery season, which was open in zones 11 and 12 only (southwest Connecticut and shoreline towns), was warm and there were only a few days with snowcover. Under these conditions, deer move less and are less visible to hunters.

Hunting techniques, like the use of bait, are less effective if acorns are abundant or weather conditions are mild. During the early part of the bow seasons, white oak acorns were sporadically abundant. During the late bow season, temperatures were mild and snowcover was scarce.

Although statewide harvest rates have fluctuated between 11,000 and 13,500 over the past five years, harvest rates in zones 11 and 12 continue to increase. These increases are attributed to implementation of new hunting strategies to increase deer harvest rates. In these two zones, hunters can harvest unlimited antlerless deer, take advantage of harvest incentive programs, and hunt over bait on private land. Connecticut's deer management program will continue to implement new hunting strategies to reduce deer population growth in developed areas of the state.



The 2005 deer harvest was about 12% less than in 2004. This decrease likely is attributed to poor weather conditions, distribution of acorns, and a decrease in permit issuance. Much of the decrease is due to poor weather during most of the deer hunting seasons.

Deer Harvest and Permit Issuance for 2004 and 2005

Season	Harvest		Permit Issuance	
	2004	2005 ^a	2004	2005
Archery	3,334	2,700	12,063	12,008
Shotgun-rifle	7,816	7,211	29,155	28,349
Muzzleloader	1,114	756	14,589	14,531
Landowner	1,271	1,248	5,608	5,545
Total	13,535	11,915	61,415	60,433
% Change		0.12		.02

^aHarvest data for 2005 is preliminary.

Results for the 2005 Turkey Hunting Season

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

Hunters reported harvesting 202 turkeys from Connecticut woodlands during the 2005 fall turkey hunting season. Firearms hunters harvested 156 birds, representing a 50% decrease from the 234 birds harvested in 2004. Overall, 2,941 firearms permits were issued and 118 hunters took at least one turkey for a 4% success rate. Private land hunters (2,343) harvested 143 birds and state land hunters (598) harvested 13 birds. Fall firearms hunters reported taking at least one bird from 64 of Connecticut's 169 towns. The highest harvests were recorded in Woodstock (16), Union (7), and Warren (7). The highest harvest on state land occurred at Natchaug (2) and Nassahegon (2) State Forests. The firearms harvest included 33 adult males, 46 adult females, 38 juvenile males, and 39 juvenile females.

Archers harvested 46 turkeys, representing a 47% decrease from the 68 birds harvested in 2004. Overall, 2,061 archery permits were issued and 40 hunters took at least one turkey for a 1.9% success rate. The highest harvests were recorded in Lebanon (5), Lyme (3), and Newtown (3); the highest harvest on state land occurred at MDC Colebrook Reservoir/Hogback Dam (2) and Pease Brook Wildlife Management Area (2). The archery harvest included 16 adult males, 15 adult females, eight juvenile males, and seven juvenile females.

As Connecticut's wild turkey population has increased, so have hunter opportunities. In 2005, fall firearms turkey hunters were able to purchase both a fall firearms private and state land

turkey permit and the season was expanded to provide hunting opportunities for an additional 13 days. Despite these liberalizations, permit issuance and harvest declined, probably due to poor weather during the 2005 fall season; rain was a major component during this time frame. In addition, hunters have limited time to pursue game species and wild turkeys may not have been a top priority to hunt. Connecticut offers many hunting opportunities in the forests, fields, and marshes throughout the state. Be sure to read the *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide* to keep current with all hunting regulations and new hunting opportunities. The guide is available at DEP offices and on the DEP's website, www.ct.gov/dep.

Does Hunting Activity in Fall Cause Deer-vehicle Strikes?

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

Some hunting opponents have claimed that deer-vehicle accidents are highest during fall because hunters are chasing deer through the woods and these deer are crossing roads, causing an increase in deer-vehicle accidents. However, hunting opponents have presented no scientific data to support this claim. While it is true that deer-vehicle accidents are highest during the fall, scientific studies have shown that this is a result of increased deer movements associated with breeding activity.

The DEP Wildlife Division conducted a cursory review of the frequency, distribution, and timing of deer-vehicle accidents during the fall, based on reports received from state and local

police departments. Also, the distribution and timing of vehicular traffic, based on data provided by the Department of Transportation were examined to investigate this claim.

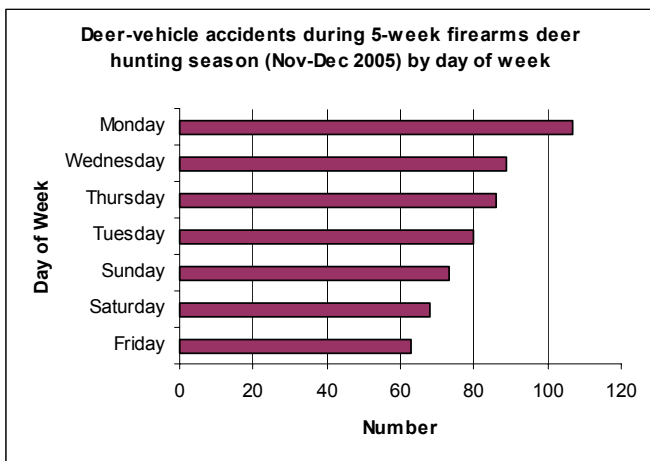
Deer hunting occurs during the day (½-hour before sunrise to sunset) during the fall season. Hunting is allowed on Monday through Saturday, but is prohibited on Sundays. In short, hunting does not occur after dark or on Sundays. The timing of deer vehicle accidents was looked at relative to day of the week and time of the day.

If hunting activity contributed to deer-vehicle accidents, it would be expected that there would be more deer vehicle accidents on Saturday because most hunting occurs on Saturdays and less on Sunday because hunting is not permitted. During the five-week firearms deer-hunting season in November and December, Friday and Saturday were the days with the lowest number of deer-vehicle accidents (see figure). More accidents actually occurred on Sundays when no hunting is allowed. Interestingly, deer-vehicle accidents were relatively high on weekdays

and relatively low on weekends. This pattern also was evident when looking at deer-vehicle accidents by day for the entire year. This closely corresponds with vehicular traffic patterns. Vehicle traffic volume was higher on weekdays and lower on weekends. This suggests that traffic volume was a significant factor in deer-vehicle accident rates.

If hunting activity contributed to deer-vehicle accidents, then it would be expected that deer-vehicle accidents would be highest during hunting hours (½-hour before sunrise to sunset) when hunters are in the woods and lowest at night when hunting is prohibited. Data on time of day of deer-vehicle accidents in Greenwich do not support this concept. Deer vehicle accidents actually peak about one to four hours after dark. Again, this peak closely corresponds with peak traffic volume at the end of the workday.

No scientific data support the claim that hunting activity increases the rate of deer-vehicle accidents. However, the data do suggest that vehicular traffic patterns have a significant influence on deer-vehicle accidents. Removing deer through hunting or other deer management techniques are effective methods for reducing deer populations, which actually contributes to fewer deer-vehicle accidents.



Rare Mudpuppies Found During Burbot Research Project

Written by Christopher Dixon, University of Connecticut

In 2005, the University of Connecticut (UCONN), supported by the federal State Wildlife Grants program administered by the DEP, embarked on a two-year research study of a state-endangered fish, the burbot (*Lota lota*). Fisheries biologists have documented the presence of burbot within two tributary watersheds of the Housatonic River drainage in northwestern Connecticut. Other than presence, little data existed on the habitat use and population demographics of the isolated fish populations and the overall conservation status was poorly known. The objectives of the project are to identify important characteristics of the stream environment that juvenile and adult burbot use and to describe the demography of the population. Part of

the second goal includes the determination of whether any movement and migration patterns are occurring into and out of the two tributaries and the mainstem Housatonic River. This led the project researchers, Chris Dixon (graduate student) and Dr. Jason Vokoun (professor in the UCONN Department of Natural Resources), to discover another rare Connecticut salamander, the mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus*). The Housatonic drainage locations are the first confirmed records of mudpuppies for the northwest corner of the state.

To capture the moving burbot, four baited hoop-net traps, two facing upstream and two facing downstream, were placed in the streams at five localities. Three of the trapping stations were set up near the mouths of the Blackberry River, Hollenbeck River, and Browns Brook. Another station was established upstream in the Hollenbeck River and the last station was located in the mainstem of the Housatonic River, approximately halfway

What Is a Mudpuppy?

A funny line from Conant and Collins (1991) *A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America* reads: "North America boasts an assortment of big, bizarre salamanders that look more like a bad dream than live animals." Mudpuppies also are called waterdogs as there was a mistaken belief that these animals bark. These unique-looking salamanders keep their gills throughout their life. Scientists use the term neotenic (or permanent larvae) to describe this feature. In the warmer parts of the mudpuppy's range, the gills are big and bushy, while in the colder parts of its range, where the water holds more oxygen, the gills are smaller. Mudpuppies range from southern Quebec to southern Missouri. They can grow to be 8 to 13 inches long, live up to 20 years, are usually nocturnal, and are totally harmless. They are sensitive to chemical pollution and can be a good ecological indicator as to the health of the water system where they are found.

Julie Victoria,
Wildlife Diversity Program

What Is a Burbot?

Burbot are the only freshwater members of the codfish family (Gadidae), which includes better known saltwater species, such as Atlantic cod and haddock. Burbot have an elongated body and are generally 6 to 14 inches long. They have a conspicuous single chin barbel, making them unique among Connecticut's freshwater fishes. Burbot grow much larger in lakes and rivers, where they can reach up to 25 inches long and live up to 16 years.

between two tributaries, the Blackberry River and Hollenbeck River.

During this sampling, which occurred in late fall to early winter 2005, four mudpuppies were captured within the hoop-nets. Two mudpuppies were captured on separate dates in the mouth of the Blackberry River, and the other two were captured in the mouth of the Hollenbeck River and in the mainstem Housatonic River, respectively. The mudpuppies ranged in size from approximately 8.7 inches to 13.4 inches.

Mudpuppies -- Introduced or Native?

The mudpuppy (*Necturus m. maculosus*), a large aquatic salamander, has long been the subject of debate -- was it introduced to Connecticut or is it a native species? Babbitt, in his 1937 *Amphibians of Connecticut*, described the species as introduced. Klemens, in his 1993 *Amphibians and Reptiles of Connecticut and Adjacent Regions*, describes well the conflict among reference materials but also reports on the specimens collected in the 1800s and 1950s. Klemens concluded in his book that while the origin is unclear, if mudpuppies were to be "found in the Housatonic River, the entire question of the natural occurrence in southern New England would have to be examined." Now, here we are with four specimens captured in 2005 and all in the Housatonic River and its tributaries! The even better news is that researcher Chris Dixon, in his efforts to survey for burbot, seems to have inadvertently developed a good mudpuppy surveying technique!

While the Wildlife Division does not have any immediate plans to survey for mudpuppies, this intriguing new find and technique may prompt us to encourage interested students and herpetologists to help increase knowledge about this species.

Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program

P. J. FUSCO



Landowner Incentive Program Receives 113 Applications!

Written by Judy Wilson, Landowner Incentive Program

Connecticut landowners responded eagerly to Connecticut's new Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)! LIP received 113 applications during its first open application period from August 1 through October 31, 2005. LIP provides technical assistance and cost-share assistance to landowners for habitat management projects that will result in the protection, restoration, reclamation, enhancement, and maintenance of habitats that support fish, wildlife, and plant species that are rare or declining and considered "at risk." Because over 90% of Connecticut's landscape is privately owned, there is an overwhelming need for private lands to be managed for the benefit of these species.

Of the 113 applications, 70 were from individual private landowners, 17 from land trusts, nine from sportsmen's clubs, seven from non-governmental conservation organizations, four from corporations, and six from various groups like homeowner associations. Applicants proposed a variety of projects, including phragmites control and open marsh water management in tidal wetlands; mowing to maintain early successional habitat; invasive plant control in imperiled communities, uplands and freshwater wetlands; warm season grass establishment; old field restoration; and creation of tree seedling/sapling areas. These types of projects will directly support species at risk by improving the quality and quantity of priority habitats vital to their survival.

Connecticut landowners responded eagerly to Connecticut's new Landowner Incentive Program by submitting 113 applications during the first open application period, which was held in 2005.

Wildlife Division staff began inspecting properties and proposed projects in December 2005. Ninety-four applications passed the initial review, which screened for applicants proposing work outside of LIP's priority habitats and/or types of projects not eligible

under LIP. Because many neighboring landowners and/or homeowner's associations submitted applications as a group in tidal wetland areas, where people often own only a small part of a larger tidal system, the number of individual proposed projects was actually 74. Those 74 properties are being inspected to assess each property and proposed project using a ranking system to determine the relative value to "at risk" species.

The ranking system considers the size of the property and the value of the proposed project to species "at risk," the current level of protection of the land, the quality of neighboring habitats, the current and potential quality of the habitat for species "at risk," and the feasibility of the project, along with other factors. Each property and project is awarded a numerical ranking based on this assessment.

The LIP Project Committee, which is comprised of wildlife and habitat experts from the DEP, will meet once all of the applications are ranked and properties are inspected. The Committee will determine which projects will be funded, based on their ranking, program priorities, and available funding. For those projects awarded funding, LIP staff will begin the work of preparing detailed DEP project proposals, project mapping, cost estimates, permits where necessary, scheduling, and procurement of state approved contractors to carry out the project. LIP project monies are paid to state approved contractors who perform the work; LIP does not reimburse the landowner.



LIP Coordinator Judy Wilson (left, facing camera) meets with members of the Aspetuck Land Trust, which submitted an application to LIP to control invasive phragmites and restore native vegetation useful to "at risk" species in a tidal marsh.

Landowners will need to sign a Landowner Agreement before any groundbreaking work can begin. All projects require a minimum 25% match, which can be met through landowner funds, in-kind services necessary to project success, funding from a third partnering organization, and/or use of DEP Wildlife Division-owned equipment on limited tidal wetland projects when available. Under the Landowner Agreement, the Wildlife Division and landowner agree to what costs LIP is responsible for, what costs and/or in-kind service work the landowner is responsible for, specific work to be performed by a contractor, required landowner maintenance of the project, yearly monitoring by DEP, and length of the agreement.

Landowners will have a future opportunity to become involved with LIP and carry out habitat management on their property for "at risk" species in partnership with the Wildlife Division! The Division anticipates having a second open application period starting August 1, 2006. To learn more about LIP, please contact Judy Wilson or Robin Blum at the DEP's Eastern District Headquarters, at 860-295-9523. Information also can be found on the DEP's website at www.ct.gov/dep.

Warm Weather for the 2006 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey

Written by Kelly Kubik, Migratory Gamebird Program

Staff from the Connecticut DEP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) conducted the annual Midwinter Waterfowl Survey over a three day period between December 31, 2005, and January 2, 2006. The survey is conducted throughout the Atlantic Flyway, and is used as an index of long-term wintering waterfowl trends. The Midwinter Waterfowl Survey is the longest running operational survey in North America. In Connecticut, the survey is conducted from a low-flying airplane where observers take a census of all waterfowl seen along the entire coastline, major rivers (Connecticut, Housatonic, and Thames), and selected lakes and reservoirs.

Conditions for conducting the 2006 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey were generally poor. Unseasonably warm temperatures preceded the survey and, as a result, ice cover was virtually nonexistent. Waterfowl are more widely distributed, and thus more difficult to count, when there is a lack of ice inland. This dispersal of waterfowl during the survey likely resulted in smaller concentrations of birds occurring along the coastal survey route. Colder temperatures, which result in the freezing of inland waterbodies, are more conducive to a successful survey. When inland waterbodies freeze, waterfowl are unable to use them as a resource. Ducks, geese, and swans are thereby forced to concentrate in areas that contain open water, which in Connecticut is usually the coastline and large river systems.

Counts for some of the puddle ducks, such as the American wigeon and mallard, were above both the 5-year and 10-year averages. Incidental observations of gadwall also were noted during the survey.

This year's American black duck count was considerably higher than last year's and in accordance with the 10-year average for this species. The black duck was once the most abundant freshwater duck in eastern North America until the population began to experience a steady decline beginning in the 1950s and subsequently crashed during the 1980s. Until a more complete black duck breeding survey is developed and implemented, the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey will continue to provide critical population data for the management of this species.

While the scaup count was above both its 5-year and 10-year averages, it was well below the historical wintering numbers that Connecticut once harbored. Declines in scaup numbers throughout North America continue to concern state and federal wildlife biologists. Mergansers (common, hooded, and red-breasted) were significantly abundant in both inland and coastal locations and were well above both their 5-year and 10-year averages. Observations of other diving duck species, such as bufflehead, common goldeneye, long-tailed duck,



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The long-tailed duck count during the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey has remained stable over the years.

and ruddy duck, were lower than last year's count, but above or similar to the 10-year averages for these birds. Scoters were once again detected during the survey for the third time in the previous four years of the survey. Before that, scoters had not been detected by observers since 1993.

Atlantic brant numbers also were lower than last year's count but higher than the 5- and 10-year averages. Data from the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey for Atlantic brant and Eastern population tundra swans are unique as they are used to set the annual hunting regulations for these two species. Hunting regulations for other species are based on breeding numbers rather than wintering numbers.

This year's tally for mute swans was similar to the 5-year average. Numbers of swans along the Connecticut coast have been fairly stable for the last several years, while inland counts (Wildlife Division summer swan surveys and National Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts) are continuing to increase.

Connecticut Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Results for Major Species*

Species	2005	2006	5-year Avg.	10-year Avg.
Atlantic Brant	1,400	1,000	800	500
Black Duck	1,000	2,000	1,500	2,000
Bufflehead	800	700	900	600
Canada Goose	3,000	3,000	2,800	3,300
Canvasback	100	100	40	800
Common Goldeneye	700	600	700	500
Long-tailed Duck	100	100	100	100
Mallard	1,000	900	800	800
Mergansers	300	1,900	800	900
Mute Swan	800	900	800	1,000
Ruddy Duck	200	100	200	100
Scaup	400	4,200	1,200	3,400
Wigeon	0	100	20	20

* rounded to nearest hundred

Birds and the Boreal Forest

Text and photos by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

Many people might wonder what Canada's boreal forest has to do with Connecticut's birds. While there is no boreal forest habitat in Connecticut, there are many birds that pass through our state as they migrate to and from the boreal forest. Also, some boreal breeding species spend the winter here. The significance of the boreal forest to North American bird life is staggering. With the number of birds that breed in the boreal forest estimated in the billions, the habitat is critical to the survival of almost half of all North American bird species.

What Is the Boreal Forest?

The boreal forest covers a vast swath of the northern hemisphere. In North America, it stretches from Newfoundland in the east all the way through most of Canada and the southern two-thirds of Alaska, covering 2.5 million square miles.

Boreal habitat is typified by a complex mix of forest, bogs, fens, lakes, and tundra. Most of the land is dominated by forest, including spruce, fir, poplar, birch, and tamarack. Wetlands, including over 1.5 million lakes, account for one third of the area.

Icy cold temperatures prevent plant material from decomposing in the boreal ecosystem, creating thick layers of peat and moss. This prevents carbon from being released into the atmosphere, so boreal forests in Canada and Russia are believed to hold more stored carbon than any other area on earth. It also is believed that the immense size of the world's boreal forests helps to regulate the earth's temperature by moderating the effects of climate change.

The Nursery

The boreal forest is sometimes referred to as the nursery of North American bird life. One in three birds in North America either resides in or breeds in the boreal forest ecosystem. For almost 100 bird species, half of their breeding population occurs in the boreal region. The numbers and diversity of species that depend on the boreal forest ecosystem for breeding are tremendous.

The diversity includes loons, grebes, hawks, sandpipers, gulls, owls, waterfowl, warblers, and finches. It is estimated that over 80% of the entire



A wide variety of birds, from waterfowl to warblers, including the palm warbler (above), depend on the boreal forest.

population of such familiar backyard feeder birds, such as dark-eyed juncos and white-throated sparrows, breed in the boreal forest. Blackpoll, Tennessee, palm, Connecticut, and yellow-rumped warblers are among the many warbler species that depend heavily on boreal forest habitat to maintain their populations. Over 26 million ducks and other waterfowl breed in the boreal ecosystem, representing over 40% of their total North American populations. With such numbers, it is easy to see how critical the boreal forest is in sustaining North American bird life.

What Species Depend on the Boreal Forest?

Some species are highly reliant on the boreal ecosystem, with most or almost all of their breeding population using the boreal forest. Some of the most dependent species include lesser yellowlegs, short-billed dowitcher, black scoter, surf scoter, bufflehead, palm warbler, blackpoll warbler, common loon, white-throated sparrow, and rusty blackbird. Some of these and other boreal species have been declining at precipitous rates over the last 50 years. Researchers are trying to determine the causes.

For example, the lesser yellowlegs population is estimated to have dropped

by over 90% since the 1960s. The decline has been attributed to loss and degradation of habitat, mostly in their migration and wintering range, but this underscores the importance of conserving breeding habitat.

One of North America's most endangered and spectacular birds, the whooping crane, breeds in the muskeg wetlands of the boreal forest zone in western Canada. Another high profile species that depends on the boreal forest is the great gray owl. The only time this species leaves the boreal forest is during some winters when there is a food shortage. This irruption of owls to the



Many waterfowl species breed in the boreal forest zone, including over 80% of the black scoter population.



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A high-profile species in the boreal forest is the great gray owl, whose primary range encompasses the boreal zone of Alaska and Canada.

south happens periodically when the population of their primary food source, small rodents, crashes.

Boreal Forest Conservation

The boreal forest is still largely intact. At this time it faces new and growing pressures from industrial development and logging interests. The forest is being clearcut at a rate of over a million acres per year to satisfy the demand for paper products. That rate is expected to grow in the coming years.

The boreal forest is entering a critical stage where management and conservation decisions are being made. Currently, less than 10% of the forest is protected. Because of its importance to birds and other wildlife and its great size, the boreal forest now stands as one of the continent's few remaining opportunities



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Over 80% of the population of a familiar winter visitor, the white-throated sparrow, breeds in the boreal forest.

for responsible forest management and conservation on a large scale. With so many birds relying on the boreal region, significant consequences for the continent's, and Connecticut's, bird life are at stake.



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Surprisingly, an estimated 30% of the North American osprey (above) population breeds in the boreal forest ecosystem, along with three-quarters of the hermit thrush (left) population.



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Virtually the entire breeding population of lesser yellowlegs falls within the boreal forest ecozone.

Boreal Forest Facts

- The North American boreal forest accounts for 25% of the earth's remaining intact forests, and is 75% the size of the contiguous United States.
- There is more intact forest in Canada's boreal forest than in the Brazilian Amazon.
- 80% of the waterfowl species in North America breed in the boreal forest ecosystem.
- Over 300 bird species breed in the boreal forest, almost half of the species that occur in the United States and Canada.
- Connecticut has 96 regularly occurring bird species that breed in the boreal forest.

Leave Wild Reptiles and Amphibians Where Found

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

Children love to explore the backyard woods or look for creatures in a nearby stream or pond. In their explorations, they often come upon reptiles and amphibians that stay hidden for most of the time. All it takes is turning over a rock or downed log and a child may find a spotted salamander hiding underneath. Fishing in a pond with a large net may yield a painted turtle. A toad may be found hiding in a garden or a box turtle is “rescued” from crossing a road. Finding these animals and seeing them up close is a great experience for any child or adult. However, things can go wrong when someone decides to bring a wild animal home to be kept as a pet.

Collection Is Prohibited or Limited

Trying to keep a wild reptile or amphibian as a pet comes with many problems. First and foremost, people usually don’t realize that there are regulations prohibiting or limiting the collection and possession of certain species. **The DEP Wildlife Division is a strong advocate of NEVER removing any reptile or amphibian from the wild and keeping it as a pet, whether or not it is against the law.** In Connecticut, it is against the law to remove from the wild any bog turtle, wood turtle, eastern box turtle, timber rattlesnake, Jefferson salamander, blue-spotted salamander,



P. J. FUSCO

This female eastern box turtle was collected about 10 years ago from the wild. However, the owner lost interest in caring for the turtle and gave it to a nature center, which then passed it on to the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. This unfortunate turtle must spend the rest of its life in captivity, with no chance to reproduce and replace itself in the population.

What Turtle Was That?

Last spring, the Wildlife Division’s Sessions Woods office received a phone call from someone who saw a turtle in the middle of a busy highway. He stopped to move it out of harm’s way but did not recognize it as being a native species. He called the Wildlife Division to inquire if he could just drop the turtle off at a wetland area down the road from where he picked it up. Because he was unsure about the identification of the species, the caller was asked if he would be willing to drop the turtle off at a nearby nature center to be identified. Later that morning, a staff member from the nature center called the Sessions Woods office with an identification. The turtle was an African side-necked turtle, probably a pet store animal, released into the wild by its owner.

Freedom at a Cost

Releasing a non-native species into our ecosystem is not a benevolent act. This turtle was not a native reptile species to Connecticut. Therefore, it had not evolved defenses to our weather conditions, food sources, or predators. It was “set free” by its owner and would most likely have died from exposure or inadequate food and shelter.

Consider the Bigger Picture

Amphibian and reptile populations are declining worldwide at an alarming rate. Scientists aren’t completely sure of all the factors contributing to this decline. Disease may be one factor. Dumping non-native animals of questionable origins into the wild could introduce detrimental pathogens, such as fungi, viruses, bacteria, or parasites to our native wildlife species.

Plan for the Future

If you, or a family member, are considering purchasing a reptile or amphibian as a pet, consider its needs as well as your limitations. Will this animal outgrow its terrarium before reaching adult size? Is this animal long-lived? Does it need a specialized diet? These are all questions you should research before deciding upon a pet.

If you purchase a reptile or amphibian from a pet store and decide you no longer want it, do not “set it free.” It is illegal to liberate reptiles or amphibians into the wild (Connecticut General Statutes Section 26-55). Consider selling the unwanted pet back to the pet store you bought it from; place an ad in the newspaper; donate it to a nature center, school or nursing home; or check online for rescue groups.

Laura Saucier, Wildlife Diversity Program

eastern spadefoot toad, or northern leopard frog. All of these animals are on Connecticut’s List of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species.

Proper Care Is Needed

Most people don’t know how to properly care for reptiles and amphibians. Proper care requires time and money, just as it does for any other pet, such as a dog or cat. Each animal requires specific foods, vitamin supplements, special lighting, heat, humidity, clean cages, and certain substrates for their “habitat.” Without proper care, these animals don’t live very long in captivity. However, if they are properly cared for and are healthy, some reptiles can live a very long time, much past the interest of childhood. When these reptiles become larger and harder to care for, they may end up being neglected, given to shelters, or released into the wild.

Deadly Diseases

Reptiles and amphibians taken from their natural habitat and kept in captivity should never be returned.

After being fed by their owners and kept in a tank or cage, they are less likely to survive once they have to find their own food, deal with the elements, and escape from predators. Most importantly, pet reptiles also are susceptible to infection and disease and may end up spreading a disease to a wild population. In the wild, these animals rarely come into contact with their own waste or uneaten food, which commonly occurs in captivity. In addition, it is difficult to tell when they are sick. People also run the risk of being infected by *Salmonella* bacteria when they handle reptiles. Although most reptiles that carry the *Salmonella* bacteria do not get sick, people who are exposed to the bacteria could suffer life-threatening complications.

Contamination of the Gene Pool

Reptiles and amphibians taken from their natural habitat also should never be released in a different location due to the threat of introducing genes to a population. These genes, which can be passed along through mating and reproduction, may not be suited for local conditions. Reptile and amphibian populations are not as mobile as birds and mammals and thus tend to be more isolated from one another. Because of these two factors, local reptile and amphibian populations have their own genetic makeup suited for the environment they live in. The future health of such populations may be jeopardized by the introduction of animals with a different genetic makeup.

Lost Chance to Reproduce

When a reptile or amphibian is collected from the wild, that individual is permanently removed from the natural breeding population. Many reptiles, such as turtles, have low reproductive rates. It may take them years to reach maturity. Once turtles are mature enough to mate, their survival rate is high. However, turtle eggs and hatchlings are extremely vulnerable to predation by a number of animals, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and opossums. Very few hatchlings survive to reach adulthood. Removing a few adult individuals can harm, even eliminate, a population. While juvenile turtles do disperse somewhat from the area where they were born, adult female turtles tend to stay in a particular area for nesting. Local population extinctions may occur when adults die or are removed from the population before they can replace themselves through reproduction.

Illegal Collection Takes a Toll

Despite all of these consequences, many native, wild reptiles and amphibians continue to be collected and sold or

kept as pets. This situation has caused some species to become threatened or endangered, especially when combined with habitat loss, water pollution, road mortality, and predators. Although some reptiles and amphibians sold in pet stores are the result of captive breeding programs, many are still collected from the wild.

Removing a reptile or amphibian from the wild to be kept as a pet can be a death sentence for that animal. Learn to enjoy turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, and salamanders by observing them in their natural habitat, where they belong.



P. J. FUSCO

This radiated tortoise, which is native to southern Madagascar, was confiscated as an illegal pet and now resides at the Science Center of Connecticut. Radiated tortoises can weigh up to 35 pounds and live as many as 40 to 50 years. The species is endangered due to loss of habitat, being poached for food, and overexploitation in the pet trade. It is listed in Appendix I of CITES, which prohibits the import or export of the species. However, due to the poor economic situation of Madagascar, many of the laws are ignored.

Those contemplating purchasing a reptile or amphibian from a pet store should investigate the source of the animal—did it come from a captive breeding program or the wild? Better yet, consider adopting an animal that someone else no longer wants.

Having any animal as a pet means being responsible for providing appropriate care. When wild animals are involved, it is usually impossible to meet this responsibility. In the long run, it is the animals and the natural environment that suffer the consequences. The best advice is to learn to enjoy turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, and salamanders by observing them in their natural habitat, where they belong.

The DEP website has a new address: www.ct.gov/dep

Participants Sought for “The Great Park Pursuit – The Connecticut State Parks Family Adventure”

The Connecticut DEP is seeking families from across the state to participate in “The Great Park Pursuit, The Connecticut State Parks Family Adventure.” The Great Park Pursuit is an 8-week game that will take participants on a tour of parks and forests where they will take part in activities and challenges for a chance to win great prizes. The game is part of “No Child Left Inside,” a statewide initiative designed to raise awareness for state parks and forests and build enthusiasm for the outdoors among children. The game kicks off at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill on May 6.

“Our goal is to get more children and families to our state parks to enjoy the beauty, history and recreational opportunities they offer, from hiking to biking to cross country skiing,” says DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy. “What better way to do that than to invite them to participate in a fun game that will allow them to experience our state parks and their many resources first hand.”

The Great Park Pursuit will take Connecticut families on a journey to 8 different state parks over an 8-week period. At each location, teams will be asked to complete various activities, such as a scavenger hunt, hike, fishing contest, and more. At the end of each task, families will receive a clue to the following week’s park or forest. Addi-

tional clues to the location will be available on the website, www.NoChildLeftInside.org. Family teams that complete all game activities will be entered into a drawing at the conclusion of the game for a chance to win one of three grand prizes, including mountain bikes, camping equipment, and ski and snowboard equipment. Family teams that complete five or more of the park visits and activities will be entered to win one of numerous gift cards for outdoor equipment and gear.

Upon registering for “The Great Park Pursuit,” families will be invited to create their own personal family page on the campaign website where they can track their progress throughout the game and post photos and comments.

“We’re looking forward to getting families out to the state parks and forests to make their own discoveries,” says Commissioner McCarthy. “Residents and visitors of Connecticut need to experience our parks in order to fully understand how wonderful they are. That’s what we’re looking to accomplish through the game, along with generating greater awareness for our entire park system.”



To register for “The Great Park Pursuit” and for official rules and guidelines, visit www.NoChildLeftInside.org. Family teams must consist of at least one adult 18 years or older and one child under 18 years old.

“No Child Left Inside” will raise awareness for the recreational activities available at the state’s 130 state parks and forests, attract families to the parks and build enthusiasm for the outdoors among children. The DEP is working in partnership with Connecticut Forest and Park Association, Friends of Connecticut State Parks, the Connecticut Library Consortium, and WFSB-TV/3. For more information contact Diane Joy of the DEP at 203-734-2513 (diane.joy@po.state.ct.us).

CWCS,

continued from page 3

sportsmen’s conservation organizations, tribal groups, watershed groups, land trusts, private landowners, and many others.

Other environmental conservation organizations present at the event also were pleased at the announcement of federal approval of the CWCS. “Audubon applauds DEP Commissioner McCarthy and her staff on completion of this strategy that lays out a blueprint for the conservation of wildlife, both game and nongame, rare and common species alike,” said Thomas Baptist, Executive Director of

Audubon Connecticut. “Especially important are the proactive strategies set forth to keep our common species common. This will increase the efficiency of our conservation efforts, address potential threats at the earliest stage possible, and will help to avoid the more difficult and costly task of endangered species recovery.”

“The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy is a major conservation milestone in Connecticut,” said Milan Bull, Director of Science and Conservation for Connecticut Audubon. “We are pleased to partner with the DEP to move this plan forward to help

conserve and protect birds and their habitats in the state.”

“This plan is an extraordinary and complete look at what we know about our most imperiled wildlife species and the places they live,” said David Sutherland, Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy. “It provides a conservation action roadmap for our state to address the most serious threats facing the species with which we share our lands and waters.”

Connecticut’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy can be viewed online on the DEP’s website at: www.ct.gov/dep.

Andover LEGO FIRST Team Promotes No Balloons Campaign

Written by Debby Rodriguez, Mentor for Team Andover Lego FIRST and Teacher

How does releasing balloons affect wildlife in the oceans? This question was recently answered by the Andover Lego FIRST (ALF) Team from Andover Elementary School. Team ALF consisted of 10 fifth and sixth graders that met twice a week, from September through December, to learn how to program and build a robot with Legos. A research project coincides with the Lego robot building so all team members can participate. This year's theme for the competition, sponsored by FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), was Ocean Odyssey. The team's job was to build a robot to navigate through the "water" and perform different tasks, worth points. The "water" was a mat with specific outlines for a sunken ship, oil pipeline, reef, and a set of flags. The team also needed to research an existing problem facing the oceans and waters of the world, and come up with a creative solution to the problem. Team ALF spoke with DEP Wildlife Division biologist, Julie Victoria, and Heather Medic from the Mystic Aquarium. The team also searched the Internet for a Connecticut connection that would bring the problem to a local level.

In their search, the team found the New York Whale and Dolphin League that had started a "No Balloons Campaign." Members of ALF spoke with the New York League and explained their project. The League was more than happy to share information and posters with the team. Team ALF decided to make their campaign part of the solution.

All of the students were surprised to discover the dangers of releasing balloons with their strings into the air. They were able to find pictures of strangled sea birds and they read about sea turtles and other mammals ingesting plastic trash. The team decided to take a trip to Sandy Point Beach in West Haven to help pick up trash and see if they could find balloons. The team, along with some of their parents, spent an hour walking the beach. Three large bags of trash were collected, along with three large clumps of balloon strings. All of the students were both excited and dismayed at their find.



Team ALF from Andover Elementary School picked up trash at Sandy Point in West Haven as part of a "No Balloons Campaign." From left to right are Jonah Propfe, Dalton Minor, Mark D'Anzi, Nick Gruner, Pat Stratton, Collin Bancroft, Katie Wood, Joel Palmer, and Jake Colli.

Team ALF then decided that the rest of the school needed to have this important information. Members of the team spoke at a school assembly to educate their friends about the dangers and consequences of releasing balloons into the air. Specific facts, such as 70% of airborne balloons and fragments end up in the oceans, along with posters explaining their project, engaged the rest of the student body in conversation. The entire school population then stood and took the *No Balloons Pledge*.

Team ALF put all of this information together, along with pictures, to be presented at the state Lego competition that was held at Central Connecticut State University on December 11, 2005. Fifty teams presented their projects, some of the teams being made up of seventh and eighth graders. All members of Team ALF had a part in the presentation, speaking to adult teachers and mentors. At the end of the day, ALF was awarded second place in creative presentation, second place for Director's award and first place in robust programming. All 10 team members, parents, and mentors were both ecstatic and excited to have been able to share their newfound enthusiasm and knowledge about the No Balloons Campaign!

Releasing Helium Balloons Is Harmful to Wildlife

An article in the July/August 2004 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* discussed how dangerous and deadly helium balloons that are released into the atmosphere can be to wildlife. Very few Connecticut residents realize it is illegal for anyone or any group to release 10 or more helium balloons in a 24-hour period. This law was passed to protect wildlife, particularly marine animals that live in Long Island Sound.

Released helium balloons can ride air currents for hundreds of miles. And, in Connecticut, balloons released in inland areas can make their way to Long Island Sound with the help of a little wind. Once in the ocean, the popped balloons--just like plastic bags and other floating plastic garbage--look like food (mainly jellyfish) to some sea creatures. When these creatures, particularly sea turtles, eat the balloons and plastic garbage, their digestive systems become blocked and the animals eventually die.

The long, colorful strings on the balloons cause problems of their own. They are often picked up by birds as nesting material. Problems arise when the strings get wound around the birds or even nestlings, often causing death by strangulation or starvation. If you were to take a trip to a Connecticut beach bordering Long Island Sound, just like Team ALF did while preparing for their competition, you would be amazed at the number of popped balloons and balloon string you would find.

You can make a difference for wildlife by spreading the word about the dangers of releasing helium balloons and by taking the "No Balloons Pledge."

No Balloons Pledge

"I PLEDGE to protect the environment and wildlife by releasing NO BALLOONS into our environment at any time."

Andover Lego FIRST Team



IMBD Explores a Wilderness Treasure: The Boreal Forest

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), held annually on the second Saturday in May, is an invitation to celebrate and support migratory bird conservation. This year's theme focuses on the Boreal Forest Region of North America, which stretches across 3,500 miles from Alaska to the Atlantic Ocean. This vast region is critical to the survival of nearly half of all North American species, which return each year to the forest to breed. Most boreal nesting birds spend at least some of the year in the United States, and at least 20% of birds at North American birdfeeders in winter have returned after a summer in the Boreal. (See article on pages 10-11 to learn more about Birds of the Boreal Forest.)

Why should residents of the United States, including Connecticut, be concerned about what happens to the Boreal Forest? They should be concerned because it is one of the largest intact forest ecosystems left on earth and critical to North American birdlife. International attention is a key part of conserving the Canadian Boreal because of the volume of trade between Canada and the United States. Resource development in the Boreal is largely being spurred by American consumption. The United States is the leading importer of Canadian wood products and oil, as well as other natural resources. Presently, trees being logged in the Boreal are primarily pulped and turned into such products as toilet tissue, paper, and catalogs. Yet little of the paper that newspapers and catalogs are printed on is recycled.

There are several ways you can help!

- Use the highest post-consumer recycled fiber products you can find for all your paper needs, including printing paper, paper towels, toilet paper, etc.
- Reduce the number of catalogs that you receive by registering with the catalog trade's mail preference system. Send a postcard including your name, address, and email to: Mail Preference Service Direct Marketing Association, PO Box 643, Carmel, NY 15012-0643.
- Support efforts to conserve the Boreal Forest, such as the Boreal Songbird Initiative.
- Learn more about the Boreal Forest and International Migratory Bird Day by visiting the following websites: www.borealbirds.org and www.fws.gov/birds/IMBD.



Report Ruffed Grouse Observations

The DEP Wildlife Division needs help in collecting information on ruffed grouse. Connecticut's grouse population continues to decline. A research project was launched in 2004 to help provide baseline population data.

Whether you are out hunting or hiking, if you observe or hear 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 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).

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 2006 Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day has been scheduled for Saturday, April 29. 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 also must have written consent from the landowner. The adult mentor may **not** carry a firearm, but can assist in calling turkeys. Only junior hunters may hunt on the training day. For more information, consult the current *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*, which is available at DEP and town clerk offices and on the DEP's website: www.ct.gov/dep.

On May 2, 2006, the University of Connecticut will host the first annual Connecticut Wildlife Conference on the Storrs Campus. The Conference will bring together diverse interests with a common goal – to learn how working together with the new Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy can assure that wildlife resources remain viable, relevant, and accessible, with realistic steps to assure their continuing presence.

Who should attend? Anyone who has an interest in the status and future of Connecticut's wildlife. The audience will be a dynamic mixture of researchers, managers, planners, state and town officials, students, and citizen-conservationists. Invited speakers will provide overviews of population status, threats, and remedial conservation actions for the following groups: landbirds, waterbirds, mammals, reptiles/amphibians, invertebrates, and fish. There also will be a session on natural resource data management and technical assistance to guide land use decisions. The last hour of the conference will be an interactive session involving the speakers and the audience. Throughout the daylong conference, posters will be on display showing examples of wildlife initiatives and research that are currently underway in Connecticut.

Detailed information on the Connecticut Wildlife Conference, including the agenda, directions, and registration forms can be found at the following website: www.wildlife.uconn.edu. Pre-registration is required and there is a reduced registration fee for those who register by April 15. Additional information can be obtained by calling the DEP Wildlife Division's Hartford office at: 860-424-3011, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM. Please join us by participating in this historic event!

Dale W. May, Wildlife Division Director

Join the Plover Patrol

Spend your summer at the beach and help protect a federally threatened species! The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and its partners are seeking volunteers to monitor breeding piping plovers from April to September on Milford, Stratford, and West Haven beaches. Volunteers work 3-hour shifts from April through August. A training and orientation session will be held April 1, 2006, from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point. The session will review piping plover biology and demonstrate how to monitor breeding pairs and chicks. Please make a reservation for the training session by calling the USFWS at (860) 399-2513.

Bluff Point Deer Herd

In mid-February, the DEP completed the 10th year of deer management at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve in Groton. Ten years ago, deer density at the Reserve exceeded 200 deer per square mile. At this density, deer were dying annually of overwinter starvation and they were significantly impacting the ecological diversity of the Reserve. The deer population was initially reduced in 1996 through a controlled hunt using licensed sportsmen. In the following years, low densities have been maintained (25 deer/square mile) using DEP staff.

This year, DEP staff used sharpshooting tactics and equipment to remove 20 deer over four-and-a-half nights. Deer removal activities occurred in the evening when the park was closed to the public, minimizing any inconvenience to the public and maximizing the efficiency of removing deer. Preliminary examination by DEP biologists of deer body weights, female reproductive rates, and age-sex composition of the herd indicates improved herd health since deer management activities were implemented in 1996. A post-removal deer survey conducted on March 3, 2006, estimated the Bluff Point deer population at 24 deer.

All venison (800 lbs.) from deer taken at Bluff Point was donated to "Hunters for the Hungry" for distribution to local food charities. Since deer management was initiated at Bluff Point in 1996, about 10,475 pounds of venison have been provided to charities. The DEP Wildlife Division thanks Warren Speh, Paul Chickowsky, Don Messier, Ron Dobrowski, and Bob Jean for processing and distributing the venison to those in need.

Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

Migratory Bird Workshop for Educators

The DEP Wildlife Division will be holding a wildlife educator workshop on Neotropical Migratory Birds on Thursday, May 4, 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 0.3 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). Registration deadline is two weeks prior to the workshop. In case of bad weather, the raindate for the workshop will be May 5.

Information Needed on Diamondback Terrapins in Connecticut

If you have ever seen diamondback terrapins in the wild and/or have experience in salt marshes, you may have useful information. Field observations are necessary for determining the past and current distribution of diamondback terrapins. These turtles, which inhabit salt marshes in Connecticut, are unlikely to be confused with any other turtle because they are the only turtle that lives in this habitat. Historically, diamondback terrapins have been reported as far north as Cape Cod in Massachusetts and as far south as Corpus Christi, Texas. They are most commonly seen basking or crossing roads during the nesting season.

Those who have observed diamondback terrapins are asked to take a few minutes to fill out an on-line survey. The survey can be found at www.people.hofstra.edu/terrapin, or you can request a paper version from Dr. Russell Burke, Department of Biology, 114 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11549, 516-463-5521, biolrb@hofstra.edu.



Diamondback terrapins have a gray, light brown or black top shell (carapace) that is broad and patterned with concentric rings or ridges. The carapace also is wedge-shaped, and when viewed from above, the widest part is in the rear. The under shell (plastron) can range from yellowish to greenish gray, with or without bold, dark markings. The large feet are webbed, and the head and limbs may be spotted. The turtle can measure from 4-9 inches in length.

National Keep Your Cat Indoors Day

National Keep Your Cat Indoors Day is on May 13, 2006. This event, which is sponsored by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), aims to educate cat owners that cats, birds, and other wildlife all benefit when cats are kept indoors. The day also coincides with International Migratory Bird Day which involves thousands of people in birdwatching and education activities across the country during the spring bird migration.

Each year, free-roaming domestic cats kill hundreds of millions of birds and small mammals, some of which are rare species. In addition, millions of outdoor cats are killed or injured by cars or in fights with other cats, dogs, or wild animals. Free-roaming cats also can contract debilitating and life-threatening diseases or become lost or stolen. It is clearly in the best interest of both cats and birds to keep cats at home.

Dr. George Fenwick, ABC president, said, "Our migratory birds have survived habitat loss on their wintering grounds, severe weather, and a very long flight—sometimes across open water. To be killed by a well-fed cat on their return to the United States is an unspeakable, but preventable, tragedy."

ABC's *Cats Indoors!* Campaign is supported by thousands of individuals and conservation and veterinary organizations throughout the country. ABC produces campaign education materials, which include fact sheets on cat predation on birds and other wildlife, hazards to free-roaming cats, cat ordinances, and how to make an outdoor cat a content indoor pet. A four-color brochure and posters are available, as well as a teacher's activity guide for grades K-6, through ABC's website (<http://www.abcbirds.org>).



P. J. FUSCO (2)

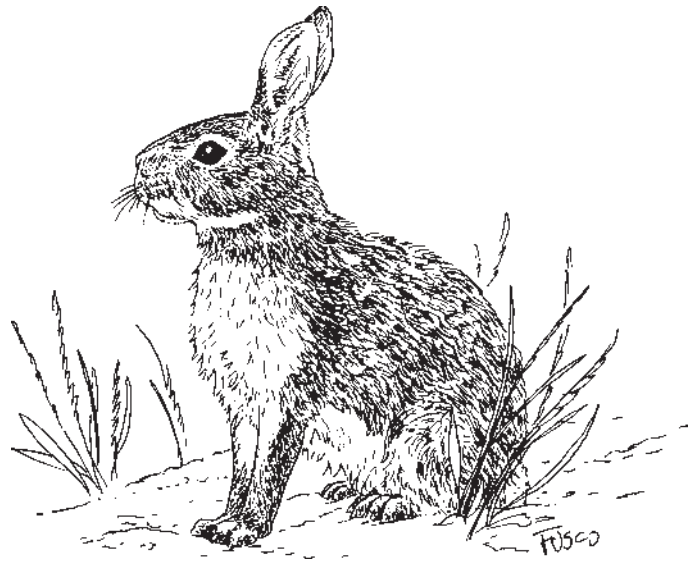
Just for Kids

Connecticut's Cottontails

Both New England and eastern cottontail rabbits are found in Connecticut. The New England cottontail is a native rabbit that lived here before the settlers arrived in the 1600s. The eastern cottontail was brought into the northeastern states in the early 1900s.

Habitat Hunt

Biologists have been studying New England cottontails to find where they live in Connecticut. Since the study began, it has been discovered that New England cottontails like to live in the thickets of young forests while eastern cottontails can live just about anywhere (mostly fields, farms, and forest edges). In Connecticut, it appears that there are more eastern cottontails than New England cottontails; however, New England cottontails have been found to be abundant in several locations.



Looking for Signs

- *A rabbit's track pattern shows two back feet and two smaller front feet. The smaller front feet will be one in front of the other while the back feet will be side by side. BUT, the back feet will be ahead of the front tracks!*
- *Rabbits have two sets of front incisor teeth. The incisors neatly snip off twigs at an angle, with a clean cut. (Twigs that have been browsed by deer have a jagged edge.) Look for signs of rabbit feeding about 12 inches from the ground.*
- *Rabbit droppings are found all around their territory. They look like small, round (sometimes a little flattened and wrinkled) pellets.*
- *Rabbits make shallow "nests" called forms in the ground and line them with fur and grass before having their young.*

Identical Identities?

The two Connecticut cottontails are hard to tell apart . . . unless, you look at their skulls or DNA! The DNA removed from a rabbit's droppings (aka "poop") can be examined to identify which rabbit it is!

Run Rabbit Run!

Rabbits are food for many different animals, like coyotes and bobcats. They also can be hunted in Connecticut. There are laws to say how many can be harvested and during which season. Some people find rabbit meat delicious and rabbit fur can be used to decorate coats and jackets.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- Jan.-April 15 Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2005 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 22 Earth Day
- April 22-30 **National Wildlife Week**, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Visit NWF's website for more information: www.nwf.org.
- April 23 **Friends of Sessions Woods Annual Meeting**, starting at 1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. All are welcome to attend! This year's special presentation will feature staff and live, native animals from the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport. For more information, call the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).
- April 29 **Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day** (see page 16 for more information).
- April 30 **Wild Turkey Hunting Seminar**, from 9:00 AM-1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Learn to hunt wild turkeys in the spring season, as well as specific techniques for using camouflage, decoys, and calling. Safety considerations will be discussed in full. This seminar will be conducted by DEP Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Program Senior Instructors Gary Bennett, Ray Hanley, and Dave Sanford, along with DEP Wildlife Division biologist Mike Gregonis. Participants are encouraged to bring the shotgun and ammunition they plan to use in their hunt. If weather permits, there will be an opportunity to pattern shotguns. Please preregister by calling the Division's Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130, on Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM. Sessions Woods is located on Route 69 in Burlington.
- May 3-27 **Spring Turkey Hunting Season**. See the 2006 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for specific details. The guide is available at Wildlife Division offices, town halls, and on the DEP's website, www.ct.gov/dep.
- May 4 **Migratory Bird Educator Workshop** (see page 7 for more information).
- May 6 **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 12 and over. Bring binoculars and meet at the flagpole in front of the building. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister.
- May 13 **International Migratory Bird Day**. To learn more about this annual celebration, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website: www.fws.gov/birds/IMBD (also see article on page 16).
- **Keep Your Cat Indoors Day** (see page 17 for more information).

Step Up to the Plate for Wildlife...

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



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

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

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

Connecticut Wildlife

Subscription Order

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

Check one:

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

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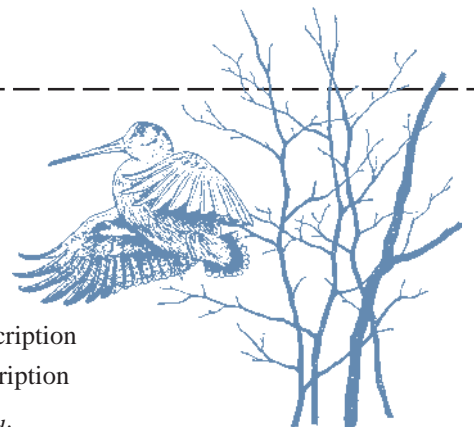
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A Wilson's snipe forages in a snow-free seep on a cold winter day. Seeps and spring runs provide an important cold weather feeding habitat where some species, such as snipe, are able to find food in the form of invertebrates when other areas are encrusted with snow and ice.

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