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Connecticut Wildlife

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From the Director

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal condition if contracted by deer, elk, moose and perhaps other species of the deer family (Cervidae). Because its discovery is relatively recent, certain aspects of CWD are not well understood. However, we do know that the organisms (prions) that cause the disease by infecting the spinal cord and brain of cervids can persist in the environment for years. The persistence of the disease agent presents a serious challenge for managing or eradicating CWD. (For more information on CWD, visit the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us).

For years now, wildlife agencies have kept a wary eye to the west as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was identified in the Rocky Mountain States and spread to the Midwest. Under natural conditions, CWD would be expected to spread its range slowly since deer and elk do not migrate over long distances. However, the movement of live cervids via the captive deer industry and the transport of carcasses by hunters create the potential for CWD to be introduced to any part of the United States. In fact, the appearance of CWD in most areas can be linked directly to deer held in captivity.

Because of this threat, wildlife and agriculture departments are working cooperatively to restrict the interstate movement of live cervids and to impose mandatory testing at captive cervid facilities. (Currently there is no live-animal diagnostic test for CWD). The United States Department of Agriculture is providing funding for states to monitor for the presence of CWD in wild deer and, until 2005, the monitoring had indicated that the Northeast was free of CWD. Unfortunately, this year CWD was documented in wild deer in New York and West Virginia.

All the states either have or are developing plans for managing CWD. The plans specify actions to monitor for the presence of the disease and to prevent its introduction. If detected, there are protocols for containing CWD within a geographic region of the state. Eradication is the ultimate goal of every plan, but once CWD spreads to the wild, total eradication may be an unattainable goal. At this point, Connecticut is considered a CWD-free state and we will take all necessary and prudent actions to ensure that CWD is not introduced into our state.

Dale W. May

Cover:

New information on this year's hunting seasons, including white-tailed deer, can be found on page 6.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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Nightjar Surveys 2005: A Good Start, But Help Is Needed!

Written by Shannon Kearney, Wildlife Diversity Program

Two species of nightjars have been recorded as breeding in Connecticut: the common nighthawk and the whip-poor-will. The whip-poor-will is easily identified by its distinctive call, "whip-poor-will," which is heard most often at dusk or dawn, along woodland edges. The common nighthawk has a less obvious, more nasal vocalization. However, it can easily be observed at dusk in urban areas, flying erratically as it catches insects. Available evidence for the northeastern United States suggests that both of these species are declining. They are largely crepuscular (active at twilight) and, as a result, have been poorly surveyed by traditional survey methods, such as the USGS Breeding Bird Survey.

Surveys Initiated

This past summer, the DEP Wildlife Division partnered with northeastern states, from Maine to Virginia, in a pilot attempt to quantify the distribution and abundance of breeding nightjars. The data from these surveys are being used to track population trends and identify areas where these birds may still be relatively abundant. This information will be used to guide land protection efforts, habitat management projects, and future research.

Because the life cycle of the whip-poor-will is closely tied to the lunar cycle, it was important that surveys occurred under specific lunar conditions. Surveys could only be conducted after sunset and when the face of the moon was at least 50% illuminated, above the horizon, and not obscured by cloud cover. With these constraints in mind, Wildlife Division staff, with the help of volunteers, covered 25 roadside survey routes, as well as three off-road routes that targeted state forests.

Few Nightjars Noted in Surveys

Whip-poor-wills were detected on only one of the road survey routes and one of the state forest routes. Connecticut was not the only state in the region to have low detection rates for nightjars. Preliminary results suggest that whip-poor-will populations are localized in clumped "hotspots" throughout the northeast region, and these hotspots were missed by most of the randomized roadside survey routes. Plans are in place to modify the surveys to focus upon predicted whip-poor-will hotspots.

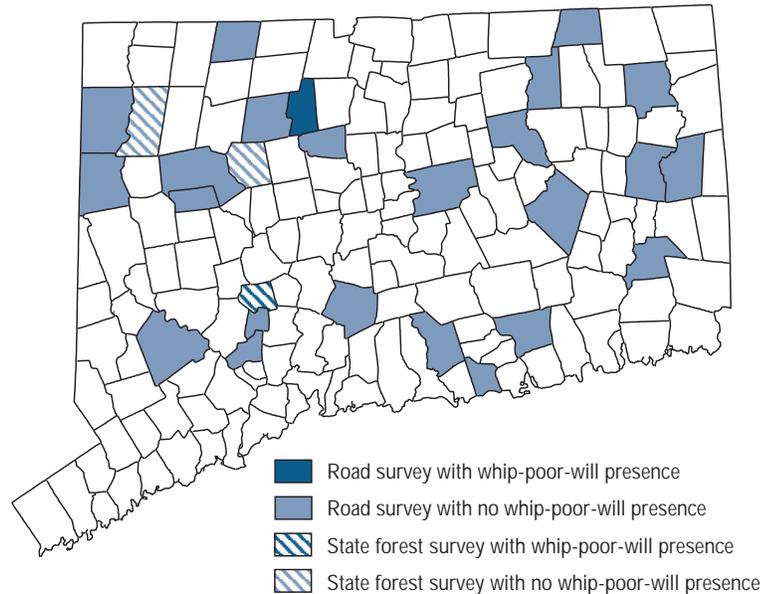
Common nighthawk populations also tend to be concentrated. Instead of being found along woodland edges, they concentrate in city centers where suitable nesting substrate occurs on the gravel roofs of tall buildings. Because of these localized populations and the logistical difficulties of conducting the surveys in cities, Connecticut's nighthawk populations also are unlikely to be sampled well by traditional survey methods. Efforts are underway through Partners In Flight to develop coordinated, regional survey methodology. In the meantime, Wildlife Division staff visited four historical nighthawk nesting sites during July to search for evidence of current nesting

and to gather baseline data. Unfortunately, no breeding common nighthawks were detected.

Surveys for both whip-poor-wills and common nighthawks are planned for next season as well. You can assist the Wildlife Division in gaining a better understanding of Connecticut's nightjar populations by providing whip-poor-will and common nighthawk sighting information to the Wildlife Diversity Program. All nightjar observations made during the breeding and summer seasons, including location, date, time, and bird activity, should be sent to: Shannon Kearney, Sessions Woods WMA, PO Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013; 860-675-8130 (shannon.kearney@po.state.ct.us).

Funding for the whip-poor-will and nighthawk surveys was provided by the State Wildlife Grants Program.

Whip-poor-will Surveys 2005



You can assist the Wildlife Division with its nightjar survey by providing whip-poor-will and common nighthawk sightings to the Wildlife Diversity Program (860-675-8130). All nightjar observations made during the breeding and summer seasons, including location, date, time, and bird activity should be reported.

Belding Wildlife Management Area in Vernon Dedicated

Belding Trust Fund established to protect, preserve, and manage use of 282-acre property previously donated by family



Maxwell Belding and Ruth Belding Nardini (Maxwell's daughter) pose in front of the dedication monument placed at Belding Wildlife Management Area in Vernon.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection held a special ceremony on August 24, 2005, to honor Maxwell M. Belding for funding a program to protect, preserve, and manage the use of 282 acres of land in Vernon he had previously donated to the State of Connecticut.

During the ceremony, which was held on the property, located off of Bolton Road in Vernon, DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy said, "Max Belding and his family have demonstrated a real commitment to make a lasting contribution to our state. First, they donated this beautiful and important wildlife area for all of us to appreciate and enjoy. Now, they have taken steps to guarantee that this property is properly managed and preserved so that it will be here for the benefit of future generations."

Establishing a Trust

Mr. Belding, who donated the land in 1981, and his daughter, Ruth, have established a charitable trust that will support natural resource management, conservation activities, and educational programming on the property.

Well known for many philanthropic activities, Mr. Belding has historic connections to the Vernon area. His grandfather owned the Belding Silk Thread Mill that was part of the once-thriving textile industry in Rockville.

"We are indebted to Max Belding for allowing us to establish and preserve the Belding Wildlife Management Area," continued Commissioner McCarthy. "His generosity ensures the proper use and protection of land that has remained relatively pristine – despite the population density of the Greater Hartford area."

Oversight of the land will be provided by the DEP and a three person Board of Trustees. Members of the board include Ruth Belding Nardini, Max Belding's daughter, and a representative of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, as well as a representative of Bank of America, which manages the trust account.

Day-to-day supervision of programs and activities on the property will be directed by a full-time steward, as well as a seasonal employee. Both positions are being

funded through the Belding trust. DEP Wildlife Division technician Jane Seymour of Vernon is now serving as the steward.



Maxwell Belding shakes hands with DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy as Maxwell's daughter Ruth and grandson Max look on.

P. J. FUSCO (2)



Maxwell Belding and family were honored at the dedication ceremony held at Belding WMA. Speakers at the ceremony included DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy, Vernon Mayor Ellen Marmor, DEP Wildlife Division director Dale May, and DEP Inland Fisheries director Bill Hyatt. All thanked the Belding Family for their generous contribution.

Monument Unveiled

At the ceremony, the Belding family joined Commissioner McCarthy in unveiling a monument that officially marks the Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The inscription reads:

“The State of Connecticut Honors Maxwell M. Belding for donating this property to the people of Connecticut, his daughter Ruth, who with Maxwell established the Belding Trust to ensure wise use of the property for future generations, and his father Frederick, for acquiring the land that is now the Belding Wildlife Management Area.”

Special Features of Belding WMA

The property was designated in 1981 as a wildlife management area due to its unique ecological characteristics and the species found there. Wildlife management areas have unique or outstanding wildlife qualities that are managed primarily for the conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and to provide opportunities for fish and wildlife based recreation. Mr. Belding began donating portions of the property to the State in 1981 and the State took full ownership in 1984.

The Belding WMA includes portions of the Upper Tankerhoosen River, a river so pure that wild brown and brook trout thrive in its waters. It also offers visitors a convenient opportunity to hike on scenic trails and sportsmen the chance to fish in appealing streams and ponds. The area is an inspirational setting for visiting school children, who can see and learn about wildlife.

Fishing and Fisheries Management

Formal wild trout management in Connecticut was pioneered when the Belding Wild Trout Management Area was designated in 1993, the first management area of its type in the state. This designation reflects the high densities of wild brown and brook trout present on the property and the potential to provide high quality trout fishing without stocking.

The DEP Inland Fisheries Division has witnessed a growing desire on the part of anglers for the unique experience of pursuing wild trout in this type of natural setting. Wild trout indicate the high water quality of the Tankerhoosen River within the Belding WMA.

Wildlife Habitat

Belding WMA contains a diversity of wildlife habitats, including softwood and hardwood forests, open fields, wetlands, streams, and a pond. Because of this

diversity, a wide variety of birds can be found at the area. A natural resource inventory conducted at the site in 2003 documented 82 species of birds. Streams, wetlands, and vernal pools provide breeding habitat for 11 species of amphibians, and a variety of butterflies and dragonflies can be found in the open fields. Four species of special management concern also were found on the property during the 2003 inventory. A plan has been developed to guide the management of this diverse property for fish and wildlife and their habitats.



Maxwell Belding (right) in 1942 at the firepit that can still be seen today at the Belding Wildlife Management Area.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

The Belding Wildlife Management Area is a 282-acre parcel, located in Vernon. The area has a diverse array of quality habitats, including mixed forest, field, and stream corridors.

The 2005-2006 Hunting Season Is Underway

White-tailed Deer Season

Connecticut's deer population remains healthy and harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2005 deer hunting season. The abundance of acorns and weather conditions during the hunting season will likely influence hunter success.

During the 2005 season, hunters who harvest an antlerless deer on private land and have permission to hunt on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12 (see the 2005 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide) will be eligible to obtain a free replacement antlerless tag. Replacement tags will be available for use during the shotgun/rifle, bow, and muzzleloader hunting seasons. The replacement tag program has resulted in an increased harvest of female deer in southwestern Connecticut and in many Connecticut shoreline towns.

This year, a new program is being implemented in deer management zones 11 and 12 to provide additional incentives for harvesting antlerless deer. Under the "Earn-a-Buck" Program, any hunter who harvests and checks in three antlerless deer during the same season (bow, shotgun, or muzzleloader) will be eligible to earn an extra bonus buck tag (either-sex) to use during the same hunting season.

New for the 2005 season, bowhunters are no longer required to wear fluorescent orange while bowhunting during the firearms deer season in zones 11 and 12, provided they are in an elevated stand at least 10 feet above the ground. Hunters are reminded that bowhunting is permitted during the shotgun/rifle hunting season only in designated deer bowhunting areas and on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12. Bowhunters also can hunt deer during January on private land in zones 11 and 12. These liberalizations, combined with the ability to use bait during the deer hunting seasons in zones 11 and 12, will contribute to increased deer harvest rates in these areas.

Fall Wild Turkey Season

The 2005 fall turkey season harvest should exceed last year's total, primarily because new regulations have expanded fall firearms hunting opportunities. Hunters will be able to purchase both a private land and state land permit for the fall firearms season and the season



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Deer harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2005 hunting season.

length has been expanded to the first Saturday in October through the end of October (October 1-31).

Connecticut's wild turkey population continues to remain healthy throughout the state. This fall turkey hunters should concentrate their efforts on oak ridges, cut cornfields, and forest openings. Each of these areas contains a food source that turkeys will use during fall. Hunters should scout several locations, prior to the season, to find scratching, feathers, and droppings to determine whether turkeys are present. Also, hunters can locate turkeys by listening at sunrise for birds calling from their roost. By locating birds at several locations, hunters can maximize their efforts and minimize hunter interference.

The fall bow and firearms seasons opened statewide, on September 15 and October 1, respectively. During the bow season, the bag limit is two birds of either-sex taken on either state or private land. During the firearms season, the bag limit is one bird of either-sex on state land and two birds of either-sex on private land. If hunters purchase all available fall firearms and archery permits, they will be allowed to harvest a total of five birds.

Waterfowl Season

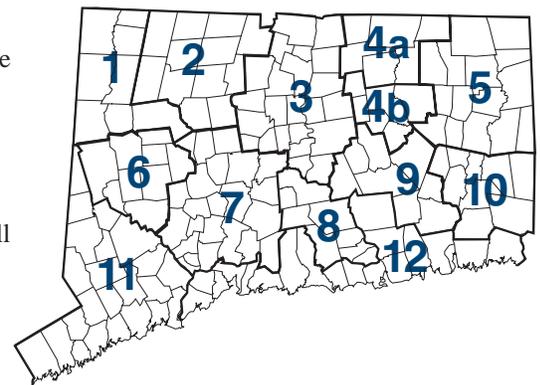
Ducks, Mergansers, and Coots: There are a few changes in the

duck season frameworks this year. The major change is that mergansers are now included in the total duck bag limit.

Previously, there was a separate bag limit of five for mergansers.

Black duck populations continue to show stability, and one black duck will be allowed during the early season in both the north and the south zones. One continued change from last season is a reduction in the daily bag limit of sea ducks from seven to five. The daily bag limit for long-tailed (oldsquaw) ducks has been reduced from seven to four. Declining numbers of wintering sea ducks and increased hunting pressure on these long-lived species warrants more conservative regulations.

Deer / Turkey Zone Map



Regular and Late Canada Goose

Seasons: The North Atlantic Population (NAP) hunt zone for Canada geese continues to be split into two zones—the NAP L-Unit, and the NAP H-Unit—based on differences in the proportion of resident to migrant geese between the two areas. These zones were created to exert more harvest pressure on resident geese in areas (primarily southwestern Connecticut) where there have been persistent nuisance problems. The seasons for these two units are identical to last year: a 70-day season with a three-bird daily bag limit in the NAP-L unit and a 60-day season with a two-bird daily bag limit in the NAP-H unit.

The Atlantic Population (AP) of Canada geese continues to recover. Breeding pair estimates for 2005 were 165,000. Although this estimate is less than last year, the 2005 survey was conducted late, in the midst of nest hatching, and thus the results are biased due to the late timing. Production in 2005 appears to be excellent. The regular season in the AP Unit will be 45 days, with a three-bird bag limit.

Sportsmen also will have the opportunity to harvest resident Canada geese during the special late season (in the south zone only) from January 16 through February 15, 2006. No special permit is required for this season.

Descriptions of the hunting zones for Canada geese are in the Migratory Bird Hunting Guide, which is available at most town clerks' and DEP offices.

Hunters are reminded to report waterfowl bands. Band returns provide vital information for the continued management of the waterfowl resource. Additionally, the Wildlife Division is concluding a four-year resident Canada goose study. Anyone observing yellow neck collars on geese is urged to call 860-642-7239 with the location and individual collar code information (see page 17 for more information).

Small Game and Upland Bird Seasons

Opening day for most small game hunting is Saturday, October 15. The DEP will purchase 19,142 adult pheasants for the upcoming fall season, a



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The daily bag limit for long-tailed (old squaw) ducks has been reduced from seven to four during this year's waterfowl season.

decrease of 1,628 birds from the previous year's purchase. Most stocking areas will receive relatively minor adjustments in allocations as a result of the decrease in the number of birds purchased. In addition to adult pheasants, 1,000 eight-week-old pheasants were purchased and delivered to Norwich Fish and Game and Sprague Rod and Gun Clubs. These pheasants were raised by the clubs for eventual release on permit-required hunting areas.

The Pheasant Program budget is determined by the net revenue collected in the previous year. The 2005 stocking program was directly affected by a decrease of approximately \$10,000 in the net revenue collected from pheasant hunters in 2004, combined with the largest single annual increase in average pheasant costs. Fuel and grain costs continue to impact commercial growers.

Despite the reduction in the number of pheasants stocked, sportsmen should recognize that the ratio of pheasants stocked per hunter has actually increased over the years and the prospects for pheasant hunting are as good as they have been in several years.

A total of 53 areas will be stocked during the 2005 fall season. A number of lower quality/lower public use areas were removed from the stocking list in

2003 and will not be stocked. Areas that will not be stocked in 2005 include the J. Minetto State Park in Torrington and the Lebanon State-leased Area in Lebanon (which has been closed to the public). Stocking will occur two to three times per week during the seven-week distribution period. Pheasants will be nearly evenly distributed with one-half of the allocations released in October and one-half during November. All stocking will conclude by Thanksgiving Day.

To provide opportunities for the weekend/family and youth hunters, volunteers for the DEP will release pheasants on Friday evenings and variable Saturdays at some sites. Cooperative sportsmen's clubs that provide public hunting access to permit-required hunting areas will continue to stock state-purchased pheasants on several areas.

A pilot program to provide youth hunters with unrestricted access to select permit-required hunting areas also will be implemented this fall. For details and a complete listing of all major stocking areas, visit the DEP website at www.dep.state.ct.us. Pheasant tags (\$14 for 10 tags) can be purchased at town halls or at DEP's License and Revenue office, at 79 Elm Street, in Hartford.

Details on all hunting seasons can be found on the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us. The 2005 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide and the 2005-2006 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide also can be obtained at DEP offices and local town halls.

New Regulation to Limit the Importation and Possession of Deer and Elk from States with CWD

At the time this issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* went to press, an emergency regulation to address the issue of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer and elk was waiting final approval. The regulation states that “no person shall import or possess whole carcasses or parts thereof of any deer or elk from wild or captive herds from other states or Canadian Provinces where chronic wasting disease has been confirmed, including but not limited to Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Montana, South Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska, Oklahoma, New York, West Virginia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.” Any additional states and provinces where CWD is confirmed will be published in the DEP’s annual Hunting and Trapping Guide and on the DEP’s website (www.dep.state.ct.us). **This provision shall not apply to meat that is de-boned, cleaned skullcaps, hides, or taxidermy mounts.**

The regulation is intended to prevent the introduction of CWD into Connecticut

by prohibiting the importation of neurological tissue of deer and elk from states and provinces where CWD has been confirmed. CWD is a fatal disease of deer and elk that is similar to mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep. Although no relationship has been documented between CWD and humans, CWD has the potential to seriously impact Connecticut’s native white-tailed deer herd. No treatment or vaccination exists and, if contracted by deer or elk, the disease is always fatal. The disease-causing organisms (prions) are found in neurological tissue and the regulation is designed to prohibit the transportation of infected tissue into Connecticut.

Regulated hunting is the primary tool for managing the statewide deer population. If CWD spreads into Connecticut, hunter participation may decline, which will further promote growth of the deer population, particularly in areas of the state where the population is overabundant. In addition, efforts by the state to

contain or eradicate the disease will be extremely costly and labor intensive.

All states in the Northeast have already prohibited the importation of live deer and elk. Before March 2005, the disease was found primarily in the western and midwestern United States. There were no documented cases of CWD east of Illinois. However, in March 2005, CWD was confirmed in captive and wild deer in New York. Massachusetts passed emergency regulations in August 2005 restricting the importation of deer and elk carcasses from states with confirmed cases of CWD. Rhode Island passed similar emergency regulations in April 2005. Vermont also prohibits the importation of harvested deer and elk carcasses from states with CWD. Connecticut’s new regulation is consistent with a regional effort to prevent the introduction of CWD into New England.

Results for the 2005 Spring Wild Turkey Season

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

Connecticut hunters reported harvesting 2,016 birds during the 2005 spring turkey hunting season. Hunters from throughout the United States and Canada enjoyed Connecticut’s wild turkey resource during the spring season, with nonresident hunters accounting for 12% (243 birds) of the total spring harvest. Hunters from Alaska, North Carolina, Utah, Florida, and all the New England states, as well as Canada, harvested Connecticut turkeys.

The 2005 spring wild turkey season harvest was three percent lower than the 2004 harvest of 2,081 birds. Declines in the turkey harvest during spring 2005 may be attributed to lower permit sales and weather. Turkey hunting permits decreased by four percent to 7,050 as compared to the 2004 season when 7,330 permits were issued. In addition, May 2005 was the fourth coldest on record. A total of 1,323 hunters harvested at least one bird. Statewide hunter success rate was 19%, which is consis-

tent with the past several years. Multiple birds were harvested by 520 hunters; 347 hunters harvested two birds and 173 hunters harvested three.

At least one turkey was harvested in 150 of Connecticut’s 169 towns (89%), with Lebanon reporting the highest harvest at 63 birds, followed by Woodstock (52) and Lyme (43). State land hunters reported the highest harvest in Cockaponset State Forest (28), Naugatuck State Forest (17), and Natchaug State Forest (15). Private land hunters accounted for 89% of the total harvest (1,793) and 77% of the permit issuance (5,446). Reported spring harvest consisted of 709 jakes (35%), 1,294 toms (64%), and 13 bearded hens (1%).

Generally, the highest harvest occurs on opening day and Saturdays during the season. The 2005 spring season was no exception as 18% (355) of the total harvest occurred on the first day of the season and 22% (434) occurred on the following four Saturdays. This is

expected because opening day and Saturdays are when the majority of hunters have time to enjoy a day of hunting. Although most of the turkeys were harvested during the early portion of the season, a significant number of birds were still available throughout the entire season. The last three days of the 2005 spring season accounted for 12% (235) of the total harvest.

To provide a quality turkey hunting experience for Connecticut’s junior hunters (ages 12 to 15), the third annual junior turkey hunter training day took place on Saturday, April 30. Participants harvested 47 wild turkeys, which was an increase of 12 birds over last year and 25 birds from 2003. The junior turkey hunter training day was well received as participants and mentors had many positive comments on the 2005 spring turkey hunter surveys. The junior hunter training day is proving to be a great way to introduce youth hunters to spring turkey hunting.

Spring Turkey Hunters Comment on 2005 Season

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

A question that is often asked of the DEP Wildlife Division's Turkey Program biologist is, "Do you actually read all of the comments on the spring turkey hunter surveys?". The answer to this question is "yes." The comments provide insight about hunters' opinions, concerns, and experiences. The information is useful in managing the state's turkey population and providing quality hunting opportunities.

Hunters provide a wide range of comments regarding the spring turkey hunting season framework, wildlife observations, wild turkey observations, and hunt information. In 2005, the Turkey Program received responses from 2,056 spring turkey hunters. Additional comments were provided by 713 (35%) hunters.

A large portion of the comments related to the framework of the spring turkey hunting season (211 respondents). Most hunters would like an earlier season (102), followed by extended hunting hours (36), Sunday hunting (17), and additional days (12). Some typical comments were as follows: "Would like to see season start one or two weeks earlier;" "Extending hunting all day would increase participation and harvest. This would allow hunters to hunt after work;" "Sunday hunting would double field time for most hunters. Open season same as fishing or last week of April."

Respondents also commented on spring turkey season bag limits and permit allocations. It appears that most hunters are content with the current spring bag limits of three bearded birds on private land and two bearded birds on state land. However, 18 individuals said that they would like to see a decrease in bag limits. Twenty-five individuals indicated they "would like to be able to purchase both private and state land permits to provide more options."

Wildlife observations made up a significant number of comments on the survey. Respondents reported seeing coyotes (24), fishers (16), bobcats (6), deer (4), foxes (4), bears (3), moose (2),



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The information provided by spring turkey hunters on their surveys are useful in managing the state's turkey population and providing quality hunting opportunities.

hawk (1), and weasel (1) during the 2005 spring turkey season. Hunters also believed that coyotes (20), fishers (11), and bobcats (3) were responsible for reducing turkey populations in local areas. Typical comments included: "You must get rid of the coyotes. They are killing everything;" and "Fisher killing a lot of birds." Despite these hunter concerns, research conducted by the DEP indicated that coyotes and fisher take few nesting turkeys.

Turkey hunter survey respondents recorded a wide variety of wild turkey observations. Many of the comments centered around the difficulties of harvesting a bird. Twenty-seven hunters reported a limited amount of gobbling: "Not much gobbling!" Twenty hunters said that there were lots of hens: "Never saw so many hens in one season." Thirteen hunters indicated that gobblers were call shy: "Toms would not respond to calling." Respondents (20) also saw many wild turkeys near roads and frequenting bird feeders. Two hunters summarized many of the spring turkey hunters' thoughts with these comments: "Those toms got smarter" and "They escaped for another year."

Many hunters had strong opinions regarding the 2005 spring turkey season, some positive and others negative. Twenty-seven individuals indicated a very positive season with comments: "Wow, what a great season;" "Great season, saw more jakes and toms than ever before;" "The most exciting hunting I have ever done;" and "Awesome." Other hunters (17) had very different responses: "Hunting on state land is poor;" "Heard nothing – saw nothing;" and "Bad Year." Twenty-seven respondents had comments about the poor weather during the season: "Cold and rain made for poor hunting" and "The weather was not the greatest for turkey hunting." These comments were probably justified as May 2005 was the fourth coldest on record. A large number of respondents also indicated that they did not hunt (75) or hunt time was limited (32).

A few hunters offered encouraging words about the Division's Turkey Program: "The State DEP has done a wonderful job of restoring the wild turkey" and "keep up the good work."

The Long and Short of It

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

Owls are a secretive and mysterious group of birds. They are well camouflaged while roosting during the day and are most active in darkness. Some aspects of their anatomy enable them to use darkness to their advantage in their hunt for food. Owls have an extremely well-developed sense of hearing and the ability to see better than most other wildlife species at night. Their ears are offset and the eyes are in a frontal, “binocular” position. These characteristics, which are different from most other birds, help owls locate prey at night. Owls also can turn their heads almost completely around and, coupled with offset ears and binocular vision, they are able to locate and zero in on prey in almost complete darkness.

Owls have soft plumage which reduces noise that otherwise would be generated when the birds flap their wings to fly. The flight feathers have serrations on the edges which dampen the sound of the wings. These adaptations give owls the ability to fly silently and overtake their unsuspecting prey by surprise. Most owls eat mice, voles and other small mammals, amphibians, large insects, and smaller birds. Large owls, such as the great horned will kill animals as large as skunks.

There are two medium-sized owls found in Connecticut that are similar in size and somewhat similar in appearance. Both have long wings and fly in a bouyant and irregular “mothlike” fashion. One has long ear tufts while the other has short ear tufts, thus they are named the long-eared owl and the short-eared owl. The tufts are really not part of their ears, but are actually elongated feathers above the eyes that help them blend into their surroundings.

Long-eared Owl

Long-eared owls are secretive and strictly nocturnal. They are normally found in dense conifer stands during the breeding season, and in winter they also may roost in woodland edges and thick vine tangles. While typical nesting and winter roost areas are in dense cover, long-eared owls also need to be close to open areas for hunting. Their hunting areas can be forest openings, fields, marshes, or agricultural habitats that have an abundance of small mammals or birds for prey. Long-eared owls become active at dusk and will hunt during the night before returning to heavy cover to roost for the day.

Conifer stands, heavy vine tangles, and thick woody cover that are near open foraging habitats along the shoreline are important wintering habitats for long-eareds in Connecticut. Small numbers of long-eareds tend to move to these coastal habitats during the coldest and most stressful part of the year. Some of these favorable locations may harbor over a dozen individuals in a communal roost.

The pronounced ear tufts of a long-eared owl are held high when the bird is alarmed. This slim owl also will compress its body feathers and elongate its posture in order to make itself look like a broken limb or blend into the bark of a tree trunk. Long-eareds have cryptic plumage that is patterned with streaks,



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P. J. FUSCO

Long-eared owls typically roost in heavy cover, frequently conifer stands that will afford them protection from predators and the elements.

small spots, and various shades and blends of brown. They can be very difficult for an observer to locate. Why would such a predator need to blend into its surroundings so well? Long-eared owls are known to frequently fall victim to larger birds of prey, such as great horned owls and goshawks.

Short-eared Owl

Short-eared owls are found in wide open country. They require large grasslands, marshes, and farmland. Connecticut has a small amount of these large open habitats. Therefore, the occurrence of short-eared owls is limited in the state. Short-eareds regularly show up in small numbers in Connecticut during migration and in winter, with most sightings at coastal saltmarsh locations.

Although short-eared owls are most active at dusk and dawn, they often can be seen hunting over fields and marshes

during daylight hours. In fact, they are one of the very few species of owls that may be active during the day. Their flopping wing beats and erratic flight pattern are unmistakable. Observers also may spot a short-eared sitting on an open perch overlooking a marsh, which would be very uncharacteristic behavior for a long-eared owl.

Normally roosting on or close to the ground, short-eared owls use clumps of thick grass and other vegetation for cover. They have streaked earthy brown and sienna plumage that blends well with the dried grasses of their surroundings. The ear tufts on a short-eared owl are so small that they are difficult to see and most times go unnoticed.

Conservation

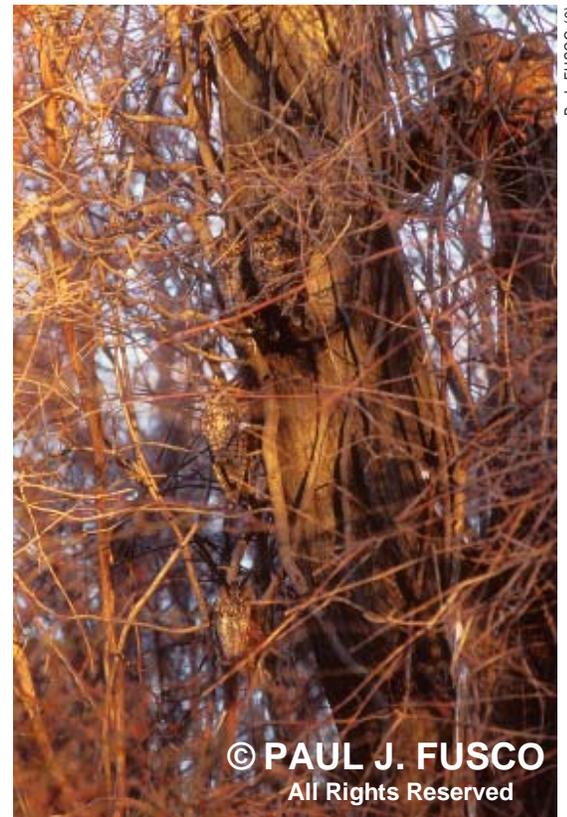
Once fairly common residents, long-eared owls have declined in Connecticut over the last 100 years due to a number of factors. The loss of open field habitats to development and forest regeneration has reduced available foraging habitat. Forest management practices that promote thinning and the conversion of softwood forests to hardwood forests may have led to a decline in suitable nesting sites for the owls. Today, long-eared owls breed in very small numbers in Connecticut. The actual breeding population is difficult to determine because the birds are so secretive and tend to use heavy cover when nesting. Long-eared owls are listed as an endangered species in Connecticut.

Short-eared owls do not presently breed in Connecticut; however, in the mid-1800s they were considered residents. Since that time, human development, forest regeneration, and the loss of inland marshes have been the primary factors in the decline of short-eared owls and their presumed extirpation as a breeding species. Short-eared owls are listed as threatened species in Connecticut due to the low wintering population and limited suitable habitat.

Winter is an especially vulnerable time for these birds. Their daytime roosting areas are sensitive to disturbance. If disturbance becomes more frequent or intrusive, the owls may abandon an otherwise safe place, forcing them into a situation that may have a less certain degree of survivability. Many winter roost locations have been used for a long time and are used almost every year.

A large percentage of the Connecticut populations of both species spend a good part of the winter close to the shoreline. There, the weather is moderate and snow cover is usually less than it is inland, which makes hunting easier for the birds. The largest and best

quality shoreline habitats left in Connecticut are on public properties, including state parks, wildlife management areas, and national wildlife refuges. These properties are critically important to wildlife, particularly these owls, during the stressful months of winter. The protection and proper management of coastal habitats to meet the needs of wildlife is imperative for the conservation of these “eared” owls, as well as for other wildlife, in Connecticut.



P. J. FUSCO (2)

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During winter, long-eared owls sometimes roost in groups. Four owls can be seen in this vine tangle.



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Short-eared owls are normally found in or near large open habitats, such as agricultural fields and marshes. They are most active at twilight hours but may also be seen hunting during the day.

American Woodcock Research Hits the 'Air-Waves'

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

In 2005, the DEP Wildlife Division began the three-year radiotelemetry component of an ongoing research project focused on American woodcock. As outlined in previous issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*, American woodcock have been declining across their range for the past 35 years. Conservation groups in the state have expressed concern about the status of woodcock. The Endangered Species Scientific Advisory Committee for avian species (experts on avian ecology from academia and conservation groups) considered listing the woodcock as a state species of special concern in 2004. The range-wide declines in woodcock are largely attributed to habitat loss and habitat degradation in both breeding and wintering areas. Other factors, such as contaminants and predation, also may be contributing to the decline. In response to the decline and the widespread concern over woodcock, the Wildlife Division began a comprehensive research project in 2003.

Finding CT's Woodcock Habitat

Much of the current woodcock habitat in Connecticut is highly fragmented. The objective of the radiotelemetry portion of the woodcock research is to determine woodcock use of habitats, and whether survival rates and mortality factors differ in various habitat types. Hopefully, the research will provide information on what types of habitats woodcock use in the state, and what their survival rates are in these habitats. This information is key in guiding habitat management efforts for, not only woodcock, but for other species of birds that depend on similar habitat. Predation by both avian and mammalian predators may be high in isolated habitat patches or in areas where suitable nesting, foraging, and escape cover are limited and in poor juxtaposition. Important in the analysis will be estimation of survival rates of woodcock in fragmented and, if possible, larger unfragmented areas.



This woodcock has been fitted with a radio transmitter in an effort to help determine woodcock use of habitats and whether survival rates and mortality factors differ in various habitat types.

Trapping Woodcock

Scouting for potential trapping sites for the research began in April 2005. It involved listening for and observing displaying male woodcock. Flags were then placed to mark the displaying ground and the flight path of the bird. The following evening, mist nets were set up around the marked site so that the displaying males could be captured. Nets also were set up opportunistically to catch nearby females. Male woodcock were typically captured on their first or second display flight. If they were not, the birds were flushed into the nets. Female woodcock were caught opportunistically as they flew out of their daytime cover to feed.

Once captured, birds were placed carefully into "bird bags" to await processing. The window of opportunity to capture birds each evening was short, only about 45 minutes, as that was the active display period for the woodcock. Thus, it was a very time-sensitive activity to catch these birds. On the best night of trapping, four woodcock were caught. However, one or two birds per night was more common, and there were two nights when no birds were caught.

Radio Transmitters Provide Data

Once trapping activity for the evening died down, the mist nets were

closed and Wildlife Division staff began to process the birds that had been caught. Each bird was aged, sexed, and weighed. They were then fitted with metal leg bands and equipped with a radio transmitter. The very small transmitters, which weighed only four grams, were attached to the back of the bird and then secured with a belly harness. The transmitter does not affect the flight or activity of the bird at all. The "on-the-ground" range of the transmitters varies from approximately 0.5 mile to 0.1 mile, depending on topography and what type of cover the bird is in. The more varied the topography, the more difficult it is to get a signal

from the radio transmitter. Plus, it is more difficult to receive the signal in thick cover. The range of the transmitters from the air is about two miles. As of this writing, 26 woodcock were being tracked with radio telemetry equipment.

The radio-tagged birds were followed twice a week. Initially, it was found that many of the birds did not move far from the trapping site locations, about 1.5 miles at the most. One bird, however, moved over 10 miles from its original capture site. To date, eight of the radio-tagged birds have been lost to predation. The majority of these losses were due to mammalian predators, while only one bird was taken by an avian predator. More recently, a few of the birds can no longer be located.

At each point where radio-tagged woodcocks have been found, intensive habitat analyses will be conducted. This quantification of the habitat features that woodcock require is vital towards achieving the ultimate goals for the project. The radio telemetry portion of this woodcock project is still in its early stages. There is so much more information to collect. If the funding is available and secured, the radiotelemetry portion of this project will continue for two additional years.

Landowner Incentive Program Gets Off the Ground

The DEP Wildlife Division began accepting applications in August 2005 from private landowners interested in participating in the new Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). LIP provides technical advice 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 considered at-risk in Connecticut.

LIP, which is made possible through grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides an exceptional opportunity for both private landowners and the DEP to work in partnership to provide stewardship for at-risk species by carrying out on-the-ground projects. Good stewardship can slow down or reverse the decline of some species. 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 rare or declining species.

At-risk species in Connecticut include all federally listed species, state-listed endangered, threatened and special concern species, and other species of conservation concern as determined by the Wildlife Division. Examples of at-risk species include the bog turtle, ruffed grouse, meadowlark, golden-winged warbler, seaside sparrow, New England cottontail, northern metalmark, and northern white cedar. Early successional habitats and tidal and freshwater wetlands have been designated priority habitats by LIP because the majority of Connecticut's at-risk species are dependent on them. LIP also has designated the management of certain imperiled natural communities as a priority because they provide habitat for a host of at-risk species.

Any private landowner, sportsmen's club, conservation organization, landowner association, corporation, or land trust can apply to LIP for project funding. All privately owned (non-governmental) land in Connecticut is eligible. Applications are being ranked

based on an on-site project/habitat evaluation conducted by the Wildlife Division. The evaluation will consider the current value of the property for wildlife and the potential of the proposed project to benefit LIP-designated at-risk species, priority habitats, and imperiled natural communities. Land containing priority habitats or imperiled natural communities will receive priority. Funds will be committed based on rank, funding availability, and the recommendations of the LIP Project Committee. LIP can fund up to 75% of the cost of an approved project, while the landowner, partnering conservation group, or other nonfederal grant source must provide the remaining 25%. Payment for project work is provided directly to state-approved contractors once work is completed to the satisfaction of the Wildlife Division.

To learn more about the LIP, visit the DEP's website (www.dep.state.ct.us), or contact Judy Wilson, LIP coordinator at 860-295-9523 (Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

Mussels on the Move

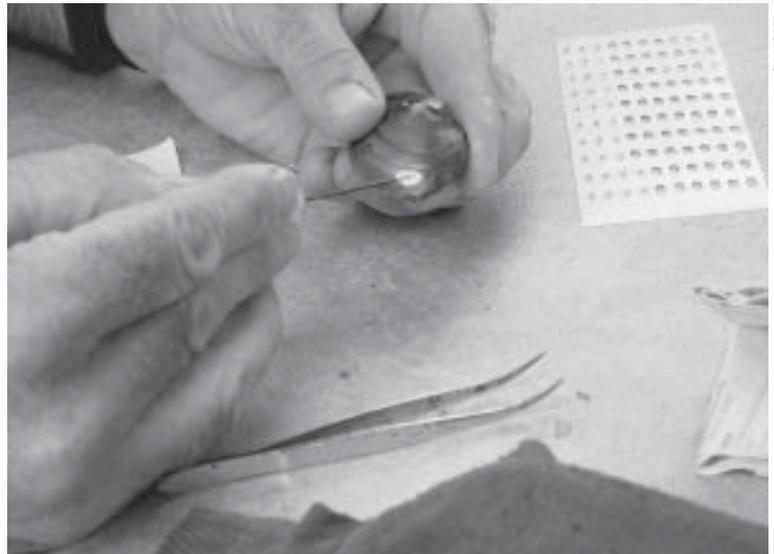
Written by Laura Saucier, Wildlife Diversity Program

A freshwater mussel survey of the Salmon River, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, revealed small populations of two state-listed mussels close to the Route 151 bridge in Moodus. The tidewater mucket is a threatened species and the Eastern pearlshell is a species of special concern on Connecticut's Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species List.

Biologists were understandably concerned because work had already started on the replacement of the Route 151 bridge. Pile driving of the new bridge supports could send a heavy sediment load downstream and threaten the existence of these state-listed mussel populations. The Department of Transportation was notified of the mussel populations, and, subsequently, Baier Construction hired Biodrawversity, an environmental consulting firm, to relocate the mussels downstream and out of harms way.

On August 19, 2005, Ethan Nedeau and Sean Werle of Biodrawversity, spent eight hours with SCUBA gear, searching

and collecting 245 mussels of eight different species. On hand to help were Mark Carabetta and Shelly Green from The Nature Conservancy, Steve Gephard from the DEP Fisheries Division, and Julie Victoria and Laura Saucier from the DEP Wildlife Division. The mussels were kept in aerated coolers until all were collected. Twelve tidewater muckets and four Eastern pearlshells were found. These rare mussels were marked with dental adhesive and tags (one tidewater mucket had a damaged shell and was not marked) before they were moved.



This rare mussel has been tagged with a number before being brought down river and placed in a safer mussel bed.

The mussels were brought down river to be placed in another mussel bed. While the habitat was being evaluated, another mussel species was found! This find brought the overall total to nine species of freshwater mussels (out of 12 endemic to Connecticut) in a small stretch of the Salmon River, denoting excellent diversity.

L. SAUCIER

FROM THE FIELD



Volunteers Needed for Shepaug Eagle Area

Connecticut Audubon is coordinating volunteers needed to help out at the Shepaug Eagle Observation Area (which will be open from December 28, 2005, to March 15, 2006). Interested individuals are asked to attend a volunteer training session on December 3, 2005, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, at the Northeast Generation Services office in New Milford. For more information about volunteering, contact the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point, 1 Milford Point Road, Milford 06460 (203-878-7440); or email curbain@ctaudubon.org.

Shepaug Eagle Observation Area Opens Dec. 28

The Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area will be open to the public on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays from December 28, 2005, through March 15, 2006, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM--strictly by advance reservation. All individuals and groups wishing to visit the site to view eagles must make a reservation for a particular date, as there will be a limited number of visitors allowed per open day.

Starting December 6, 2005, reservations for the Shepaug Eagle Observation Area can be made Tuesday through Friday, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, by calling 1-800-368-8954.

Volunteers Needed for Annual Eagle Survey

Every January, the DEP Wildlife Division coordinates the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, in which many volunteers count eagles along standard survey routes. **The 2006 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey will be conducted on Saturday, January 7, 2006, between 7:00 AM and 11:00 AM.**

Objectives of the survey are to establish an index to the total wintering bald eagle population in the lower 48 states, determine eagle distribution during a standardized survey period, and identify previously unrecognized areas of important winter habitat.

If you would like to participate in the 2006 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, send a postcard with your name and mailing address to: Julie Victoria, Franklin Wildlife Management Area, 391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254. You will receive an information packet about the survey in early December.

Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program



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Clapper rail calling from within a tidal marsh.

Wetland Bird Call Back Survey Results 2005

Volunteer surveyors have submitted data from eight wetland sites. Virginia rails were the most recorded species with occurrences at five of the eight sites. Other target species detected were sora and clapper rail (2 sites each), and least bittern, pied-billed grebe, and willet (1 site each). American bittern, king rail, black rail, common moorhen and American coot were not detected during surveys at the eight wetland sites.

Early analysis of the data indicates mixed success. The high water level during spring, 2005 allowed the volunteers greater boat access to several of the sites, likely increasing the detection rate of the birds. The high water level was also a limiting factor for potential nesting areas for these birds. These birds nest in the reedy vegetation along the shores of wetlands. When the water level is too high, they are pushed from their preferred nesting sites and can suffer complete nest failure.

FROM OUR READERS

Eagle Nest Platform Built by Reader

Dear Editor,

It would be nice if it were mentioned that I built the nest platform that was used "13 years ago, when a bald eagle pair that successfully raised two chicks in Litchfield County became the first pair to nest in the state since the 1950s" (see July/August 2005 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*). The Bald Eagle Study Group, of which I am a member, initially was against building a platform in the belief that the platform would attract ospreys which would compete with the eagles. When the Connecticut DEP and the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) asked me to climb a large white pine tree that eagles were attempting to build a nest in and build a platform for them, I agreed. This nesting attempt had been reported by Don Hopkins. The problem was that the crown of the tree was too dense. The eagles were trying to build at the outer end of a large branch and the nest attempt kept blowing out of the tree.

In March 1991, with the help of Julie Victoria (DEP Wildlife Division), Bud Saunders, (MDC) and several other MDC workers, I

built a nest platform in the tree to which Don directed us. The white pine was about 120 feet tall. I climbed to a level of about 90 feet. At that point, there was a clump of nesting material, about 18 inches across and several inches deep, that the eagles had brought in for a "nest cup." I collected this material and put it aside. I then cut out a "wheel" of branches, creating an opening between two "wheels" about seven feet high, so the eagles could approach from any direction. While I was doing this, I saw two adults soaring off in the distance and assumed they were the pair. I then set up a rope and pulley system while the MDC workers on the ground cut and bundled six-foot lengths of maple saplings. These bundles were sent up to me and I lashed them onto the wheel of branches that was I standing on and built a platform that extended about five feet out from the trunk of the tree and three-quarters of the way around. Then the workers on the ground sent up finer materials, as well as buckets of pine needles. With these materials, I built an "eagle" nest and, when I was finished, I put back the nest cup that had been built by the eagles themselves.

Sincerely,
Larry Fischer, Newtown

CWD Suspect Deer Turns Out to Be Rabid

Written by Andrew LaBonte, Deer Program

In mid-July, a resident of Stamford observed a deer behaving strangely in his backyard. The landowner saw a deer, that appeared to be drinking from a small pond on his property, begin to turn in circles as if chasing its tail. The deer went further into the water and died in the pond. Unsure of what to do, he called the local animal control officer, who was unable to assist him in removing the deer. Eventually, the landowner contacted the Deer Program at the Wildlife Division's Franklin office.

This deer's behavior and condition resembled many of the symptoms associated with chronic wasting disease (CWD) -- excessive salivation, odd posturing and behavior, and excessive drinking. It appeared Connecticut might be looking at its first case of CWD in deer. The landowner and his landscapers removed the deer and transported it to a local veterinary hospital for pick-up by the Wildlife Division. The deer was then transported to the University of Connecticut's Pathobiology Lab for testing. Lab results revealed that the deer was negative for CWD but tested positive for rabies. Fortunately, the homeowner and landscapers who assisted him in removing the deer took precautionary measures by wearing latex gloves and they did not come into direct contact with saliva or nervous system tissues. Consequently, there was no need for them to take precautionary rabies vaccination treatments.

This was the first case of a free-ranging deer testing positive for rabies in



A deer exhibiting strange behavior was later found to be rabid in Stamford.

Connecticut. A captive deer in Norwich tested positive for rabies in November 1994. Rabies is a deadly disease that affects the nervous system. It is caused by a virus that lives in the saliva of a rabid animal. All warm-blooded mammals are susceptible to rabies; however, prevalence is highest among raccoons, skunks, bats, and unvaccinated cats and dogs. Once contracted, rabies is invariably fatal unless treated before symptoms appear (usually in 2-8 weeks). Symptoms include irritability, headache, fever, itching or pain at the site of exposure, paralysis, spasms, convulsions, delirium, and death.

Although rabies is extremely uncommon in deer, the Wildlife Division expects that because of the increased efforts to test abnormally acting deer for CWD, there is the potential for detecting more cases of rabies in deer.

At this time, there is no cause to be concerned about hunting and handling a deer during the upcoming hunting

season. The likelihood of encountering a rabid deer in the field is extremely low. Despite the low risk of exposure to rabid deer, the Wildlife Division recommends the following precautions:

- 1) While in the field avoid contact with animals exhibiting extremely abnormal behavior, such as those symptoms mentioned above;
- 2) Always wear rubber gloves when field dressing and handling an animal;
- 3) Avoid unprotected contact with the animal's mouth, brain, and spinal column;
- 4) Wash hands regularly with

soap and water and avoid exposure to the eyes, mouth, or open cuts; and

5) Cook harvested game meat thoroughly to kill any bacteria or viruses (freezing will not kill the rabies virus).

Anyone exposed (bitten, scratched, or direct contact with saliva or nervous tissue) to an animal that may be rabid should immediately wash the area with soap and water and call your doctor for medical advice. The animal should be saved and submitted for testing. Contact the Connecticut Department of Public Health (860-509-7994) for instructions.

Anyone who observes deer displaying symptoms associated with CWD or rabies should contact the Wildlife Division's Franklin Wildlife office (860-642-7239), Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130), or the DEP Division of Law Enforcement office (860-424-3333).

Volunteer for Wildlife

A new Master Wildlife Conservationist Program series is slated to begin in late winter, 2006. Master Wildlife Conservationists are volunteers who assist the Wildlife Division with outreach and research efforts. Volunteers can assist with goosebanding, recording data at deer check stations, monitoring piping plover and least tern nesting beaches, or various other research projects. Outreach efforts include:

manning exhibits at fairs and festivals, providing information at the Shepaug Dam Eagle Observation Area, and presenting programs at schools, libraries or nature centers.

The program series consists of 40 hours of training by wildlife personnel. Class topics range from wildlife ecology to Connecticut specific wildlife issues. There is also an interpretation component and volunteers are videotaped while

interpreting a natural history item. Only 20 people are accepted into the program each year and participants are chosen through an application process. If you would like more information or receive an application, please contact Laura at the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130 or by email (laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us).

Your Questions Answered

Do you have a wildlife question you'd like to have answered?

Please send it to:

*Your Questions Answered
DEP - Wildlife Division
P.O. Box 1550
Burlington, CT 06013*

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

Why Are Bears Being Seen with Different Colored Ear Tags?

Q: *I have been seeing bears in the last few years. Some have ear tags with different colors. What do the colors mean?*

A: Most of the ear-tagged bears seen by Connecticut residents were trapped and tagged as part of a research project. A smaller number were tagged after they were caught at problem sites or removed from urban areas. The project, which began in 2001, was an effort to gain better information on the state's growing bear population. Bears were trapped in Barkhamsted, Hartland, Colebrook, Goshen, and Cornwall. Trapped bears were given an immobilizing drug, and then they were sexed, weighed, measured, and ear-tagged. Adult female bears were fitted with radio-collars so that biologists could find their winter dens and determine how many cubs were born to each sow and how many survived the following year. All of the marked bears were released in the same area where they were trapped.

In 2001, eight bears were marked with yellow tags; an additional 19 bears also received yellow tags in the first portion of 2002. In the latter portion of 2002, orange tags were put on seven bears. White tags were used on 14 bears marked in 2003. In 2004, 11 yearling bears found during winter den inspections were

marked with green tags. Active trapping of bears was completed in 2003, but an additional five bears were handled (typically at problem sites) in 2004 and given white ear tags. During winter den inspections in 2005, two more yearlings were handled and given light blue ear tags. Bears that were handled incidentally in 2005 were outfitted with blue tags.

The color of the tags is a good indicator of the year the bear was trapped or handled. All tags have a unique number or letter-number combination that helps in identifying individual bears. The last number on the tag is the year the bear was tagged. The first number or letter is the sequence in the bears handled that year. As an example, a bear with tag number 7-4 would be the seventh bear tagged in 2004. Although there was an attempt to use distinct colors for the tags, some are difficult to tell apart under certain light conditions.



P. J. FUSCO

Wetland Restoration Project Completed in East Lyme

Written by Paul Capotosto, WHAMM Program



Workers install two culverts in East Lyme to restore a tidal pond that had previously converted to a freshwater pond.

The Wildlife Division's Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management (WHAMM) Program completed the Davis Pond Culvert Project this past July. Davis Pond, located in East Lyme, was a tidal pond that had been converted to a freshwater pond. The goal of the project was to restore the tidal pond by installing two 18-inch diameter culverts with two Agri-Drain Inline water control structures. These structures will bring tidal water from Niantic Bay into the pond. The water level control structures will be used to manage the water levels in the pond, making the site more attractive to wildlife. Weir boards in the water control structures are set to allow full and new moon tides in (6-8 times per month) with full pond height.

Funding for this wetland restoration project was provided by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (\$6,000) with in-kind services from the Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management Program (\$4,000). The area will be monitored for its wildlife use by the Division in the future.

Resident Canada Goose Study Yielding Important Data

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

In 2002, the DEP Wildlife Division initiated a four-year study to assess Connecticut's growing resident Canada goose population. Resident geese are those that were hatched or nest in the lower 48 states, or in Canada below 48°, excluding Newfoundland. In Connecticut, Canada geese were not present as summer inhabitants until the early 1920s when a winter feeding program established in Litchfield attracted migrant geese. These migrant geese eventually stayed for the breeding season and became a small population of approximately 80 birds. In the 1960s, a small breeding population was established at Charter Marsh in Tolland. Additionally, adults and goslings were transplanted from New Jersey and other states and placed throughout eastern Connecticut during this time.

Over the years, human activities have created excellent goose habitat. As a result, the state's resident goose population continues to grow. With this expansion has come an increase in nuisance, damage, and health complaints and concerns. The feeding of geese in urban and rural areas has substantially contributed to increasing nuisance problems. Resident geese have negatively impacted both property and agricultural interests. High densities of geese in urban settings have led to conflicts at parks, beaches, golf courses, athletic fields, and residential lawns.

Fourth Year of Trapping Geese

One aspect of the research project involves assessing the movement patterns and survival rates of resident geese. To acquire this information, Wildlife Division staff have been capturing geese throughout the state over the past four years to fit them with individually coded plastic neck collars and metal legbands. These fixtures, which cause no harm to the birds, allow biologists to assess movement patterns, survival rates, and population size.

During the summer of 2005, DEP staff and numerous volunteers captured 1,821 geese at 54 different sites throughout the state. Yellow neck collars were placed on 497 geese, with approximately



Look for yellow collars on Canada geese. Numbers should be reported to the Wildlife Division.

60 geese fitted with collars in each of the eight counties.

The best time to capture Canada geese is when they undergo an annual wing feather molt and shed all of their flight feathers. During the period of feather regrowth, which lasts approximately four weeks, the birds are unable to fly. It's at this time that geese can be corralled into a portable net placed along the shore of a waterbody. Once the birds are captured, their age and sex are determined and the collars and leg bands are attached. Subsequent sightings of the collared birds provides valuable information on movement patterns.

One important piece of information being provided by this study is that a percentage of juvenile geese and a smaller percentage of adult resident geese undergo a "molt migration" to Canada. During the past three years, the Wildlife Division has received over 35 reports of geese collared in Connecticut being observed in Canada during the annual molting period. These birds migrate out of Connecticut in early June,

molt in Canada, and then return in September and October.

Biologists have known for some time that geese undergo "molt migrations." The frequency and cause of these movements are of great interest. If, through planned actions, resident birds can be encouraged to undergo molt migrations, there is the potential to alleviate many of the conflicts experienced during summer. The Division is presently experimenting with some management techniques to induce molt migration. Molt migrating geese, apart from not being present in Connecticut during summer, also are subject to higher mortality rates, as they experience greater hunting pressure during their journey home.

Regulated hunting of resident geese is an effective tool for managing over-abundant populations. Connecticut's resident goose seasons, held in September and in late January through early February, are timed to occur when migrant geese are not present in large numbers. These seasons have been

successful in reducing resident goose numbers in rural parts of the state. The Division is investigating innovative ways to target urban birds, such as working with golf courses and water companies to structure hunting on their areas and coordinating hazing activities within urban areas that coincide with hunting seasons. Ultimately, an overall assessment of the efficacy of sport hunting to reduce goose-human conflicts is paramount in achieving the proper balance between Canada goose numbers and human tolerance.

Report Collar Observations

Anyone who observes geese with yellow neck collars is urged to report their sightings to the Division's Migratory Gamebird Program at 860-642-7239 or min.huang@po.state.ct.us. Observations should include the individual collar codes, number of collared birds present, number of uncollared birds present, the location and date.

Just for Kids

Shrews

Shrews are small mammals with long snouts and beady eyes. Five different kinds of shrews are found in Connecticut.

Mighty Metabolism!

Shrews eat all the time! Their small size and constant activity make them very hungry! Although mostly insectivorous (insect-eating), shrews will eat earthworms and larger prey, such as young mice and salamanders.

Five Shrews in CT!!

- Masked shrew
- Water shrew
- Smoky shrew
- Short-tailed shrew
- Least shrew



Sizing Up Shrews!

Most shrews weigh less than a quarter of an ounce! That's about the weight of a nickel! The water shrew is large and weighs about a half of an ounce.

Did You Know?

The short-tailed shrew is one of two mammals in the world with a venomous bite! The venom is toxic and is used to paralyze its prey.

Studying Shrews

Ever think about being a shrew scientist?

There is still much to be discovered about shrews. The DEP Wildlife Division is studying the least shrew, an endangered species in Connecticut, to learn more about its habitat and range in the state. Least shrews actually live together in groups and share nests and tunnels underground.

Take a Wild Guess!

How many times does a shrew's heart beat in one minute?

(Answer: It can beat 1,200 times per minute!)

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- Nov. 8 **Children's Program: Connecticut's Wild Turkeys**, starting at 4:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. Come to Sessions Woods and learn the story behind Connecticut's wild turkey population. This is an indoor program with a short slide presentation and activity. Meet in the new classroom area located in the education center. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.
- Dec. 28-Mar. 15 Shepaug Bald Eagle Viewing Area open for the 2005-2006 viewing season (see page 14)

Hunting and Trapping Season Dates

- Sept. 15-Nov. 15 Fall turkey and deer (zones 1-10) bowhunting season on state and private land
- Sept. 15-Dec. 31 Deer bowhunting season on state land bowhunting only areas and private land in zones 11 and 12
- Oct. 15 Opening day of the small game and pheasant seasons
- Oct. 15-29 Fall turkey firearms season
- Nov. 16-25 Deer shotgun season on state land (A season)
- Nov. 16-Dec. 6 Deer shotgun/rifle season on private land
- Nov. 26-Dec. 6 Deer shotgun season on state land (B season) and state land no lottery season
- Dec. 1 Beaver trapping season opens
- Dec. 7-20 Deer muzzleloader season on private and state land
- Dec. 7-31 Deer bowhunting season on private land in zones 1 through 10
- Jan. 1-31, 2006 Extended deer bowhunting season on private land in zones 11 and 12. A 2006 deer permit and private land consent forms for 2006 are required.

See the 2005 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for specific season dates, details and delineation of deer management zones. The guide is available at Wildlife Division offices, town halls, and on the DEP's website, www.dep.state.ct.us. The 2006 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide will be available by mid-December.

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.



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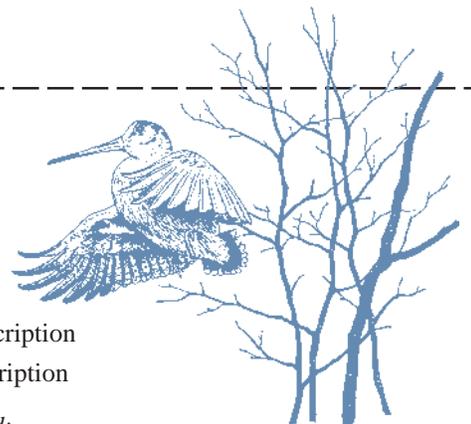
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A state-endangered long-eared owl perches along a woodland edge on a sunny, winter morning.

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