

January/February 2021

CONNECTICUT Wildlife

From The Director

I think we all moved into 2021 with a grateful sigh and the hope that the strange events of 2020 were moving into the past. There is no doubt last year brought us more challenges, and loss, than we ever considered possible. The DEEP community was not exempt; many of those losses had significant impacts on all of us. The transition into a new year is also time for reflection. Despite the obstacles we faced, we worked together to find creative solutions and keep conservation moving forward, and we should all be proud of those accomplishments.



We streamlined delivery of educational materials and Conservation Education/Firearms Safety classes; rolled out video guides; created online wildlife programs; and deployed new technology. From virtual bluebird nest box building instruction workshops to online learning programs which helped families pivot into at home lessons to community science projects that aided biologists in the collection of data they could not gather personally, we did a lot!

And, perhaps most importantly, we helped record numbers of people reconnect with nature at a time when we all needed the physical and mental health benefits that time spent in the outdoors can provide. As I reflect on those accomplishments, I am eager to see what creative conservation actions we can implement in 2021.

We plan to continue, and expand, the positive things that were initiated in 2020. Look for new opportunities to help our biologists with community science projects, additional wildlife webinars, the next installments in our Living with Black Bear video series, and expanded digital offerings. We are excited for the reintroduction of Recovering America's Wildlife Act into the U.S. Congress and the opportunities it presents for proactive wildlife conservation long into the future.

Even more importantly, we want to continue providing opportunities for everyone to connect with nature and take advantage of the many physical and mental health benefits time spent outdoors, or simply observing nature, can provide. Our natural spaces and amazing wildlife, among other things, make Connecticut special. For a New Year's resolution, why not consider inviting someone who is less familiar with the outdoors to join you for a little time in nature? We would love to hear about your experiences.

Jenny Dickson, DEEP Wildlife Division Director

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A male white-winged crossbill cracks his way into a pine cone to get at the seeds within. Read more about crossbills and other winter finches on page 8. PHOTO BY P. J. FUSCO

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*An Eastern screech owl soaks up the morning sun on a cold February morning.
Photo courtesy Paul Fusco*

Stopping Illegal Wildlife Trafficking: Connecticut's Native Species Targeted

Written by Kyle Testerman, Wildlife Management Institute

Documenting illegal wildlife trade may sound like something fit for a globe-trotting reality TV series, and indeed it is. But, you do not need to travel to exotic markets to be impacted by this global crisis. In the United States, many of our native species face threats posed by illegal collection for the pet trade, perceived medicinal use, or from their use in jewelry and other decorative crafts. In Connecticut and neighboring states, some of the animals targeted by poaching and illegal collection include flying squirrels (pet trade), black bears (perceived medicinal uses), snakes (pet trade and medicinal use), and most of all, turtles (pet trade, medicinal use, and decoration).

Like other wildlife of conservation concerns, turtles face several better-known human-related threats, such as road mortality, habitat loss, and habitat degradation. However, the illegal trade in wild turtles remains a major conservation challenge in Connecticut. Despite that all 12 of our native turtle species are protected by law, the number of cases of illegal collection continues to rise.

Turtle poaching can involve a single animal or many species and age classes, making the impacts wide-ranging and

severe. One reason why even a single turtle removed from the wild is a big deal has to do with how turtles have survived so well for millions of years. Like humans, turtles are long-lived, commonly living over 60 years, and in some cases over a century. Most species do not become reproductively active until they are between eight and 10 years old and can then reproduce successfully even at advanced ages. While there is potential to have many offspring over a long lifetime, most turtles do not make it past the egg stage, and fewer live to reproductive age, even in the most natural settings. With relatively new pressures of human-caused habitat changes and road mortality, the loss of a single turtle can impact the viability of an entire population. Even for species with a “stable” population in Connecticut, the potential for local extinction from over-

exploitation is a very real risk. The threat from turtle poaching is not limited to the most eye-catching species, but includes the turtles you might find

in your own backyard or nearby pond. In Connecticut, our native turtles are

being illegally bought and sold online; some are shipped overseas; and others are sold as “pets” over internet market-



P. BENJUNAS

The Eastern box turtle is a species of special concern on Connecticut's List of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species.



P. BENJUNAS

The wood turtle is also listed as a species of special concern in Connecticut.



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Common snapping turtles are often exploited by illegal trafficking.

P. J. FUSCO



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An invasive red-eared slider (left) basks next to a much smaller, native Eastern painted turtle (right).



K. TESTERMAN

Unmarked traps like this one are used by poachers to collect turtles. Traps set by researchers will be clearly marked for the purpose.

places in plain sight.

Non-native turtles being kept as pets are also problematic. Many pet owners are unaware how long turtles can live, and over time, turtles usually outlive their owner's interest. Some think it is all right to release the animal into the wild, but this causes numerous issues. Regardless of whether the species being released is native to Connecticut or not, releasing animals into the wild can transmit diseases to wild populations. Respiratory diseases, shell rot, and even diseases like ranavirus are all linked to captive releases. Releasing native turtles into a new area can also introduce new genes to the resident population, possibly making individuals less able to survive local habitat variations or pathogens. When released into the wild,

non-native species, like reared sliders, compete with native species for food and nesting locations.

The DEEP Wildlife Division continues to work with local, state, regional, and federal partners to combat the illegal wildlife trade. These collaborations are essential for protecting wildlife populations and involve law enforcement agencies, zoos and aquariums, wildlife biologists, and others. In the next issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*, these partnerships, and their important roles in stopping wildlife trafficking will be discussed in more detail.

Save these numbers to report illegal wildlife trafficking:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service anonymous tip line: 1-844-FWS-TIPS (397-8477) or email FWS_TIPS@fws.gov.

CT DEEP Dispatch (EnCon Police) Emergency: 860-424-3333

TIP - Turn in Poachers Hotline: 1-800-842-HELP (4357)



K. TESTERMAN

Turtles face many human-related threats, including vehicle mortality. This crushed painted turtle was found on a dirt road at a state wildlife management area.



P. J. FUSCO

The bog turtle is an endangered species in Connecticut.

Enhancing Your Backyard for Wildlife, Even in Winter

Article and photos by Kyle Testerman, Wildlife Management Institute

Making improvements to your backyard habitat can be difficult outside of the growing season. Fortunately, there are still many projects you can do inside while awaiting the return of spring. One of the easiest is creating a plan for next year. Developing your backyard habitat “wish list” in winter allows you to plan and prepare in advance, providing enough time to decide what changes to make to improve the wildlife value of your area. For a few ideas, revisit the earlier articles in this series or on our backyard habitat webpage at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Wild-Activities/Family-Friendly-Projects-to-Improve-Backyard-Habitat>. Preparing early will allow you more time to reach out to local native plant nurseries about which wildflowers, shrubs, and trees will be available and the best fit for your property. Some important aspects of your planning should consider the sunlight, soil, and water needs of plants you would like to bring in, as well as the types of wildlife the plants will benefit. Use the Native Plant Finder to learn about types of local plants and their importance for wildlife (www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder).

For some hands-on projects you can



(Above) Drilling holes of varying depths and diameters into tree stumps can provide nesting sites for many species of native bees. (Right) American robins and eastern phoebes are not likely to nest in cavity boxes, but will take to nesting platforms like this homemade one installed on the back of a tool shed.

do in winter, consider adding nesting or roosting structures for birds, bats, and even native bees. Even if you do not have the tools or know-how to build one from scratch, many local and online vendors offer pre-made structures that are ready to install on your property. The first step is deciding what wildlife to build for.

Building for Birds

For bird boxes, www.nestwatch.org is a good starting point (Bluebird box plans are at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/Eastern-Bluebird>). Select your region and the



type of habitat surrounding where you live to get a list of cavity-nesting birds in your area. You can learn about each of those species and their nesting needs, and have the option to download plans for building your own nesting boxes. For example, if you live in a forested area, there are plans for titmice, owls, woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches, with detailed information about the design and placement for each species, and how to maintain the boxes, prevent nest predators, and safely monitor nesting activity each year.

While nest boxes will typically not be used until the next breeding season, you can put up a songbird roosting box for use this winter. Roosting boxes are similar in design and appearance to nest boxes, except the interior provides several perches for songbirds to roost together and conserve warmth. Box designs can also be found online.

Building for Bees

Another woodworking activity for wildlife includes building simple nesting structures for some of our wild bees. Connecticut's many species of leafcutter, mason, and carpenter bees all take to man-made nesting sites. These wood- and cavity-nesting bees find natural tubular cavities to lay their eggs inside. A ball of pollen is left by the adult bee for the larva to eat once it hatches and develops over the next year, eventually emerging from the cavity as an adult. These bees are great pollinators for your summer vegetable garden and are important for the commercial cultivation of blueberries, apples, tomatoes, and flowers.

The simplest homemade bee blocks can be made by drilling holes of different depths and diameters into untreated wood blocks or logs. To accommodate most species, vary the holes between 3/32 inches and 3/8 inches in diameter and 3 to 6 inches deep, with the widest holes being on the deeper end. Make sure the holes are not drilled all the way through the block. Carpenter bees like to chew out their own nesting cavity in

the wood, so you can drill out a few 1/2-inch diameter holes to a depth of 1/2 inch to provide a starter hole.

Other bee nesting boxes consist of simple wood exteriors that can be filled with cardboard or natural reed tubes of various diameters. While one bigger nesting box could support many bees, some experts recommend putting up several smaller units in different locations in case disease, predators, or parasites affect one nesting site but, hopefully, not the others. Detailed plans and guidance are at <https://www.xerces.org/publications/factsheets/nests-for-native-bees>.

Building for Bats

Last, but not least, your backyard habitat could include a summer home for bats. Of Connecticut's nine species of bats, big brown and little brown bats are the two most likely to use bat houses. A bat house can serve as a place for individual bats to roost or may be used by a whole colony of female bats raising their pups, thus providing your yard with excellent insect control. Plans for single and multi-chambered bat houses are available online. Bat Conservation and Management (<https://batmanagement.com/>) and Bat Conservation International (<https://batcon.org/about-bats/bat-houses/>) are great places to start learning about build-your-own designs



Bird houses are not one-size-fits-all and many bird species have different preferences for placement height, aspect, and size. Research the kind of bird you want to host, then look for plans to build the right type of nesting box.

and installation tips to ensure your bat house is set up in a suitable place that is more likely to be used. Even in a perfect location, it may take several years for bats to start using their new home.

Choosing the right projects to improve your backyard habitat for wildlife will depend on many factors. No matter the size of your yard, type of existing habitat, season, or budget, there are projects big and small to enhance the wildlife value of the spaces you share with nature. Be sure to visit our backyard habitat webpage to see more project ideas and links to help you decide what projects are right for you: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Wild-Activities/Family-Friendly-Projects-to-Improve-Backyard-Habitat>.



Watchable Wildlife



Winter Finches

Splashes of Color to Liven Up a Drab Winter

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

Some winters have remarkable opportunities for wildlife watching in Connecticut. The winter of 2020/2021 may be one of them. Because of food shortages that were brought about by natural cycles, in combination with dry weather, there has been an increase in visitation by birds that normally remain much farther to our north during winter. These winter finches add jewel-like color and energetic liveliness to many backyards, parks, and natural areas.

Most winters, a few of these birds may pass through Connecticut on their way farther south, or they may not show up here at all. But this



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Evening grosbeak occurrences in the East are dependent, to a large extent, on spruce budworm outbreaks in Canadian boreal forests.



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Common redpolls can be found feeding on birch catkins or seeds in weedy fields.

winter, there has been a major influx of many types of winter finches, making this a wonderful winter for observation. Most of these birds will stop to partake in the offerings of black oil sunflower or thistle seed at backyard bird feeders. Pine siskins, purple finches, redpolls, and evening grosbeaks are just some of the irregular visitors we may see come into Connecticut in good numbers. There is also the possibility of other more uncommon visits by pine grosbeaks and crossbills.

Wildlife watchers should be equipped with binoculars and a good bird field guide. A spotting scope would be helpful, though not essential. It also helps to be aware of the calls of these birds as they often call to each other as flocks or single birds fly overhead. Each has a distinct call that can be heard on



Pine grosbeaks are attracted to fruit-bearing trees, including crabapples, winterberry, and mountain ash.

the Cornell Lab All About Birds website at <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/browse/topic/sounds-songs/>.

Separate populations of red crossbills are recognized to have 10 identifiable flight call types across North America. These vocalizations correspond to slight and unique differences in physical characteristics, ecological associations, and genetics. Some avian experts think the 10 types can be separated with certainty to represent 10 different unique red crossbill species in North America. Other experts believe there is too much intermixing between the types to be separated.

Irruptions

A winter finch irruption occurs when large numbers of birds move beyond their typical range, usually in response to lower than normal food supplies.

This irregular, nomadic displacement of boreal winter finches happens periodically and is closely tied to the summer production of seeds by trees in the boreal region of Canada.

If there is a bumper crop of seeds, the birds remain north. But, if there is a drought or other disruption of seed production that causes seed crops to fall below normal, thousands of finches may be forced to move from the boreal forest in search of food. Flocks may move nomadically or directionally (south). In 2020, widespread dry conditions during the growing season have undoubtedly contributed to a lack of food production.

Most of the winter finches are heavily reliant on the mast of just a few plant types. For instance, redpolls seek out the catkins from birch and alder. The cone seeds from spruce trees are associated with white-winged crossbills,

So, a spruce cone crop failure will lead to a white-winged crossbill irruption. The irruption may be regional or more extensive, depending on how far the crossbills have to move to find a good source of cone seeds from spruce, pine, or other conifers.

Different seed producers have different year to year cycles of peak seed production. When poor conditions align with downpeak seed production, the result may be a huge movement of all the species, called a “superflight”. By all accounts, a superflight is occurring this winter.

The Spruce Budworm Connection

Outbreaks of spruce budworm have allowed some of the finches to raise more young than usual due to an abundance of caterpillars. The cycles of



Purple finches often show up at backyard feeders that offer black oil sunflower seed.

budworm and resulting deforestation in the boreal forests of Canada can have a major influence on populations of winter finches, especially evening grosbeaks, and, to a lesser extent, purple finches. Bird populations will increase and expand with budworm outbreaks, and contract in years following outbreaks when forest die-offs occur. Spruce budworm outbreaks can have the effect of killing a large percentage of the trees in the

boreal forest, especially those that are most vulnerable, including balsam fir which is a widespread boreal forest tree. It has been documented that evening grosbeaks, a normally western species, expanded their range eastward with the help of budworm outbreaks. Years with fewer budworm outbreaks have been implicated in evening grosbeak range contraction, sometimes due to pesticide spraying to combat spruce budworm.



Pine siskins are often seen in association with goldfinches and redpolls, but can be distinguished by their streaky breasts. They feed in weedy fields and come to backyard feeders that offer thistle (nyger) and black oil sunflower seeds.

Winter Finch Species and Diet

Pine Siskin:

Siskins are goldfinch-sized, and are often found in association with goldfinches. They are heavily streaked with brown on the breast, and a splash of yellow in the wings and tail. Their bills are narrow, and sharply pointed.

Calls include a long buzzy shreeeee that rises in pitch. Also, a chlee-ip. Winter food: dried flower heads, weed seeds, seeds at feeders.

Purple Finch:

Male purple finches are raspberry red with faint streaking on the underside. Females are brown with streaks and a whitish eyebrow line. They are similar in appearance to the much more common house finch.

Calls include a rich chur-lee and in flight, a loud, metallic pik.

Winter food: various seeds and berries, seeds at feeders.

Common Redpoll:

Redpolls are pale, sparrow-sized finches with brown streaks on back and flanks. Males have a rosy-red breast. Both sexes have a red patch, or poll, on the forehead.

Call is sweee-ee-eet; in flight gives a rattling chut-chut-chut-chut.

Winter food: birch and alder catkins, weed seeds, seeds at feeders.

Hoary Redpoll:

Hoary redpolls are similar to common redpolls but are paler and slightly larger.

Their flight call is similar to the common redpoll.

Winter food: birch and alder catkins, weed seeds, seeds at feeders.

Evening Grosbeak:

Large and stocky, about the size of a starling, with huge, pale bills. Males are yellowish with black and white wings; females browner.

Call is a loud clee-ip, or ringing cleer. Winter food: various seeds, buds, berries, sunflower seeds at feeders.

Pine Grosbeak:

This robin-sized finch has a long tail

and short, stubby black bill. Adult males are bright pink; females are gray and rust colored. Both sexes have two white wing bars.

Flight call is tee-tee-tew.

Winter food: berries, buds, sunflower seeds at feeders.

Red Crossbill:

Crossbills are unique songbirds whose bills have crossed tips, which allow them to better access seeds within conifer cones. Male red crossbills are brick-red with black wings and tail, while females are yellowish-green with dark wings and tail.

The flight call is a repeated series of sharp and distinctive jip-jip notes.

Winter food: seeds of conifer cones, rarely sunflower seeds at backyard feeders.

White-winged Crossbill:

Both sexes of the white-winged crossbill have two bold white wing bars on their black wings. Adult males are bright pink, and females are greenish or yellowish in color.

Flight call is a rapid series of chif-chif notes.

Winter food: seeds from conifer cones, primarily spruces and pines.

Where to Look - Habitat

Wildlife watchers can use the presence of winter finches to liven up their natural experience this winter, whether at a park or in their backyard. Some of the best places to look for these birds would include popular parks and nature centers, especially those that maintain bird feeders.

Keep an eye on weedy fields that may be visited by redpoll or siskin flocks. Redpolls also feed on the catkins of birches, so look over any birch stands. Pine grosbeaks and evening grosbeaks will feed in fruit trees, including winter



Red crossbills will nest at any time of the year, including in winter, if cone crops are plentiful. Crossbills are parrot-like in that they often maneuver around cone clusters and feed from any angle. Interestingly, some birds have a left-facing cross to the bill and some are right-facing.



Adult male white-winged crossbills have rosy-pink body plumage while females are greenish and may show streaking. Immature males are a mix of patchy greens, yellows, and reds with streaks. Both sexes have black wings with bold white wing bars.

persistent crabapples. Crossbills feed primarily on seeds from conifer cones, so check trees that hold cones, including spruces and pines, as well as black pines that have been planted at many regional coastal parks.

Do not miss the irruption of winter finches! Get outdoors to your local

open space with a pair of binoculars and look over the weedy fields, fruit trees, and conifer trees for those splashes of color that brighten the landscape this winter. Share your photos with us at <https://www.instagram.com/ctfishandwildlife/>.



This Little Bird Is All Business

The Brown Creeper

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

This tiny, unassuming, forest bird with a long tail and long curved bill blends into its tree bark surroundings so well that it can seemingly disappear at will. Its cryptic brown and buff plumage is streaked and spotted with white. Its underside is white. The solitary brown creeper is often seen in fall and winter along with chickadees and nuthatches, although it does not closely associate with them or their movements.

The brown creeper is fairly common throughout its range. It is the only member of its family in North America. The creeper's range extends coast to coast from southern Canada through most of the northern United States and into the mountain forests of Mexico. Creepers breed in mature mixed or coniferous forests, frequently where there is a swampy habitat component. They are resident birds, but will retreat from northern areas in winter when they may be found as far south as Florida and Texas.

Behavior

Typically, the brown creeper is seen as it hitches its way up the trunk of a large tree. It creeps along in a spiral, using its spiky, stiff tail to help brace against the bark. Using its

thin curved bill with delicate precision, the bird inspects bark crevices for small bits of food, including insects and spiders that may be hiding within. The creeper feeds in an uninterrupted, methodical, and focused manner. Once reaching the upper parts of the tree, the creeper will fly down to the base of the next tree to start its way up again, blending into the tree bark as it goes.

Brown creepers build a hammock-shaped nest, usually behind a section of loose bark. Females typically lay five to six eggs. Incubation takes about 14 to 26 days and young fledge after two to three weeks. Nesting often occurs near a forested wetland.

The birds are usually quiet. During the breeding season, their quiet nature is transformed when males sing with a series of high-pitched cascading notes. The song has a clear and delicate ringing nature that carries through the woods, adding quality of life to the leafless early spring forest.

Conservation

The protection of mature forests with large trees is critical to this species. Brown creepers have fared well in the Northeast where forests have been slowly maturing over the last 100 years. This bird is considered an indicator species because of its reliance on, and occurrence in, healthy mature forest habitat. Forest fragmentation and habitat loss may impact the species as well.

Protecting forestland through land acquisition is an important way DEEP and conservation organizations can ensure habitat for forest-dependent birds. Forest management practices can also play a role in the conservation of many forest-dependent birds. Designating areas of forestland for passive management aims to ensure sections of mature forests are allowed to grow even older. Many forest management practices also aim to retain standing dead and dying trees for wildlife habitat.

Look for brown creepers in winter visiting bird feeders offering suet.



Brown creepers will systematically search bark crevices of large trees and limbs for tidbits of food, including insects and spiders.



Typically seen hugging close to the bark of trees, the brown creeper's cryptic plumage blends into its surroundings, where the bird often goes unnoticed.



Lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) are aggressive and hard-fighting gamefish that remain very active during winter, making them ideal ice fishing quarry.

PHOTO BY A. SWANSON

Connecticut Lakers: *A prized gamefish returns after more than five decades*

Written by Kierran Broatch, a year-round angler and writer at TheConnecticutYankee.com

Anglers in Connecticut have a unique and exciting opportunity to take advantage of this winter. For the first time in over 50 years, lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) have been stocked in state waters to enhance our recreational fisheries. Nearly 500 of these prized gamefish, ranging from five to seven pounds and 24 to 36-inches in length, were released this past November into Winchester Lake, Coventry Lake, Tyler Lake, Squantz Pond, and Bigelow Pond.

This one-time specialty stocking is thanks to a kind gesture by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The “lakers” are surplus broodstock from USFWS’ Berkshire National Fish Hatchery, a 148-acre, cold-water aquaculture facility in New Marlborough, Massachusetts. The hatchery supports the restoration of lake trout populations in the Lower Great Lakes and supplies multiple strains of disease-free lake trout eggs to other federal hatcheries as part of the National Broodstock Program. Like

brook trout, lake trout are technically not a trout – they are a closely-related “char” (one way to tell them apart is that trout have light-colored bodies with dark spots, while char have dark-colored bodies with light spots). In fact, lake trout are the largest char and, in the right environments, can reach extraordinary age and size (the rod-and-reel world record is 72-pounds!).

The lake trout’s native range is mostly the northern reaches of North America. Yet, the fish has been widely



Lake trout have a storied history in Connecticut dating back to the 1890s. The 29-pound, 13-ounce state record was caught in Salisbury's Lake Wononscopomuc in 1918.

to finalize the list of five stocking sites. "We wanted to put these fish in places where we really don't do a lot of specialty

introduced all over the world. Believe it or not, lakera have a storied history in Connecticut, too. Starting in the 1890s and for most of the 20th century, this species was reared in state hatcheries and stocked into a handful of our lakes. The program ceased in 1967, likely attributed to poor survival in the wild, but not before the fish left their mark in the Nutmeg State. The largest ever caught in Connecticut was from Salisbury's Lake Wononscopomuc in 1918 (coincidentally during a global pandemic) and weighed a massive 29 lbs. 13 oz.!

When the DEEP Fisheries Division was approached by the USFWS, it jumped at the chance to provide this bonus fishery to Connecticut anglers. Brian Eltz, a senior fisheries biologist with DEEP and the state's trout stocking coordinator, helped explain why. "To me, it was the fact that we haven't stocked these fish in the state since 1967, so the majority of our anglers have never had the opportunity to fish for them," says Eltz. "It has obviously created a buzz and it fits in well with what we're trying to do in creating year-round fishing opportunities."

The Fisheries Division went through an exhaustive process of elimination

stockings, and provide the opportunity to catch them through the ice," says Eltz. "We did try to get the lake trout on both sides of the state as best we could, but we were limited."

While lake trout are typically found in deep, well-oxygenated lakes and ponds, the intention and expectation are for these fish to be caught and enjoyed now, not to reproduce or hold-over for multiple years. For that reason, chosen waterbodies, like Winchester, Tyler, and Bigelow, are known to have a better chance of freezing-over during winter, which will, hopefully, give anglers a real shot at catching these lake trout through the ice.

Some lakes were omitted as potential stocking sites due to already having existing specialty fisheries that DEEP did not want to interfere with. "Places like East Twin and West Hill were removed just because they have kokanee salmon,



CT DEEP FISHERIES DIVISION FILE (3)

A new generation of anglers can now try for their first lake trout in Connecticut waters – like this 11-year-old with an impressive specimen from Coventry Lake this past November.

and lake trout are voracious feeders on kokanee," says Eltz. "We also wanted to stay out of the Farmington River drainage for fear of introducing a disease. Although these fish came from a disease-free hatchery, it's something that we think about when we're bringing in an outside species."

This winter will be the first time many Connecticut anglers attempt to catch a

lake trout. The good news is that the fish behave in a similar fashion to species of trout already here, and can be caught using the ice fishing methods one would normally use on frozen Connecticut lakes and ponds. Lakers will readily eat a live shiner set under a tip-up and will not turn down many dead meals either, even if it is cut bait laying on bottom. In winter, lake trout can normally be found following schools of baitfish in any part of the water column, but a good place to start for these fish will be around the boat launches where they were stocked in late fall.

Jigging for lake trout is an effective technique in popular fisheries to our north, like New York's Lake George and Maine's Sebago Lake. These fish are known to put up a



A. SWANSON (2)



(Top) Before November's stocking, Connecticut anglers had to travel out-of-state to target lake trout. Here, the author displays a nice example from New York's Lake George.

(Above) The Fisheries Division is asking anglers who are targeting lake trout to fill out a short survey after each fishing trip.

tough fight and you will want something a little stouter than a panfish combo to subdue one through the ice. As for jigs, metal spoons like the classic Swedish Pimple or bucktail jigs and soft-plastic tubes are all proven lake trout offerings. Since lakers are keen on scent, another good option is a Berkley Gulp! Minnow on a jig head. Whatever you drop down the hole, it cannot hurt to sweeten the hook with a piece of meat, like a shiner head or sucker filet.

The Fisheries Division wants to hear from anglers targeting Connecticut lake trout. A short survey has been created for anglers to fill out after each trip – success or skunk – to help evaluate this bonus fishery. It can be accessed by copying the following URL address into your web



Lake trout respond well to scent – this one fell for a bucktail jig complimented with a strip of sucker meat.

A live minnow on a gold willow leaf jig did the trick for this lake trout.
PHOTO BY A. SWANSON



browser: <https://arcg.is/CzOhr>. The daily creel limit for these fish has been set for five per day, but anglers are encouraged to only take home what they will immediately eat to allow more people the opportunity to catch one.

While none of these lake trout will break the Connecticut state record by weight, the Fisheries Division recently implemented a second category for state record fish. Knowing that many of today's anglers prefer to release their trophy catch (rather than harvest it to be weighed on a certified scale), this new state record category is for the largest

fish of each species by length. At the time of this writing, the very first state record application for the catch-and-release of a lake trout had just been submitted—a 27.75-inch specimen from Squantz Pond. Any angler that tops a catch-and-release record can fill out and submit the affidavit on the DEEP website at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Trophy-Fish-Awards>.

As for the future of lake trout in Connecticut, it is still up in the air. While our state is extremely limited in terms of waterbodies with sufficient coldwater habitat for lake trout to thrive, the

Fisheries Division will not be turning down any future opportunities of surplus broodstock. “We would warmly welcome these fish on an annual basis,” says Eltz.

In the meantime, get outside, stay safe (be sure to check ice conditions), and enjoy this special fishery. “Although these fish are not going to reach 29-pounds like seen in 1918, a five to seven-pound, 24 to 36-inch fish is the catch of a lifetime for somebody,” says Eltz. “That, to me, is fantastic for our anglers.”



One Person's Trash May Not Be Another Person's Treasure

Written by Andrew LaBonte, DEEP Wildlife Division, photos DEEP Wildlife Division File

For months we have been cautioned about using facial coverings and hand sanitizer to minimize the spread of COVID-19. What some people do with used facial coverings, gloves, and sanitizing wipes can certainly be seen if you venture out to any retail store and end up finding these items scattered throughout shopping carts and parking lots. So, when you hear the phrase “one person's trash is another person's treasure”, probably more often than not, that is not the case. People sometimes disregard the simplest of things, such as responsibly throwing away their trash, either due to laziness or apathy towards other people, wildlife, or the environment. In some instances, it could be due to “mother nature” simply blowing our unsecured items around during storm events. Regardless of the cause, these items can end up in some of the most peculiar of places.

In 2008, I co-authored a *Connecticut Wildlife* article about a resident in Trumbull who had a white-tailed deer frequenting her yard with something stuck on its leg, which was causing it to hobble around. A coworker and I were able to immobilize the deer and remove a discarded weed wacker spool that had been stuck on its foot. Based on later sightings, the deer had completely recovered from the incident. At the time, we thought to ourselves how rare that occurrence must have been.

In 2019, the same coworker and I responded to a call



Finding white-tailed deer with “trash” items stuck on their feet is becoming more common than it should be! This deer ended up with a toy truck tire stuck on its hoof. Wildlife Division biologists were able to immobilize the deer and remove the item. This is a reminder to properly dispose of all trash items to protect wildlife and the environment.



from New Canaan concerning a deer that was initially believed to have a leg-hold trap stuck on its foot. It is not every day that the DEEP receives calls about foreign objects stuck around a deer's foot, but surprisingly it had happened again. This time it turned out to be a plastic truck tire from a toy and not a



leg-hold trap. Once again, we safely removed the item from the deer's foot while thinking to ourselves how rare such an occurrence is.

In early October 2020, we received a report from a homeowner in Uncasville about a young deer regularly seen in his yard with some kind of ring around its foot. It seemed unlikely that deer rings were trending, but as a father/step-father to three teenage girls, I see some of the things that are popular with the young crowd these days, so anything was possible. However, as the young animal began to grow, the ring became increasingly tighter, making it difficult for the deer to put weight on its leg.

Fellow staff and I have taken action in previous situations and successfully removed these foreign objects. This often requires a great deal of patience and skill to immobilize the animal and remove the object. In October, no different than the other occasions, a coworker and I put in several hours patiently waiting for an opportunity to immobilize the deer. The first night out, the deer never showed up. So, we put up a trail camera to get a better idea about how frequently the deer was coming and at what time. During the second attempt, a group of four deer came through as predicted, but the deer with the object around its foot never presented a capture opportunity. On the third attempt, we were able to successfully immobilize the young male fawn, which happened to have a plastic toy ring stuck around its leg. The deer had likely stepped through the ring over a month before and, as it grew, the ring became tighter and slowly began to impact the deer's ability to walk. We carefully removed the ring, applied an antibiotic ointment to the exposed skin, and administered reversal drugs. Not long after, the deer was alert and recovering nicely. The homeowner was thankful to see the deer the next day with the rest of the group and reported that it seemed to be walking much better.

How we discard of everyday items can impact not only other people, but the ecosystem and wildlife. None of the items that were removed from these deer were purposefully left to harm or cause injury to wildlife. The same can be said about those who leave behind discarded personal protective equipment (PPE), like face masks, rubber gloves or wipes. But, it is what happens with those items when they are not properly discarded that matters. Littering not only makes people look irresponsible, it also causes a mess that ends up in our woods and nearby streams, and also becomes more costly, and challenging, to address. Discarded PPE items



This young deer had a plastic ring stuck on its foot, which became tighter as the deer grew. Wildlife Division biologists were able to immobilize the deer in an Uncasville backyard to remove the item and apply an antibiotic ointment to the exposed skin. The homeowner observed the deer walking much better the next day.



are showing up all over the place. Could it be possible sometime in the near future that the Wildlife Division receives a call about a deer with a disposable face mask stuck around its neck, with the elastic choking it? Improperly worn PPE and improperly disposed of PPE are not good for anyone or anything! The same emphasis put on the proper use of PPE to protect everyone should also apply to the proper disposal of PPE (such as cut elastic on masks before discarding). Everyone needs to do their part to responsibly dispose of all trash items. Maybe the phrase "one person's trash is another person's treasure" should be replaced with a phrase often seen at trail heads or camp sites – "pack out what you pack in". The second phrase reminds us to preserve the land for all, with "all" not just referring to humans but wildlife as well.



A Big Year for Hunter Safety Program Despite COVID-19

Written by Paul Benjunas, DEEP Wildlife Division

The first step to be able to legally hunt in Connecticut is to pass a hunter safety course. Connecticut's Conservation/Education Firearms Safety Program, more commonly referred to as the CE/FS or Hunter Safety Program, is responsible for (among many other things) overseeing the administration of hunter safety courses in our state. For years, courses in firearms, bowhunting, and trapping have been taught by a dedicated corps of certified volunteer instructors who are committed to ensuring their students demonstrate safe, ethical, and responsible behavior when it comes to hunting in the field.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to most in-person gatherings and created an entirely new series of challenges for everyone. Many individuals found they had to change their lifestyle and habits to adhere to a more socially-distant world. And, although the hunter safety courses were cancelled as a result of the pandemic, the demand for courses was as strong as ever. From emails and phone calls to Wildlife Division staff to inquiries through social media, it was clear that people wanted to be outdoors and experience the incredible natural resources our state has to offer.

After several months of planning, approval was given to continue offering



CE/FS Program Coordinator Tom Donlon teaches bow safety during a Modified Field Day course at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington. The CE/FS Program is diligently making plans to expand hunting and trapping safety course offerings in 2021.

bow and firearms hunter safety courses, but in a new modified format compliant with COVID-19 safety guidelines. This new modified format required students to complete a series of online prerequisites at home before attending a three-hour in-person outdoor field day that was comprised of four hands-on stations of 20 minutes each with 40 minutes of in-person testing. While the majority of the courses were held at DEEP facilities, many sportsmen's clubs across the state were able to provide support as well.

In just four months (August 1 through November 30), Wildlife Division staff from the Hunter Education and Outreach Programs and several biologists, with assistance from volunteer CE/FS instructors and Master Wildlife Conservationists, held 90 courses and graduated 1,645

students under this new modified format. Although 2021 will present challenges as the pandemic continues, the Hunter Safety Program looks forward to resuming these modified hunter safety courses in the coming spring. If you or someone you know is looking to take up a new outdoor activity that allows participants to be socially distant, now is a great time to consider taking up hunting. To learn more about the Modified Field Days, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Hunting/CEFS/Hunter-Education-Modified-Field-Days-COVID-19>. Interested in learning more about hunting in Connecticut? Subscribe to our free electronic hunting newsletter, Hunting Highlights at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Hunter-Highlights>.



Welcome Bill Moorhead!

Botanist/Plant Community Ecologist

Bill Moorhead, who recently started as the Wildlife Division's Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDDB) Botanist/Plant Community ecologist, has a long association with natural history and DEEP. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, Bill and his family moved to Roxbury, Connecticut, in 1967 when Bill was 11. While living in Roxbury, he discovered the natural world of western Connecticut. When not in school, Bill spent his teens and early adult years hunting, fishing, trapping, birdwatching, raising orphaned wildlife (in the era before licensed rehabilitators), hiking, and rock climbing whenever he could. Except for a 2½-year stint as a Plant Ecologist with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, Bill has been based in Connecticut since arriving in 1967, although he also has worked as a field botanist/ecologist in Maryland, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island.

Bill has had many interests in his life, and his career path changed directions several times before he discovered his passion and aptitude for field botany and plant community ecology in the late 1980s. He pursued a pre-veterinary curriculum at the University of Connecticut, and later changed to environmental science with a focus on chemistry (his Bachelor's degree is in chemistry). While pursuing the chemistry degree, Bill began part-time work as a field and lab assistant to a consulting ecologist, Dr. K. E. Tolonen, who was a mentor for six years. He also began his first association with what is now DEEP as an intern with Water Compliance in the mid-1980s. These two experiences introduced Bill to the concept of bio-indicators and the study of stream macroinvertebrates and their communities as a way to measure water quality, for which he developed a passion. Through this work, Bill de-

veloped a fuller appreciation of the depth and richness of biodiversity, much of which is still unknown, in one's own backyard. He also developed an appreciation of technical taxonomy and systematics, the fundamental importance of making correct identifications. This prepared Bill for an introduction to serious field botany in the late 1980s, which began due to increasing demand for federal (Army Corps of Engineers) wetland delineations that require vegetation sampling. He submitted his first rare plant report to the NDDDB in 1987 (for a bog rarity whose existence was already known), and conducted his first professional rare plant survey, documenting previously unknown rare plant occurrences in 1989.

From 1991 to 1993, Bill worked as a biologist with the DEEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs, where a large component of his job was detecting and resolving Tidal Wetlands Act violations. He returned to consulting and did his first contract work for the NDDDB, which involved rare plant surveys and collection of vegetation plot (relevé) data from Critical Habitats. From 1994 to 1996, Bill was a Plant Ecologist with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, which involved collection of relevé data, and classification and mapping of rare vegetation types. He returned to Connecticut in 1996 and worked as a contract botanist/ecologist for the NDDDB, conducting rare plant surveys, collecting relevé data from Critical Habitats, and classifying and mapping vegetation types of five Natural Area Preserves (Canaan Mountain, Kitchel, Matianuck, Pachaug Great Meadows, and Rhododendron



R. BLUM

Sanctuary). Since the early 2000s, Bill has conducted similar work for a variety of clients, including many conservation organizations, land trusts, and MassWildlife. In 2008-2009, he worked for UConn's Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department on the production of DEEP's Critical Habitats GIS layer.

Bill also teaches plant identification workshops focusing on difficult species groups, and has served on Connecticut's Endangered Plant Advisory Committee since 2018. A favorite conservation project, funded by the Farmington River Watershed Association, has been a long-term experiment in the restoration of a highly significant floodplain forest community along the river. Bill has overseen the removal of invasives by hundreds of volunteers over the last 13 years, and carefully documented the natural recovery of the native vegetation. He has lived in Litchfield with his wife, Suzanna, since 1997.



Golden Eagle Captured on Camera in the New Haven Area

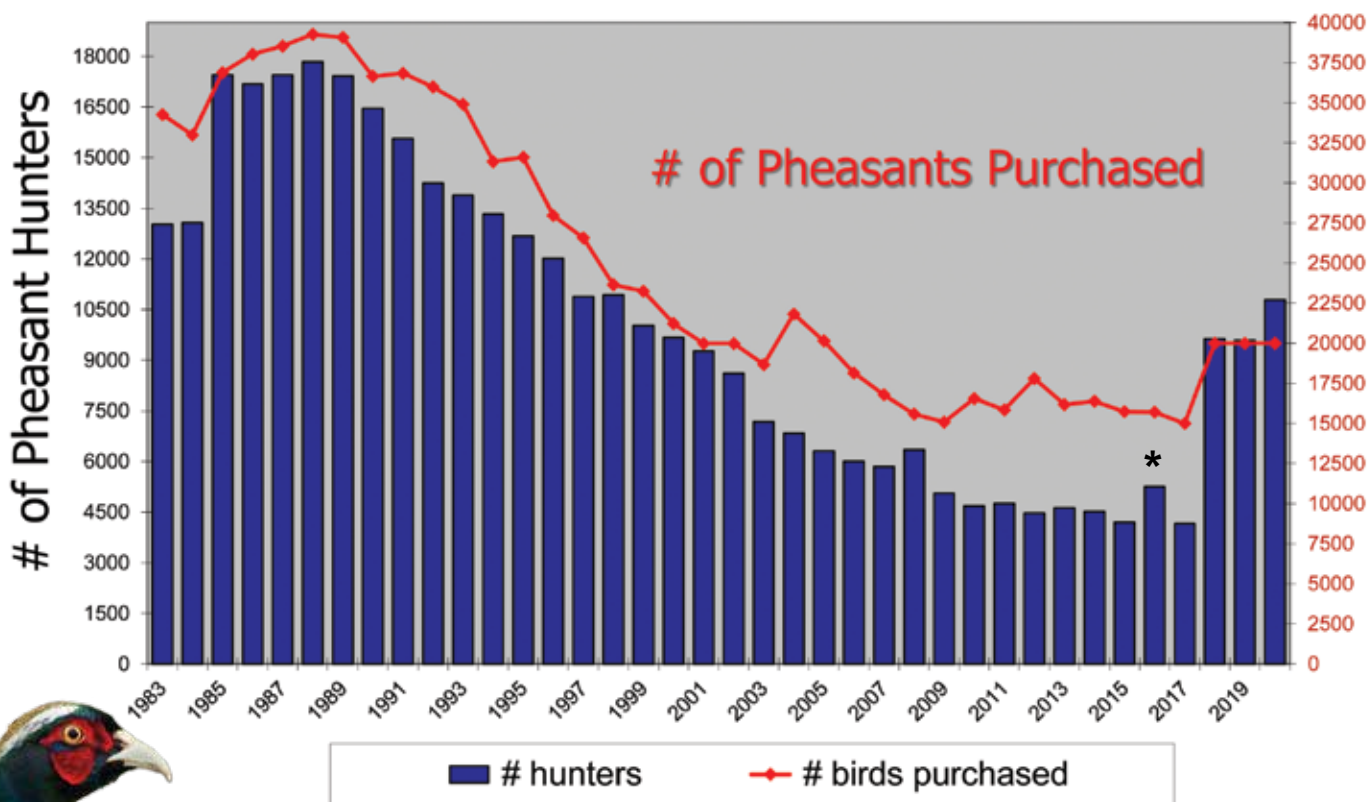
The South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority (SCCRWA) allows staff from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) access to their properties in the greater New Haven area. While conducting research on deer demographics and bait preference on a SCCRWA property, CAES staff witnessed what appeared to be two immature bald eagles feeding on a deer carcass. Because trail cameras were being used for the research, staff decided to put one over the carcass. While bald eagles of various ages are fairly commonplace on the property in winter, the sighting of a golden eagle was not expected! Every third or fourth winter, a migrating golden eagle is seen on the property (including one with a backpack GPS unit about 10 years ago), but to capture an image of one to share with the Connecticut public is special.



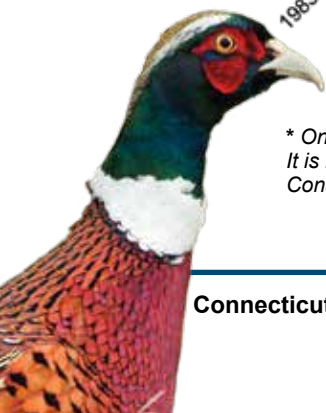
Golden eagles are rare migrants in Connecticut. There may

be one or two that spend the winter in open habitats, including along the lower Connecticut River or large reservoirs where bald eagles may also be present.

The Number of Adult Pheasants Purchased and Number of Hunters Who Bought Pheasant or Resident Game Bird Stamps* from 1983 - 2020



* On July 1, 2016, pheasant stamps and all turkey permits were replaced with the Resident Game Bird Conservation Stamp. It is required to hunt pheasant, ruffed grouse, quail, partridge, and wild turkey. All revenues from the sale of Resident Game Bird Conservation Stamps are deposited into a separate, non-lapsing account to use exclusively for game birds and their habitat.



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Conservation Calendar

Jan. - April..... Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2020 Connecticut Income Tax form. Learn more at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/Endangered-Species/Endangered-SpeciesWildlife-Income-Tax-Check-Off>.

February Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the season opening for viewing bald eagles at the Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area in Southbury is postponed until February 2021. Follow their Facebook page for updates: <https://Facebook.com/baldeagles>.

Educational Resources for Students and Families

DEEP's Bureau of Natural Resources and other organizations have a wealth of information available to help families and students learn about wildlife, fish, forests, and the outdoors.

- A good place to start is <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Natural-Resources/Outdoor-Learning-Resources>.
- DEEP's Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) Program has gone virtual. Learn about fishing through a variety of learn to fish resources at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEPCARE>.
- Dinosaur State Park offers a virtual tour series and video presentations on exploring their collection of fossils. More information is at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Education/Family-and-Youth-Resources>.
- Hammonasset State Park hosts Facebook Live presentations daily from the park and surrounding areas. Archived sessions and new presentations are hosted on the Meigs Point Nature Center Facebook page at <https://Facebook.com/MeigsPointNatureCenter>. Programs are also archived on the Meigs Point Nature Center website at <https://www.meigspointnaturecenter.org/> and YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmwTM32xIzeXRAPqxYNDRGw>.
- Project WILD has materials available for home use and opportunities for workshops at <https://www.fishwildlife.org/projectwild>.
- Project WET has a collection of free, downloadable materials and lessons ready for use for distance learning situations at <https://www.projectwet.org/programs/distance-learning>. Free materials, posters and booklets are also available through the store.
- Project Learning Tree has a variety of resources for use with classrooms and for parent/child engagement at <https://www.plt.org/resources/resources-for-plt-lessons>. To learn about electronic curricula or how to obtain the resource guide contact bbarnard@ctwoodlands.org or kristen.bellantuono@ct.gov.

Sign up for free electronic newsletters to learn about Connecticut's wildlife and the outdoors!

Wildlife Highlights (monthly): <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Wildlife-Highlights>

Hunter Highlights (quarterly): <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP-Hunter-Highlights>

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Lake trout were recently stocked in Connecticut waters for the first time in more than 50 years, providing anglers with a unique and exciting opportunity this winter. See page 14 to learn more.

PHOTO BY A. SWANSON