May/June 2006

Connecticut Wildlife

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

From the Director

First it was West Nile Virus. Then Chronic Wasting Disease. Now the DEP Wildlife Division is involved with another disease that has the potential to affect wildlife and people – the H5N1 subtype of avian influenza (AI). H5N1 has been found in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, mainly affecting wild and domestic bird populations. While it has not yet been documented in North America, state and federal agencies have established a surveillance program to monitor for the appearance of the disease in wild bird populations on our continent.

Wild birds, particularly water birds, are a natural reservoir for many varieties of AI and most of these are low pathogenicity ("low-path") forms that do not cause serious illness in birds. However, the high-path H5N1 strain currently circulating in much of the rest of the world does cause severe illness and death in both domestic poultry and wild birds. While the mechanics of how this virus moves around are not fully understood, the potential for migratory birds to transport H5N1 does exist and the surveillance is designed to be an early warning system to its presence here.

Federal agencies (Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], Geological Survey [USGS], Agriculture [USDA]) have worked with the four Migratory Bird Flyway Councils to develop flyway and state sampling plans. Due to Connecticut's geographic location in the Atlantic Flyway, the state has been designated as a Level 1 participant in the surveillance plan. During the remainder of 2006, we will attempt to collect 800 samples from a broad geographic area where waterfowl, shorebirds, and other migratory birds are found in abundance. Some of the techniques, such as the live-capture of shorebirds, will be new to our staff and may improve our knowledge about these species. For other samples, we will rely upon waterfowl collected by hunters. The sampling design throughout the Atlantic Flyway has been developed to provide a strong early detection system for H5N1 in our region.

In addition to conducting surveillance, Wildlife Division staff is working closely with counterparts in several other state agencies, including the Departments of Health, Agriculture, and Emergency Management/ Homeland Security, on a wide variety of topics related to high-path AI. By starting early and preparing for all contingencies, Connecticut will be prepared to respond should H5N1 be detected here. A state website is being developed that will allow Connecticut residents to stay informed about developments related to avian flu. In addition, websites for the federal agencies provide excellent references for avian flu information.

Dale W. May

Cover:

After hatching, wild turkey poults will leave the nest within 12 to 24 hours to feed. Poults eat insects, berries and seeds. They will stay with the hen throughout the summer, fall, and winter.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

Connecticut Wildlife

Published bimonthly by
State of Connecticut
Department of Environmental Protection
www.ct.gov/dep

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

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Bat Trapping at Roxbury Mine

Written by Geoffrey Krukar, Wildlife Diversity Program

On the evenings of April 19 and 20, 2006, Wildlife Division staff captured bats emerging from winter hibernation at the Roxbury Iron Mine in Roxbury. The bats were captured using specialized traps known as harp traps. Harp traps get their name from their resemblance to a musical harp. Parallel, vertical strings trap and funnel the bats into a holding cage where biologists can collect them.

A total of 174 bats were captured over the two nights. Three species were observed, of which the majority were little brown and northern long-eared bats, along with a few eastern pipistrelles. The scientific data collected from each bat included species, sex, weight, forearm length, and reproductive status of females. Some of the bats were fitted with metal wing bands. The bands allow for identification at a later date and can provide information about how far bats travel to their summer roosts. Bat bands have been an important part of gaining life history information for many bat species.

Hair samples also were collected from the female bats for use in a regional stable isotope analysis. Stable isotope markers, such as carbon or nitrogen, and their differing nuclear masses, can be used to identify migratory pathways of bats because bats acquire different isotopic signatures based on the geographic location where they grew their hair.

E. VICTORY

Wildlife Division Technician Geoffrey Krukar puts the final touches on one of the harp traps used to catch bats at the Roxbury Iron Mine. The trap is suspended in front of the shaft opening and surrounded with plastic to force the bats through the device.

Besides collecting biological data on the emerging bats, another goal of this project was to look for the federally endangered Indiana bat. Although Indiana bats have not been documented in the Roxbury Mine in several decades, temperature and humidity levels in the mine during winter are suitable for Indiana bats. It is hoped that as recovering populations expand in neighboring states, Indiana bats will return to this hibernaculum. Harp trap surveys will be repeated in the fall when bats are returning to the mine to hibernate.

E. VICTORY

Captured bats were closely examined and biological data collected, including species, sex, and weight.

G. KRUKAR

Average forearm length varies from bat species to species and can be used to aid in identification of similar species.

A Turtle in Trouble

There was a time in Connecticut when box turtles were commonly found in backyards and woodlands. Many a child has experienced the thrill of finding a box turtle. However, children today rarely have this experience and it's not because they don't always get to be outdoors. It's more because Connecticut's box turtle population has been on a steady decline. In fact, box turtle populations are declining throughout the species' range.

Box turtles were once common throughout Connecticut. However, their distribution is now spotty, although where found, they may be locally abundant. Because of the population decline in Connecticut, the box turtle's status was recently changed to "species of special concern" when the List of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species was revised in 2004. The box turtle also is protected from international trade by the 1994 CITES treaty. It is of conservation concern in all the states where it occurs at its northeastern range limit, which includes southern New England and southeastern New York.

Many states have laws that protect box turtles and prohibit their collection. In Connecticut, eastern box turtles cannot be collected from the wild (DEP regulations 26-66-14A) and possession of box turtles is limited to a single animal (DEP regulations 26-55-3D). These regulations provide some protection for the turtles, but not enough to combat some of the even bigger threats these animals must face.

How has the box turtle population reached this point? The main culprits in Connecticut (and other states) are loss and fragmentation of habitat, vehicle strikes on the busy roads that bisect the landscape, and indiscriminate (and now illegal) collection of individuals for pets.

P. J. FUSCO

The box turtle population has been on a steady decline in Connecticut and throughout the species' range.

Although this turtle has evolved to deal with several risks—predation on eggs and young; fires; drought, temperatures fluctuations, natural disasters, and outbreaks of disease and parasites—it is ill-equipped to handle the human caused factors that threaten its population. Even more, the characteristics that have helped box turtles remain a part of the state's biological diversity for so long are now working against them in their fight for survival.

- Box turtles are very long-lived, sometimes living up to 50 years in the wild and up to 100 years or more in captivity. Natural mortality is high for eggs, hatchlings, and juvenile turtles, mostly due to predation. Because of this, most turtles never survive the almost 10 years it takes to reach breeding age. Those that do survive to breeding age must still contend with all of the human caused threats (habitat loss, roads, pet collection). Every year that a wild female box turtle might live is critical in ensuring that, of the five or six eggs she may lay a year, at least one of her young survives to adulthood to replace her in the population. Local populations can disappear completely over a short period of time, as fewer young turtles survive to replace older individuals, and the number of breeding adults decreases.
- Box turtles have a limited home range. Juvenile turtles usually stay in a small area. Adult turtles may wander a little more. Also, box turtles do not migrate to new locations in significant numbers to replenish habitats where box turtles no longer live. Research has shown that they cannot detect mates at a distance. Therefore, they need to have high population density in a small area in order to find mates, breed, and thus sustain the population. Studies also have shown that densities in some areas are too small and the populations may not be able to sustain themselves. In addition, some of the individual turtles in an area may be too young or too old to breed.
- Like most other turtles, female box turtles will travel from their home territory to find a suitable location in which to lay their eggs. Turtles also will travel between wintering and feeding areas. This worked well before Connecticut's landscape became fragmented by development and busy roads. Now, with the disappearance and fragmentation of suitable habitat, turtles must travel greater distances. Turtles traveling to these scattered areas are often killed while crossing roads.

The shell of a box turtle is extremely hard, but not hard enough to survive being run over by a vehicle. In addition, turtles move slowly as they make their crossing. Most vehicle fatalities are egg-bearing females searching for a nest site. Turtles traveling through developed areas also face a variety of obstacles, such as fences, walls, buildings, and large, open areas with no protective cover.

- Box turtles are long-lived and easy to care for, making them attractive as pets. The collection of box turtles for pets has contributed to the population decline.

There are several drawbacks to making a box turtle a pet, most important being that it is illegal to collect one from the wild in Connecticut.

What You Can Do to Help

Connecticut's population of Eastern box turtles may be in trouble, but fortunately there are actions you can take to help them. Some require a little effort and groundwork, others just some common sense.

- If you come across a nesting turtle, leave it alone and do not approach it. Box turtles can be scared away from nesting sites. Unmowed or lightly mown meadows are popular nest sites, as well as lawns and flower gardens. Do not disturb the nest (see sidebar on nest exclosures).
- Dogs and cats will prey on turtle nests, adding to the destruction caused by natural predators. Keep dogs on a leash and under your control. Pets that wander can be devastating predators to native wildlife.
- If you see a turtle in the road, help it across in the direction in which it was traveling, if it is safe to do so (watch out for

continued on page 14

To Exclose or Not to Exclose? – That Is the Question

Knowing that turtles already face many obstacles that are difficult to control, like habitat loss and road mortality, many want to help reduce the impact of nest depredation by placing exclosures around nests. However, the DEP Wildlife Division discourages the use of nest exclosures. When people set up turtle nest exclosures, they can leave behind their scent, which then becomes an unintended attractant. Many predators associate human scent with food, thanks to garbage cans and litter. Once human scent is detected near an exclosure, predators will make a beeline to the exclosure. But, the exclosure is supposed to protect the nest, correct? Not always. If you have ever had a problem with a raccoon raiding your garbage cans, you should know how difficult it is to keep a diligent raccoon out of something that it wants. Box turtles are a protected species and any activities associated with nests or eggs would require a DEP permit. A better way to help turtles would be to protect turtle nesting areas from development and to leave turtles where they are found (rather than picking them up and moving them elsewhere).

A Closer Look at the Eastern Box Turtle

The Eastern box turtle is probably the most familiar of the eight species of turtles found in Connecticut's landscape. It is known for its high-domed carapace (top shell), which has irregular red, orange, and/or yellow markings on a brown to black background. The plastron (under shell) may be brown or black and may have an irregular pattern of cream or yellow. The length of the carapace usually ranges from 4.5 to 6.5 inches, but can measure up to eight inches long. The shell is made up of a combination of scales and bones, and it includes the ribs and much of the backbone.

Each turtle has distinctive head markings. Males usually have red eyes and a concave plastron, while females have brown eyes and a flat plastron. Box turtles also have a horny beak, stout limbs, and feet that are webbed at the base. This turtle gets its name from its ability to completely withdraw into its shell, closing itself in with a hinged plastron. Box turtles are the only Connecticut turtle with this ability.

This terrestrial turtle inhabits a variety of habitats, including woodlands, field edges, thickets, marshes, and stream banks. Typically, however, they are found in well-drained forest bottomlands and open deciduous forests. Box turtles are known to swim in slow-moving streams and ponds. During the hottest part of a summer day, they will wander to find springs and seepages where they can burrow into the moist soil. Activity is restricted to mornings and evenings during summer, with little to no nighttime activity, except for egg-laying females. Box turtles have a limited home range where they spend their entire life.

Box turtles are omnivorous and will feed on a variety of food items, including earthworms, slugs, snails, insects, frogs, toads, small snakes, carrion, leaves, grass, berries, fruits, and fungi. They also will feed on some garden vegetables, including tomatoes, lettuce, and cucumbers.

From October to April, box turtles hibernate by burrowing into loose soil, decaying vegetation, mud, and stream banks. They may return to the same place to hibernate year after year. As soon as they come out of hibernation, box turtles begin feeding and searching for mates.

The breeding season begins in April and may continue through fall. Box turtles usually do not breed until they are about 10 years old. This late maturity is a result of their long lifespan, which can range up to 50 to even over 100 years of age. The females do not have to mate every year to lay eggs as they can store sperm for up to four years. In mid-May to late June, the females will travel from a few feet to more than a mile from their territory to find a location to dig a nest and lay their eggs. The three to eight eggs are covered with dirt and left to be warmed by the sun. During this vulnerable time, skunks, foxes, snakes, crows, and raccoons often raid nests. Sometimes, entire nests are destroyed. If the eggs survive, they will hatch in late summer to early fall. If they hatch in the fall, the young turtles may spend the winter in the nest and come out the following spring.

As soon as young turtles hatch, they are on their own and they receive no care from the adults. This a dangerous time for box turtles because they do not develop the hinge for closing into their shell until they are about four to five years old. Until then, they cannot entirely retreat into their shells. Raccoons, skunks, foxes, dogs, and some birds will prey on young turtles. Adult box turtles are relatively free from predators due to their unique shells. However, the adults face other threats of their own (see accompanying article).

Wildlife Rehabilitators - Who Are They?

Written by Laurie Fortin, Wildlife Technician

If you've ever found a sick, injured, or orphaned animal, it's possible that you made several phone calls and eventually stumbled upon a person that was referred to as a "wildlife rehabilitator." Wildlife rehabilitators, or wildlife custodians as they are called by the DEP, are volunteers that care for wild animals in distress until they can be released back into the wild. Currently, almost 240 people are recognized statewide as having completed the DEP's training requirements and been appointed as wildlife custodians. Although each individual shares in common the completion of state-required paperwork and training, the overall group is extremely diverse. In Connecticut, alone there are seven veterinarians, at least eight veterinary technicians, eight nature centers, one zoo, one educational facility, and various other professionals from all walks of life appointed as wildlife custodians.

Some people have focused their efforts on only one species group, such as cottontail rabbits, bats, or insect-eating songbirds, while others have attempted to handle all possible species. There are many individuals who volunteer their time each year to care for a handful of animals, while there are others that care for up to 100 animals and some larger facilities that can handle up to 1,000 animals, thanks to a dedicated network of volunteers.

In the past 10 to 20 years, wildlife rehabilitation has become a more professional activity. The days of stay-at-home moms taking in baby squirrels has evolved into something much more sophisticated. Nowadays, people can learn from a variety of conferences or workshops that are offered at the state, regional, national, and even international level. Veterinarians who focus on the care of wildlife, as well as conduct studies on wildlife nutrition, husbandry, and disease control, have furthered the cause, making significant contributions to the level of care that can be provided by wildlife rehabilitators. Today, rehabilitators commonly participate in studies that identify the causes of mortality in wildlife and seek to prevent the spread or find a cure for infectious diseases.

This issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* highlights seven people who contribute their time, money, and energy to assisting the public with unfortunate animals. These people represent some of the diversity in ages, professions, species interests, and time spent in the world of wildlife rehabilitation. We should thank them, and their many other counterparts, for their efforts!

Wildlife Division Technician Laurie Fortin (left) and Hope Douglas in the bald eagle flight cage at Wind Over Wings.

P. J. FUSCO (4)

Gerri Griswold

Age: 48

Years as a Rehabilitator: 14

Species Cares for: bats, and occasionally porcupines

Occupation/Degree: Gerri works in Broadcasting and has a BA degree in Fine Arts.

Why Became a Rehabilitator? Gerri has a strong desire to learn more about Connecticut's bat species, as well as educate the public about bats.

Time Spent on Rehabilitation: Gerri cares for five to 10 bats a year.

Money Spent: About $1,000 per season

Number of Volunteers: Gerri works alone.

"What having my permits has done for me (what joy working with these amazing creatures brings) and what I am able to bring to the public is the greatest gift and an honor. I call the time I spend with bats 'my therapy.' I hope that my passion for bats is absorbed by the public and our bat species will find more habitat and more public support in the future." ***Gerri***

Gerri Griswold holds one of the big brown bats that she cares for as a rehabilitator. This bat is non-releasable so Gerri uses it for educational programs.

Sherry and Gerald Hart

Age: Sherry, age 26, and her father, Gerald, age 49

Years as Rehabilitators: 4

Species Cares for: mammals, including rabies vector species (raccoons, foxes, etc.), some birds

Occupation/ Degree: Sherry is a Team Leader at The Learning Clinic and has a BS degree in Environmental Education from Unity College.

Why Became a Rehabilitator? Ever since Sherry was a young child, she was fascinated with the animal world and always having her hands on bugs and snakes. At this young age, she was "rescuing" animals (long before she knew that it was illegal to do so without a license). While in college, her career goal was to open an education center using non-releasable wild animals in educational programs. She did an internship at The Wildlife Center in Virginia where she learned hands-on rehabilitation and absolutely fell in love with it!

Time and Money Spent: Too much to count!

Number of Volunteers: Sherry and Gerald get occasional help from high school students.

"Consider becoming a wildlife rehabilitator. It is demanding work, but also very fulfilling." ***Sherry***

Hope Douglas, Wind Over Wings

Age: 59

P. J. FUSCO

Years as Rehabilitator: 25

Species Cares for: raptors, especially eagles

Occupation/ Degree: Hope is the Director and Founder of Wind Over Wings and has a Master's Degree in Education and Psychology.

Why Became a Rehabilitator? Hope had visited a facility in Florida that was caring for a blind red-tailed Hawk. She was so moved by the experience, she took the opportunity to create a similar facility in Connecticut.

Time Spent on Rehabilitation: Currently, Hope spends about two hours a day, especially in winter and spring. In the past, she has spent more than 12 hours per day.

Money Spent: About $1,000 per year in the beginning to about $20,000 per year now.

Number of Volunteers: In the past, there have been as many as 50 volunteers. Now, there are about 15 volunteers that help Hope.

"All of us get involved in wildlife rehab because we don't like to see animals hurt. This is an excellent opportunity to touch their lives and the lives of people who want to make a difference in this world." ***Hope***

Jayne Amico

P. J. FUSCO

Age: 43

Years as a Rehabilitator: 8

Species Cares for: migratory songbirds, about 300 per year

Occupation/Degree: Hair Stylist

Why Became a Rehabilitator? Found a baby bird and was captivated.

Time Spent on Rehabilitation: 40 hours a week

Money Spent: $12,000 a year

Number of Volunteers: approximately 10

"Having the opportunity to handle songbirds that many people can only get glimpses of is an incredible opportunity. Without a doubt, releasing these birds back into the wild is the best reward I could ever have." ***Jayne***

continued on next page

Rabies Vector Species Training Course for Rehabilitators

Wildlife rehabilitators who wish to handle high risk rabies vector species (RVS), such as raccoons, skunks, or foxes, are required to receive special training above and beyond normal requirements. In addition, they must provide proof of pre-exposure rabies vaccinations, show proof of a secure pre-release RVS enclosure, and commit to following specialized guidelines that pertain specifically to the care of RVS. To date, of the nearly 250 wildlife rehabilitators, only 33 are authorized to handle RVS.

In spring 2006, the DEP Wildlife Division held a specialized class for RVS rehabilitators. This course was modified to also allow environmental educators, nature center staff, and interested individuals to attend the first half of the class so that they could learn about the history, life cycle, and transmission of diseases that can infect animals and humans.

Speakers included Dr. Randall Nelson, from the Department of Public Health's Epidemiology Program, who gave an in-depth presentation on the history of rabies in Connecticut and the United States. He also answered many questions about the human health concerns associated with rabies exposure. Dr. Dennis Richardson, a parasitologist from Quinnipiac University, provided a close-up look at raccoon roundworms and gave an informative talk about the life cycle and infection rates of leptospirosis and raccoon roundworm in wild animals. Although bats are not specifically grouped into the RVS program, they have the potential to transmit the rabies virus to humans. Wildlife Division Biologist Jenny Dickson discussed the disease concerns, as well as the care and safe handling of wild bats. The final presentation was given by currently authorized RVS rehabilitators who provided information about the specialized guidelines and techniques authorized by the RVS program.

Although a small group of individuals attended this class (about 35), the Wildlife Division received plenty of positive feedback. Therefore, this class will be offered again in the same format next spring. Interested individuals should check the DEP calendar of events at www.ct.gov/dep for the date and location of future course offerings.

Wildlife Rehabilitators,
continued from previous page

Rick McPherson, Waterford Country School

P. J. FUSCO

Age: 58

Years as a Rehabilitator: 12

Species Cares for: birds, small mammals, and reptiles

Occupation: Director of Experiential Education at the Waterford Country School

Why Became a Rehabilitator? Rick wanted to expand the school's animal sanctuary to include wildlife. He also wanted to give back to the community.

Time Spent on Rehabilitation: Rick spends seven days a week, all 365 days of the year working on rehabilitation of wildlife.

Money Spent: The rehabilitation work is funded by the school and various grants.

Number of Volunteers: There are five other licensed rehabilitators at school and several volunteers.

"I feel that rehab work is just not about the animals but also about providing a service for the concerned people who try and help an injured wild animal." ***Rick***

P. J. FUSCO

One of the animals Rick McPherson cares for is this red-eared slider, which is an unwanted pet that is not native to Connecticut.

Cathie Kovacs, The Wildlife Orphanage, Inc.

Years as Rehabilitator: 11

Species Cares for: native mammals, except deer.

Occupation/ Degree: Freelance bookkeeper with a Bachelor's degree in Accounting Information Systems from Pace University.

Why Became a Rehabilitator? "Once I was presented with the opportunity to handle and care for an orphaned litter of squirrels, I found the process to be both interesting and rewarding. Rehabilitation is a unique opportunity to see wildlife up close and I recognize that as a privilege. However, now I also see the bigger picture of how important education is. The information that we provide to the public can result in fewer animals that need to come into rehab in the first place. This is a win-win situation as the person learns appreciation and tolerance for the animals that live in our backyards and we keep wild animals out in the wild where they belong."

Money Spent on Rehabilitation: Cost per animal can be anywhere from $15-$115 each

Number of Volunteers: Currently, The Wildlife Orphanage, Inc., is a network of six licensed rehabilitators with at least 15 volunteers that perform various tasks on an ongoing basis.

"*The Wildlife Orphanage, Inc., works as a team to share resources and knowledge. Being a wildlife rehabilitator can be very expensive and time consuming, as well as emotionally and physically draining. Having a network to rely on lessens the physical and financial burdens and curbs burn out. Once a member becomes licensed, we encourage them to stay active in whatever capacity they can and we offer the support network that allows them to do that. Once we have an independent rehabilitation and education facility, we will be able to accommodate everyone, including the animals, even better."* ***Cathie***

To Learn More . . .

If you would like to become a wildlife rehabilitator, please contact Laurie Fortin of the DEP Wildlife Division at (860) 424-3963 or laurie.fortin@po.state.ct.us. You also can visit the DEP's website at: www.ct.gov/dep for application information or a listing of current rehabilitators statewide.

Now on the DEP Website . . . Snakes in Connecticut -- A Guide to Snake Identification

The Wildlife Division receives numerous phone calls from residents who want help in identifying snakes. Identification over the phone can often be difficult. In addition, many callers are concerned that the snake they have encountered is venomous. In response to the information inquiries, the Division published a snake identification guide several years ago. The guide contains color photographs of all 14 snake species found in Connecticut, including the two venomous snakes, the timber rattlesnake and copperhead. There is a listing of key characteristics that help distinguish a snake from similar-appearing species and a "confusing species" listing that provides a quick reference to snakes that are most often mistaken for one another. Connecticut residents who want to identify a snake can now find the snake identification guide on the DEP website (www.ct.gov/dep) in a web view version or a duplex color printer version. Color copies of the guide also can be obtained from the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office by calling 860-675-8130.

The Truth About Fawns!

Ever find yourself face to face with a young fawn quietly resting in your yard? If so, like most people, did you immediately assume the fawn had been abandoned by its mother. Well, not to worry. This is not a case of abandonment or "bad parenting." The fact is, female deer (does) leave their fawns alone on purpose! It is actually in the best interest of both the doe and fawn if the fawn remains well hidden between feedings because the fawn is well camouflaged and has very little odor to attract predators. Even at a young age, feedings may only take place once every eight hours, or even longer, if there is a lot of human activity nearby. It is unlikely that you will stumble upon the doe and fawn together. Below are some important guidelines to consider before assuming a fawn has been abandoned.

P. J. FUSCO

Is It an Orphan?

Has anyone found a dead doe nearby? If, the answer is NO – Is the fawn lying quietly and curled up on the ground?

If YES – wait 24 hours before checking on the fawn again. If it is in the same place it was in the day before, observe it from a distance and call a wildlife rehabilitator for further advice.

Did someone handle the fawn? If YES, the mother will not necessarily reject her fawn. Wipe the fawn off with a clean towel that was rubbed into the soil, put on a pair of clean gloves, and put the fawn back where it was found. Wait at least 24 hours and reassess the situation.

Is the fawn wandering around, crying out, or bleating like a goat or sheep? If it is doing one or all of these, it is either hungry or being chased. If it doesn't appear to be in danger (i.e., dog chasing it, predator nearby), then the fawn might be orphaned. Call a wildlife rehabilitator for advice. It also may be possible to determine if the fawn is orphaned by feeling its stomach (in front of the hind legs). If the stomach feels or looks noticeably sunken in, it may have been abandoned. A full stomach will look like a fairly straight line from the chest to the hips with a slight indentation.

Does It Need Help?

If a fawn was chased by a dog or other type of predator, but it has not been injured, bring it back to the original location if you know where that is. If you don't know where it came from, then the fawn may need to be placed with a rehabilitator. Wait 24 hours and reassess the situation.

Does the fawn have any open wounds? If YES, call a wildlife rehabilitator for advice. If left alone, flies may get into the wound and the maggots could kill the animal.

Was the fawn found wandering into a garage or around a yard? If the fawn is not calling out in distress or it doesn't show signs of emaciation, then put on a pair of clean gloves and gently coax it to a quiet site nearby. Make sure not to move it very far away or the mother will not be able to find it.

Keep in mind that it is illegal to care for sick, injured, or orphaned fawns unless you are a Wildlife Custodian. Always call the DEP Wildlife Division at (860) 424-3011 (weekdays, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM), the DEP Law Enforcement Emergency Dispatch at (860) 424-3333 (weekends, evenings), or a recognized fawn rehabilitator **before** taking any action!

Information provided by Fawn Rehabilitators, Dara McDonough-Reid of Wildlife in Crisis and Skip Hilliker.

Lost in the Woods

By Carl R. Sams II and Jean Stoick, $19.95 (hardcover)

This children's book, with its colorful photographs of wildlife, teaches an important message. The story is about a newborn fawn that appears to be lost or abandoned, but actually is not. Newborn fawns spend most of the first two weeks of their lives without their mother because her scent will attract predators. The mother visits only briefly to nurse and care for her fawn until it is strong and old enough to go with her. The story also points out how wild animals use camouflage to blend into the natural environment to protect them from predators. At the end of the book, readers can look back through the pages to find other creatures that are hidden in the photos.

Carl R. Sams II and Jean Stoick, a husband and wife team, have been photographing wildlife together for more than 20 years. (Publisher contact: Carl R. Sams II Photography, Inc., 361 Whispering Pines, Milford, MI 48380; www.carlsams.com; carlsams@ameritech.net.)

Spectacular and Intriguing - The Black Skimmer

Text and photos by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

Black skimmers are a shoreline species. They typically feed in shallow coastal waters by skimming across the water's surface.

One of the most stunning and remarkable birds found on our shoreline is the black skimmer. Its huge orange and black bill looks out of place and bizarre, as if it belongs in the Amazon jungle instead of in Connecticut.

The black skimmer is a highly gregarious species that generally uses coastal sandy beaches and mud flats for roosting and loafing. It is often found in the company of terns and gulls. The young sometimes fall prey to gulls, including the great black-backed gull.

Skimmers are about the size of a small gull. When seen standing on a beach, their long bill, long wings, and small, short legs give skimmers an elongated and seemingly ungainly appearance. At times they can be seen resting with their head and bill outstretched, laying flat against the sand. In this posture, skimmers blend into their surroundings, appearing to be driftwood on the beach.

In flight, black skimmers use shallow wing beats with their long, pointed wings propelling them in surprisingly powerful flight. They are swift and agile in the air. Skimmer flocks fly in synchronous and graceful flight. Their tails are short and slightly forked.

Distribution

Black skimmers have a large distribution, with a breeding range that extends from Cape Cod south along the Atlantic coast, including the Gulf of Mexico, and down to northern Argentina. They also breed along the Pacific coast from northwestern Mexico south to Ecuador.

Connecticut Occurrence

Black skimmers are at the northern edge of their Atlantic coast range in southern New England. Over the past 100 years they have been classified as a migrant that shows up occasionally in Connecticut. Their preference for nesting habitat is open, flat sandy beaches with sparse vegetation. While the population has been gradually increasing in the Northeast over the last century and birds have nested on Long Island and Cape Cod, skimmers were not known to have nested in Connecticut prior to the 1990s.

The first known nesting attempt was in 1983 (Greenwich), but the nest was washed out by extreme high tides. In 1996 another attempt was made (West Haven) and that nest also was washed out by tides. The black skimmer's status changed in 1998 when the species was added to Connecticut's list of breeding birds. Six pairs showed up and bred in West Haven that summer. This was the first documented successful nesting in the state. It is believed that 13 young were raised that year. Virtually every year since 1998, skimmers, in increasing numbers, have attempted to breed at the same West Haven location. In most of those years, skimmers have successfully raised young. Last year, between two and three dozen young were fledged.

In Connecticut, black skimmers have been nesting within colonies of least and/or common terns. Terns are aggressive defenders of the nest colony. They will attack and drive away any potential predator or intruder that ventures too close to the colony. This aggressive behavior

The most notable feature of the black skimmer is its large, laterally flattened bill.

Black skimmers typically feed on small bait fish. The birds' long lower mandible cuts through the water while skimming. Once the lower bill touches a fish, the upper mandible clamps down tight on the prey.

provides protection from predators not only for the terns, but also for other beach nesting species that may nest within the tern colony, including skimmers.

Feeding Behavior

The most prominent feature of a black skimmer is its long, laterally compressed bill, in which the lower mandible is noticeably longer than the upper. It uses this knife-like bill to feed by flying low over the water. The longer lower mandible cuts through the water's surface. Once the bill touches a fish, the skimmer will clamp down its upper mandible, snatching the prey.

Skimmers most often feed in the evening, at night, or in the early morning hours when the waters are at their calmest. Their primary food is small fish and sometimes crustaceans.

Nesting Shorebird Conservation

Connecticut has a number of bird species that nest on sandy beaches. Many of them are in a vulnerable situation because they are subject to disturbance and predation. Nesting beaches are in short supply, forcing these birds to nest in areas of high human activity. Among these birds are the federal and state threatened piping plover, state threatened least tern, and two state special concern species, the common tern and American oystercatcher. Black skimmers are not a state-listed species, but because they nest in only one Connecticut location they may be considered for addition to the Connecticut Endangered and Threatened Species List.

While nesting and raising their young, black skimmers must endure encounters with dogs (leashed or free-roaming), illegal ATV use, and trash left on beaches (which attracts predators like raccoons, skunks, rats, crows, and gulls). When visiting a Connecticut beach this summer, please be aware of nesting birds and the fencing and signs that are present to protect them. These protections are in place so that spectacular birds like the black skimmer will continue to be a part of Connecticut's avian diversity.

Dogs and Beach Nesting Birds

Dogs can have a significant impact on beach nesting birds. Not only can free-running dogs step on and destroy eggs and young if they run through a colony, but the birds are terrified of them. Beach nesting birds see dogs as predators, similar to foxes, and their reaction to the presence of dogs close to their nest colony can lead to nest abandonment.

If you see unleashed dogs on nesting beaches, please call local animal control authorities, especially if you have a cell phone.

Stratford Police Department 203-385-4100
Stratford Dog Warden 203-385-4068

Milford Police Department 203-878-6551
Milford Dog Warden 203-783-3279

West Haven Police Department 203-937-3900
West Haven Dog Warden 203-937-3642

Volunteer CE/FS Instructors Honored at Annual Ceremony

Written by David Kubas, Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Program Coordinator

Connecticut's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program honored its volunteer safety instructors on March 26 at the Annual Awards and Recognition Dinner. This year's event marked the 24th anniversary of the CE/FS Program. Since 1982, 110,929 students have graduated from one of the three programs: firearms, bowhunting, and trapping. The 330 volunteer instructors honored at this event donated 13,364 hours during 2005 to conduct 157 courses for 3,879 students.

P. J. FUSCO

Award recipients at the 24th Annual CE/FS Recognition Dinner: (standing, back, l to r) David Kubas (CE/FS Program Coordinator), Francis Wasylink, Lawrence King, Jules Perreault, John Fountain, Warren Speh, Anthony DelMastro, and Mark Clavette (CE/FS Program Administrator). (Seated, front, l to r:) Francis Wasylink, Jr., Frank David, George Finch, and James Rice, Jr.

At the dinner, two instructors also were recognized from each of the firearms, bowhunting, and trapping programs who have made exceptional contributions during the past year. The prestigious "Award of Merit" was given to instructors Lawrence King and Francis Wasylink for their outstanding efforts in teaching classes and their participation in other activities directly related to the CE/FS Program. Instructors Russell Cobb and James Rice, Jr., were chosen by CE/FS Program coordinator David Kubas in recognition of their individual long-standing and unique contributions to hunter education. In addition, Junior Assistant Francis Wasylink, Jr., was recognized for his outstanding contribution of 137 hours to the Program.

Special recognition for their contributions and support to the CE/FS Program also was given to the Harwinton Rod and Gun Club and the Pachaug Outdoor Club. The Connecticut Rivers Council of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) received one of the two awards given to organizations for their support of the CE/FS Program and sportsman development. Tom Transue of the BSA accepted the award for the Council. The other organizational award went to the United Bowhunters of Connecticut (UBC) for their support of the CE/FS Program and steadfast support for bowhunter and bowhunting issues in Connecticut. Anthony DelMastro, president of UBC, accepted the award.

A special presentation was made by chief instructor Ray Hanley to Mike Roberts on behalf of the St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. Mike is an outdoor writer with a well-known history of supporting efforts to cure childhood cancer by organizing fundraising events among sportsmen for the cause. A check for $1,100 was presented to Mike for St. Jude's. The money was from donations collected at the CE/FS booth at the Annual Sportsmen's Show held in Hartford in February.

The DEP Wildlife Division is proud of the instructors who donate their time and expertise to educating Connecticut's citizens to be safe and responsible hunters. Connecticut's program continues to be recognized as one of the best in the nation, thanks to the efforts of the volunteers.

Don't wait until the last minute! Sign up for a Conservation Education/Firearms Safety course today. Check the DEP website (www.ct.gov/dep) for a list of available classes or call the Wildlife Division at (860) 642-7239 or (860) 675-8130 (M-F, 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

DEP Deputy Commissioner David K. Leff Retires

After spending more than a decade as Deputy Commissioner of the Environmental Conservation branch of the Department of Environmental Protection, David K. Leff retired at the end of March, 2006. As stated by DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy to DEP employees, David "has poured his heart and soul into a wide variety of efforts to make and keep Connecticut a wonderful place to live, play and raise a family -- for all our two-legged and four-legged residents. He has played an instrumental role in protecting the state's unique landscapes through the open space acquisition program and been the Department's face and voice on so many important natural resource protection and conservation issues."

For the last 10 years, David Leff attended the Annual Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Awards Dinner and spoke to the volunteer instructors and their guests. His speeches were always well received. The most recent speech given shortly before his retirement is no exception. It follows here. As an end note, the Wildlife Division staff thanks David for all of his hard work and support and wishes him well in his future endeavors.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

DEP Deputy Commissioner David Leff delivers his final address to CE/FS Program volunteers and their guests.

Deputy Commissioner Leff accepts a recognition award from CE/FS Program Administrator Mark Clavette (left) and Wildlife Division Director Dale May (right).

Speech Given by Deputy Commissioner David K. Leff at the Conservation Education/ Firearms Safety Awards Dinner on March 26, 2006

This is the tenth year in a row I have stood before you to formally offer the thanks of the Department of Environmental Protection for all that you do to keep alive the hunting heritage in this state and educate the next generation of sportsmen.

You might think that by now I would have run out of things to say, that the needle might be reading empty when it comes to enthusiasm. Fortunately, you would be wrong. Each time I step to this podium and look out at so many people and hear tales of your efforts as individuals, organizations, and clubs, I am inspired.

Being here renews my faith in what is the backbone of American communities – volunteerism. I am also reminded that hunting and fishing are the wellspring of the conservation movement in this state and around the country. Most importantly, these feelings are not just professional, they are personal.

This past year I had the opportunity to attend the basic Conservation Education/Firearms Safety course that you teach. I know some of you are rolling your eyes – it's about time, right? Indeed it is a very different course than the one I first took many years ago. But last year, I sat through it for an even better reason than I did the first time, when I wanted a hunting license. This time I was there because my 12-year-old son, Josh – the excited recipient of a 20-gauge shotgun for his birthday – wanted his hunting license.

For several nights and a weekend we sat in the big room at the Bristol Fish and Game Club and listened to lectures, looked at various firearms, saw films, and engaged in discussions. Though nervous about the test to come, my boy enjoyed himself, not just because of the presentations, but even more, by being in the company of people who love the woods and swapped stories about the pursuit of game and the camaraderie of being in the field.

continued on page 17

Top Instructor Honors for 2005:

Firearms
Mark Fowler, Warren Speh

Bowhunting
John Fountain, Richard Potter

Trapping
George Finch, Jules Perreault

Award of Merit
Lawrence King, Francis Wasylink

Coordinator's Award
Russell Cobb, James Rice, Jr.

Outstanding Junior Assistant
Francis Wasylink, Jr.

Organization Awards
CT Rivers Council, Boy Scouts of America
United Bowhunters of Connecticut

Club Awards
Harwinton Rod and Gun Club
Pachaug Outdoor Club

Box Turtle,
continued from page 5

other vehicles). If you turn it around in the other direction, the turtle will only make another attempt to cross the road. Remember, turtles have a home range and females often return to the same general area to lay eggs. Therefore, moving a turtle to a different location is not a good idea.

- Protect or promote the protection of turtle habitat in your community and statewide.
- Do not allow children to keep wild turtles as pets. Encourage them to observe the turtles in the wild and leave them where they are found.
- Notify the DEP Law Enforcement Division (860-424-3012) if you suspect any illegal collecting in your area.

What About Moving Displaced Turtles?

Relocation of box turtles has been suggested, mostly by non-biologists, from areas where rapid development is occurring. Rather than killing the turtles during construction, wouldn't it be more humane to move them into a new undeveloped area? The solution is not that simple. Box turtles have a very small home range. Moving box turtles out of their home range usually results in the turtles trying to get back to the original site. In addition, the turtles have specific habitat, demographic, and biological requirements. Population genetics and social structure of the turtles already living in the new habitat, as well as the possibility of disease transmission, must all be considered.

There has been little long-term monitoring of past reptile and amphibian relocation projects to provide critical information as to whether the project was a success or failure. With a long-lived species like the box turtle, this information could be very expensive to collect. As far as it can be determined from scientific literature, no relocation, repatriation, or translocation program has yet established a long-term, self-sustaining snake, turtle, frog, or salamander population.

The DEP Wildlife Division believes that trying to create protected areas within an animal's habitat or dealing with the larger issue of habitat protection in rapidly developing areas are better ways to deal with this complex issue.

Annual Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation meetings are held in each of the five regions to provide a forum for discussing projects, hearing presentations on various conservation and research activities, networking, and electing officers. ***Northeast PARC (NEPARC) will be holding its 2006 meeting at the DEP Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center*** *on Route 69 in Burlington on August 15-17, 2006. To view a tentative agenda and obtain registration information, go to NEPARC's website at www.parcplace.org/northeast.html.*

P. J. FUSCO

A new Reptile and Amphibian Habitat Management Guide for the Northeast will help land managers and private landowners provide habitat for species like the state-threatened blue-spotted salamander.

Reptile and Amphibian Habitat Management Guide for the Northeast Available Soon

As awareness of habitat loss has grown, many people overseeing land-use decisions have become more concerned about the needs of amphibians and reptiles. Sometimes this is a land manager, but more frequently it is the private landowner.

In spite of a desire to help, many people do not have all of the necessary information to help protect amphibians and reptiles. Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is hoping to change that by providing the information people need to make a difference. PARC has designed a project to bring the most current thinking on habitat-based management practices to landowners and land managers who want to manage portions of their properties for amphibians and reptiles, or who want to minimize the impact of their land management activities on these species.

PARC has been in the process of developing and producing Habitat Management Guidebooks for five geographic regions across the continental United States: the Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest. The Northeast Guide, which includes Connecticut, should be available in the summer of 2006. The DEP Wildlife Division has contributed its logo in support of this project.

The guides are directed towards resource managers and private landowners who want to help protect amphibians and reptiles. The approach has been to identify the most important considerations for each habitat, explain why they are important, and then suggest what to do about it. However, the guides are not intended to be exhaustive. For many of the suggested activities, you will need help or you may need to acquire specific training.

If many landowners and land managers each implement some of these guidelines, then the cumulative effect can only be a positive one. The guides provide guidelines for managing habitats of each region that have general positive benefits, not only for the associated reptiles and amphibians, but also for other wildlife that share those habitats.

PARC is an inclusive partnership dedicated to the conservation of the herpetofauna—reptiles and amphibians—and their habitats. Membership includes individuals from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, museums, pet trade industry, nature centers, zoos, energy industry, universities, herpetological organizations, research laboratories, forest industries, and environmental consultants. The diversity of its membership makes PARC the most comprehensive conservation effort ever undertaken for amphibians and reptiles. To learn more about PARC, visit its website at www.parcplace.org.

The information in this article is from PARC's website.

Black Bear Den Work Continues

Written by Paul Rego, Furbearer Program

For the fourth winter in a row, DEP Wildlife Division staff visited dens of radio-collared black bear sows to assess productivity. In February and March, 2006, biologists located the sows' winter dens and attempted to determine if they and new cubs or yearlings from the previous winter. Black bear cubs are typically born in January, the middle of the denning period. Cubs born the previous year will spend the following winter with the sow in the den.

Efforts to locate dens were more difficult this year due to the lack of snow cover in March. Snow cover and cold temperatures seem to make the bears reluctant to leave their dens. Bare ground and warm temperatures encourage bears to leave dens early. These conditions also make them more responsive to disturbance near the den.

Dens of 12 sows were located this year. Three sows were out of their dens earlier than expected and prior to the day biologists planned to handle them. A fourth sow bolted when biologists approached within 50 yards of the den. Even with these difficulties, cub production and cub survival were documented for nearly every bear.

Seven sows had new litters that averaged two cubs per litter. Six of the nine cubs observed in 2005 were found in dens this year. Two sows that were expected to have yearlings had new cubs. This suggests that their cubs from 2005 probably died. Over the last three years, cub survival has been greater than 80%. The lower average litter size and cub survival were probably related to low acorn production in the fall of 2005.

Downed trees and slash or brush piles continue to be favored as winter den sites. One sow was found at a den she had used in 2004. Coincidentally, this was one of only three dens over the last four years that was located in a hollow tree.

Native Plant Profile: Pin Cherry

Written by Peter Picone, Habitat Management Program

When walking through an abandoned field that is gradually reverting back to forest, the shiny red bark of the native pin cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*) can often be seen. This relatively unknown member of the native cherries of Connecticut provides late August berries for wildlife, especially migratory songbirds. Also known as fire cherry, this small tree colonizes areas that have plenty of sunlight.

As its alternate name "fire cherry" alludes to, this tree tends to inhabit drier and well-drained soils that may be more susceptible to fire. Pin cherry is one of Connecticut's three native cherries. It may be found growing in association with other early colonizers of abandoned fields, such as gray birch (*Betula populifolia*), sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina*), and pasture juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*). This native cherry provides berries that give the appearance of the traditional domestic cherry, except that it is more diminutive at only about one-fourth the size. Songbirds seeking to fatten up before their long migration trip south will gobble them up in late summer as they ripen.

P. J. FUSCO

The native pin cherry provides late August berries for wildlife, especially migratory songbirds. The cherries give the appearance of the traditional domestic cherry, except that it is more diminutive at only about one-fourth the size.

Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and choke cherry (*Prunus virginiana*) are probably the best known of the three native cherries because they commonly harbor the white "tents" of tent caterpillars. Pin cherry can be distinguished by its shiny red bark and the berries are clustered in threes, whereas black cherry and choke cherry have pendulant clusters of berries that droop in a grape-like manner. Pin cherry also has a bright red berry when ripe, whereas the other two native cherries turn a blackish-purple color.

Pin cherry and choke cherry tend to grow to about 25 to 40 feet tall, while black cherry can grow to over 80 feet tall. Black cherry is known for its high-quality lumber characteristics and it competes better in the shade than the smaller shade-intolerant pin cherry.

If you are interested in seeing a nice specimen of a pin cherry tree, visit the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area on Route 69 in Burlington. The tree, which is identified with a marker, graces the parking area in front of the Conservation Education Center. If you are unable to visit Sessions Woods, then put on those hiking shoes, pack your tree identification book, and head out to some old field habitat to search for pin cherry.

FROM THE FIELD

66 Eagles Counted in Midwinter Survey

On January 13 and 14, 2006, volunteers (183) from the DEP, the Wildlife Division's Master Wildlife Conservationist Program, private conservation organizations, and the general public conducted the annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey. Rain on the survey date caused low visibility, but volunteers were still able to observe 66 bald eagles — 44 adults, 19 immature eagles and 3 unknown. In 2005, 46 birds were counted. The higher number of eagles counted in 2006 compared to last year can be attributed to milder winter weather leading up to the survey. However, the survey results probably underestimate the true number of eagles that were in Connecticut in January.

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is not a complete census of the entire wintering population in Connecticut, but an index of the species' use of the state, which can be compared year to year. The survey is conducted nationwide during a specific time period and is coordinated by the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center at the Snake River Field Station in Oregon. (For more information, go to: http://srfs.wr.usgs.gov/midwinte.htm.)

The volunteers conduct the survey by recording all eagles seen at areas traditionally used by the birds and areas of suitable wintering habitat. The DEP Wildlife Division appreciates the efforts of all the volunteers who donated their time to the survey. Fortunately, this year, the 183 volunteers that helped out was an increase from the 127 that helped in 2005. Still, several areas that have been checked in the past were not surveyed this year. Additional volunteers are still needed to help with the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey in 2007, especially around some of the lakes and reservoirs in western Connecticut. Those interested in helping with next year's survey should send a letter providing your name, address and telephone number to Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program, 391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254.

Bald Eagle and Peregrine Nest Update

The DEP Wildlife Division and several volunteers are keeping watch over seven nesting pairs of bald eagles and four pairs of nesting peregrine falcons. The bald eagle pairs are in New London County (1 pair), Hartford County (3), Middlesex County (1), and Litchfield County (2). The peregrine falcon pairs are in Middlesex (1), New Haven (2), and Fairfield (1) Counties. Any young eagles or peregrines produced from these nests will eventually be fitted with leg bands before they fledge. Stay tuned to *Connecticut Wildlife* to see how the nesting season progress.

Freak Accident Does In Red-tailed Hawks

On March 21, 2006, DEP Wildlife Division staff responded to a phone call about a suspected deceased bald eagle hanging upside down in an oak tree in Bridgewater. Immediately upon arrival at the site, the brightly colored tail of a red-tailed hawk was visible. With further inspection, it became evident that it was not one, but actually two red-tailed hawks, interlocked and hanging from a branch in the tree. The talons from one of the hawks were dug into the leg of the other hawk. How these hawks ended up in this position will remain a mystery, but one thing is for sure...this was a rare and interesting situation.

Geoffrey Krukar, Wildlife Diversity Program

P. J. FUSCO

First Annual CT Natural Resource Conference - A Resounding Success!

On May 2, 2006, the first annual Connecticut Natural Resource Conference was held at the University of Connecticut's Nathan Hale Inn and Conference Center. The conference's theme was Conserving Connecticut's Wildlife - The Future is Now! It was co-sponsored by the University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and brought together over 200 natural resource professionals, educators, and community leaders from throughout the state. The goal of the conference was to learn more about Connecticut's new Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (see *Connecticut Wildlife* Mar/Apr 2006 issue) and how everyone can work together to ensure that our wildlife resources remain viable, relevant, and accessible for generations to come.

Posters and presentations highlighted the current wildlife conservation and research activities being conducted in Connecticut. A series of speakers discussed the known status of the state's diverse array of wildlife taxa and identified needs, as well as issues of common concern. A recurring theme throughout the day was how much additional information is needed if we are to continue conserving and restoring the state's wildlife, and how this information needs to be shared and accessible to both natural resource professionals and community leaders alike. Connecticut's new Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy should provide the blueprint for this collaboration.

The excitement and enthusiasm of attendees, as well as the conference speakers, made for a great day. Based on its resounding success, people are already planning on attending next year's conference. The date of March 3, 2007, has been chosen for next year, and the conference will once again be on the UCONN campus. Look for more information in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*.

Invasive Plant Symposium Planned for October

The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group Symposium, "Working for the Landscape of Tomorrow," will be held on October 12, 2006, at Mountainside Resort in Wallingford. DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy will be the opening speaker. Topics will include "Linking Ecology and Horticulture to Prevent Plant Invasions," "Alternatives to Invasive Plants," "Restoration: Establishing a Native Landscape," and "Management: Planning and Control." The agenda and registration information can be found at www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg.

Local Webcams Showcase Osprey

Osprey Cam Launched by The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk

The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk recently launched an Osprey Cam that allows web surfers to view an active osprey nest that is located on property owned by the City of Norwalk. The Osprey Cam can be viewed over the Internet from The Maritime Aquarium's web site, www.maritimeaquarium.org. This unique opportunity was made possible by a grant from the Law Offices of Gary Oberst in Norwalk.

DEP Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria participated in the press conference announcing the Osprey Cam, along with Maritime Aquarium staff members, City of Norwalk officials, and Gary Oberst.

The Osprey Cam provides web surfers a great, non-intrusive way to watch the birds as they bring fish back to the nest, build onto their nest, lay and hatch eggs, and raise their young. Teachers will be able to use the Osprey Cam as a teaching tool that helps illustrate life cycles, a required unit in the Connecticut Science Framework. Researchers will be able to observe the ospreys as well, to monitor their habits and gain insight into the health and activity of the Long Island Sound ecosystem.

Connecticut Audubon Osprey Cam

A nesting platform located in the DEP's Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area has been used by a pair of ospreys since 1997. The platform is ideally located in a salt marsh where there is an abundant variety of fish for the birds to eat. The nearby Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Milford Point has a video camera that monitors the nest. Live images of the nest can be viewed on the Internet on Connecticut Audubon's web site, www.ctaudubon.org.

P. J. FUSCO

Friends of Sessions Woods Annual Meeting

The Friends of Sessions Woods hosted their annual meeting in late April with close to 70 people in attendance. President Clark Spencer reviewed the group's accomplishments over the past year, including the completion of an outdoor pavilion and indoor classroom space in the Conservation Education Center. Laurel Martin, an educator with the Beardsley Zoo and Master Wildlife Conservationist, was the speaker for the event. Laurel brought live animals from the zoo for an up-close look. Participants were eager to see native walking sticks (a type of insect), a marbled salamander, big brown bat, screech owl, and black rat snake. Laurel also talked about the return of fishers to Connecticut before she brought out the zoo's ferret, a close relative of the fisher but one that has been domesticated. The meeting also featured local folk musicians McMillan and White. The exhibit area of the Conservation Education Center was open for participants to view the latest wildlife-related information. Many thanks are extended to the Friends of Sessions Woods for all their assistance to the Wildlife Division.

Laura Rogers-Castro, Outreach Program

David Leff,

continued from page 13

I couldn't have been prouder because I knew that he understood intuitively that the most important thing about hunting was not what your bag contained, but what was in your heart – your love and respect for the woods and your companions. The true and lasting trophies are not the mounts on the wall or a pair of antlers, they are stories we bring home.

As for the course, again, I couldn't have been prouder than to be associated with a curriculum that goes beyond regulations, field dressing, and game identification and that emphasizes ethics, individual responsibility, respect for wildlife, and courtesy to landowners. It is a model that should be followed by many other educational programs. Imagine how much better off we would be if as much ethics and individual responsibility were taught as part of getting a driver's license, a plumber's license, or teaching certificate.

So it is truly heartfelt when I say thank you to the 330 volunteers who taught 157 courses and contributed more than 13,000 hours, the equivalent of eight full-time employees. Thank you for graduating 3,879 students and keeping alive the sporting heritage. Thank you also to Dave Kubas, Mark Clavette, Winnie Reid, Heather Overturf and Trish Cernik who keep this program organized and operating so as to most effectively use your skills and talents.

Thank you most of all for your efforts to keep alive in this state the time-honored opportunity to pursue wild game. "It is always someone's turn to prepare the North American hunting heritage for its transition to the next generation," wrote Jim Posewitz in his wonderful book Inherit the Hunt. "To keep it alive," he observes, "we must learn the stories, we must appreciate their significance and we must teach each successive generation how this heritage was delivered into our custody."

Posewitz is exactly right. We are merely stewards of a grand tradition. This is a big responsibility. You have shouldered a great part of that burden. Never lose sight of how essential your work is. Never give up. There are thousands of kids out there, like my son Josh, that are eager to be taught. They need you! They will give you a rate of return on your investment of time that is the envy of Wall Street. And, what better reward could there possibly be than to know that in our later years, these youngsters will grow to be our companions afield who in turn will teach the boys and girls behind them.

Just for Kids

Beach Nesters

Several birds that live at the coast nest right on the beach! Beach nesters must adapt to a changing environment that is well-used by many people and other animals!

Tides and Terns

Terns, like other beach nesters, must nest far enough from the shore to avoid any flooding caused by spring tides. The nest is placed on the sand. It is not very deep and sometimes lined only with small shells or pebbles. In three to four weeks, the chicks hatch. Some, like least and common terns, are fed by their parents. Others, like piping plovers, feed on their own shortly after hatching. All eat small fish or invertebrates from the sea.

What *you* can do to help beach nesting birds!

- *Stay clear of nests!*
- *Keep dogs off the beach or, at least, on a leash!*
- *Don't fly a kite near nesting birds*
- *Don't leave trash on the beach. Trash attracts raccoons, house cats, and other predators which prey on eggs and young birds.*

Skimming Skimmers

Black skimmers, another beach nester, are unique birds with a long, lower bill and short, upper bill. Skimmers skim the water with their bill while flying slightly above the surface. As soon as a fish is touched, the bill snaps shut and the fish food is lifted from the water.

P. J. FUSCO

Least terns nest directly on the beach. The chicks and eggs are well-camouflaged.

Camouflaged Chicks!

Ever see a plover or tern chick? Probably not! They blend very well into the sandy environment with their creamy brown color.

Oyster Outing

One Connecticut beach nester is new to the scene. Oystercatchers have been nesting in Connecticut only since 1980. True to their name, oystercatchers eat oysters! They can open an oyster shell in less than 30 seconds!

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

May-August ..... Respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas when visiting Connecticut beaches. Also, keep dogs off of shoreline beaches to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

..... Herons and egrets are nesting on offshore islands in Long Island Sound. Refrain from visiting these areas to avoid disturbing the birds.

..... Dispose of fishing line in covered trash receptacles. Improperly discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife.

June 4 ..... **National Trails Day**, sponsored by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA). Events are planned across Connecticut, in parks, forests, and at nature centers. Hike, learn about trails and history, do trail maintenance, ride horses, or try orienteering. For a brochure or more information, call CFPA at (860) 346-2372 or email info@ctwoodlands.org.

June 10 ..... **Sessions Woods Hike**, starting at 10:00 AM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington (located on Route 69). Join Wildlife Division Educator Laura Rogers-Castro on a hike of the trails at Sessions Woods. Learn all about this wildlife management area and some of its special features. Meet in front of the Conservation Education Center. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water. Please preregister by calling the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (weekdays, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

June 10 ..... **BioBlitz**, at Brooksvale Park in Hamden. For more information, check the following website: http://web.uconn.edu/mnh/bioblitz.

July 4 ..... While viewing fireworks displays at Connecticut coastal areas, respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas and offshore rookeries.

July 15 ..... **Children's Program: Woodland Wildlife**, starting at 10:00 AM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington (located on Route 69). Families are invited to attend an outdoor hike, with Wildlife Division Educator Laura Rogers-Castro, focusing on forest ecology and woodland wildlife. Meet in the exhibit area of the Conservation Education Center. Please preregister by calling the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (weekdays, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

August 3 ..... **Beaver Marsh Hike**, starting at 4:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington (located on Route 69). Take a late afternoon hike at Sessions Woods. Participants will walk to the Beaver Marsh to learn about this unique habitat. Meet in the exhibit area of the Conservation Education Center. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water. Please preregister by calling the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (weekdays, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM).

Aug. 15-17 ..... **2006 Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (NEPARC) Annual Meeting** will be held at the DEP Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center on Route 69 in Burlington. To view a tentative agenda and obtain registration information, go to NEPARC's website at www.parcplace.org/northeast.html. (See page 14 to learn more about PARC).

Step Up to the Plate for Wildlife...

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

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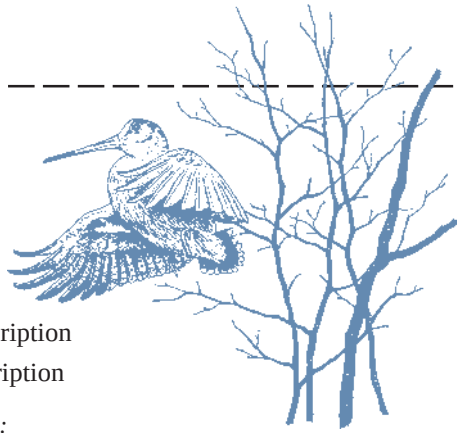
Application forms are available at DEP and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at www.ct.gov/dmv.

Connecticut Wildlife



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E. PYZNAR

DEP Environmental Conservation Police Officer Ed Pyznar took this photograph of a young male black bear that took refuge in a Bloomfield neighborhood, close to the Hartford city line. The bear was immobilized by the DEP Tranquilization Team and transported to more suitable habitat.

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