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Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES ● WILDLIFE DIVISION

From the Director

Thanks to a new federal grant, the DEP Wildlife Division is planning to initiate 21 new projects over the next two years (see project descriptions in article on facing page). The Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) was established to provide the states with funding to address three categories of important wildlife issues that have traditionally been underfunded: wildlife conservation priorities, wildlife-related recreation and wildlife education. The grant will be allocated to the states as a subaccount of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) Program, which is sportsman-generated and provides the majority of the Wildlife Division's funding. However, unlike Pittman-Robertson, which provides predictable, annual funding, WCRP is a one-time grant that must be spent over a two-year period.

While WCRP provides an unprecedented opportunity to expand our programs, the nature of the grant restricts us to projects that are short-term and can be accomplished with no new personnel. As a consequence, our already busy staff is taking on a lot more responsibility. Much of the work will be done through contracted or seasonal personnel, but the job of administering and overseeing the projects will be substantial. Time will tell if we can accomplish all that we have planned to, but our intentions are good and we are excited by the challenge of addressing so many areas of need.

The projects we have identified represent a good mixture of surveys, research, and wildlife-related education and recreation. From songbirds to shorebirds, bears to rabbits, mussels to dragonflies, we will be working with a diversity of birds, mammals and invertebrates that have been largely neglected until now. Increased technical assistance to urban communities and schools, municipal planners, landowners and the public is in great demand and several of the projects address these needs. We plan to do some additional early successional stage habitat management, conduct comprehensive inventories and improve wildlife viewing opportunities on state land. The development of a coastal birding trail will combine recreation, education, and the cooperation of many municipalities and conservation organizations.

WCRP merely scratches the surface of meeting the needs of wildlife and society. However, it is a promising start. We remain hopeful that the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA), that has been reintroduced in Congress this year, will ultimately pass and provide the states with stable, long-term funding to support wildlife diversity programs, including the staff required to administer them. Until then, we will do our best to make the most of the opportunity we have before us. As you read through the project summaries, note that many of them will benefit from volunteer participation. If you have the interest and the time, I encourage you to follow the progress of these projects in future issues of Connecticut Wildlife, *and assist where you can.* --Dale W. May

Cover:

Visitors to CT's coastline this summer may catch a glimpse of the magnificent osprey. Kids can learn about ospreys on page 19.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program was initiated by sportsmen and conservationists to provide states with funding for wildlife management and research programs, habitat acquisition, wildlife management area development and hunter education programs. It places an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. Articles reporting on Wildlife Division projects funded entirely or in part with federal aid monies are depicted with the logo of the Wildlife Restoration Program.

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Federal Grant Provides Funding for New Wildlife Projects

Written by Dale W. May, Director

For the next two years, the DEP Wildlife Division will be busy undertaking 21 new projects that cover everything from learning more about grassland birds to training volunteers to become Master Wildlife Conservationists to assessing the state's growing bear population. All of these projects have been made possible by a one-time federal grant through the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP). [Please see "From the Director" on page 2.] Following is a list of project summaries that describes what the Division plans to accomplish with the WCRP funding.

A new WCRP project will document the use of Connecticut's major river corridors as stopover habitat for migratory birds during fall and spring.

WCRP Projects

Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat Survey. *Objective:* To document the use of Connecticut's major river corridors as stopover habitat for spring and fall avian migrants. *Need:* Most avian management has focused on breeding and wintering birds. Little information exists on critical stopover habitats used by migrating birds. Loss of these critical habitats can result in greater distances between "refueling" stops for migrating birds, which can significantly increase their mortality. The project will identify priority sites for protection at the state or local level and contribute to the Partners In Flight national goal of identifying such areas throughout the country.

Master Wildlife Conservationist Program. *Objective:* To train volunteers to deliver wildlife-related programs for education outreach and technical assistance. *Need:* The public's demand for wildlife-related programs far exceeds the Wildlife Division's capabilities. By developing an intensive training course, the Division will create a pool of highly trained volunteers to educate others about issues related to wildlife and natural resource management.

Grassland Bird Studies. *Objective:* To document the extent of grassland bird nesting habitat in Connecticut and, at larger nesting areas, to learn more about essential habitats and limiting factors. *Need:* Many species of grassland birds are declining throughout the Northeast and grasslands are one of the most rapidly disappearing habitat types in Connecticut. Studies are needed to develop plans to ensure the continued existence of grassland dependent species in Connecticut. Study results will allow the Wildlife Division to identify critical habitats for acquisition or protection and will assist in the development of a long-term grassland bird conservation plan.

New England Cottontail Rabbit Conservation. *Objective:* To evaluate the home range size, habitat and distribution of New England cottontail rabbits. *Need*: Limited research suggests that populations of the New England cottontail (Connecticut's only native cottontail rabbit) have declined dramatically over the past century as a result of habitat fragmentation and competition from the eastern cottontail. More needs to be known about the status of the New England cottontail and its habitat requirements. The study will result in an improved assessment of New England cottontail distribution and identification of specific habitats that can be managed to improve suitability for New England cottontails.

Dragonfly and Damselfly Surveys. *Objective:* To collect the information needed to develop a statewide dragonfly and damselfly conservation plan. *Need:* A systematic survey is needed to evaluate the status of this diverse group of invertebrates. Development of dragonfly and damselfly identification materials and workshops, creation of on-line resources and the resulting data collection will improve our knowledge of the status of damselflies and dragonflies and guide habitat protection for uncommon and rare species.

Connecticut Coastal Birding Trail. *Objective:* To provide the public, through a recreational framework, with the guidance and information that will allow them to learn more about Connecticut's bird resources and the conservation issues they face. *Need:* There is a growing public interest in bird viewing and bird conservation, but limited information to guide citizens to the best observation sites or to inform them about the birds and habitats they are viewing. This project will establish a trail, or network, of key birding sites along the coastline, providing information about the birds and habitats at each site, as well as wildlife educational opportunities in recreational settings.

Assessing Conditioning to Reduce Black Bear Problems. *Objective:* To assess aversive conditioning as a means of reducing problems caused by black bears. *Need:* Connecticut has a growing black bear population and the DEP is

continued on next page

Federal Grant, continued

increasingly responding to individual bears that persistently cause problems. There are limited options for responding to such bears. Currently, aversive conditioning, coupled with improved public awareness, is being prescribed at many sites with persistent problem bears. However, better information is required to evaluate the effectiveness of this technique. Using radio telemetry, this project will determine whether trapped and aversively conditioned, problem bears exhibit "reformed" behavior upon their release.

Town Planning Workshops and Manuals. *Objective:* To develop a series of land managers' workshops and manuals that will include information on landscape-level resource management. *Need:* Many of the land use decisions that affect wildlife are made at the municipal level. There is a need to provide local decision makers with helpful, productive guidance and to promote cooperation on a regional basis to address wildlife conservation issues. Training and a land managers' manual will provide municipal officials with guidance for making informed land use decisions and promote a landscape-level ("beyond town boundaries") perspective for addressing smart growth and sustaining viable wildlife populations.

Wildlife Management Area Comprehensive Inventory. *Objective:* To conduct comprehensive natural resource inventories on two wildlife management areas. *Need:* The Wildlife Division has not had the resources to conduct intensive natural resource inventories on most of the 90 wildlife management areas that it administers. Improved inventory data would assist in guiding habitat management decisions and evaluating management actions. This project will allow the Wildlife Division to evaluate floral and faunal inventory techniques and develop a detailed natural resource data base on two of its largest Wildlife Management Areas.

Urban Schools Small Habitat Project. *Objective:* To provide technical assistance and plantings to at least 10 urban schools to enhance schoolyard habitats. *Need:* As Connecticut's landscape continues to become more urbanized, smaller habitat parcels become increasingly important to wildlife. Schoolyard habitats offer an excellent opportunity to teach students, teachers and parents about urban wildlife and small-scale habitat enhancement techniques. This project will enhance wildlife habitat at about 10 urban schoolyards by providing plantings. These schoolyard habitats will also serve as demonstration sites for the local communities.

Specialty Landowner Habitat Workshop Series. *Objective:* To conduct a series of workshops to promote wildlife habitat enhancements for owners and managers of specialty habitats, such as cemeteries, golf courses and tree farms. *Need:* Golf courses, cemeteries and tree farms present opportunities to benefit many species of wildlife. Within this group of specialty landowners there is increasing interest in being environmentally friendly; however, there has not been a concerted effort in the past to provide outreach or technical assistance to these groups. This project will improve awareness of wildlife habitat needs and result in wildlife habitat enhancements on these relatively large acreages.

Freshwater Mussel Key and Surveys. *Objective:* To develop a identification key for freshwater mussels and train volunteers to assist in stream surveys. *Need:* Six of Connecticut's 12 freshwater mussel species are listed as endangered, threatened or special concern. Systematic surveys have not been conducted and better data is needed to assess the status of these species. The development and distribution of the identification key will enable individuals to assist the Division in documenting the occurrence of rare species.

Informational and Educational Exhibits. *Objective:* To create two new displays for the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center: one on the importance of habitat to Connecticut's birds and, the other, on Connecticut's endangered species and their management. *Need*: The number of visitors to the Center and habitat demonstration sites at Sessions Woods has been increasing annually. Development of these new exhibits will expose visitors to a variety of important messages related to birds, endangered species and wildlife habitats.

Grassland Habitat and Wildlife Viewing. *Objective*: To develop and enhance wildlife viewing opportunities at four early successional stage habitat sites. *Need:* Grassland habitats are rapidly disappearing in Connecticut. The public needs a better understanding of how remaining grassland

P. J. FUSCO

With WCRP funding, two new projects concerning Connecticut's growing bear population will be initiated.

habitats can be maintained and an appreciation of their importance to many declining species of wildlife. This project will improve access, develop viewing blinds and provide interpretive signs at four state-managed grassland areas. The improved viewing opportunities will increase public awareness and appreciation of the management activities required to maintain grassland habitats.

Estimating the Black Bear Population. *Objective:* To develop a baseline estimate of the black bear population in Connecticut. *Need:* The Wildlife Division uses sighting reports to monitor the distribution of black bears in the state. However, the sightings cannot reliably be translated into population trends. As the number of bears increases, it will be important to have more precise information on population size and growth rates. By capturing, marking and releasing bears, the Division will increase its knowledge of bear population demographics, physical condition, movements and dispersal.

Heron and Egret Monitoring at Charles Island Natural Area Preserve. *Objective*: To provide on-site education about the rookery and monitor human use and impacts on nesting birds. *Need*: The Charles Island rookery is one of the state's largest nesting colonies for the great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron and little blue heron. Despite educational signs, protective fencing and seasonal closures of the island, the colony continues to suffer annual mortality due to human disturbance. An on-site monitor will educate site users about the rookery and its sensitivity to disturbance. The monitor will collect information on human-related disturbances that will assist in the development of a long-term rookery protection plan.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancement for Urban Parks. *Objective*: To create wildlife habitat enhancements in urban parks, greenways and urban open space properties. *Need*: Many urban residents are unfamiliar with local wildlife and unaware of wildlife needs. The potential for some of these urban green areas to provide important habitat for wildlife could be increased through habitat enhancement practices. This project will result in habitat enhancements at four or more sites, fostering an appreciation and understanding of wildlife among urban residents.

Control of Invasive Vegetation and Enhancement of Early Successional Stage Habitat. *Objective*: To enhance 60 acres of early successional stage habitat on three state wildlife management areas. *Need:* Early successional stage habitat is declining throughout the Northeast due to development, natural succession, loss of farmland and absence of fire. In addition, invasive plant species, such as autumn olive, often dominate disturbed sites. Active management to create, maintain and enhance early successional stage habitats is needed to reverse the population decline of many species that require such habitats. As a result of this project, 20 acres of warm season grasses will be enhanced, 30 acres of old field habitat will be restored and 10 acres of aspen will be regenerated.

An on-site monitor at Charles Island will educate visitors about the heron and egret rookery and its sensitivity to human disturbance.

Red-headed Woodpecker Status Assessment. *Objective:* To document the occurrence of red-headed woodpeckers in Connecticut and to develop management recommendations for the species. *Need*: The red-headed woodpecker is a state endangered species. Very little is known about its current status or habitat requirements in Connecticut. Data documenting the population status and habitat use will be used to develop a management plan for this species.

Shorebird Use of Horseshoe Crab Concentration Areas. *Objective*: To document the use of horseshoe crab concentration areas by migrating shorebirds. *Need*: Little information exists on the use of critical stopover areas by migrating shorebirds. Recent studies in Delaware Bay have demonstrated the importance of horseshoe crab eggs as a food source for migrants, such as red knots. The data collected through this project will help determine the relative importance of horseshoe crab concentration areas to shorebirds, assist in evaluating horseshoe crab harvest levels and their related impacts to shorebird populations, and help guide management and land acquisition efforts in coastal areas.

Wildlife Diversity Web Site. *Objective*: To develop a comprehensive web-based source of information about Connecticut's Wildlife Diversity Program. *Need*: The public has a strong interest in Wildlife Division projects. A web site would be a powerful communication tool for providing timely updates to cooperators and volunteers, as well as the general public. The web site developed under this project would serve as a cost-effective method of providing the public with timely information about Wildlife Division projects, including the WCRP projects described above.

Two Peregrine Falcon Chicks Banded in Bridgeport

Peregine Nest on Travelers Tower Fails

Last February and March, three peregrine falcon nest boxes were installed by a Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) contractor under the P. T. Barnum Bridge in Bridgeport (see article in the May/June 2001 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*). One of the boxes was installed close to an original nest site for a pair of peregrines that has nested on the bridge since 1999. This pair fledged two chicks in 1999. In 2000, the same pair produced one chick, which was found dead on the bridge abutment below the nest.

This year, the peregrine pair used the new nest box and produced two healthy chicks. They were banded by DEP Wildlife Division biologists at the end of May. The federal bands that were placed on the peregrine chicks help biologists identify individual birds (with the aid of a spotting scope). Biologists can then track the movements of these young peregrines after they leave the area. The chicks are expected to fledge from the nest in early July.

The Wildlife Division extends special thanks to the DOT for their help in installing the nest boxes on the bridge and for allowing the use of their equipment to access the box so that the chicks could be banded.

J. VICTORIA

Michael Amaral, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, prepares to remove the peregrine falcon chicks from the nest on the P. T. Barnum Bridge in Bridgeport so that identifying bands can be placed on their legs and their overall health can be assessed.

J. VICTORIA

A young peregrine falcon from the Bridgeport nest has a band placed on its leg which will help biologist identify it throughout its life.

Travelers Tower Peregrines

An article in the May/June 2001 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* mentioned the peregrine falcon webcam at the Science Center of Connecticut's website. Those who checked out the webcam probably discovered that the nesting peregrines were not there. The two cameras providing images to the falcon web site are trained on a nesting location on the ledge of the 21st floor of the Travelers Tower in Hartford. It was hoped that the peregrines would return to that nest again this year, based on last year's successful hatching of chicks. The adult female did visit and even make an indentation, but apparently she had other plans.

On April 18, it was discovered that two eggs had been laid in another location, near a roof-top drain between the 20th and 21st floors of the Travel-

ers Tower. This site had been used unsuccessfully in 1998. The eggs from that nesting attempt did not hatch, presumably because of a large amount of water that flowed through the drain.

By April 30, there had been no reported sightings of the falcons. Upon inspection of the roof-top drain, there was no sign of either the adult peregrines or the eggs.

The reasons for the disappearance of the falcons and their eggs are unknown. Any number of factors could have contributed to the situation:

- Unintentional human disturbance may have caused abandonment of the nest site;
- A predator, such as another bird or rat, may have destroyed the eggs, causing the adult falcons to move elsewhere;
- Water runoff in the drain may have destroyed the nest.

While there is no way of knowing for sure what caused the falcons to abandon the nest, it is hoped that the peregrines have renested in a different location. A variety of behaviors are observed when a peregrine falcon pair loses its eggs. If the adult female lost her two eggs before completing a clutch of four eggs (as she has had in the past), she may have relocated to a new nest site to complete the clutch there. If she lost her complete clutch at the Travelers Tower site, she would probably be returning to the area frequently but not staying. If she renested, laying another set of eggs, she would have been capable of doing so within 14 days after losing the first nest. In 1998, when the female previously nested in the drain and lost her eggs, she did not renest.

A portion of this article was compiled from information provided at the Science Center of Connecticut's website, *Peregrine Watch at Travelers Tower.*

Three Bald Eagle Chicks Hatch in CT this Year

At the end of May 2001, DEP Wildlife Division biologists banded three bald eagle chicks that hatched from two successful nests found in Connecticut. Two chicks were banded from a eagle nest located in East Windsor and one chick was banded from a nest located in the Lake Zoar area. Nests in Suffield and Barkhamsted were also monitored this year. Both bald eagle pairs at these nests were observed incubating eggs; however, due to unknown causes, the nests failed.

The three eagle chicks that hatched this year were lowered from the nest by a tree climber for banding and examination. Once on the ground, the chicks were weighed and measured, and blood samples were taken to determine the general health of the birds and to detect the presence of heavy metals. The young eagles were fitted with aluminum leg bands that can be easily identified through a spotting scope. Attaching leg bands is a useful tool for wildlife managers because this technique allows them to trace local movements of individual bald eagles, estimate population changes and determine the species' lifespan.

Climbing to the Top: A Tree Climber's Experience

In order to band the bald eagle chicks, someone must climb to the nest to the reach the young birds. This year, Wildlife Technician Geoffrey Krukar (GK) was selected to climb to one of the two nests. The following interview, which was conducted by Research Assistant J. T. Stokowski (JTS), offers insight into what it was like climbing up to an eagle's nest.

JTS: *Why were you selected to climb to one of the eagle nests?*

GK: I've rock climbed as a hobby for several years, but I've never climbed tall trees. Fortunately, I was able to practice with Jim Starkey, from the Metropolitan District Commission, who has climbed the eagle nesting trees for the past few years. He is very supportive of me taking over the climbing duties. He showed me what equipment would be needed and taught me different techniques. Plus, he was on site to offer assistance when I actually climbed up to the nest.

JTS: *What types of equipment are used in tree climbing?*

GK: The basic equipment required includes a harness, spurs, a lanyard and a safety rope. Unfortunately, the tree was so big around at the base that I had to use my safety rope as the lanyard until I got further up. Also, it kept getting stuck on the loose bark. [Spurs are spikes used to gain traction on the tree and a lanyard is a rope that hooks to the harness, holding the climber to the tree.]

JTS: *How tall was the tree you climbed and how high up was the nest?*

GK: The tree was a cottonwood over 100 feet tall. The nest was approximately 95 feet up in a bowl at the top. The way the nest was positioned made it difficult for me to actually get into the nest, so I had to work from the side. Eagle nests can be quite large (up to 5 or 6 feet across) and I'm sure it could have held my weight easily.

JTS: *What was it like being 100 feet up a tree?*

GK: I'll be honest, it was fairly intense. I got nervous. The wind picked up just about the time I reached the nest and everything was swaying. At one point, all I could do was just hang on for the ride. Also, I was nervous because I expected to find only one chick and instead there were two. Plus, they were much bigger than I had envisioned. I didn't want to lose either out of the nest.

JTS: *Did you band the chicks in the nest?*

GK: No, I placed the chicks into a large canvas bag and lowered them down one at a time to the biologists below. The biologists measured the birds, took blood samples and placed the bands on them down on the ground while I just waited and enjoyed the view. Then I pulled the chicks back up and put them in the nest.

JTS: *Did the adult eagles attempt to protect the chicks?*

GK: No, I don't remember seeing them at all while I was in the tree, but I still had to be careful. Although eagles usually are fairly passive, it depends on the individual bird. They could have been aggressive.

JTS: *How would you rate this experience? Would you do it again?*

GK: It was incredible. The opportunity to see the birds up close in the nest was a unique experience that I will remember for a long time. Yes, I definitely would do it again and I can't wait!

For more information about bald eagles, check out the bald eagle fact sheet at www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife.

Sparrows of the Salt Marsh

Written by Paul Fusco, Public Awareness Program

Connecticut's shoreline tidal marshes are home to two inconspicuous species of sparrows during spring and summer. At this time of year, both birds are carrying out their breeding cycle in Connecticut's salt marshes. Each will nest in the marsh, just out of reach of the highest tides, in an attempt to raise four or five young. The birds will need to remain secretive in order to avoid such marsh predators as raccoons, gulls and herons.

The salt marsh is the only habitat used by these birds. The two birds are the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) and its close relative, the seaside sparrow (*A. maritimus*).

These sparrows' heavy dependence on the salt marsh has led to significant population declines for both species over the last century as development pressures have destroyed much of Connecticut's original salt marsh habitat. Today, smaller populations of these once abundant sparrows can still be found in the remaining salt marshes of our state.

Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow

The saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow is a small brown and buff-colored bird with a streaked breast and dark crown. It is identified by a broad yellow-orange triangle on the sides of the head which surround a gray ear patch.

This uncommon to locally common species inhabits the drier portions of the salt marsh, preferring saltmeadow cordgrass areas in the "high marsh" zone. This sparrow is a skulker, seldom flying up from the ground, and, when it does, it usually flies only a short distance before coming back down into the grass. It can sometimes be seen running mouse-like through matted clumps of grass as it forages for food or hides from a predator.

Although the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow occurs at higher population densities than the seaside sparrow, it is considered to be at slightly higher risk because of its much more restricted breeding range. The entire breeding range of the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow is along the northeast coast of the United States from Maryland north to extreme southern Maine. Situated in the middle, Connecticut makes up a critical part of this species breeding range.

In winter, most individuals of this species retreat from the northernmost part of their range to Atlantic coastal marshes along the southern United States. They have been documented in Connecticut during winter; however, it is a very rare occurrence.

Among the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow's preferred food items are flies and sand fleas, making this species very beneficial to anyone spending time in or near a salt marsh. The bird will also eat other insects, spiders, snails and seeds from marsh grasses.

Seaside Sparrow

Slightly larger than the sharp-tailed, the seaside sparrow has an olive gray appearance with diffused streaking on the breast. Notable markings include a more uniformly dark head, very long bill and a small yellow spot in front of the eye.

The seaside sparrow is found in the wetter parts of the salt marsh. It may be found foraging along ditches and creek edges deep in the marsh. Because the preferred wetter edges of the marsh take up less area than the rest of the marsh, this species needs large marshes with creeks and channels to sustain a viable population.

Tall stands of saltmarsh (smooth) cordgrass grow in the portions of the marsh that are flooded regularly by tides. Staying well-hidden in these stands of grass, the seaside sparrow may venture out onto the wet, soft mud as a tidal creek recedes. The sparrow frequently will wade into the shallow water as it hunts for its favored food of small crabs and other small marine invertebrates. While its diet consists mostly of animal life, the seaside

P. J. FUSCO

Lying in the middle of the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow's restricted breeding range, Connecticut plays a significant role in the conservation of this small bird.

The protection of salt marsh habitat will be critical to the continued presence of these birds in our state and region.

sparrow will also eat seeds from saltmarsh cordgrass.

The seaside sparrow occurs in salt marshes from southern Maine down the Atlantic Coast to Florida, and along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas. It is also a short distance migrant, retreating from our area during winter.

Conservation

These two secretive birds are both listed as species of special concern in Connecticut and they are on the Partners in Flight WatchList, meaning that they are conservation priority species (see sidebar below) on a national level.

One subspecies of the seaside sparrow has already been lost to extinction in Florida. After losing its habitat to development and the failure of belated attempts to rescue it, the once abundant dusky seaside sparrow (*A. maritimus nigrescens*) was declared extinct in 1987. A second subspecies, the Cape Sable seaside sparrow (*A. maritimus mirabilis*) is currently listed as a federal endangered species. It hangs on by the narrowest of margins in a tiny area of southwestern Florida, constantly threatened by wildfires and hurricanes.

As is the case with so many declining species, these small denizens of the tidal marsh need to have a healthy habitat in which to live (see article on page 11). The protection of salt marsh habitat from the pressures of encroachment will be critical to the continued presence of these birds in our state and region.

Marsh restoration projects being undertaken by the Wildlife Division will benefit these two sparrows, as well as many other species that depend on a healthy salt marsh ecosystem.

Both of these sparrows can be seen at some of the larger coastal marshes in Connecticut, including Hammonasset Beach State Park, Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area, in Milford, and the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge/ Great Meadows marsh in Stratford.

P. J. FUSCO

The seaside sparrow is most commonly seen as the male sings its buzzy song from a slightly elevated perch within the salt marsh.

So, What Good Is a Salt Marsh?

Aren't they just smelly, mosquito-infested wastelands with no economic value?

Not so.

Salt marshes are one of the most productive and important of all ecosystems. They serve as buffers, protecting developed shoreline areas from storm surges and flooding. They purify water by filtering out excess nutrients and pollutants that would otherwise cause water quality problems in Long Island Sound. They are incredibly productive nurseries, providing spawning and rearing areas for most of the shellfish and seafood that are harvested for human consumption, like clams, bluefish, flounder and many others. They are the habitat for many endangered and threatened species, including 27 state-listed vertebrate wildlife species just in Connecticut. They are also invaluable recreation areas for hunters, anglers, bird watchers, canoeists, photographers, artists, educators and naturalists.

The Importance of the WatchList

The WatchList identifies North American bird species that need conservation help. WatchList species are those faced with population decline, limited geographic range and/or threats such as habitat loss on their breeding and wintering grounds. The WatchList is an early warning system that focuses attention on at-risk bird species before they become endangered.

The WatchList is compiled by Partners In Flight, a coalition of state, federal and private sector conservationists working together to protect birds of the western hemisphere. Partners In Flight updates the WatchList yearly to reflect the most current research and data.

Saving species pushed to the edge of extinction is difficult, costly and politically charged. The WatchList shifts the agenda from reactive, last minute rescue attempts to preventive action. The goal is to keep common birds common.

Nominations Being Accepted for the GreenCircle Awards

The GreenCircle Award Program was first announced in 1997 by former Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Sidney Holbrook. The program recognizes businesses, institutions, civic organizations and individuals which have undertaken projects to improve the quality of Connecticut's environment. The objective is to encourage groups and individuals to create innovative ways of preventing pollution or increasing awareness.

In April 1998, under the direction of Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr., the DEP implemented the GreenCircle Award Program. Examples of eligible applicants and activities include:

- *Businesses–large and small--in the commercial, industrial and service sectors who increase access to waterways, improve energy efficiency or implement pollution prevention techniques in their operation.*
- *Government and other non-profit institutions, such as municipalities, state agencies, schools and hospitals, who compost, limit pesticide use through better management techniques or convert buses or other fleet vehicles to natural gas or electricity.*
- *Individuals, citizen groups, school classrooms and other volunteers which improve community areas, lands and gardens, sponsor river clean up days, implement habitat enhancements for fish and wildlife on private property or volunteer time to environmental instruction programs.*

Many groups and individuals donate significant quantities of their time and resources in an effort to develop safer and cleaner methods of conducting business, create environmental programs for their students or sponsor river clean-ups. These efforts have a significant, measurable effect and warrant recognition. The Program acknowledges these activities and promotes them as positive examples for others within the community to follow.

Nominations are screened by DEP staff and then forwarded to the GreenCircle Advisory Board for final selection. The Advisory Board, which is comprised of representatives from environmental organizations, municipalities, law firms and Connecticut's General Assembly, reviews GreenCircle applications and determines qualifying applicants. Since the program began in 1998, over 375 award winners have been recognized for over 575 project activities. Award recipients are presented a certificate of commendation and recognized publicly.

The DEP will soon be accepting nominations for 2001. Interested parties are welcome to fill out a GreenCircle Award application and submit it to the DEP. Be sure to check out the DEP's website at http://dep.state.ct.us/grncrc/greencircle.htm. Questions concerning the program or applying for the award can be directed to Robert Hannon, at (860) 424-3003.

Preliminary Results for the 2001 Spring Turkey Season

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

A preliminary analysis of the 2001 spring wild turkey harvest indicates hunters harvested a record number of birds this past spring. Although not all of the spring turkey kill report cards have been tabulated, hunter reports have already exceeded last year's record harvest of more than 2,040 birds. In 2001, the total spring turkey permit issuance included 5,658 private land permits, 1,243 state land no-lottery permits and 357 state land lottery permits. This was an increase of 1.4 percent over last year's total of 7,154 permits. Also, there were no reported hunting accidents during the spring season.

Initial analysis indicates that the majority of the harvest occurred on private land (89% private, 11% state). Birds were harvested from at least 137 towns, with the top towns being Lebanon, Litchfield, Woodstock, Coventry and Sharon. The state areas with the most birds harvested included Cockaponset State Forest, Naugatuck State Forest and Natchaug State Forest.

The majority of the harvest consisted of adults (78% adults, 21% juveniles, 1% bearded hens). The low juvenile to adult ratio indicates that the previous spring nesting season was not very successful or hunters were selective for larger birds. Recruitment of juvenile turkeys may have been poor in 2000 due to relatively cold and wet conditions during the nesting period. Good nesting conditions during April and May of this year should assist with population growth and expansion. Connecticut's healthy wild turkey population provides a quality hunting experience for spring and fall wild turkey hunters.

Sharon Audubon Festival to Be Held August 4 & 5

Audubon In Sharon and the Housatonic Audubon Society will be hosting the 34th Annual Sharon Audubon Festival on Saturday and Sunday, August 4 and 5, 2001, at the Sharon Audubon Center, located on Route 4 in Sharon. Both days will be filled with exciting nature walks and presentations, live animal programs, hands-on exhibits, workshops, music, food and more. A featured performance on Sunday will be the spiritual and powerful songs of the flute performed by Joseph Fire Crow, a Native American musician whose album "Cheyenne Nation" was nominated for a Grammy this year. The event will be held rain or shine from 8:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Admission is $5.00 for adults and $3.00 for children. For more information about the event, contact the Sharon Audubon Center, at (860) 364-0520, or visit the website www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/sharon for a full listing of events.

Putting Your LIS Plate $ To Work:

Research Shows Effect of Non-native Plant on Tidal Marsh Birds

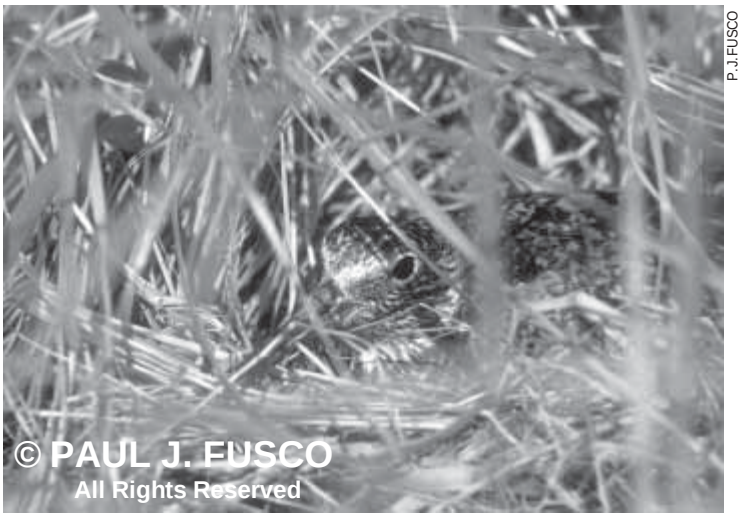
Written by Laurie Rardin, Office of Long Island Sound Programs

What do seaside sparrows, sharp-tailed sparrows and willets have in common? They breed only in the salt marshes so vital to the Long Island Sound ecosystem. The Long Island Sound Fund provided a $16,902 grant to Connecticut College in 1996 to conduct a study of the impact of the spread of *Phragmites australis* (common reed) on populations of tidal marsh birds in Connecticut.

The quality of tidal marshes is vital for many salt marsh birds, especially those birds that are endangered or threatened. Grasses such as saltmarsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and salt meadow cordgrass (*S. patens*) are typically found in the salt marsh. Dense stands of the aggressive *Phragmites* have been rapidly expanding and replacing the *Spartina* cordgrasses and cattail marsh vegetation, especially in areas where the marsh has been disturbed and the amount of saltwater entering the marsh has been restricted.

DEP staff member Lori Benoit conducted a study while a researcher at Connecticut College. Her study focused on whether the structure of the bird community differs between marshes dominated by *Phragmites* or dominated by cattails and *Spartina*. Forty salt and brackish marshes along the Connecticut shoreline were chosen as study sites. Benoit surveyed birds by listening and observing at specific locations for a 10-minute period. She also broadcast tape-recorded calls of eight bittern and rail species and listened for responses.

Results of the study indicated that the marsh wren and swamp sparrow actually preferred the tall, reedy vegetation at sites with more *Phragmites* or cattails. Overall, however, Benoit found fewer bird species in the dense *Phragmites*-dominated wetlands compared to the *Spartina*-dominated marshes. Seaside sparrows and sharp-tailed sparrows, both listed as species of special concern in Connecticut, were conspicuously absent from *Phragmites* marshes. Both bird species, which breed only in salt marshes, time their nesting cycle to the monthly tidal inundation. The willet, another species of special concern, constructs its nest from only one type of salt marsh grass. The spread of *Phragmites* also negatively affects the many state-listed wading birds that use open pools and mud flats. As a result of her research, Benoit concluded that there is a need for continued salt marsh restoration, *Phragmites* control and conservation of large marshes to protect and enhance coastal bird habitat.



P. J. FUSCO

A willet sits on its nest in a Connecticut salt marsh.

For more information about the Long Island Sound Fund, please contact the Fund Coordinator, Kate Hughes, at (860) 424-3034, or by email at kate.hughes@po.state.ct.us. You may also visit the Long Island Sound Fund website at http://dep.state.ct.us/olisp/licplate/licplate.htm.

Learn About Wildlife at CT State Parks

Visit a State Park or Forest this summer to learn about Connecticut wildlife! Many parks and forests throughout the state offer interpretive programming on numerous natural and cultural history topics. From snakes to raptors to insects to mammals, interpretive programs offer participants a chance to meet some of Connecticut's other inhabitants! Most programs are free; park entrance fees may apply. For more information about the Connecticut State Park and Forest Interpretive program offerings, contact the DEP Division of State Parks, at 860-424-3200, or Program Coordinator Lisa Monachelli, at Southford Falls State Park (203-264-5169). Here is just a sample of some of the programs being offered:

Slithering Snakes (daily). Live snakes will greet you at Meigs Point Nature Center, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison.

Bears in Connecticut (July 21). DEP Wildlife Biologist Paul Rego will discuss these newsworthy mammals at Housatonic Meadows State Park, Cornwall Bridge.

Tails and Talons (July 28). Live hawks, owls and eagles at Kettletown State Park in Southbury.

Bat Watch (August 18). View 300 + bats in flight, followed by a slide show by DEP Wildlife Biologist Jenny Dickson at People's State Forest in Barkhamsted.

Tree-Roosting Bat Study Continues Over the Summer

Silver-haired bat kept over winter and released provides important data

Written by Geoffrey Krukar, Wildlife Technician

Last November, a silver-haired bat was brought to Ansonia Nature Center after being found in someone's house. The bat was cared for and monitored by the Nature Center until it could be transported to Sessions Woods for the winter. It could not be released during winter because the cold temperatures and lack of food would have been fatal to the migratory bat. Instead, it was kept in a room with stable temperatures to allow for semi-hibernation.

As spring approached, the bat was allowed to exercise its wings in a closed room to prepare for its eventual release. The flights gradually increased in duration and frequency and the bat became much more active, as did its appetite. As a final preparation, a small radio-transmitter was attached to the bat's back, between the shoulder blades, using surgical glue. The transmitter was attached to allow biologists to track the bat's movements and discover which trees it would roost in during the day as part of an ongoing research project. Very little is currently known about the tree roosting preferences of silver-haired bats and any data collected is valuable to help guide conservation efforts for this Connecticut species of special concern.

After the transmitter was attached, a release site needed to be selected. The location where it was found last November was in a highly residential area, adjacent to major roads and highways. Releasing the bat in that exact location would have been hazardous for the bat as it readjusted to natural surroundings. Therefore, the bat was released in a portion of West Rock Ridge State Park. This site was selected because its wooded hillsides provide good roosting habitat, there is an abundant supply of various night-flying insects for food and the park is in close proximity to the site where the bat was found last fall.

In the early morning of May 21, the bat was released. Monitoring occurred twice daily, once in the morning to determine roost location and again at dusk to confirm its location and gain information on its foraging areas. A concern early in the bat's release was that because it was found during migration, it could have originated from somewhere much further away and might decide to "migrate" back to that place. Fortunately, the bat did remain in the local area, roosting approximately one mile from the release site and frequently foraging over area ponds. Data on the roost trees (height, diameter, species, etc.) were collected for three weeks until the signal was lost, most likely due to the surgical glue releasing and the transmitter being lost. This is commonly encountered in bat telemetry studies and many transmitters fall off over water or into crevasses where the signal cannot be received. Battery life is typically 30 days for these tiny transmitters.

The Wildlife Division's tree roosting bat research project is ongoing. Staff members will continue to set up mist nets in areas across the state to live capture bats. If a red, hoary or silver-haired bat is captured, a transmitter will be attached to allow monitoring of their movements.

G.KRUKAR

A tiny radio transmitter is attached to a silver-haired bat with surgical glue. Signals emitted from the transmitter allow biologists to track the movements of the bat.

Bats Are in the News

The saga of the silver-haired bat that was recently released by the Wildlife Division and tracked with radio telemetry was featured as part of an informational program by Connecticut Public Radio on bats.

In addition, you can catch a glimpse of what is involved in mist-netting for bats by tuning in to National Geographic Explorer **on CNBC, August 5, at 8:00 PM. Wildlife Technician Geoffrey Krukar and Research Assistant J. T. Stokowski were recently filmed mist-netting bats as part of the University of Connecticut's annual BioBlitz, which was held at Danbury's Tarrywile Park on June 8 and 9, 2001. Since 1999, the BioBlitz has explored the flora and fauna in Connecticut city parks. During the BioBlitz, teams of scientists, ranging form entomologists to ornithologists, search the area during a 24-hour period to identify all of the insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals that are present. This year, more than 2,500 species were identified.**

Wildlife Division Cooperates in Indiana Bat Telemetry Project

The state and federally endangered Indiana bat was the focus of a cooperative research project this past spring. The purpose of this project was to learn where Indiana bats that hibernate in New York spend the summer months and where they go to give birth and raise their young. The project was divided into two segments, one in northern New York along the Vermont border and one in southern New York closer to the Connecticut border. Researchers from the New York Department of Conservation, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Forest Service, Bat Conservation and Management and other state and federal agencies (including the Connecticut DEP Wildlife Division), as well as local landowners and businesses, worked together to track female bats as they left hibernation sites. Other objectives of the study included identifying female Indiana bat movement patterns, roost preferences and feeding activity during migration.

Wildlife Division Technician Geoffrey Krukar and Research Assistant J. T. Stokowski participated in bat trapping efforts during the study. They worked with bats caught in harp traps, helped with identification of the various species, assisted in the attachment of radio transmitters to the female Indiana bats and assisted tracking the bats, both from the ground and from the air. Most importantly, they learned how to correctly identify Indiana bats. Identification can be difficult because Indiana bats are very similar in appearance to little brown bats, which are not endangered and actually quite common. The primary differences are that Indiana bats have pinkish noses, less hair around the eyes, smaller, relatively hairless feet and a keeled bone, or calcar, near their feet. Proper identification requires a significant amount of training and field experience, something Geoff and J. T. were fortunate to receive as part of this cooperative research project.

Sportsmen Aid Community Facing Deer Population Dilemma

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

Mumford Cove in Groton is one of many residential communities in Connecticut that has been experiencing problems with overabundant deer populations. Large deer populations in residential communities often are associated with high incidences of tick-borne disease, deer-vehicle accidents and damage to landscape plantings. Hunting is the most cost-effective way of reducing high deer populations, but may not always be feasible in suburban areas. However, if certain precautions are followed, communities with open space areas may be able to customize a hunting program to safely and effectively reduce overabundant deer populations.

In the summer of 2000, Mumford Cove residents voted 2:1 in favor of eliminating their no-hunting ordinance so they could organize a controlled deer hunt in their community. The Mumford Cove Wildlife Management Committee (MCWMC) was formed to cooperatively design a hunt with technical assistance from the DEP Wildlife Division that would be safe and effective at removing deer.

Potential hunters interested in participating in the controlled hunt were required to pass a shooting proficiency test and attend an interview with the MCWMC. Of 106 hunters interested in bow hunting, 56 attended the shooting proficiency test and 53 passed (95%). Of 124 hunters interested in hunting with a shotgun, 49 attended the shooting proficiency test and 48 passed (98%). Chosen applicants were then required to attend a pre-hunt meeting to review specific hunting guidelines, safety requirements and property boundaries. Hunters were required to wear 400 square inches of fluorescent orange and could only shoot from designated tree stands. Shooting from tree stands was a particularly important safety feature of the hunt because a shot taken from a stand is directed downward to the ground. The designated tree stands were distributed at a rate of one per 2.2 acres.

The 51 hunters (16 bow and 35 shotgun) who eventually participated in the six-day controlled hunt harvested 27 deer. They hunters were surveyed to assess why they participated in the hunt, their opinion of the hunter-selection process, hunt experiences and future interest in participating in similar controlled hunts. Most hunters (80%) were satisfied with the hunter selection process and 96 percent were satisfied with the hunt guidelines. In addition, 50 percent of the hunters said they participated in the hunt as a service to the community. Overall, 88 percent of the hunters would participate in a similar controlled hunt again. Eleven hunters participating in the hunt believed they were too close to houses or each other, and five would have preferred radios or some mechanism for communication.

Most surveyed hunters (87%) indicated that they could hunt both weekends and weekdays. Hunting on weekdays only reduced hunter availability by nine percent. Conducting the hunt on weekdays, when most residents were at work, contributed to minimizing conflicts. Only a few protesters were encountered by hunters as they traveled to the community. The protesters were not residents of the community and were not confrontational.

Hunters that applied to the controlled deer hunt in Groton were experienced and skilled sportsmen. They adjusted their hunting schedule to accommodate residents of the community and viewed the hunt as a service to the community. Cooperation between residents of Mumford Cove, the Wildlife Division and sportsmen resulted in a safe and effective solution to the overpopulation of deer in this community.

Explore Wild Connecticut at the Beardsley Zoo

Written by staff from the Beardsley Zoo

P.J.FUSCO

The term "wild Connecticut" conjures up different images for different people. The hilly northwest corner coursed by ridgelines and dotted with shady ravines and crystal-clear streams might be someone's idea of "wild Connecticut." For another, the term might represent over 100 miles of sandy beaches, rocky coves and salt marshes bordering Long Island Sound. To yet another resident, "wild Connecticut" might mean black bears, wood turtles or bald eagles.

However, to increasingly more people, these words conjure up an image of Bridgeport...yes, Bridgeport! Like Hartford, New Haven and other urban areas within Connecticut, Bridgeport hosts a surprising wealth of resident and migratory species alike. Bridgeport is also the home of the Beardsley Zoo, which exhibits approximately 125 species from North, Central and South America. To date, zoo staff members have identified 146 Connecticut animal species within the Zoo and greater Beardsley Park, with 94 species of birds alone! While this list may seem large, it only includes the eye-catching creatures we are likely to encounter and represents just a small sampling of thousands of smaller species present within the Zoo and park grounds. Several factors combine to make the Zoo and surrounding Beardsley Park a unique haven for wildlife.

The Beardsley Zoo is...

- a few miles from Long Island Sound, with access to the Atlantic Ocean.
- positioned along the Atlantic Flyway for dozens of species of waterfowl and migratory birds.
- on the banks of the Pequonnock River, bridging Connecticut's coastal and upland habitat types.
- a natural travel corridor for many animal species, including endangered species and many birds of prey.
- a green oasis bordering Connecticut's largest city.

As state and federal wildlife management programs have largely increased many species' ranges and populations, we too have seen a surge in wildlife sightings. Sightings that would have been considered a rarity only a few years ago are becoming more common. In the past year resident wild turkeys, visiting bald eagles and hunting peregrine falcons have all been encountered on Zoo grounds. Snowy owls have even been recorded in downtown Bridgeport! With habitat enhancement and the creation of more naturalistic exhibits, black rat snakes, gray tree frogs and northern water snakes have moved into the Zoo. Over the spring and summer, more species will probably be added to a growing list of butterflies as they feed on the new plantings the Zoo horticultural staff, gardeners and volunteers have maintained within the expanding Victorian gardens.

The latest publication being distributed by the Zoo, "The Hidden Wildlife of Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo," not only celebrates this wildlife heritage, but also includes a call to action, enlisting your help in expanding this living record. So, the next time you visit Connecticut's cities, keep your eyes and ears open--you never know what wildlife you'll discover. You are encouraged to explore, learn and share your discoveries. For more information about native animals at the Beardsley Zoo or to check out a copy of "The Hidden Wildlife of Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo," please visit their website at www.beardsley.zoo.org. The Zoo can also be contacted at (203) 394-6572.

P.J.FUSCO

This gray wolf is one of over 120 species of animals that can be seen at the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport.

The Beardsley Zoo is a nationally accredited institution dedicated to wildlife education, conservation, research and recreation. It has 52 acres dedicated to rare and wonderful animals from North and South America

Hooded Merganser Added to Breeding Waterfowl Survey

Written by Paul Merola, Waterfowl Program Biologist

Since 1989, Connecticut has participated in the Atlantic Flyway Council's annual Breeding Waterfowl Survey. Every spring, states from New Hampshire to Virginia, conduct the survey from the ground by counting all waterfowl seen at ponds, marshes and swamps within randomly selected, one-kilometer square plots. In Connecticut, there are 50 plots in inland habitats and six in coastal tidal habitats.

The mallard and Canada goose were the most frequent and abundant species found in the survey. The number of mallard pairs was estimated at 16,763 in inland habitats, which was similar to last year (16,744). In coastal habitats, 266 pairs of mallards were estimated. The Canada goose pair estimate was 14,323, which was an increase from last year (12,063) and above the previous five-year average. The wood duck population estimate, at 7,250 pairs, was up considerably from last year (5,767). The inland black duck pair estimate (976) increased slightly from last year (755), while the coastal pair estimate was average.

P.J. FUSCO

The hooded merganser was added to the Breeding Waterfowl Survey in Connecticut this year and 473 pairs were recorded.

The hooded merganser was added to the Breeding Waterfowl Survey in Connecticut this year. This species has been an uncommon breeder in the state since the 1950s. Breeding hooded mergansers were first seen in the survey during 1998 and have been seen in each successive year. This suggests that the population is increasing in Connecticut. The population estimate for hooded mergansers was 473 pairs.

Mallards and Canada geese are highly adaptable to the urban/suburban landscape which encompasses much of Connecticut, explaining why they tend to be more abundant than the other breeding waterfowl species. The resident Canada goose is the only waterfowl species that has been steadily increasing in Connecticut during the last decade, as well as throughout the eastern United States. This is because of a high survival rate, a high reproductive rate and their ability to adapt to a changing landscape. The wood duck, which prefers forested habitats and beaver marshes, is less abundant in Connecticut, but has a relatively stable population. On the other hand, the black duck, which once was a common breeder in Connecticut, is less adaptable to the state's changing landscape and has done poorly in most areas. Coastal areas currently provide the most important habitat for Connecticut's remnant black duck population.

Waterfowl Breeding Pair Population Trends for Major Species in Connecticut

	Year 2001	Previous 5-year average
Mallard		
Inland	16,763	14,423
Coastal	266	291
American black duck		
Inland	976	553
Coastal	228	185
Wood duck		
Inland	7,250	5,670
Coastal	0	0
Canada goose		
Inland	14,323	11,344
Coastal	63	66
Hooded merganser		
Inland	473	--

Do You Want to Help Conserve Waterfowl and Wetlands? *Buy Duck Stamps! The Connecticut Duck Stamp is available for $5.00 at any town clerks' office or DEP License and Revenue, 79 Elm Street, Hartford. The federal Duck Stamp can be purchased at your local post office for $15.00. Not only hunters can buy Duck Stamps. Anyone who wants to make a difference for wildlife should buy one to help fund wetland and waterfowl projects.*

FROM THE FIELD

Banded Owl Lived 20 Years

Bird banding is an important tool in the study of the movement, survival and behavior of birds. Recently, a great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) with a leg band was found dead on a roadside in Kent. The band number and location of the bird were reported to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory and information concerning this bird's origins were returned. This owl was banded in its nest in Litchfield nearly 20 years ago. Very little information exists concerning the longevity of this species, but great horned owls raised in captivity are only expected to live to 20 years, making this bird's 20 years in the wild an exceptional case.

P. J. FUSCO

Assistant Director Greg Chasko Honored by CWA

At the Connecticut Waterfowl Association's (CWA) Annual Dinner in March 2001, Greg Chasko, Assistant Director for the DEP Wildlife Division, was named CWA's Conservationist of the Year. As a memento of the award, Greg was presented with a hooded merganser decoy beautifully carved by well-known carver Bob Harris of Old Saybrook.

The award was presented to Greg by Alexander W. Samor, President of CWA. During the presentation of the award, it was noted that Greg has rendered invaluable service to waterfowl and waterfowl hunters in Connecticut through his involvement in the state's Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program, in setting the annual waterfowl hunting seasons and through his efforts in dealing with legislative and other regulatory issues.


Connecticut Waterfowlers Association

Wildlife Division Assistant Director Greg Chasko (left) receives the Conservationist of the Year Award from CWA President Alexander W. Samor.

School Project for Wildlife

The DEP Wildlife Division extends its appreciation to the students at Eli Whitney School, in Hamden, who constructed 25 osprey nesting platforms and six roofs for signs to be posted at state wildlife management areas. This school project was coordinated by former Eli Whitney teacher Scott Behling and Wildlife Division biologist Ann Kilpatrick.

Staff Notes

The Wildlife Division recently said good-bye to maintainer Nathan (Lew) Hale when he accepted a position with the DEP State Parks Division. Lew worked out of the Sessions Woods office for almost 15 years and spent a good portion of his time helping the Division's Habitat Management Program with its many projects throughout the state. Lew's carpentry and welding skills, his expertise in operating heavy equipment and especially his cooperative spirit will be missed by the Wildlife Division. However, Putnam Memorial Park, in Redding, has gained a hardworking, new Park Manager. The Wildlife Division staff wishes Lew the best of luck with his new position.

Teacher Workshops

Several teachers participated in a workshop on neotropical migratory birds presented by the Public Awareness Program of the Wildlife Division in May 2001. The teachers viewed warblers, flycatchers, vireos, swallows, woodpeckers, waterfowl and other birds during a morning walk. Later, a discussion followed on migratory bird conservation issues and suggested activities for use in the classroom. Evaluation forms completed at the end of the program commended the Wildlife Division for a "very informative, educational and useful workshop."

Check the Wildlife Calendar Reminders section in this issue to find out about other upcoming teacher workshops.

CT Envirothon 2001 Held at Annie Fisher Elementary School

Written by Peter M. Picone, Urban Wildlife Program Biologist

The weather wasn't the best it could have been, but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of 37 high school teams as they competed in the 10th Annual Connecticut Envirothon competition held in the northwest corner of Hartford, at Annie Fisher Elementary School. This year's top scoring team was Litchfield High School, followed by the second place team, Lewis Mills High School, from Burlington. The team from Litchfield High School will go on to the National Envirothon competition, which will be held in July, in Raymond, Mississippi.

The 2001 Envirothon was located in a more urbanized watershed of Connecticut and there were plenty of "natural challenge" questions that could be asked at this urban site. Five stations, which included forestry, wildlife, soils, aquatics and non-point source pollution, were located throughout the school's property.

Preparation for the Connecticut Envirothon occurs during the school year where each team of five students studies the five environmental subjects and attends workshops to broaden their knowledge of the environment and how it is managed. Subject matter contains not only definitions of terms, but also hands-on identification and applied science questions. The teams had 30 minutes to answer a 100-point test in each subject, using their knowledge and teamwork skills.

The Wildlife Division commends the students of the 37 teams that competed in the Envirothon for their hard work and enthusiasm.

The mission of the Connecticut Envirothon is to promote environmental awareness, knowledge and active personal stewardship among Connecticut high school students through education and team competition.

CT ENVIROTHON

The winning team members of the 2001 Connecticut Envirothon, from Litchfield High School, display their awards. The team members, from left to right, are Nelson Bricker, Amanda Sahl, Kyla Peetoom, John Markelon (team advisor), Steven Zepecki III and Jenn Healy. Team alternates (not pictured) were Kevin Waugh and Brian Coffill.

More on Annie Fisher School

Annie Fisher Elementary School is located on Mark Twain Drive just south of the University of Hartford Campus. The North Branch of the Park River flows along the forested western border of the school's property and there is a large, open recreation field on the north side of the school. The Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) has been coordinating the development of an outdoor classroom and nature trail along the North Branch of the Park River and has partnered with public and private organizations, including the University of Hartford, Watkinson School, Weaver High School and the Department of Environmental Protection. The DEP Wildlife Division's Urban Wildlife Program has been providing technical assistance and also participated in the initial environmental review as part of the King's Mark Environmental Review Team in 1998.

Women in the Outdoors Event to be Held September 7-9

It's time once again to reserve the second weekend in September for the annual *Women in the Outdoors* event, sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation. All women from age 14 and older interested in fine tuning their outdoor skills or wanting to try something new will want to attend this program. *Women in the Outdoors* is designed to provide hands-on, educational and outdoor recreation activities, while also teaching about conservation and responsible wildlife management.

Skilled professional instructors will provide training on bird banding, canoeing, camping, basic firearms, skeet and trap shooting, wildlife/outdoor photography, freshwater ecology, fishing, outdoor first aid, waterfowl identification and turkey calling and hunting. There will also be environmental awareness hikes, a Rock & Roll Geology presentation/hike, an archery range and woods course, a rock climbing/rappelling and ropes course and a live, rehabilitated bird presentation.

The event will be held at the Deer Lake Scout Reservation Camp in Killingworth, from Friday night, September 7, through Sunday afternoon, September 9. Whether you choose to attend one day or the entire weekend, there is a minimal fee of $75.00, to cover the event, all meals, lodging (if needed) and most equipment. To obtain a registration form or for more information, contact Patti Laudano-Kolodnicki, at (860) 399-9673, or send email to: ct.nwtf@snet.net.

Take the Wildlife Challenge

Guess which animal is described in the challenge and enter into a drawing to win a free wildlife poster. Clearly print your answer on a postcard, along with your name, address and phone number and send it to: CT Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013, **Attn: Wildlife Challenge**. The answer and winner will be printed in the next issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*. **Official Rules:** Only one postcard will be accepted per household, per challenge. Postcards for this issue's contest must be postmarked by August 4, 2001. Only one winner will be chosen for each challenge. Each winner will be chosen at random from all correct entries received by the postmarked deadline.

Congratulations go to Joe Swinik, of Seymour, who was chosen as the winner of the March/April challenge. He gave the correct answer of "porcupine" and his name was randomly picked from all correct answers submitted by readers. Congratulations also go to Edward Wendland, of West Haven, who gave the correct answer of "piping plover" for the May/June challenge. Joe and Edward will be sent the wildlife poster of their choice. Thanks to all readers who sent in postcards with answers to the Challenge. Please keep trying!

May/June Wildlife Challenge

This issue's wildlife challenge is an animal found from Canada and Alaska south through the United States (except parts of southern Texas, California, Nevada and southeastern New Mexico). Although its population has declined over the last several decades due to an expanding human population and decrease in suitable wetland habitat, there has been an upward trend, recently, in its population in the Northeast. Our wildlife challenge has a home range that may cover as much as 50 miles and is adapted for travel in water, more so than on land. It eats fish, frogs, crayfish and shellfish. This animal's fur is extremely durable and is used as the standard by which all other furs are judged. What's the animal?

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

July 1 ..... Federal Duck Stamps are available at post offices.
..... Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamps available at local town halls.

July 15 ..... **Children's Program: Insects of Connecticut**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 10:00 a.m. Catch insects in a local field and discover those found in the nearby forest. Be sure to BYOB (bring your own bug) for a pre-program discussion. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Rain cancels. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

July 26 ..... **Teacher workshop: "Wildlife in Your Connecticut Backyard" & "Woodland Wildlife" Outreach Kits**, at Franklin Wildlife Management Area, in North Franklin, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Participants will be introduced to the Wildlife Division's educational kits available for loan. They will also learn about common Connecticut wildlife through the kits' slide shows and printed materials. There will be an opportunity to conduct activities for use in the classroom by using wildlife-related props. For more information and to obtain a preregistration form, call Laura Rogers-Castro at (860) 675-8130.

July 29 ..... **Children's Program: Butterflies**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 10:00 a.m. Discover butterflies as we explore various habitats at Sessions Woods. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Rain cancels. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

August 4 & 5 ..... **Sharon Audubon Festival** (see page 10 for more information).

August 7 ..... **Children's Program: Explore a Beaver Marsh**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 10:00 a.m. What animals live in a beaver marsh? Hike to the marsh (2 miles roundtrip) and learn about beavers and other animals. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Rain cancels. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

August 18 ..... **Children's Program: Animals and Habitats**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 10:00 a.m. Investigate the forest and field for signs of animal life. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Rain cancels. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

Sept. 1 ..... 2001 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices ($10.00 for 10 tags).

..... Early squirrel hunting season opens.

Sept. 4-25 ..... Proposed early Canada goose hunting season in the north zone only. For more information, consult the 2001-2002 Waterfowl Hunting Guide, available at town clerks' and DEP offices and at the DEP website (http:www.dep.state.ct.us) by late August.

Sept. 7-9 ..... **Women in the Outdoors** event (see page 17).

Sept. 15 ..... Report use of bluebird nest box use by sending a Bluebird Nest Box Network survey card to the Wildlife Division.

Sept. 15-Nov. 13 ... First portion of archery deer and turkey hunting seasons.

P.J. FUSCO

The dog pictured in the article about the Dr. John E. Flaherty Field Trial Area in the March/April issue was incorrectly depicted as a field trial dog. Although dogs of this breed can be trained as field trial dogs, the individual dog pictured, known as Montague De Rycharde, is actually a hunting dog.

Just for Kids

Meet The Fish Hawk

What's big, brown and white and hovers above bays, lakes and rivers? A bird called an osprey.

These remarkable birds are found almost worldwide and are usually seen plunging into the water while catching fish, their favorite food. Ospreys can capture fish weighing up to 4 pounds. (That's about as much as an osprey weighs!)

P. J. FUSCO

A Room with a View

Ospreys like to nest on the tops of standing, dead trees (snags). They have also used the tops of utility poles, chimneys and buildings. People have helped ospreys by putting up nesting platforms, tall, flat-topped wooden stands. Ospreys use sticks, seaweed, driftwood, bones, cornstalks and trash when building a nest.

Osprey Ups and Downs

Sixty years ago, there were more ospreys in Connecticut than there are now. Development along the coast and the use of the deadly pesticide DDT, which made osprey egg shells thin, caused problems for these birds. Ospreys are doing better now that DDT is not used anymore in the United States. However, other countries still use harmful pesticides and ospreys need to be watched.

Take a Wild Guess!

(One or more answers may be correct)

1. How large is the wingspan of an osprey?
a. 2 ft b. 3 ft. c. 4 ft. d. 5 ft.

2. How can an osprey lift a big fish?
a. its toes are spiny
b. with two toes in back and toes in front, an osprey can better hold a fish
c. it lifts the fish headfirst

3. When can you see ospreys in Connecticut?
a. summer b. fall c. winter d. spring

Answers:
1. d; 2. a, b, c; 3. a,b,d

How does littering hurt ospreys?

Littering attracts raccoons that can eat eggs or young osprey. Plastic six-pack holders and fishing line, two common types of litter on the beach, can strangle a young osprey.

Connecticut Wildlife

The official bimonthly publication of the DEP Wildlife Division

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CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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