July/August 2019

CONNECTICUT Wildlife

From The Director

This issue of Connecticut Wildlife *is a celebration of successes in wildlife and fisheries conservation. As one of the biologists who intently watched the nesting return of bald eagles to Connecticut after an absence of over four decades, I can remember both the excitement and concern surrounding the 1992 pair. Would they be able to successfully hatch and fledge young? Had we done enough to protect the nest from predators or human disturbance? Would they return? Little did we know then that by 2019, bald eagles would have made a spectacular recovery resulting in a record 81 chicks becoming part of our natural heritage.*

You'll also learn more about the history of fish — and fish stocking — in Connecticut. Long ago glaciers impacted our native fish and populations of Atlantic salmon, shad, and brook trout gave us the reputation of having endless fish resources. Man-made barriers and a changing climate have left a slightly different picture today, but again work is underway to improve and restore habitats.

The connections between wildlife and their habitats — and between each other — is underscored by the example of how healthy growing seasons for trees can result in abundant food for small mammals, which in turn provides food for many birds of prey. You may never look at an acorn in the same way again! Understanding these relationships and appreciating how connected and complex our natural world can be gives us a better appreciation for all the hard work, and science, which goes into conservation.

With the successes also come new challenges, and there is perhaps no group of animals facing more threats than our native turtles. Not only do they face habitat loss, road mortality, predation, and illegal collection, they are also battling competition from non-native species that have been liberated by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the harm they are causing to native wildlife. Not only do our native turtles face competition for food and habitat from these "outsiders," they are often exposed to illnesses, such as ranavirus, that are common in captive reptiles and amphibians and deadly for wild turtles.

One amazing thing could help Connecticut face these new conservation challenges and create more success stories to celebrate. Recovering America's Wildlife Act was reintroduced in Congress in July. This landmark legislation would provide stable funding for all wildlife species. If you love wildlife and natural places, please take a minute to learn more about this legislation. The proactive conservation it would support is not just good for wildlife, it is good for their habitats, the economy, and our physical and mental health. Spend some time outside, marvel in the natural wonders of Connecticut, and think about what a great conservation success story this could be.

Jenny Dickson, DEEP Wildlife Division Director

Connecticut Wildlife

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CONNECTICUT Wildlife

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PHOTO BY P. FUSCO, DEEP WILDLIFE

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The eastern coyote resembles a small, lanky German shepherd dog, but has wide, pointed ears, a long muzzle, yellow eyes, and an uncurled, bushy tail which is carried low to the ground. Its weight averages between 30-50 pounds. Coyotes were first documented in Connecticut in the 1950s. Since then, they have expanded their range and are now common throughout the state.

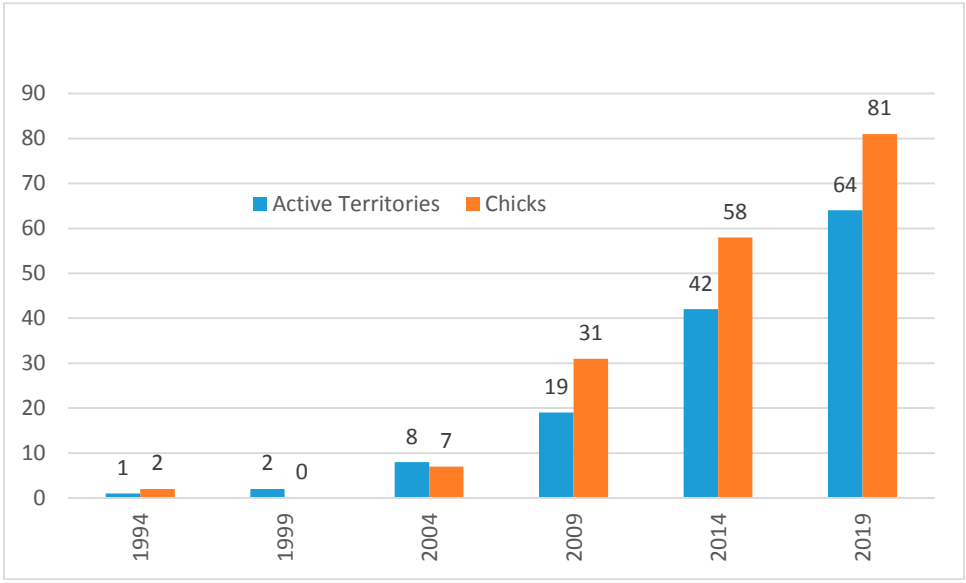
Photo by Paul Fusco

This Used to Be Easy

Written by Brian Hess, DEEP Wildlife Division, photography by Paul J. Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

As Connecticut's bald eagle numbers continue to grow, the task of monitoring bald eagles around the state continues to grow as well. The DEEP Wildlife Division has always relied on volunteers and reports from the public to help monitor nests around the state, and the results from 2019 underline the importance of the observations by citizen scientists in keeping tabs on these birds.

Bald Eagle Productivity, 1994 - 2019



In 2019, Connecticut smashed records for the number of active territories (64; previous record 55), number of successful nests (45; previous record 38), and number of chicks (81; previous record 68). In addition, 14 new nesting territories were reported in 2019, with six of those new nests being successful in raising chicks. While seven of the new nests were reported by long-time eagle volunteers, five were submitted by casual observers who happened to see eagles working on nests around their neighborhoods.

After the pesticide DDT caused massive declines in bald eagle populations across the continental United States, recovery began slowly. This slow pace was a result of the depth of the population decline, the delayed maturity of eagles, and their relatively slow reproductive rate. In Connecticut, the first post-DDT nesting territory was established in spring 1992, decades after the widespread use of DDT was prohibited in Connecticut in 1969 and nationally in the early 1970s. Many people spent countless hours monitoring the 1992 nest and following the progress of the two chicks that hatched.

Wildlife Biologist and eagle nest tree climber, Brian Hess, talks with long time raptor volunteer, Larry Fisher, about the 65-foot climb to reach one of the eagle nests in Fairfield County.

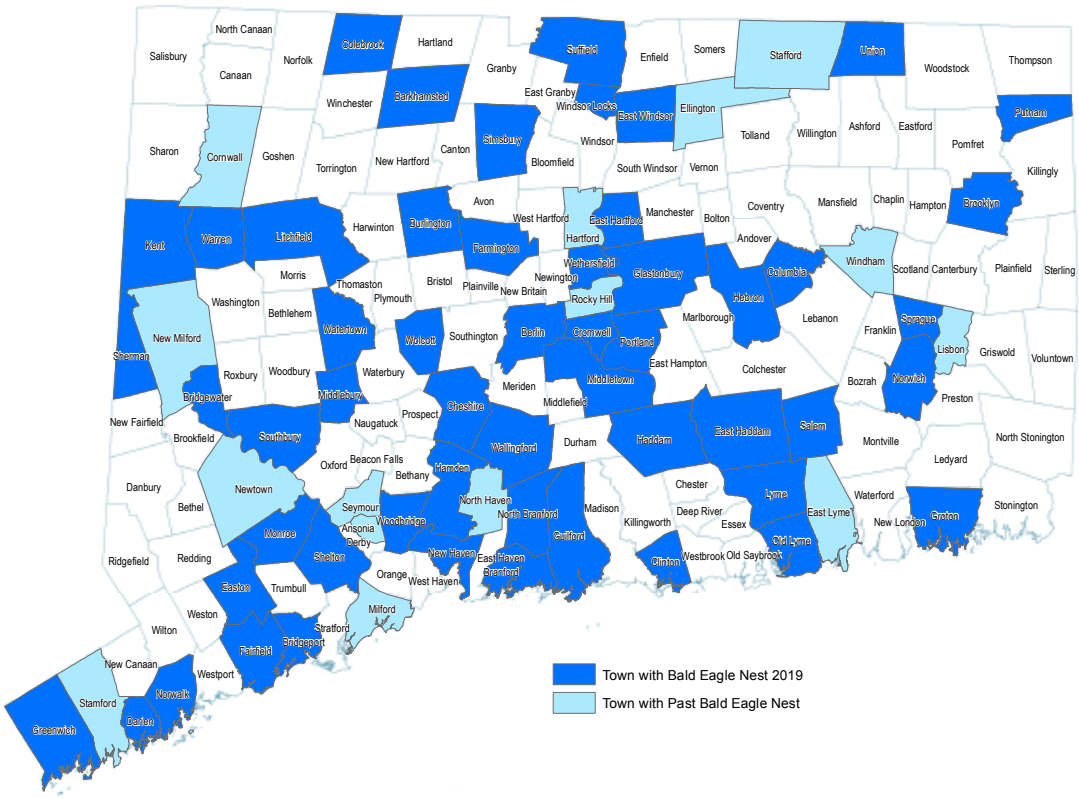
By 1999, 20 years ago, only two nesting territories were active in the state. That season, neither pair was successful and no chicks were produced.

A decade later, the eagle population had begun to climb. In 2009, Connecticut had 19 territories, producing 31 chicks. By this point, the Wildlife Division had begun to rely on volunteers to help collect the data necessary to monitor the population. Nesting territories had radiated throughout the state,

and more people were routinely seeing eagles.

In the past decade, the number of territories in Connecticut has more than tripled. Nesting eagles are widespread across the state and in every county and major watershed. Eagles commonly nest in suburban and urban areas. Managing information on a rapidly expanding population is challenging, and without the dedicated observations of knowledgeable and passionate volunteers statewide, it would be virtually impossible. As the eagle population continues to grow, struggling with the number of nests to monitor is a wonderful problem to have.

Bald Eagles by Connecticut Town, 2019



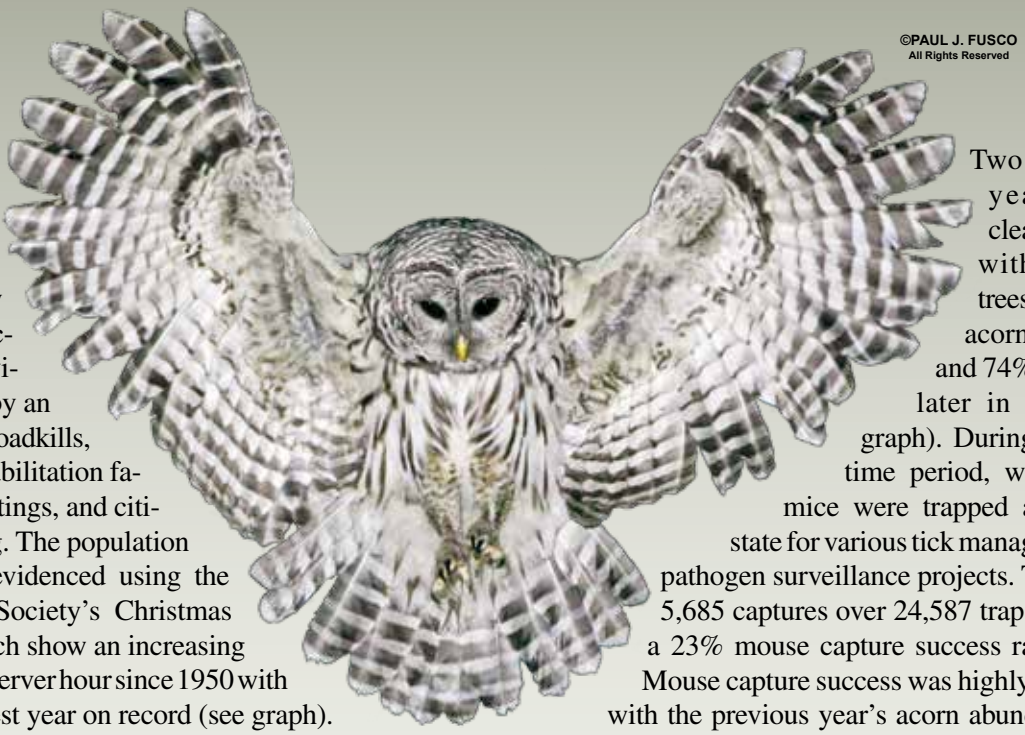
One of seven of bald eagle chicks that were banded by Wildlife Division staff this year.

Bald Eagle Citizen Scientists Wanted

You can help the Wildlife Division collect important data on Connecticut's bald eagles by submitting nest locations and observations starting in early spring and also participating in the annual Midwinter Eagle Survey in January. Look for information on the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/baldeagles* or send an email to Wildlife Division biologist Brian Hess at *Brian.Hess@ct.gov*.

Can Oak Trees and Acorns Influence Raptor Populations?

Written by Scott C. Williams, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Michael A. Gregonis, DEEP Wildlife Division, and Megan A. Linske, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station; photography by Paul J. Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division



Winter 2018–2019 saw a dramatic increase in non-migratory barred owl abundances in Connecticut evidenced anecdotally by an increased number of roadkills, owls taken in by rehabilitation facilities, daytime sightings, and citizen science reporting. The population increase is further evidenced using the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count data which show an increasing trend in sightings/observer hour since 1950 with 2017 being the highest year on record (see graph).

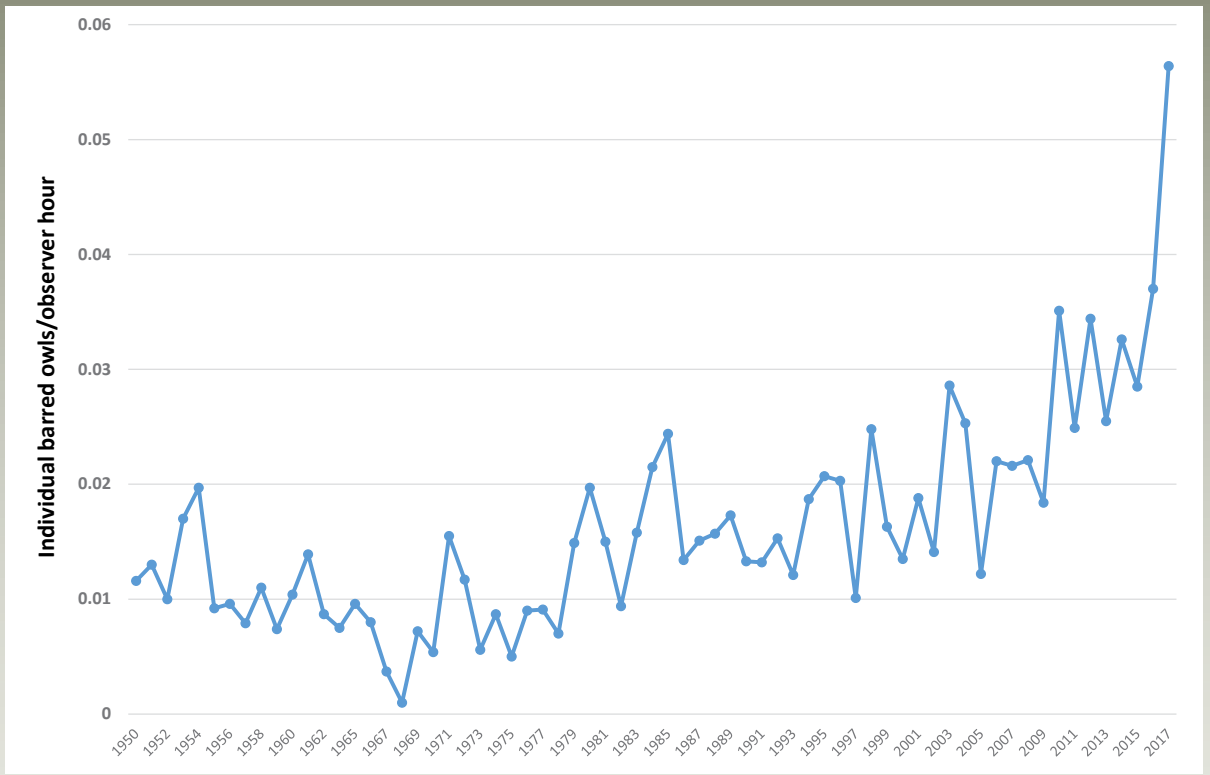
It is well known that the predator/prey relationship is driven both from the bottom-up in terms of increased prey availability in predator populations and top-down through predation decreasing prey populations. However, the dynamic between small mammals and their food source is strictly a bottom-up process. Oaks produce acorns in semi-regular events called masting. Masting episodes occur in numerous plant species and exist to overwhelm seed predators with a super abundance of food. Even if the majority of seeds are consumed, there are still enough viable seeds remaining to insure adequate regeneration. This has been dubbed the "predator satiation hypothesis". Small mammals are found in greater abundances the year following a high mast year due to their ability to overwinter with a more than adequate food supply. This insures increased breeding success through winter and the following spring. While oak masting drives small mammal abundances, small mammal abundances have no influence on oak masting events.

From 2007 to 2018, the relationship between acorn and small mammal abundance was investigated, along with the relationship between the abundance of small mammals, barred owls, and other birds of prey. Annually, a total of 575 red and white oak trees in each of Connecticut's 12 deer and turkey management zones were surveyed for the presence of acorns. Two big mast years were clearly evident with 73% of trees containing acorns in 2010 and 74% five years later in 2015 (see graph). During the same time period, white-footed mice were trapped around the state for various tick management and pathogen surveillance projects. There were 5,685 captures over 24,587 trap nights and a 23% mouse capture success rate overall. Mouse capture success was highly correlated with the previous year's acorn abundance with back-to-back high capture success rates in the two years following the 2015 mast year.

Annual relative abundance of birds of prey was determined using National Audubon Christmas Bird Count data. While the main focus was barred owls, data were also examined for Cooper's hawks, great horned owls, eastern screech owls, red-shouldered hawks, and red-tailed hawks, all of which feed on mice. Sighting data for all six species from 2007 through 2018 was standardized across years. Sighting data for barred owl, Cooper's hawk, and red-shouldered hawk were related, but not statistically significant, with mouse capture data. All three had a peak in sightings in 2017. However, sighting data for eastern screech owl, great horned owl, and red-tailed hawk were significantly associated with mouse capture success.

While the 2007 to 2018 barred owl sightings was not significantly related to mouse trapping success, it is curious that their highest sightings on record in Connecticut occurred in 2017, the second year of back-to-back high mouse abundance. In fact, there was an increase in sightings in 2017 for all six birds of prey. It is suspected that the high mouse years in 2016 (32% capture success) and 2017 (35% capture success) increased nestling survival in both years due to the abundant prey availability. With the significant drop in mouse abundances in 2018 (14% capture success), there

1950-2017 barred owl sightings/observer hour from National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count data.



Mouse capture success and the previous year's acorn abundance.

X-axis values "M08-A07" means 2008 mouse data compared to 2007 acorn data.

were a lot of desperate, inexperienced juvenile birds hunting for limited numbers of mice outside of normal forested habitats making them much more vulnerable and visible to the public. The way acorn abundance impacts small mammals and indirectly the abundance of several birds of prey highlights the interconnectedness of our ecosystems.

Predator/prey relationships are driven from the bottom-up in terms of increased prey availability in predator populations and top-down through predation decreasing prey populations.

Qui Transtulit Sustinet

He who transplanted [fish] still sustains

Written by Mike Beauchene, DEEP Fisheries Division

What does Connecticut's state motto have to do with fish? Well, much more than you think when it comes to her freshwater recreational species.

The legacy of the last glaciers over Connecticut includes some prominent geologic features, like Long Island Sound, the fertile Connecticut River Valley, and occasional large boulders seemingly out of place, called "glacial erratics". The glaciers also shaped Connecticut's native fish communities, leaving us only a handful of native freshwater fish species (as compared to parts of the country that were not covered by ice where fish had tens of thousands of years to evolve and create new species, leading to a much more diverse modern day fish assemblage).

It is hypothesized that Connecticut's native fishes became established as the last glacier retreated. During the initial melting, Long Island Sound was actually a giant freshwater lake fed by several major meltwater streams, including what is now the Connecticut River. The continental shelf south of Long Island was exposed land due to prolonged lowering of the sea level and, as such, was

DEEP FILE PHOTO

Connecticut's early fish culturists had an insatiable appetite to stock a wide variety of fish into many waters across the state. Here is one of the first hatchery trucks used to accomplish the task of "planting" fish.

The black bass, largemouth and smallmouth, is one of the most popular fish introduced to Connecticut and has become widely naturalized and is not supported by stocking. Tens of thousands of hours are spent in the pursuit of these two species of bass.
PHOTO COURTESY M. KURNYK

an area of refuge for freshwater species. As the glacier retreated, more land was uncovered and the sea level began to rise. As a result, the freshwater fish moved inland following the retreating glacier (at glacial pace). Over thousands of years, the networks of rivers and lakes we are familiar with today were formed, each with a population of native fish species.

Even with the glacial legacy, the early colonists were amazed by the bountiful runs of American shad and Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut River and how many of the smaller rivers and streams were "brimming with brook trout". Reports were sent back to King Charles, Monarch of England, indicat-

Freshwater fish species introduced to Connecticut and how they are currently sustained:

Natural reproduction (no stocking)

- Bluegill Sunfish
- Brown Trout (some rivers and streams)
- Bowfin
- Calico Bass
- Channel Catfish (CT River only)
- Common Carp
- Largemouth Bass
- Smallmouth Bass
- Rock Bass
- White Catfish

Mostly by stocking, some natural reproduction

- Northern Pike
- Brown Trout (other than some rivers and streams)

Stocking (no natural reproduction)

- Kokanee Salmon
- Channel Catfish (other than Connecticut River)
- Rainbow Trout
- Walleye

PHOTO COURTESY R. JACOBS, DEEP FISHERIES DIVISION, RETIRED

PHOTO COURTESY K. QUINE

Brook trout are one of Connecticut's most prized and sought after native species. Each year, our hatcheries rear and stock over 100,000 brook trout to support the fishing pressure.

DEEP FILE PHOTO

DEEP FILE PHOTO

The earliest fish "planting" was with recently-hatched fry transported by horse and wagon. One person was tasked with manually agitating the water to make sure the fish had enough oxygen to survive the trip.

ing the "fisheries resources seemed endless". Time would prove otherwise. Within four years of the completion of a dam near Holyoke in 1798, the harvest of Atlantic salmon at the base of the dam resulted in the extirpation of Atlantic salmon from the Connecticut River Watershed. American shad and sturgeon barely escaped a similar fate. The tremendous demand for lumber, the need to clear land for agriculture, and the damming of flowing waters to power millworks of various sorts, led to massive changes to the landscape. Many streams and rivers became inhospitable for native coldwater-loving brook trout, leaving a mere fraction of those present just decades earlier.

Connecticut's native catchable freshwater fish include the American eel, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, white sucker, pumpkinseed, red breast sunfish, yellow perch, and fallfish (see image on the bottom of page 11). All of these were thought to be of lesser value for food and recreation than other species from nearby unglaciated drainages just to the south and west or familiar fish from the motherland.

In response to such dramatic declines and losses and justified by the statement "man's pursuit of fish, for food or sport, has always been reckless", the Connecticut legislature established the Fish Commission in 1866. Their charge was threefold: to restore the runs of salmon, increase the supply of American shad in the principal rivers of the state, and restore fishes to the depleted state waters. Most relevant to this story is the last part of the charge where many species were imported and stocked into Connecticut waters.

For early fisheries managers, *Qui Transtulit Sustinet* was a "no-brainer". They had an insatiable urge to experiment with new species and sought largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill, calico bass, walleye, catfish, and northern pike from the Hudson and Mississippi drainages; lake trout, Arctic grayling, and round whitefish from Maine and Canada; Pacific salmon (sockeye, chinook, coho) and rainbow trout from the West Coast; and common carp, tench, and brown trout from Europe.

Some of these fish, like the largemouth bass and bluegill, have become so widely established across the state that it is difficult to imagine our waters without them. A few, including brown trout and northern pike, are still stocked to sustain recreational fisheries but

would have very small numbers if left to reproduce on their own. Others, like the walleye, rainbow trout, and kokanee salmon, exist only due to stocking, and, finally some just did not work out at all (chinook salmon, round whitefish, lake trout).

Currently, the DEEP Fisheries Division stocks over one million fish annually to support recreational fishing. Stocking follows two strategies. One is called "stock-grow-catch", where recently hatched (fry about 1-1.5 inches) or several month old (fingerlings 4-5 inches) fish are stocked and then grow in the environment to catchable size. Connecticut's fry stocking includes brown trout and kokanee salmon. Note: Atlantic salmon fry are stocked within the Farmington and Salmon Rivers, but not for recreational purposes. Northern pike and walleye are also stocked as fingerlings.

PHOTO COURTESY J. BROWN JR.

The brown trout, imported from Germany, grows a bit larger and can tolerate slightly warmer water temperatures than the native brook trout. Each year, over 225,000 adults and 150,000 juveniles are stocked into Connecticut's waters. Brown trout have some self-sustaining populations and the large, multi-year holdover fish on the Farmington and Housatonic Rivers are highly prized.

The second strategy provides immediate opportunity for catch (stock and catch) by stocking adult-sized fish. The majority are trout (brook, brown, or rainbow) or Atlantic salmon that have been reared in one of three state-owned fish hatcheries. The Fisheries Division also purchases approximately 8,000 channel catfish from a commercial vendor for stocking each May.

When it comes to the freshwater recreational fisheries in Connecticut, her motto, *Qui Transtulit Sustinet* – He Who Transplanted Still Sustains – is very relevant. Many of the recreational species found in her waters are long-established transplants from nearby regions or are currently stocked by the Fisheries Division. The Division hopes you enjoy the many benefits fishing has to offer and take advantage of the diverse fishing opportunities within a short cast of your home. For additional details on Connecticut's fish stocking, refer to our annual fish stocking report on the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/fishing*.

PHOTO COURTESY R. JACOBS, DEEP FISHERIES DIVISION, RETIRED

A Calculating and Clever Raider

The Fish Crow

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

Everyone is familiar with the American crow, but not as many know about its slightly smaller cousin, the fish crow, which is best identified by its short, nasal "*cahr, cahr*" call, as opposed to the familiar and somewhat harsh "*caw, caw*" of the American crow. Fish crows have a lighter, thinner bill, which is noticeable when in direct comparison between the two species. Otherwise, fish crows and American crows can be difficult to distinguish.

Always close to water, fish crows have a somewhat limited range, which includes Atlantic and Gulf coast states from New England to Louisiana. They also occur up the Mississippi River and major tributaries and valleys as far north as central Illinois. They are at the northern limit of their range in New England on the Atlantic coast.

The fish crow's preferred habitats include beaches, marshes, lakes, and rivers. Having an affinity for salt or brackish water, the fish crow is found mainly in tidal areas, and is more common along Connecticut's western shoreline than eastern. It can be found along some of the major river valleys,

A fish crow looks over a Connecticut shorebird nesting site, opportunistically waiting for a chance to make an easy meal of a young chick or eggs from an unguarded nest.

including the Housatonic and Quinnipiac, and especially close to where those rivers empty into Long Island Sound. In urban areas, they may also frequent sources of garbage or scrap food as scavengers.

Fish crows are considered a resident that may move short distances in search of food during winter. At such times, these highly social birds may gather in large flocks to roost. Fish crows have shown some range expansion to the north and inland in recent years.

Behavior and Nesting

These bold and raucous birds are often seen mobbing raptors and other predators, including raccoons. This noisy commotion can be a tip-off for anyone wishing to see a hawk or owl.

Fish crows build stick nests that may be lined with pine needles and hair. They often nest in small colonies consisting of two or three pairs. Undisturbed nesting sites may be reused year to year. Females normally lay a clutch of four or five pale greenish blue eggs with brown spots. The incubation period is approximately 16 to 18 days and young fledge after about 21 days.

Conservation and Concerns

Fish crows are well-known nest raiders. They will opportunistically take eggs and small young of colonial nesting birds, including herons, egrets, ibis, cormorants, gulls, and terns. The nests and young of piping plovers and ducks also are victimized. Fish crows may do immense damage in rookeries. In Connecticut, they are problematic with the protection and management of state-listed nesting shorebirds, such as piping plovers and least terns, both of which have been preyed on by fish crows at some shoreline nesting sites.

While North American breeding bird surveys indicate that fish crow populations have increased slightly since 1966, the birds have also been impacted by illness. Crows and other members of the Corvid family (which includes blue jays) are particularly susceptible to West Nile virus (WNV), which first appeared in our area in summer 1999. Corvid populations have been impacted by this mosquito-borne illness. Because of their vulnerability, crows have served as an indicator species to monitor the presence of WNV across the state and region. By 2010, the steepest part of the crow population decline due to WNV was over. Crows and other Corvids took a huge hit from the virus, but their populations have been rebounding ever since. Populations are gradually becoming immune as resistant individuals survive and breed.

Connecticut's crow hunting season is separated into different timeframes and restricted to certain days. See the annual *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide* or *www.ct.gov/deep/hunting* for specific details.

West Nile Virus

West Nile virus was first identified in 1937 in Uganda in eastern Africa. It was discovered in the United States in summer 1999 in New York. Since then, the virus has spread throughout the U.S. Researchers believe West Nile virus is contracted by humans when a mosquito bites an infected bird and then bites a person.

You can help reduce the threat of West Nile virus and other mosquito-borne illnesses by removing potential mosquito breeding areas, such as standing water. Do not let water pool in buckets or other containers, including old tires. Refresh bird bath water periodically to prevent mosquito larvae from growing. Learn more at *https://portal.ct.gov/mosquito*.

Fish crows are sharp-witted scavengers that will eat whatever they can find, including dead waterfowl.

Wood Ducks Will Grace the 2020 State Duck Stamp

The last year of the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Art Contest goes out the way it came in with the first contest in 2012, selecting a pair of wood ducks as the winning image. A panel of judges recently selected a depiction of a pair of wood ducks painted by Frank Dolphens, Jr., of Omaha, Nebraska, as the winner of DEEP's 2019 Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation (Duck) Stamp Art Contest. In 2012, a pair of wood ducks painted by Richard Clifton won the first artistic contest held by DEEP and adorned the 2013 Duck Stamp.

Second place in the 2019 contest went to JB Basham of North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, with his painting of a pair of Canada geese, while Broderick Crawford of Clayton, Georgia, took third with his painting of blue-winged teal. Paintings were judged in six categories: suitability for reproduction, composition, habitat suitability for that species, anatomical correctness, eye appeal, originality, and whether a recognizable Connecticut landmark or habitat was used. Frank Dolphens' painting will be the image for the 2020 Connecticut Duck Stamp.

Changes Are Coming to the CT Duck Stamp

Beginning in 2021, the Connecticut Duck Stamp will feature the winner of the Connecticut Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest. This change is being made so that future stamps will feature artwork from Connecticut artists, while at the same time encourage conservation awareness in young people through the Junior Duck Stamp Program. Every student, from kindergarten through high school, who participates in the Junior Duck Stamp Competition is provided with a limited curriculum on wetland conservation, waterfowl, and nature in general. The program encourages students to explore their natural world, invites them to investigate biology and wildlife management principles, and challenges them to express and share what they have learned with others. As the use of technology has increased, a general connection with nature and the outdoors has decreased. It is anticipated that in some small part, this program can help connect young people with the natural world. The Connecticut Junior Duck Stamp Program, which is administered by the Connecticut Waterfowl Association, will also begin awarding monetary scholarships to the schools with winners from each age category (kindergarten-3rd grade, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, grades 10-12). The Connecticut Waterfowl Association, a conservation group created in 1967 dedicated to wetlands and waterfowl conservation, has administered this Program since its beginning in 1987.

More information about the Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program and the Connecticut Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Program can be found on the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/CTDuckStamp*.

Protect Our Cherished Wildlife Habitat – Purchase a CT Duck Stamp

The Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program is a great example of how conservation works – concerned citizens paying into a program that was formed to protect and enhance vital habitat. Over 3,145 acres of critical wetlands have been protected in our state using Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp funds. These wetlands benefit not only waterfowl, but also a multitude of other wildlife species, like herons, egrets, fish, and amphibians.

Migratory bird hunters are required to purchase a Connecticut stamp to participate in migratory bird hunting seasons. Other licensed hunters are encouraged to purchase a Connecticut Duck Stamp (even if they do not participate in the migratory bird hunting seasons), and nonhunters as well, to show their support for the conservation and purchase of wetland habitats. Stamps can be purchased for $17 each wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold: participating town clerks, participating retail agents, DEEP License and Revenue (79 Elm Street in Hartford), and through the Online Sportsmen Licensing System (*www.ct.gov/deep/SportsmenLicensing*).

P. J. FUSCO

CE/FS Volunteer Instructors Attend "Trapping Matters Workshop"

Written by Paul Benjunas, DEEP Wildlife Division

In early June 2019, volunteer instructors with the DEEP Wildlife Division's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program attended the "Trapping Matters Workshop" hosted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Hadley, Massachusetts. The focus of the workshop was to help participants understand and better communicate the benefits of regulated trapping and the ways in which it contributes to wildlife management programs. The topic of regulated trapping is one of the most contentious and least understood subjects within wildlife management programs, and it can be challenging discussing the subject due to a prevalence of misinformation and a lack of knowledge of Best Management Practices. Some of the topics covered at the workshop included the role of trapping in wildlife management, effective means of communication, and trapping techniques. The five key messages recommended for communicating the role of regulated trapping include:

From left to right: Keith Cagle, Keith Hoffman (CE/FS Program Assistant Coordinator), Will Cassidy (Wildlife Division R3 Coordinator), Jenny Kilburn, Jules Perreault, Dave Shepack, Paul Benjunas (Wildlife Division Outreach Program), Andrew Gargano (R3 Contractor); Scott Kneeland, Fred Becker Jr., Rob Lee, Tip Garritt, Don Dandelski, and Fred Becker Sr.

- Regulated trapping does not cause wildlife to become threatened or endangered.
- Trapping is managed through scientifically-based regulations that are strictly enforced.
- State wildlife agencies continually review and develop rules, regulations, education programs, and capture methods that consider animal welfare.
- Regulated trapping provides many benefits, such as reducing wildlife damage to crops and property.
- Most of the animal can be used as clothing, food, or other useful products.

Enhanced information and messaging can result in a well-informed public, and based on survey results, most people are not aware that trapping is a regulated activity. For example, the beaver is recognized as one of North America's most important wildlife species, renowned for its ability to create sizeable wetland habitat for a host of plant and animal species. Unfortunately, in densely populated Connecticut, beavers also frequently come into conflict with landowners, creating extensive and costly damages. Connecticut's beaver management program relies on a regulated trapping season to protect property from severe damage. After completing the workshop, volunteer instructors and Wildlife Division staff are better suited to effectively communicate the importance of regulated trapping in Connecticut.

Using Snapping Turtles to Gauge Water Quality in CT Watersheds

Written by Bobby Greco, DEEP Wildlife Division

One of Connecticut's most common and widespread species, the snapping turtle, occurs in a variety of wetland habitats across the state, including ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, and marshes. During the nesting season (mid-May through mid-June), sightings of females on Connecticut roadways is a common occurrence as they attempt to seek out upland habitat to lay eggs. As omnivores, snapping turtles serve an important role in freshwater ecosystems, feeding on a variety of plants and animals, including carrion (dead animals). As hatchlings and juveniles, they are vulnerable to predation by birds, mammals, fish, large frogs, and snakes, with only a lucky few surviving to adulthood.

The DEEP Wildlife Division, in cooperation with UCONN, is undertaking research to investigate water quality within the four major watersheds in Connecticut, using snapping turtles as indicator species of water quality and overall ecosystem health.

D. QUINN

Wildlife Division seasonal resource assistant Bobby Greco holding one of the larger snapping turtles caught in the study. This turtle weighed 42 pounds and is likely over 40 years old!

How Are Snapping Turtles Connected to Water Quality?

Snapping turtles play a crucial role in their aquatic ecosystems as bioindicators. Bioindicators are organisms that can be studied to determine the health of the ecosystem they inhabit. In this case, snapping turtles are being used to determine levels of aquatic contaminants in the watershed they live in. Because snapping turtles are long-lived, widely distributed, and relatively tolerant of human disturbances and environmental impacts, they accumulate a variety of contaminants over their lifetime. Therefore, analyzing samples of blood and other tissues collected from snapping turtles can help determine watershed contamination levels. Data collected from this research will not only guide legislation for cleaner water in Connecticut, but also help in the development of protection measures for this species as it continues to face ever-increasing threats to its survival.

Field Study

Over the past two years, 56 snapping turtles have been captured across the state in the Connecticut, Housatonic, Thames, and Quinnipiac River watersheds. Within each of these four major watersheds, 14 individuals (7 from each river and 7 from surrounding ponds and lakes within the watershed) were captured and sampled. Turtles were captured using two methods: hand capture from a kayak (the more exciting method) and baited hoop traps. Blood samples and toenail clippings were collected from each individual and sent to UCONN for

P. J. FUSCO

contaminant testing. Samples are currently being analyzed; be sure to keep an eye out for a follow-up report detailing the results of this exciting study.

Conservation Concerns

Although widespread, populations of snapping turtles appear to be declining across the state. There are many reasons for this decline, including high incident rates of road mortality, commercial harvest and export to meet international market demands, and historic persecution due to their false reputation for eating game fish and waterfowl (scientists have proven that snapping turtles rarely prey on either). Fortunately, Connecticut's snapping turtle harvest is strictly regulated and, as of October 1, 2018, the commercial harvest and export of snapping turtles from Connecticut has been banned.

Other threats can be mitigated by driving more attentively during the spring and summer months when snapping turtles are most active and through a greater understanding of these animals to prevent indiscriminate killing. If you have snapping turtle concerns or questions, assistance can be found on the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/wildlife* or by calling the Wildlife Division at 860-424-3011.

Sliding Under the Radar –
Invasive Turtles in Connecticut Waters

Written by Paul Benjunas, CT DEEP Wildlife Division

D. QUINN

A large, non-native red-eared slider basks among several smaller native painted turtles. Sliders are large and notoriously aggressive and can easily dominate prime basking sites over native turtle species.

Native turtle populations are faced with many challenges, including habitat loss and degradation, mortality from roads, agricultural machinery, fishing bycatch, and predators, and competition with NON-NATIVE, invasive species. Connecticut is home to 12 species of turtles, including four sea turtles. In recent years, the Wildlife Division has experienced an increase in the number of reports of non-native turtles seen in Connecticut waters or digging nests near waterbodies.

P. BENJUNAS

This red-eared slider was unintentionally caught as part of a snapping turtle research project. Red-eared sliders can be distinguished from painted turtles by the large red markings found behind the eye.

Several documented invasive turtle species look similar to Connecticut's native eastern painted turtle, and it is important for people to distinguish the painted turtle (and other native turtles) from invasive species, especially during spring and early summer when the Wildlife Division receives the majority of calls and emails about nesting turtles. One of the most frequently found invasives is the red-eared slider, which was commonly sold at pet shops, markets, and dime stores prior to October 2018. This turtle's indigenous range broadly covers the Midwestern states and extends east to West Virginia, west to eastern New Mexico, and south into northeastern Mexico.

Painted turtles and red-eared sliders are similar in appearance. The painted turtle has bright yellow markings along its head, and the red markings along its neck and shell help give this turtle its common name. It can be further distinguished by its dark shell, which has olive lines running across the carapace (upper shell), dividing the large scutes (scales). The margin of both the carapace and plastron (bottom shell) have black and red markings. The limbs also have yellow and red

stripes. The plastron is typically yellow, but may be stained a rust/red color. Males can be distinguished from females by their long front claws, long tail, and smaller size. Red-eared sliders can be distinguished from painted turtles by the large red markings found directly behind the eye (for which the slider is named) and their much larger size.

Owning a red-eared slider or other turtle species was popularized in the late 1980s when the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were at the height of their pop culture fame. Many pet owners who purchase exotic turtles are not fully aware of the care requirements and may not know that most exotic slider species live for 30 years in captivity and can reach a carapace length of 12 inches. Countless numbers of these exotic pet turtles, however, never live out their lives with their initial owners and are instead wrongly released into the wild by owners who no longer wish to care for them.

P. BENJUNAS (2)

This yellow-bellied slider was found basking at Cromwell Meadows Wildlife Management Area. It was likely a pet that was wrongfully released into the wild.

Given that the red-eared slider is an "omnivorous generalist" (eats almost any kind of plant or animal matter), as well as highly adaptable to a variety of freshwater habitats (and even brackish water on occasion), it is no surprise that this species now has a stable overwintering population in Connecticut. This is concerning for painted and other native turtles who now have to compete with sliders for food and basking sites. Red-eared sliders are large and notoriously aggressive, and can easily dominate prime basking sites over some of our less aggressive native turtle species. What is even more concerning is that introduced, non-native turtles also have the potential to carry parasites and diseases that could negatively impact wild turtle populations.

The painted turtle is one of Connecticut's most common species of turtle. Note the red markings along its neck and shell, as well as the olive lines running across the carapace (upper shell).

To prevent more exotic sliders from ending up in Connecticut waterbodies, regulations were recently passed prohibiting the sale of red-eared sliders, as well as the release of these turtles into the wild.

Another invasive species that has been documented in Connecticut is the yellow-bellied slider, which is native to southeastern Virginia southward through the Carolinas, Georgia, northern Florida, and eastern Alabama. The carapace of the yellow-bellied slider is typically brown to black in color and, as the name implies, the plastron is mostly yellow with black spots along the edges. The skin is often olive green with prominent yellow patches along the face, neck, and legs. Similar to the red-eared slider, the yellow-bellied slider is omnivorous and highly adaptable to a variety of freshwater habitats. Earlier this spring, a large female yellow-bellied slider was captured and removed from Cromwell Meadows Wildlife Management Area, a site that has an abundance of eastern painted turtles.

While there is a large market for exotic reptiles and amphibians in the United States and worldwide, it is ultimately the pet owner's responsibility to ensure proper care for their animals throughout their lifetimes and to NEVER release an unwanted pet into the wild. Owning a pet turtle can be a 30-year commitment, and should be strongly considered prior to purchasing. Take the time to familiarize yourself with Connecticut's native turtle species to help with distinguishing them from non-native turtles. Any possible sightings of invasive turtles or other exotic pets in the wild should be reported to the Wildlife Division at 860-424-3011 (Monday through Friday, 8:30 AM-4:30 PM) or DEEP's 24-hour Dispatch Center at 860-424-3333 after hours, weekends, and holidays (photos are helpful). Learn about Connecticut's native turtles at *www.ct.gov/deep/YearofTurtle*.

Report Color-banded Martins

Written by Paul Benjunas, DEEP Wildlife Division

P. FUSCO (2)

The purple martin is one of North America's most beloved songbirds. It is known for its skillful aerial exhibitions, tolerance of humans, and pleasant twittering call. Humans have long sought to attract purple martins. Native Americans hung hollow gourds in saplings or on poles to encourage nesting in their villages. When European settlers arrived in the New World, they also adopted the custom of hanging gourds for martins. Today, the entire eastern race of purple martins (east of the Rocky Mountains) is totally dependent on humans for supplying them with nesting sites in the form of specially-designed houses or hollow gourds. If humans were to stop supplying martins with homes, they would likely disappear as a breeding bird in eastern North America.

Fortunately, several purple martin colonies are established in Connecticut on state and private land, and these colonies are thriving, thanks to a highly dedicated group of volunteer landlords. The Wildlife Division initiated a project in 2011 to learn more about the survival rates of purple martins, which involves visiting colonies to place identifying leg bands on young martins before they fledge from their nest boxes or nesting gourds. Through this study, biologists can track and assess movement patterns of the birds from their hatching location to their breeding locations and future nesting sites. All of the young birds banded at each purple martin colony are given colored bands specific to that colony location. This allows the birds to be identified while in flight and also keeps track of the colony they hatched from. This year, DEEP Wildlife Division staff and volunteers banded 772 purple martin chicks from seven different colonies.

A purple martin colony is not an assemblage of birds that travels or functions as a flock. Rather, it is a random grouping of birds attracted to a favorable breeding site. Colony members arrive and depart independently of each other. Purple martins seek natural cavities, gourds, or man-made apartment houses for nesting that are 12 feet or more above ground. Martins will return to the same nest site year after year as long as the habitat conditions meet their needs. Purple martins exhibit a stronger communal lifestyle than most other birds and will nest in colonies of varying sizes. This tolerance of other birds extends primarily to other martins and not to aggressive competitors like starlings and house sparrows.

For the study to be successful, these banded birds need to be seen again – and reported. That is where you come in. We are asking residents to watch for banded purple martins and tell us what they have seen. Observations of color-banded purple martins should be reported to the DEEP Wildlife Division at *deep.wildlife@ct.gov*.

Thank You, Martin Landlords!

The Wildlife Division would like to thank all of the purple martin landlords in Connecticut who manage colonies on their properties. Being a martin landlord requires having the perfect habitat in which to establish a colony on their property, as well as time and dedication to monitor and regularly check nest houses or gourds. Nest checks occur at least every five to seven days during the entire nesting season until the chicks have fledged. One of the benefits of frequent checks is that potential problems, such as nest parasites, can be addressed early. Another benefit to their work is that they are able to determine the approximate age of the chicks. This information is extremely helpful when it comes time for Division staff to band the chicks and collect data. Those who have an interest in becoming a purple martin landlord should visit the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/purplemartin* to learn more about what is required to be a successful landlord, including appropriate habitat, nest house or gourd options, and how to manage colonies.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act Reintroduced in the U.S. Congress

An unprecedented alliance of business, academic, tribal and conservation leaders has united to provide a solution to one of America's greatest threats – the decline of our fish and wildlife and their natural habitats. Scientists estimate that one-third of wildlife species in the United States are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without much needed funding for their proactive conservation. Healthy, sustainable fish and wildlife populations not only reduce the regulatory burden and uncertainty for businesses, they drive many sectors of our economy, especially the outdoor recreation industry.

The solution to this wildlife crisis is passage of the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act, introduced on July 12, 2019, by Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE). The bill will dedicate $1.3 billion annually to state fish and wildlife agencies to implement their science-based wildlife action plans and an additional $97.5 million for tribal fish and wildlife managers to conserve fish and wildlife on tribal lands and waters. This will provide dedicated funding so state and tribal wildlife managers can proactively conserve fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need in a voluntary, non-regulatory manner before federal listing under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. All of this can be done without additional taxes.

The Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife's purpose is to secure dedicated funding for proactive conservation of our nation's most precious natural resources, our fish and wildlife. This effort has expanded out of the strong partnership and recommendations created by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources, consisting of members representing the outdoor recreation, retail, and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, sportsmen's and other conservation groups and state, tribal, and federal fish and wildlife agencies.

Not since enactment of the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts, which provided critical funding for many fish and wildlife species on the brink of extinction, have we had an opportunity to pass legislation of such importance to protecting what is every American's birthright – our great natural heritage. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is the most important conservation legislation in a generation.

Please visit *OurNatureUSA.com* or the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/AllianceforFishandWildlife* and urge your U.S. Representative to support passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act so that future generations may enjoy the same abundant fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation opportunities that we have today.

Volunteers and Staff Band Canada Geese throughout the State

Each year, the Wildlife Division captures resident Canada geese during their annual molt in an effort to collect important data and mark the birds with identifying leg bands. Waterfowl such as Canada geese are unique because unlike other birds, they simultaneously shed their primary feathers and become temporarily flightless for approximately one month each year. Biologists take advantage of this flightless period by driving molting geese across land and/or water and corralling them into a portable net where they are aged, sexed, banded, and released. Information derived from banding is used by researchers for various purposes, including assessing distribution of harvest, productivity, population size, and survival rates.

A total of 1,565 geese were captured this past season, which included 931 new birds and 634 previously marked geese. Geese were captured at 31 different sites and capture size at each location ranged from six to 299 geese. Banding sites were distributed statewide with a minimum of one site per county.

As always, volunteers were an integral part of the goose banding project this year. Volunteers spent over 628 hours and drove almost 6,000 miles assisting us! Without the help of volunteers, we would not be able to capture and band as many geese as we did. Those interested in volunteering for next year's goose banding project should contact Wildlife Division biologist Kelly Kubik at *kelly.kubik@ct.gov* or 860-418-5960.

Kelly Kubik, DEEP Wildlife Division

P. FUSCO

Happy 75th Birthday Smokey Bear

There are icons and then there is Smokey Bear. Iconic mascots and images come and go, but Smokey and his one clear message "Only you can prevent wildfires" has stood the test of time – 75 years to be exact. Smokey Bear was born on Aug. 9, 1944, when the U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council agreed that a fictional bear would be the symbol for their joint effort to promote forest fire prevention. Artist Albert Staehle was asked to paint the first poster of Smokey Bear. It depicted a bear pouring a bucket of water on a campfire and saying "Care will prevent 9 out of 10 fires." Smokey Bear soon became very popular, as his image appeared on a variety of forest fire prevention materials. In 1947, his slogan became the familiar "Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires!" Then in spring 1950, a young bear cub found himself caught in a burning forest in the Capitan Mountains of New Mexico. He took refuge in a tree, and while managing to stay alive, was left badly burned. The firefighters who retrieved him were so moved by his bravery, they named him Smokey. News about this real bear named Smokey spread across the Nation, and he was soon given a new home at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. The living symbol of Smokey Bear, he played an important role in spreading messages of wildfire prevention and forest conservation. Smokey died in 1976 and was returned to Capitan, New Mexico, where he is buried in the State Historical Park.

COURTESY U.S. FOREST SERVICE (2)

(Right) First appearing in an advertisement sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service and Wartime Advertising Council on August 9, 1944, Smokey Bear is an early icon of fire prevention. (Above) The living symbol of Smokey Bear was rescued from a New Mexico forest fire in 1950 and flown to a veterinary clinic in a Piper PA-12 Super Cruiser by Raymond Bell, New Mexico's first "flying game warden".

Smokey has appeared with thousands and thousands of children throughout his illustrious career, leaving them with a powerful understanding of what they can do to prevent wildfires. He is continuing to spread his message to a new generation about how the vast majority of destructive wildfires are started by careless behavior, like not properly putting out a campfire or adults tossing cigarettes out of a car window. Learn more about Smokey Bear and how to prevent wildfires at *www.smokeybear.com*.

Adapted from information provided on the U.S. Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us.

Avoiding Mosquitoes

West Nile virus and eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) have been detected at certain Connecticut locations this year. Residents are encouraged to take steps to avoid mosquito bites:

- Minimize time spent outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active;
- Be sure door and window screens are tight-fitting and in good repair;
- Wear shoes, socks, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors for long periods of time, or when mosquitoes are more active;
- Wear light-colored clothing made of tightly woven materials that keep mosquitoes away from the skin;
- Use mosquito netting when sleeping outdoors or in an unscreened structure and to protect small children;
- Consider the use of mosquito repellent, according to directions, when it is necessary to be outdoors.

The response to mosquito transmitted diseases is a collaborative effort involving the DEEP, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Department of Public Health, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Pathobiology at UCONN. These agencies monitor mosquito populations and the potential public health threat of mosquito-borne diseases. Information on mosquito-borne diseases, test results, and data on human infections can be found at *https://portal.ct.gov/mosquito*.

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Order on-line with a credit card through the DEEP Store at: www.ct.gov/deep/WildlifeMagazine

Conservation Calendar

Sept. 15 ..... **Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day**, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, at Hammonasset Beach State Park (Meigs Point Area), in Madison. Lots of fun activities for the whole family are planned for this free event that explores Connecticut's fish and wildlife resources and legacy of outdoor traditions. Go to *www.ct.gov/deep/DiscoverOutdoorCT* for more details.

Sept. 28 ..... **National Hunting and Fishing Day**, which is celebrated the fourth Saturday of every September, is the most effective grassroots effort undertaken to promote the outdoor sports and conservation. Learn more at *www.nhfday.org*.

2019 Hunting and Fishing Season Dates

Sept. 2-30 ..... Early September Canada Goose Season (north zone)

Sept. 14-30 ..... Early September Canada Goose Season (south zone)

Sept. 15 ..... Opening day of the deer bowhunting season on private land

Sept. 16 ..... Opening of the deer bowhunting season on state land and the fall turkey bowhunting season on state and private land

Oct. 5 ..... Junior Waterfowl Hunter Training Day (one of two days; learn more at *www.ct.gov/deep/JuniorHunter*)

Oct. 5-31 ..... Fall Firearms Turkey Season on state and private land

Oct. 19 ..... Opening day of the Small Game Season

Oct. 12 ..... Junior Pheasant Hunter Training Day (find out about special events specifically for junior pheasant hunters at *www.ct.gov/deep/JuniorHunter*)

*Consult the 2019 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide, 2019-2020 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide, and 2019 Connecticut Fishing Guide for specific season dates and details. Guides are available at DEEP facilities, town halls, and outdoor equipment stores, and also on the DEEP website (**www.ct.gov/deep/hunting; www.ct.gov/deep/fishing**). Go to **www.ct.gov/deep/sportsmenlicensing** to purchase Connecticut hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as required permits and stamps. The system accepts payment by VISA or MasterCard.*

Connecticut Native and Dedicated Wildlife Biologist in Delaware Passes: Wayne C. Lehman

The wildlife conservation community lost a dedicated biologist August 8, 2019, with the passing of Wayne Lehman. A wildlife biologist with the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife for 30 years, Wayne was a Connecticut native, growing up in Manchester and studying wildlife conservation at the University of Connecticut. Wayne was a lifelong outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting, fishing, and wildlife photography. He helped establish the Delaware Sportsmen Against Hunger Program, served as an instructor and evaluator for the Delaware Envirothon, and, above all, loved to share his passion for wildlife conservation and knowledge of the outdoors with young people. The DEEP Wildlife Division would like to share our condolences with the Lehman family. We are confident that Wayne's contributions to wildlife conservation will have a lasting impact.

Sign up to receive *Wildlife Highlights*, a free, electronic newsletter for anyone interested in Connecticut's wildlife and the outdoors! *www.ct.gov/deep/WildlifeHighlights*

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P. J. FUSCO

Black bears and gray squirrels are not the only culprits who raid bird feeders! This raccoon found a sweet, tasty meal from a hummingbird feeder. Other culprits that visit seed feeders include wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, opossums, and more. Make sure you are not regularly feeding other wildlife at bird feeding stations to avoid having conflicts with these animals.