May / June 2002

Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES ● WILDLIFE DIVISION

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From the Director

Forty years ago, a biologist named Rachel Carson wrote a book entitled Silent Spring. *This landmark novel served as a warning of the environmental consequences due to the careless use of chemicals to control plant and animal pests. In describing a hypothetical town that discovered, too late, how the misuse of pesticides had cost them the gifts of nature and their quality of life, she wrote, "There was a strange stillness…It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh."*

Her concept of a birdless world strikes me particularly during the spring turkey season. Any turkey hunter will tell you how the May woods come alive at dawn. Even if the nearest gobbler is five miles away, the fluted song of the wood thrush, the streak of a scarlet tanager, or a close-up encounter with an inquisitive chickadee lets you know that the woods are alive; and that you are a part of it. How interesting it is to sit in camouflaged silence being entertained by the bird life around you. I can't imagine the spring woods without the birds.

May is the month to celebrate our awareness and appreciation of birds. They are diverse, colorful, approachable, visible daily reminders of the fact that we are players in the web of life. Ecologists use the term "community" to describe the association of interacting plants and animals living in one place. Unfortunately, too frequently, humans dominate the community, rather than interact with it. Given our technological advances, we face an increasing danger that we could destroy nature's processes without ever knowing it. As in Silent Spring, *birds are barometers for the health of our habitats and quality of life.*

Connecticut is fortunate to have many conservation organizations and nature centers that offer spring bird walks led by knowledgeable individuals. Take advantage of these opportunities to learn more about the natural world around us through the presence of birds. Don't be intimidated if you are inexperienced since most of these experts are thrilled to teach. The next time your child complains that life is boring or when you are searching for something different and enriching for the family to do – think outside and think of birds. Birding is a hobby that is fascinating, free, and a wonderful opportunity to learn more about your "community."

In my view, the only prospect more alarming than a "silent spring" would be a silent spring where no one noticed.

Dale W. May

Cover:

The Wildlife Division receives several calls every year about snapping turtles digging nests in people's yards. The best action to take is to leave the turtle to lay its eggs. Once finished, the turtle will cover the nest and return to its aquatic habitat. To learn more about turtles, see page 10.

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. Each issue of Connecticut Wildlife *contains articles reporting on Wildlife Division projects funded entirely or in part with federal aid monies.*

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Problem Bear Euthanized

On the evening April 17, 2002, the Department of Environmental Protection's Wildlife Tranquilization Team, comprised of Conservation Officers and Wildlife Biologists, euthanized a 225 pound adult female black bear in the town of Goshen. The bear had broken through a screened window and entered a family residence earlier that afternoon in Goshen. It then roamed throughout the unoccupied house. The DEP Wildlife Tranquilization Team was called upon to remove the bear. This bear had been the frequent cause of problems in the area for over three years and was the source of over 50 complaints received by the DEP. Over time, the problems caused by this bear were becoming more numerous, as well as more serious.

"With a long history of problem behavior in three states, and after many attempts to alter this bear's behavior using nonlethal means, we were forced to take a responsible action to euthanize the bear," said David K. Leff, DEP Deputy Commissioner. "All other options had been fully exhausted."

In May of 2001 the bear entered two residences in Litchfield by breaking screens and entering through a porch. The DEP had already received several complaints about the bear this spring, including an incident on March 19, 2002, when the bear approached a resident and showed no signs of fear after repeated attempts to scare the bear away.

The bear had been captured twice in Connecticut (May 15, 2000 and June 4, 2000) and was subjected to aversive conditioning prior to its release. On one occasion it was moved approximately 35 miles to a more remote habitat. However, moving the bear did not work. The bear soon returned to the capture area and continued its bold behavior. In addition, attempts to aversively condition the bear by using rubber buckshot and noisemakers were unsuccessful in altering its behavior. The bear will be necropsied (post-mortem assessment). The carcass will be used for education and training.

"Unfortunately, euthanizing the bear was the last resort regarding this serious situation," said Dale W. May, Director of DEP's Wildlife Division. "This bear was extremely bold and has shown no fear of humans, dogs, and even gunfire. The bear had a known history of problem behavior in Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut."

It is rare for bears to exhibit this level of habituation and boldness towards humans. The DEP receives many bear complaints and sightings and most can be addressed through education and nonlethal methods. The DEP has expended much effort in educating the public and responding to bear situations with the goal of balancing a growing bear population with public interests. Connecticut's bear population is increasing and estimated to number over 100. Several bears have been killed by automobiles in Connecticut in the last several years.

The black bear is Connecticut's largest terrestrial mammal, with some males weighing over 300 pounds. Their normal behavior is to avoid humans and, as such, most bears exist compatibly with people. However, bears that develop behavior to boldly approach humans, killing livestock, or entering buildings, can create unpredictable encounters that result in legitimate concerns for the public's safety.

Peregrine Falcon Webcam Is Back!

From April to early July, 2000, web surfers were able to watch a pair of nesting state endangered peregrine falcons through the *Peregrine Watch at Travelers Tower* webcam, the first of its kind in Connecticut. Viewers were introduced to Amelia, an adult female peregrine falcon that was born in Greece, New York, in 1994. In 1997, she moved to Hartford's Travelers Tower, where she has returned each year with her mate to nest. So far, she has produced eight offspring; two chicks in 2000 in front of webcam watchers.

In 2001, the webcam was put back in operation in anticipation that the peregrines would return to the nest again. The peregrines did return, but the eggs were not laid in view of the cameras. However, by the end of April, both the peregrines and the eggs had disappeared for unknown reasons.

The peregrines returned to the Travelers Tower again this year and the webcam was back on the Internet in April. One egg was laid in the nest on March 24 or 25. Normally, three to four eggs are laid over an interval of two to three days. The absence of additional eggs in the nest was a concern of biologists. The cold, wet weather conditions during the last week of March and the lack of both birds tending the egg may have rendered the egg unviable. Biologists are watching the activities of the peregrines carefully, with the hope that both birds will incubate the egg and the nest will be successful.

To find a link to the *Peregrine Watch at Travelers Tower* webcam, visit the DEP's website at http://.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife; click on the Special Features Section to access the Wildlife Division's peregrine falcon page.

***Peregrine Watch at Travelers Tower* is a partnership of the Science Center of Connecticut, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and Travelers Insurance.**

Public Hearing on Canada Goose Management:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold public hearings across the country in April and May to seek public comments on its recently released draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on resident Canada goose management. The draft EIS analyzes options for managing rapidly growing populations of nonmigratory, or resident, Canada geese in order to reduce and stabilize resident Canada goose populations, reduce conflicts with humans and minimize impacts to property and human health and safety. Connecticut residents can voice their concerns and suggestions at a public meeting scheduled for **Tuesday, May 21, 2002, at 7:00 PM**, at the Holiday Inn, 80 Newtown Road in Danbury, CT. Stay tuned to *Connecticut Wildlife* for more on this topic.

More Bald Eagles Nesting in CT this Year

Written by Julie Victoria, Nonharvested Wildlife Biologist

The Wildlife Division has been busy tracking nesting eagles in Connecticut. By early April 2002, eight eagle pairs had set up territories, built nests or were sitting on eggs. Last year there were four active pairs in the state. Only 10 years ago, the first successful bald eagle nest since the 1950s was documented.

P.J.FUSCO

A bald eagle perches near one of Connecticut's newest eagle nests as morning fog burns off.

Nests Need Protection

The first year that a pair of bald eagles begins to nest is a very critical and tentative time. If human activity, whether intentional or unintentional, continually disturbs eagles off their nest, the nest may fail and the pair will not return to the site. The Division doesn't disclose the locations of nests to protect the eagles from human disturbance and out of respect to the landowners who do not want trespassers on their land. All but one of the pairs are nesting on private property. What is really exciting is the distribution of the pairs throughout the state: three are in Hartford County, two are in Litchfield County, and one pair each is in New London County, New Haven County and Middlesex County.

Fall and Rise of CT's Eagles

The bald eagle declined throughout the United States due to human disturbance at nest sites; the loss of waterside habitat and nesting trees; intentional shooting by poachers; illegal trapping and the contamination of food sources by pesticides like DDT. By 1963, only 417 nesting pairs were found in the lower 48 states. In 1973, the bald eagle was listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Prior to the 1990s, the last documented bald eagle nesting in the state occurred on the Connecticut River in Middlesex County in the 1950s. The rapid decline of bald eagles was directly attributed to the effects of pesticides on breeding populations. The most significant factor in the recovery of the bald eagle was the restriction placed on the use of organochlorine pesticides. Many of these pesticides were banned from production in the United States. In 1992, the first successful bald eagle nest was reported in Connecticut since the 1950s. In 1997, a second pair started breeding and, in 2001, a third and fourth pair began nesting in Connecticut.

From Endangered to Threatened

On July 12, 1995, the bald eagle was reclassified from an endangered species to a threatened species in the lower 48 states. On July 6, 1999, the bald eagle was proposed for delisting due to recovery. However, the species has not yet been delisted as the proposal has been put on hold. Therefor, the bald eagle remains a Connecticut endangered and federally threatened species.

The endangered and threatened designations provide bald eagles with protection from human actions. Anyone who violates either the federal or state endangered species acts will be prosecuted and/or fined. Violations include "taking," "harming" or "harassing." "Take" is defined in the ESA as harassing, pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing or collecting listed wildlife species; attempting to engage in such conduct; or soliciting or causing such acts to be committed. "Harm" is defined as significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns including breeding, feeding or sheltering. "Harass" is defined as an intentional or negligent act of omission which creates the likelihood of injury to wildlife by annoying it to such an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavior patterns which include but are not limited to, breeding, feeding or sheltering. The fine for violating the ESA can be up to $100,000 and six months imprisonment.

CT Eagles Making the News

In past issues of *Connecticut Wildlife* there have been reports of sightings of bald eagles (whose leg band numbers can be identified) from Connecticut. One particular Connecticut eagle that the Division has received information about is a female chick, born in 1994, that is now a breeding adult along the Hudson River, about 10 miles north of Hudson, New York. She occupies one of the four Hudson River eagle breeding territories and successfully nested, produced and fledged three chicks in 2000 and two chicks in 2001! A four-hour documentary that aired on PBS April 23 and 24 about the Hudson River, "America's First River: Bill Moyers on the Hudson," profiled this female eagle as part of the ongoing monitoring of Hudson River bald eagles by New York biologists.

Chestnut Tree Research

Saving what we have and improving the next generation

Adapted from an article by Sandra Anagnostakis, from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

American chestnut trees were once so common in the Eastern United States that just about everyone who visited the woods in the fall could count on finding nuts for roasting and for stuffing their Thanksgiving turkey. Chestnut trees were also valued for their wood, which was highly resistant to rot and used extensively for poles, fencing and building materials.

Foreign Fungus Discovered

In 1904, it was discovered that a fungus, accidentally imported with Japanese chestnut trees, was killing American chestnut trees in New York City. Within 50 years, the chestnut blight fungus had destroyed most of the native chestnuts, drastically changing the appearance of our Eastern forests.

The fungus enters wounds in the trees, grows in and under the bark and eventually kills the cambium all the way around the twig, branch or trunk. Everything above the canker then dies. The chestnut blight fungus does not enter the root collar at the base of the tree, so sprouts continue to form, keeping the species from becoming extinct. But, before these sprouts can grow into a mature tree, the fungus reinfects the sprouts and the process starts all over again. From the earliest discovery of the disease, attempts were made to control it, but nothing succeeded, and this important forest tree was reduced to a multiple-stemmed shrub.

In Search of a Cure

In an effort to replace a lost timber source, scientists soon began crossing resistant Asian chestnut trees with American chestnuts. The longest, continuing chestnut breeding program in the United States is at The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. Dr. Arthur H. Graves planted trees on land that he owned in Hamden, Connecticut, and started making genetic crosses in 1930. In 1950, Graves deeded his land, with the Chestnut Plantation at Sleeping Giant, to the state to ensure that the work on chestnuts would continue. Since then, the Plantation has been maintained by The Experiment Station.

continued on next page

CT AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

American Chestnut trees in Connecticut around 1905. The trees pictured were about 100 years old.

Chestnut,
continued from previous page

Using Biological Control

Another method to maintain chestnut trees in the landscape was implemented in 1972. Strains of the blight fungus which contained a virus were imported to the United States. The virus debilitates the fungus so that it cannot kill chestnut trees. It can spread slowly in the forest even though killing strains of the fungus are always present. This biological control method is a partial solution. American chestnut trees will be kept alive and they will flower and produce nuts even though they will become covered with swollen cankers, thus reducing their value as timber.

The plan is to keep the native trees alive using biological control and to plant resistant hybrids next to them. The resistant hybrids will cross pollinate with the native trees and incorporate the enormous genetic diversity, which still exists in the forest, into the next generation of seedlings. The first generation offspring will be intermediate in resistance, but in subsequent generations, trees with full resistance will be produced. These trees should be well-adapted to all the regions of the country where such plantings have been made and should compete well with the additional help of the biological control.

Chestnut Research at Sessions Woods WMA

In spring 1998, seeds were planted which included two kinds of hybrid chestnuts: Japanese hybrids crossed with American chestnuts from Watertown, New York, and Roxbury, Connecticut and Chinese hybrids crossed with the same two American chestnuts. In March 2000, the trees were lifted, numbered and measured. Some of these were planted in forest plots and others went to Windsor to be planted in a nursery. Researchers have selected 20 of these trees, with five from each of the four hybrid families, for a forest planting at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington.

Timber was clearcut on 14 acres at Sessions Woods (see article in September/October 2001 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*). There are many native chestnuts surrounding the clearcut and growing near the fire tower. In addition, more will sprout and grow in the clearcut area. Any chestnut blight cankers will be treated with biological control to keep the American trees alive.

In early April 2002, the 20 selected hybrid trees were planted in the clearcut at Sessions Woods. Each was numbered so that researchers can keep track of individual trees. Mesh shelters were placed around the trees to protect them from browsing by deer. Despite the recent drought in Connecticut, it is hoped that spring rainfall will be sufficient enough to allow the newly planted trees to establish new roots.

In order to compare growth and survival in forest plots in different places, soil and leaf samples were taken in August 2001 from two forest plots in Prospect and from The Experiment Station's nursery plot in Windsor. Chemical tests were conducted on the samples and results from mineral analysis after acid digestion revealed some differences. The most

P.J. FUSCO

Wildlife Division biologist Steve Jackson and Sandra Anagnostakis, from The CT Agricultural Experiment Station, place a mesh shelter around a hybrid chestnut seedling that was planted in a clearcut at Sessions Woods. The shelter will protect the seedling from browsing by deer.

Friends of Sessions Woods Assist with Chestnut Planting

Members of the Friends of Sessions Woods, Elmer Madsen, Bob Merriman, Jeffrey Merriman and Paul Peterson, volunteered to assist with the chestnut research planting in a clearcut at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington. On March 24, the volunteers dug 22 holes, one-foot in diameter and 18 inches deep, in preparation for the planting of hybrid chestnut trees by Sandra Anagnostakis, of The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. The Wildlife Division extends its appreciation to these volunteers for their hard work and assistance in this important research project.

CT AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

An unidentified person stands next to an American chestnut in Scotland, CT, in 1905.

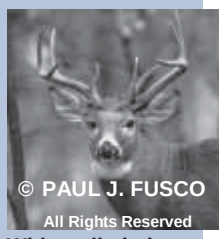
American Chestnut: An Important Wildlife Plant

Chestnuts and other trees, like oaks, that bear large seeds or nuts are called mast producers. Mast is an extremely important food source for wildlife. Compared to twigs, leaves and grass, which are low in digestible nutrients, nuts and seeds contain high concentrations of fat, protein and carbohydrates.

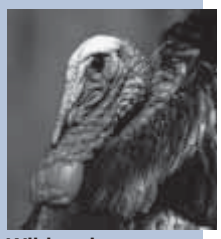
Several species of wildlife are highly dependent on mast as a food source, and its availability can have an impact on wildlife populations. The chestnut was once considered one of the most important wildlife plants of the eastern United States. Chestnuts had been a significant item in the diet of many animals, such as white-tailed deer, Eastern cottontail rabbit, New England cottontail rabbit, red squirrel, chipmunk, wild turkey, black bear and wood duck.

The loss of chestnuts from the eastern forests had a major effect on the wildlife populations that depended on the nuts. At the time in history when chestnuts were disappearing from our forests, several of the wildlife species that depended on the nuts were few in number. Turkeys and black bears had already disappeared from Connecticut's landscape and white-tailed deer and wood ducks were uncommon. Because of this situation, it is difficult to know the exact effect that the disappearance of chestnuts had on wildlife. Many of the mast-eating wildlife species now feed more on the acorns of red and white oaks, which have filled some of the gaps left in the forest by chestnuts. However, acorn crops are not as reliable as chestnuts. Good chestnut crops were available almost every year. Red oaks bear significant acorns only every two to five years, while white oaks produce good crops every four to six years.

P. J. FUSCO (4)



White-tailed deer



Wild turkey

Wood duck

Black bear

startling difference was in the pH of the soil. The soil in the "south" plot (near the old Naugatuck Reservoir) had a pH of 3.6, the soil in the plot north of that had a pH of 4.5, while the Windsor soil had a pH of 4.7. There is no obvious difference in the growth of these three groups of chestnut trees. Therefore, the very acidic soil of the south plot does not seem to be a problem. Calcium content of the tree tissue has been reported to be a factor in resisting chestnut blight disease, so the differences that were found in the leaves may be important. Sampling will be conducted again in 2002 to confirm these differences.

These same tests will be conducted on trees planted at Sessions Woods. Every year, researchers will look for new cankers on the native trees. Any cankers will be treated with biological control strains. The hybrid trees will be examined regularly to make sure they are not damaged and to watch for signs of flowering. There is hope that this is a beginning of a new future for chestnut trees in Connecticut.

Plan an outing to Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area!

Located in Burlington, off Route 69, Sessions Woods is an ideal location to take a hike or to bring the family to learn about wildlife and habitat. The area offers several hiking trails with interpretive signs, a beaver marsh, scenic waterfall, a firetower with spectacular views and a backyard wildlife demonstration. Educational programs on wildlife and natural resources are held throughout the year at the Conservation Education Center. To learn more, call 860-675-8130, or visit the wildlife section of the DEP's website (http://dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife) and click on "Sessions Woods" in the office directory.

Now You See Them, Now You Don't: *Stealth in the Marsh*

Written by Paul Fusco, Public Awareness Program

Connecticut's precious few large expanses of marshlands can sometimes be home to an uncommon and reclusive member of the heron family. With cryptic plumage and a habit of standing motionless, this bird becomes virtually invisible as it blends into the surrounding marsh habitat. Usually the bird stays concealed in tall stands of cattails or marsh grasses, making it very difficult to observe. With a little patience, the bird may move into a more visible position, giving an observer a chance to identify it as one of Connecticut's two species of bitterns.

At first glance, bitterns appear to be similar to most other members of the heron family. However, there are several differences in physical structure and behavior that separate them from true herons and egrets. Bitterns have short legs and stocky bodies, unlike most herons and egrets. They also lack the long breeding plumes that many of the other members of the heron family have.

Bitterns are stealthy hunters, stalking mostly in the concealment of marsh grasses rather than in the open like herons and egrets. They are most active around dawn, dusk and at night, while most other herons and egrets are more active during the day.

Bitterns hunt with their neck and bill outstretched as their eyes look downward toward a potential target, slowly moving into position and aiming the bill before making a darting stab to catch their prey. Their food consists of small fishes, crustaceans, insects, salamanders, frogs, snakes, mice and small birds.

Bitterns tend to be more solitary than herons or egrets. They do not nest communally in rookeries or form flocks during migration.

Least Bittern

At 11 to 13 inches in length, the least bittern is the smallest member of the heron family. It is a very shy bird that is at home in thick stands of cattails, reeds and bulrushes. One might be seen at the edge of a wetland creek, perched on a reed stalk hanging over the water, as it hunts for food. If disturbed, the least bittern typically runs or climbs its way back into dense marsh vegetation rather than flying off.

Although the least bittern is considered to be a weak flier, it migrates as far south as northern South America for the winter. Least bitterns migrate mostly at night, perhaps because that is the safest time for a small, weak-flying bird to move away from the safety of the thick cover that it's normally found in. Fall migration of the least bittern occurs in August and September, a time of year that is especially dangerous during the day for weak-flying migrants because many species of hawks are also moving south at this same time along the coastline.

Breeding by least bitterns has been documented in both coastal and freshwater wetland habitats in Connecticut. They favor wetlands that have dense stands of cattails or reeds, such as those found along the lower Connecticut River and the tidal region of the Quinnipiac River. Breeding evidence has also been recorded from inland marshes in central and northern parts of the state.

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The least bittern is one of the more secretive birds to be found in Connecticut.

American Bittern

Large, freshwater marshes with tall vegetation are the favored breeding habitats of the American bittern. In the past, this bird was also known to breed in brackish wetlands near the coast, but all recent documentation has been from inland locations.

This medium-sized member of the heron family is considered to be a short-distance migrant. It is more tolerant of winter conditions along the East coast of North America than the least bittern. American bitterns will use coastal marshes during fall migration; some will even spend the winter in the larger salt marshes in Connecticut.

One noteworthy response to danger that is exhibited by both bittern species is the tendency to freeze, standing upright, with their bill raised straight up in an effort to blend into the surroundings. The American bittern is well-known for this "stargazing" behavior, and, when in tall marsh vegetation, the

American bittern exhibiting "stargazing" behavior in a tidal wetland.

bird can seem to disappear before an observer's very eyes.

One of the more remarkable traits of the American bittern can be heard in spring as males make their loud, booming breeding calls. In the quiet of early morning, the "*pump-er-lunk*" call can be heard for an extensive distance across the stands of cattails and bulrush at a few large inland marshes in Connecticut. The thunderous calls are made possible by special, reinforced musculature in the neck and chest.

Conservation

Both bitterns are considered to be rare breeders in Connecticut and are on the state Endangered and Threatened Species List. The American bittern is endangered and the least bittern is threatened. Both species are very secretive birds that inhabit dense vegetation, making their presence difficult to document. They are found at widely scattered locations and in small numbers. Because the least bittern is so small and timid and it can be so easily overlooked, there is a chance the species may be slightly more numerous than is generally believed.

Historically both species were considered to be more common than they are today. Wetland habitat loss and degradation are the two most important factors that have contributed to declines in bittern populations. Wetlands continue to face development pressures which can isolate them from adjoining habitats, reduce their size and make them more susceptible to recreational disturbance. Pollution and the past use of pesticides may also have been factors contributing to bittern population declines.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Small numbers of American bitterns use tidal marshes along the Connecticut shoreline during migration and sometimes over the winter.

Today, a cleaner environment, ongoing wetland restoration projects and renewed appreciation for all natural areas could help improve the outlook for Connecticut's bittern populations. However, continued work is needed to better assess the status of bitterns. The Wildlife Division coordinates a wetland breeding bird survey each year to document the occurrence of bitterns, as well as other uncommon wetland species. If you are interested in participating in the survey, please contact the Wildlife Division at the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130).

The secretive nature of bitterns makes them a challenging quarry for even the most experienced researcher or bird watcher. Seeing one of these uncommon birds as it moves slowly, skulking along the edge of a tidal creek can be a memorable experience for any outdoors person. By visiting the right habitat and looking carefully, a patient observer might be rewarded with a good look at one, or even both, species of bitterns.

It's Turtle Time!

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Once common, wood turtles have been declining in Connecticut and are now listed as a species of special concern.

What Makes a Turtle a Turtle?

What is it about turtles that have helped the group survive for millions of years? What makes a turtle a turtle? Its shell, of course. Cartoons often portray turtles as being able to step out of their shells. In reality, that cannot happen. The shell, which is made of bone, is part of the turtle's skeleton. Below the shell are the turtle's organs. A turtle's shell is composed of two parts, the **carapace** (top) and **plastron** (bottom), which are joined by a bridge. The horny, raised plates of the shell are divided into distinct sections called **scutes**.

Turtles are long-lived; some turtles can live from 20 to more than 50 years; sea turtles can live over 100 years. Like all reptiles, turtles keep growing until they die, but this growth slows down after maturity.

Turtles do not have teeth. They use the bony ridges (like the edge of a knife) in the roof of their mouth to shred food. These sharp edges of the upper and lower jaws form a beak.

All reptiles, including turtles, cannot generate their own body heat and depend on the sun to warm up. Turtles bask in the sun to increase their body temperature so that they are able to move, digest food and escape predators.

When adult female turtles are ready to lay their eggs in spring and early summer, they find a place on land where they dig a hole in the ground. After the eggs are laid in the hole, the female will often camouflage the nest by flinging dirt around or by compacting the soil with her plastron. She then leaves the nest. This is the time when the eggs are most vulnerable to predators, such as raccoons, foxes and skunks. Sometimes entire nests are lost to predation.

The time until turtle eggs hatch varies greatly, but it generally takes from two to three months. A young turtle has an "egg tooth" or projection on its mouth that is used to create a hole in the egg so that the turtle can climb out. The egg tooth will disappear as a turtle grows. Hatchlings in the same nest usually emerge from their eggs at about the same time.

Painted turtles are often seen basking on rocks, logs and even on top of one another.

Turtles in Connecticut

Twelve species of turtles occur in Connecticut. (Four of these are sea turtles that occur in our coastal waters. They will be highlighted in a future article.) Some species are quite common, while others have been experiencing marked declines in their populations. Both the wood turtle and eastern box turtle are listed as species of special concern on Connecticut's Threatened and Endangered Species List; the bog turtle is listed as endangered.

Common Snapping Turtle: This largest of Connecticut's freshwater turtles is easily recognized by its dark carapace with a deeply serrated back margin, small plastron and long, "saw-toothed" tail. Snapping turtles also have a large head, long neck and sharp hooked beak.

Almost entirely aquatic, snapping turtles inhabit marshes, swamps, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. They can even be found in brackish and salt water habitats. Snapping turtles frequently lie in shallow water, almost completely buried in soft mud, while waiting to capture their prey of fish, aquatic invertebrates, waterfowl and other birds. Although snapping turtles are often blamed for decimating fish and

waterfowl populations, scientific research has shown that this is rarely the case. Snapping turtles are abundant and widespread, even surviving in polluted waters.

Eastern Painted Turtle: This most numerous and familiar of Connecticut's aquatic turtles can be distinguished by its dark, smooth carapace bordered with red and yellow markings. The neck has yellow stripes, the limbs have yellow and red stripes and the plastron is orange-yellow. Males can be distinguished from females by their long, front claws, long tail and smaller size.

Painted turtles inhabit shallow pools, rivers, lakes, wet meadows and slow-moving streams and they are able to survive in disturbed and polluted habitats. They are often seen basking on rocks, logs and even on top of one another.

Wood Turtle: A bright orange throat and front legs help distinguish this turtle. The variably-colored gray to brown carapace is rough. The large scutes are in the form of an irregular pyramid and the plastron is yellow with black markings on the edge. Females have a flat or slightly convex plastron, while males have a concave plastron and a long tail.

Wood turtles are equally at home in water and on land. In spring and fall they can be found near the streams and rivers where they hibernate during winter. In summer, they migrate to fields, pastures and deciduous forests that are adjacent to the stream.

Once common, wood turtles have been declining in Connecticut and are now listed as a species of special concern. Population declines are a result of habitat fragmentation, pollution and the development of wooded river banks. According to Connecticut regulations, wood turtles may not be collected and no person may possess a wood turtle.

Spotted Turtle: The small spotted turtle has a smooth black shell and obvious bright yellow spots on its carapace, head, legs and tail. Females typically have orange eyes and a flat or convex (curves out) plastron, while males have brown eyes and a concave (curves in) plastron.

This aquatic turtle uses a variety of shallow water habitats, such as vernal pools, ponds, streams, wet meadows, marshes, red maple swamps, roadside ditches and even brackish tidal creeks, as well as terrestrial areas nearby.

Common Musk Turtle: Also called stinkpot, musk turtles are best known for their foul odor. They have two light stripes on the head and barbels on the chin and throat. The barbels are sensory organs which help these turtles feel for food in the muddy bottoms of the lakes, ponds and rivers they inhabit. Musk turtles have an oblong shell that may be covered with moss. These turtles are often mistaken for mud turtles. However, mud turtles do not occur in Connecticut.

Musk turtles can be found during the

continued on next page

P. J. FUSCO (3)

Box turtle populations have been declining dramatically in Connecticut.

The small spotted turtle has a smooth black shell and obvious bright yellow spots on its carapace, head, legs and tail.

The musk turtle, also called stinkpot, is best known for its foul odor. Its shell is often covered with moss.

Turtles,
continued from previous page

day basking in groups on aquatic vegetation, logs and rocks, and even in branches overhanging water. When alarmed, the turtles quickly drop into the water. Because of their odor, musk turtles have never been valued for food or as pets.

Bog Turtle: This smallest and rarest turtle in Connecticut has an orange or yellow head patch which is sometimes divided into two parts. The large scutes of the dark carapace have yellow or reddish centers.

The state endangered and federally threatened bog turtle has a limited range in Connecticut. Only small isolated populations exist in the state and information on them is scant. Bog turtles live in calcareous (containing calcium carbonate, calcium or lime) wetlands, such as open sphagnum bogs, wet meadows and wet pastures. They are sensitive to changes in the environment, such as increased nutrification, altered drainage, vegetation changes and pollution.

Wildlife Division biologists have been studying bog turtles for the past several years to find out where they are currently surviving and how to protect their habitats. In Connecticut, it is against the law to remove any bog turtle, including eggs, from the wild.

Wildlife Division biologists have been studying bog turtles for the past several years to find out where they are currently surviving and how to protect their habitats.

Northern Diamondback Terrapin: This is the only estuarine species of turtle that regularly occurs in Connecticut. It can be identified by its gray, light brown or black carapace that is broad and patterned with concentric rings or ridges. The carapace is also wedge-shaped, with the widest part in the rear. The plastron can range from yellowish to greenish-gray, with or without bold, dark markings. The large feet are webbed, and the head and limbs may be spotted.

A resident of brackish salt marshes, estuaries and tidal creeks, the terrapin feeds on fish, marine snails, mollusks, worms, clams and carrion.

In the early 1900s, terrapins were a popular gourmet food. Their numbers declined with unregulated harvested and habitat loss through coastal development. Terrapin numbers have since rebounded in Connecticut. The turtles are most abundant in tidal estuaries west of the Connecticut River. The collection of terrapins is specifically regulated in Connecticut.

Eastern Box Turtle: This familiar turtle is recognized by its domed, dark brown to black carapace patterned with orange or yellow markings. The plastron is hinged across the front and back, allowing the animal to close itself inside the shell for protection. Box turtles have variable shell shapes and patterns. Males have a concave plastron and orange-red eyes, while females have a convex plastron and brown eyes.

This terrestrial turtle can be found in a variety of habitats, including woodlands, field edges, thickets, marshes and stream banks. A box turtle's diet consists of earthworms, slugs, snails, insects, carrion, leaves, grass, berries, fruits and fungi. Adults tend to eat more vegetable matter than young turtles.

The box turtle is listed as a species of special concern in Connecticut. Once common, box turtle populations have declined dramatically. This decline is mostly due to habitat loss and fragmentation, roadkills and collection as pets. Every spring and summer, hundreds of box turtles, particularly females in search of a nest site, are run over by cars as they try to cross roads. No one may collect a box turtle from the wild and possession of box turtles is currently regulated in Connecticut.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

The diamondback terrapin is the only estuarine species of turtle that regularly occurs in Connecticut.

Threats to Turtles

Most species of turtles do not reach maturity for several years (sometimes at 12 or more years of age). Once mature, female turtles may lay hundreds of eggs over the course of their long lives. However, egg survivorship is very low and during certain years, predators will undoubtedly uncover and eat entire turtle nests. As a turtle reaches adulthood, the number of animals that can prey on it decreases and its chance for survival dramatically increases. Because of these factors and the long life span of turtles, the loss of an adult turtle, especially a reproducing female, can be devastating to a population. Unfortunately, several of Connecticut's turtle populations are still faced with such threats as pollution and destruction of their aquatic and nesting habitats, excessive collection and the possibility of being run over by cars on the numerous roads that dissect the landscape.

To learn more about Connecticut's turtles, obtain a copy of *Amphibians and Reptiles in Connecticut, A Checklist*, or *Amphibians and Reptiles of Connecticut and Adjacent Regions*, both by Michael W. Klemens (available at the DEP Store 860-424-3555). The Wildlife Division has also published or is in the process of publishing fact sheets on CT's turtles. These materials were used as references for this article.

Your Questions Answered

This summer, I saw a very strange squirrel. It looked like it was covered with bumps or warts. The bumps were all over the head, face and top of the body, with less on the lower body. - L. Turcotte, Coventry.

The squirrel that you saw last summer may have been infected with "squirrel pox." This viral disease produces numerous tumors on the skin of gray squirrels. Although the natural history of the virus in not known, two species of mosquitoes have transmitted it from squirrel to squirrel in the laboratory. Researchers speculate that the virus is probably transmitted by mosquitoes in nature, too. The tumors develop at the site where the mosquitoes fed on the animal.

Juvenile squirrels are most likely to become infected with the virus. In general, there are no obvious signs of illness in infected squirrels except for the presence of tumors scattered over the body. In severe cases, when vision is obstructed or the skin experiences a secondary infection, the squirrel may be less active and weak, and eventually die. In cases where the disease is not severe, the tumors probably start to disappear and the animal recovers completely. This disease is probably not a public health threat. **(Information for this answer was obtained from the Rose Lake Wildlife Disease Laboratory website.)**

A turtle laid its eggs in my yard. What can I do to protect the nest? When will the eggs hatch?

It is usually best to leave the eggs where they were laid, flag the nest location and avoid it. There are several predators of turtle eggs, including raccoons, opossums, foxes, coyotes, snakes and dogs. To protect the nest from most predators, you could anchor a wire basket over the nest. Sufficient mesh size (2 inches square) is important to maintain air flow so that the eggs will not overheat and hatchlings are able to escape.

The toughest question to answer is: "When will the eggs hatch?" A standard reply is 60 days plus or minus a few weeks. That's because most people who ask this question do not know what kind of turtle laid the eggs and hatching time varies among species. For example, common snapping turtle eggs take between 55 to 125 days to hatch, while box turtle eggs take about 87 to 89 days. Temperature and rainfall play a big role in when eggs will hatch. Eggs laid in cooler weather and/or in the shade will take longer to hatch.

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

Please send it to:

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

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

Wildlife Encounters - *A few reminders on what to do*

The Wildlife Division offers a few suggestions for making the interactions between wildlife and people a positive experience:

Bears, Coyotes and Foxes:

To avoid conflicts with bears, coyotes and foxes, do not approach or try to feed them. Remove any food sources, such as garbage, pet food, bird feeders and suet, from your yard. Sightings of bears can be reported to the Wildlife Division at (860) 675-8130.

"Orphaned" Wildlife:

Young animals should **not** be removed from the wild. Although they may appear to be "orphaned," the adult is probably close by, waiting for you to leave. It is best to **leave the animal alone**. If you are **absolutely certain** a wild animal has been injured or orphaned, before touching or moving it, contact the Division at (860) 424-3011, to be referred to an authorized wildlife rehabilitator who is trained and experienced in handling wild animals.

To protect fragile young wildlife, people are urged to keep cats indoors and dogs on leashes. Countless numbers of rabbits, squirrels, birds and other wildlife fall prey to pets every year.

Nesting Shorebirds at Beaches:

When visiting shoreline beaches this summer, you can help piping plovers and least terns, threatened shorebirds that nest on Connecticut beaches, by:

- *Respecting all posted and fenced nesting areas and not lingering near the birds or their nests.*
- *Picking up and not leaving litter, fishing line or food scraps.*
- *Keeping pets off nesting beaches. Dogs on beaches are a major disturbance. The birds view dogs as predators, whether or not dogs are on a leash, and will flee their nests and young when a dog is nearby. Unleashed, free-roaming dogs do further damage by running through nesting areas, harassing the birds and crushing eggs and young.*
- *Contacting the DEP's TIP Hotline (1-800-842-HELP) or local authorities to report any violations or instances when nesting birds are being harassed.*

Nesting Herons and Egrets:

The Wildlife Division asks visitors to offshore islands to respect the temporary closures of heron and egret nesting areas, including interior portions of Duck Island in Westbrook and Charles Island in Milford. Charles Island is a Natural Area Preserve because of it provides critical nesting habitat for the state-threatened great egret and snowy egret, as well as the glossy ibis and other protected herons and egrets.

Rabies:

Rabies is still present in Connecticut. Therefore, you should continue to take precautions to prevent exposure to rabid animals. Have your pets vaccinated and never approach any animal, domestic or wild, that is acting disoriented or is unusually tame or aggressive. Suspect rabid animals should be reported to the local police or animal control officer. If local authorities cannot be reached, contact the DEP at (860) 424-3333.

Wildlife Problems:

Many wildlife species, such as squirrels, raccoons or bats, will use houses or other buildings for shelter and as a place for raising young. The Division can provide information on how to handle problems with wildlife or you can be referred to commercially licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators who can assist you. Call (860) 424-3011 for more information.

FROM THE FIELD

Radio-collared Cottontail Rabbits Being Followed

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Wildlife Division biologist Mike Gregonis (right) and research assistant Rebecca Riggs weigh a cottontail rabbit. Greg Kuhr (left) prepares to collect more data on the rabbit.

A comprehensive study on cottontail rabbits was initiated in Connecticut in January 2002. The objective of the study is to assess movements, home range use, habitat needs, survival and causes of mortality of both the New England (NEC) and Eastern cottontail (EC) rabbits in Connecticut. The study was initiated because of concern that New England cottontail populations may be declining throughout this region.

From January to March, 2002, 22 cottontails (6 NEC and 16 EC) were live-captured in box traps and fitted with radio collars and eartags. Biologists are using radio telemetry to locate the radio-collared rabbits eight times each week during both day and night. The data collected from the radio telemetry research will help biologists determine the seasonal movements and habitat needs of both species. Each radio collar is also fitted with a mortality sensor. If a rabbit is motionless for four hours, the mortality sensor will be triggered and researchers can locate the rabbit to determine the cause of death.

This two-year study is being funded by the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program (WCRP), the Connecticut Wildlife/ Endangered Species Income Tax Checkoff Fund and the DEP Wildlife Division. Preliminary findings from this study will be available in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*.

Hunter Education Home Study Course to Be Offered

This year, Connecticut will join several other states and Canadian provinces in providing a Conservation Education/ Firearms Safety (CE/FS) "Home Study" course on a trial basis. The Home Study course differs from the traditional, multiple session teaching program that has been used by the CE/FS Program for the past 20 years. Course participants will learn the same concepts that are taught in the traditional course. However, they will be given course materials to study at home and a take-home workbook. After completing the home study portion of the program, participants will attend an eight-hour mandatory field day in which there will be live-firing, field activities and a written test. The field day evaluation will complete the home study program.

Current plans are to offer two Home Study courses this year, one with a field day on August 24 at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office and the other with a field day on September 7 at the Franklin Wildlife office. The number of registrants for this trial course will be limited. Those interested in the Home Study course, can contact the Wildlife Division at the Franklin (860-642-7239) or Sessions Woods (860-675-8130) offices, on Mondays through Fridays, from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

The Wildlife Division is hopeful that this alternate method of teaching the CE/FS firearms course will provide more Connecticut residents with the opportunity to participate in hunter education.

First Training Sessions for Master Wildlife Conservationists Held

The Master Wildlife Conservationist Program, an adult volunteer training program sponsored by the Wildlife Division, began this past February with 22 participants attending the initial class. Volunteers met each Tuesday evening and some Saturdays for eight weeks of training in wildlife conservation, ecology, management and interpretation. Lessons were intensive, ranging from the history of wildlife conservation to basic ecological principles to the effects of invasive, non-native species to the issues of hunting and trapping. Program participants also learned how to present information in a meaningful way to a wide range of audiences.

Upon completion of the coursework, the Master Wildlife Conservationist Program candidates have one year to complete their volunteer service agreement. Service can include interpretive walks, library programs, school presentations, habitat enhancement projects or assisting wildlife biologists with their research. Volunteers can also create wildlife-related projects within their own communities to fulfil the service obligation.

The next series of classes for a new group of volunteer Master Wildlife Conservationists will begin in late summer. For more information or to be considered for the program, contact Laura Rogers-Castro at 860-675-8130 or laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

Participants in the first training sessions held for the Master Wildlife Conservationist Program listen to Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro (standing) as she instructs them on the principles of interpretation.

Coverts Project Looking for Concerned Forest Owners

The Coverts Project, sponsored by the Ruffed Grouse Society, the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, is looking for woodland owners and other interested individuals who want to learn more about their forests and the wildlife that live in them in exchange for a commitment to share that knowledge with others in their community.

The Coverts Project is a training and outreach program in woodland and wildlife management. Participants attend an in-depth, three-day seminar which combines indoor and outdoor training. All costs of the seminar, including meals, lodging and educational materials, are covered by the Ruffed Grouse Society, Cooperative Extension and The Connecticut Forest Stewardship Program. In exchange for receiving training, participants are kept supplied with detailed reference materials that allow them to either answer questions on forest and wildlife management, or direct people to the proper professionals.

This year's seminar will be held at the Yale University Forestry Camp on the 6,000 acre Great Mountain Forest in Norfolk, from September 12-15, 2002. Those who would like more information should contact a local Coverts Project Cooperator, their local Extension System office, or Steve Broderick, Extension Forester, at the Cooperative Extension Center, 139 Wolf Den Road, Brooklyn, CT 06234 (860-774-9600).

P. J. FUSCO

Coverts Cooperators learn how to improve habitat to benefit ruffed grouse and other forest wildlife.

Fewer Eagles Seen in 2002 Midwinter Survey

On January 11-12, 2002, volunteers from private conservation organizations, the DEP and the general public conducted the annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey. The 125 volunteers recorded all eagles seen at areas traditionally used by the birds and areas of suitable wintering habitat. This year, 54 bald eagles—33 adults, 20 immature eagles, and 1 unknown—were recorded statewide.

The count of 54 eagles is a significant decrease from the 77 counted last winter. However, the lower count is not a surprise considering that Connecticut and states to the north had a particularly mild winter. In normal to colder winters, bald eagles usually migrate south from the northern states to find areas of open water where they are able to catch fish, their main food item. Because the number of eagles wintering in Connecticut was lower this year, the northern states will probably report a record number of eagles observed during the survey. The increase in eagle numbers nationwide is consistent with the upward trend that this protected population is experiencing.

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is not a complete census of the entire wintering population in Connecticut, but an index of the species' use of Connecticut, which can be compared year to year.

The Wildlife Division extends its thanks to all of the volunteers who donated their time to the survey and who reported their careful observations.

Free Fishing Day: Saturday, June 1, 2002

Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque Jr. has designated June 1, 2002, as a day when everyone may fish **without a license** in Connecticut. Join the DEP for a morning of fishing fun on June 1. Fishing instruction and loaner fishing tackle will be available at the following fishing sites:

Free Fishing Day Sites (June 1)

Family Fishing at Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery: Cady Lane off Route 14, Plainfield/Central Village. General fishing at public fish hatchery ponds. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Family Fishing at Mansfield Training School Ponds: Route 44, Mansfield. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies, from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Family Fishing at Upper Fulton Park Pond: Cooke Street, Waterbury. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies, from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Connecticut River Bass & Catfish Tournament: Riverside Park, Hartford. Tournament is from 5:00 AM–3:00 PM. Fishing lessons are from 9:00 AM–1:00 PM.

Family Fishing at Chatfield Hollow State Park: Route 80, Killingworth. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Family Fishing at Saugatuck Reservoir: Easton. Cosponsored by BHC/Aquarion. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies, from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Family Fishing at Lake Saltonstall: Branford/East Haven. Fee waived by South Central CT Regional Water Authority. General fishing, instruction, prizes and trophies, from 8:00 AM–11:00 AM.

Free Fishing Day Open Houses and Tours (June 1)

Fish Ladder and Underwater Viewing Window: Rainbow Dam Fishway on the Farmington River, Rainbow Road off Route 75 in the Poquonock section of Windsor. See salmon, shad and other species, from 10:00 AM–3:00 PM.

Trout Hatchery Open House: State Hatchery in Burlington, Route 4. Rearing ponds, brood stock and hatchery staff, from 7:00 AM–3:00 PM.

Trout Hatchery Education Center: Quinebaug Valley Hatchery, Cady Lane off Route 14, Plainfield/Central Village. Live fish and plenty of displays, from 9:00 AM–2:00 PM.

For more information on Free Fishing Day, call 860-424-FISH (3474) or visit the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

Hooked on Fishing?

If you are hooked on fishing after participating in Free Fishing Day, you can obtain a fishing license at town halls and many tackle retailers. Licenses are required for anyone 16 years of age or older fishing in inland waters. They are issued on a calendar year basis and expire on December 31. Resident licenses are $15.00; resident fishing and small game hunting licenses are $21.00; and senior citizen (65 or older) licenses are free.

CT's Hunter Education Program Celebrates 20 Years

Written by Peter Bogue, Assistant Director

Connecticut's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program honored its volunteer instructors on March 17 at the Annual Awards and Recognition Dinner held at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville. This year's event marked the 20th anniversary of Connecticut's CE/FS Program, which started in 1982. Since then, a total of 93,816 students have graduated from one of the three programs, firearms, bowhunting or trapping. The volunteer instructors honored at this event have contributed some 292,063 hours in the last 20 years without compensation to educate hunters and trappers in safe and ethical techniques.

P.J. FUSCO

Award recipients at the 20th Annual CE/FS Recognition Dinner. (Standing, l to r) Dave Kubas (CE/FS Program Coordinator), Steven Bergenty, Francis Wasylink, Mark Fowler, George Finch Jr. and Bob Kalinowski (CE/FS Program Coordinator). (Seated, l to r) Lawrence King, Phil Lavalle, President of Quaker Hill Rod and Gun Club, Inc., Will Sampson, Vice President of Algonquin Archers, and Timothy Barry.

At the dinner, the CE/FS Program also recognized two instructors from each of the firearms, bowhunting and trapping programs who have made exceptional contributions during the past year. An award of merit was given to an additional two instructors for their outstanding efforts in teaching classes in all three categories of firearms, bowhunting and trapping. Instructors chosen for these top honors were evaluated based on time devoted to CE/FS programs, including classes, workshops and promotional activities. Involvement in community service on related activities, which help to enhance the instructors' relationship with the general public, were considered as credits in the award nominations. The instructor awards are presented on a total cumulative point system. Points are earned by leading and assisting classes, attending training sessions, giving workshops, total hours contributed to programs and other CE/FS-related activities.

In addition, CE/FS coordinators each chose an instructor to recognize for their individual contributions to hunter education.

Top honors for 2001 were given to the following instructors:

- **Firearms:** Mark Fowler, Warren Speh
- **Bowhunting:** Mark Hall, Timothy Barry
- **Trapping:** George Finch Jr., Jules Perreault
- **Award of Merit:** Lawrence King, Francis Wasylink
- **Special Recognition:** Henri Baxter, Steven Bergenty

Special recognition for their contributions and support to Connecticut's CE/FS Program was also given to the Quaker Hill Rod and Gun Club, Inc., and the Algonquin Archers. Instructor Marvin Curland was also recognized for over 30 years of involvement with hunter education in Connecticut.

During calendar year 2001, 316 certified instructors donated 13,543 hours without compensation to conduct 171 courses for 4,443 students enrolled in basic firearms, bowhunting and trapping programs. The Wildlife Division is proud of the hundreds of instructors who donate their time and expertise to educating Connecticut's sportsmen to be safe and responsible hunters. Connecticut's program continues to be recognized as one of the best in the nation, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers.

Sign up today for a Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Course! Call the Wildlife Division at 860-675-8130 or 860-642-7239, or visit http://dep.state.ct.us.

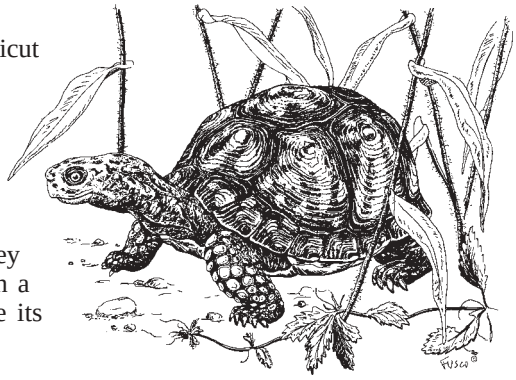
Just for Kids

Terrific Turtles

Everyone likes turtles. Connecticut has 12 different types of turtles, counting the 4 sea turtles that feed in our coastal waters. Here's a look at a few of our native turtles.

Box Turtles

Box turtles are rare in Connecticut because many have been collected as pets or are killed when they cross roads. In Connecticut, box turtles can no longer be taken from the wild to be kept as a pet.
Box turtles are land turtles. They have a unique bottom shell with a "hinge" that lets the turtle close its shell like a box.



Please don't trouble the turtles!

Turtles are best kept in the wild. It takes years for a turtle to become an adult and, once it does, it needs to mate to make more turtles! When turtles are in captivity, they can lose the ability to get food on their own, become ill easily and are unable to be returned to the wild.

Take the Turtle Test

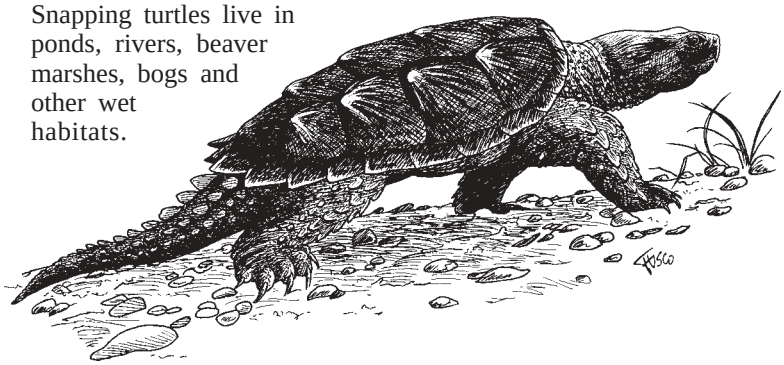
Match the description to the turtles.

1. I live in ponds and can often be seen basking in the sun on a floating log.
2. I am found in salt marshes and some people like to eat me in soup!
3. I am the largest turtle in North America.
4. I have yellow spots on my back.
5. When I am disturbed, I make a strong odor.

musk turtle
leatherback sea turtle
painted turtle
diamondback terrapin
spotted turtle

Snapping Turtles

Snapping turtles get their name from their large, strong jaws and their habit of snapping to defend themselves. They often snap more when they are out of water than in water. These turtles have a small bottom shell which does not offer very much protection compared to other turtles.
Snapping turtles live in ponds, rivers, beaver marshes, bogs and other wet habitats.



Rare Bog Turtles

Connecticut's smallest and rarest turtle is the bog turtle. This secretive turtle lives in wet meadows and wetlands called bogs, only in the northwestern part of the state. Bogs are not very common in Connecticut. The bog turtle is also rare because it has been over-collected for the pet trade. This turtle can be recognized by the orange patch on each side of the head.

Answers to *Take the Turtle Test*:

1. painted turtle; 2. diamondback terrapin; 3. leatherback sea turtle; 4. spotted turtle; 5. musk turtle

The Wildlife Observer

Battling Snapping Turtles

The following interesting wildlife observation and photographs were submitted by reader Stephen Tofani:

"I had just started walking the white trail near the DEP pond in Farmington when I heard a lot of splashing. I made my way through the bushes and discovered two large, male snapping turtles having a territorial battle-royal about 30 feet out in the pond. It was mid-May and the mating drive for the resident female probably inspired the confrontation. I ran back to my car, got my camera, returned to the action and started firing away. The snapping turtles went at it for about 35 minutes in my presence. Who knows how long they were at it before I arrived.

The slightly larger turtle was getting the worst of it as evidenced by the white bite marks all over his face. Snapping turtles' faces typically have solid, dark coloration. I suspect the larger one was either much older with slower reactions or was an intruder in the other turtle's territory. Therefore, it might have been a little tentative. When the turtles finally stopped fighting, the loser drifted close to shore to recover. I got a close-up of his severely bitten face. He may have been partially blinded. No picnic being a male snapping turtle, at least not that day."

Woodcock Woes

Laura Rogers-Castro, Natural Resource Educator for the DEP Wildlife Division, submitted this wildlife observation:

"One evening while traveling in the car, my husband and I passed a woodcock sitting on the side of the road. Wondering if the bird was injured, he reversed the car to take a closer look. The woodcock appeared to be shivering so I got out of the car. As soon as I did, it flew off into the sky. Immediately, a red-tailed hawk flew in, from what appeared to be nowhere, and grasped the woodcock. What a surprise! It was now evident to us that the woodcock had sensed the predator hawk and was probably trying to avoid being detected by the hawk by staying still on the side of the road. While we thought we were doing a good deed, we should have just let things be. I guess it worked out for the hawk, though!"

Turtle Crossing!

Watch for turtles crossing roads during spring and summer. If possible (without jeopardizing your safety), help them across the road in the direction they were headed before they get struck by cars. Hundreds of turtles, particularly box turtles, are killed on roadways every year.

P.J.FUSCO

A turtle's shell may protect it from predators, but not from being killed by cars on CT's roadways.

Don't be alarmed if a snapping turtle lays its eggs in your yard. Once the eggs are laid, the female turtle will return to the waterbody she came from. When the eggs hatch sometime in September, the hatchlings will only be about the size of a quarter.

Do you have an interesting wildlife observation to report to the Wildlife Division?

Please send it (and any photos you may have) to:

Wildlife Observations
DEP - Wildlife Division
P.O. Box 1550
Burlington, CT 06013

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

(submitted photos will be returned at your request)

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**. Answers may also be sent via email at katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us. 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 **June 21, 2002**. Email answers must also be received by that date. Only one winner will be chosen for each challenge. Each winner will be chosen at random from all correct entries received by the deadline.

Congratulations

go to James Wirth who was chosen as the winner of the January/February challenge. The winner of the March/April challenge was Freddie Ames III, who gave the correct answer of "wood frog." Thanks to all of the readers who sent in postcards with answers to the Wildlife Challenge. Please keep trying!

May/June Wildlife Challenge

The May/June wildlife challenge is a reptile commonly seen in many different habitats, including backyards, forests and fields. It eats earthworms, frogs, toads, salamanders and fish. This animal is active from March through October in Connecticut and gives birth to between three and 85 live young. It is easily recognized by the stripes down its back. However, this reptile is responsible for many identification calls to the Wildlife Division. Can you name this issue's wildlife challenge?

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

May ..... Rabies Awareness Month -- Is your pet vaccinated?

..... Keep dogs off of Connecticut beaches to avoid disturbing nesting shorebirds.

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

May 1-21 ..... Spring Turkey Hunting Season (see the 2002 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide or visit the DEP web site www.dep.state.ct.us for more information).

May 21 ..... A public hearing to discuss the draft EIS on resident Canada goose management will be held at 7:00 PM, at the Holiday Inn, 80 Newtown Road, in Danbury (see page 3).

June 1 ..... **National Trails Day Event**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 9:00 AM. The Wildlife Division is working cooperatively with the Connecticut Forest and Park Association to sponsor hikes leaving from the flag pole in front of the Conservation Education Center. These guided walks will vary in length and difficulty, ranging from an interpretive walk to a hike of several miles. Call (860) 675-8130 for more information.

June 1 ..... Connecticut Free Fishing Day (See page 13. You can also contact the DEP Fisheries Division at 424-3474 or visit the DEP's website at dep.state.ct.us).

June 1 ..... **BioBlitz 2002**, at Mohegan Park, in Norwich, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. For more information: www.mnh.uconn.edu and click on BioBlitz.

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

July 16 ..... **Teacher Workshop: Insects of Connecticut**, at the Sessions Woods WMA, in Burlington, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon. Contact Laura Rogers-Castro (860-675-8130; laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us) for information and preregistration packet.

July 30 ..... **Teacher Workshop: Woodland Wildlife Outreach Kit**, at the Sessions Woods WMA, in Burlington, from 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM. Contact Laura Rogers-Castro (see above) for information and preregistration packet.

Connecticut Wildlife

Subscription Order

Please make checks payable to:
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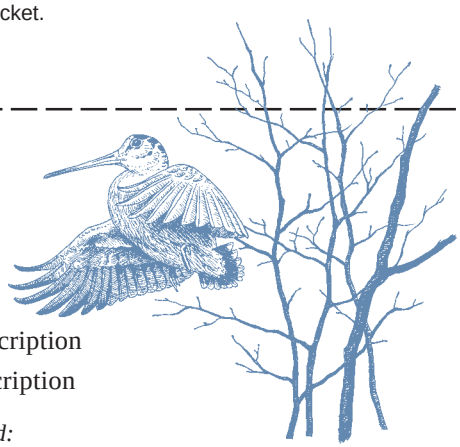

P.J. FUSCO

This Eastern cottontail rabbit was trapped in a box trap and then equipped with a radio transmitter before being released. Biologists will follow the movements and activities of this rabbit and several others to gain valuable information about New England and Eastern cottontail rabbits. **See page 14 for more information.**

Bureau of Natural Resources / Wildlife Division
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