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Connecticut Wildlife

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISIONS OF WILDLIFE, INLAND & MARINE FISHERIES, AND FORESTRY

From the Director's Desk

We celebrated a remarkable person recently – Frank Wasylink, a volunteer Senior Instructor for Connecticut's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program. Frank is unique in many wonderful ways. Most especially, he has a deep passion for wildlife and young people. Through the CE/FS Program, Frank has lived those passions to their fullest for over 20 years.

Of a cadre of more than 300 volunteers, Frank stands apart. He proudly volunteers to provide instruction in firearms safety, trapping, and archery, as well as sharing what it means to be an outstanding member of the hunting and trapping community. Certified as a CE/FS instructor in 1993 and then as a Senior Instructor in 1998, Frank serves as a mentor, not only to his students, but also to other instructors wishing to share their talents with aspiring trappers and hunters. And, what a mentor he is.

In September 2014, Frank, with the help of his teaching team, presented his 291st course. Among the graduates of that course was 11-year-old Andrew Pellerin. Not only was Andrew a wonderful student, he also was recognized as the 10,000th student to have graduated from a Frank Wasylink hunter/trapper education class. This was a milestone for both Andrew and Frank – for Andrew as entering a long and honored hunting tradition and for Frank as the first and only CE/FS instructor to reach the 10,000 student mark.

A dear friend and fellow instructor said of Frank, "He is the most dedicated guy I have ever met." No better praise than that can come from your peers and those you mentor.

One cannot help but marvel at the juxtaposition of the young, excited, and energized Andrew and the older, excited, and energized Frank. Together, they represent all that is good about our past and our future. How might each of us build on their excitement and energy?

Congratulations, Frank! We applaud you for all you have done and continue to do. And, thank you to his wife Sue and children, Chrissy, Aimee, Jenn, and Frank, Jr., for supporting Frank in this special endeavor.

Rick Jacobson, Director

Thanks are also extended to the members of the New Haven Raccoon Club, as well as to all of the fish and game clubs throughout Connecticut, for their continued support of the Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Program. Through your support, the following principles are conveyed: 1) ethical hunting; 2) the role of the hunter/trapper in wildlife management; and 3) firearms and archery safety.

Cover:

This winter, the Canada goose season in eastern Connecticut (NAP-H Unit) has been increased to 70 days with a three-bird daily bag limit through January 24, 2015. See the current Migratory Bird Hunting Guide for more information.

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

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CE/FS Instructor Recognized for Milestone Accomplishment

Written by Tom Donlon, DEEP Wildlife Division

Each year, more than 5,000 students are certified in Connecticut's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program. The program teaches safety in three disciplines: firearms hunting, bow hunting, and trapping. Classes are taught by a dedicated core of volunteer instructors. More than 300 experienced hunters and trappers donate their time and expertise to introduce students to the hunting and trapping tradition, focusing on the safety aspects associated with each discipline.

This past September, DEEP Commissioner Rob Klee visited a CE/FS firearms safety class at the New Haven Raccoon Club in Durham to recognize an unprecedented event for the program. Senior Instructor Frank Wasylink was introduced by the Commissioner to young Andrew Pellerin, a student in his class, as his 10,000th student. Frank, joined by his wife and four children, was presented an award to recognize this significant milestone.

Frank Wasylink was certified as a CE/FS instructor in 1993 and appointed a Senior Instructor in 1998. Throughout his involvement in the program, Frank has taught 292 classes as a volunteer. When asked if he had any idea of how many students he had taught, Frank replied "I knew it was a lot, but I never took the time to count. I had to get ready for the next class." Frank is the only instructor in Connecticut to achieve the milestone of teaching 10,000 students.

P. J. FUSCO

Frank Wasylink, a volunteer Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Instructor since 1993 (and a Senior Instructor since 1998), has received numerous awards and recognitions over the years for his contributions. Here, he displays a plaque he received recently. Another recent honor was marking the 10,000th student he has taught in his numerous classes.

ANDREW DONLON for DEEP WILDLIFE

Frank is a well-known and respected member of the New Haven Raccoon Club, which has hosted more than 50 CE/FS classes in the last five years.

As a Senior Instructor, Frank's responsibilities go beyond just teaching classes. He also is charged with helping new instructors become certified and building instructor teams to teach the program. Frank has assisted dozens of new instructors to learn the ropes and has built a strong team at the Raccoon Club.

When receiving his award, Frank said "The credit doesn't just go to me. We have a great team here and none of our classes would be possible without the team." Frank cited David Paulus, Ray Volikas, Alexandra Kelleher, Craig Verrilli, and Joel Cramer (the instructor team present for the class). He also recognized the other instructors, including the ones he has taught with, as the reason the program is successful.

Frank noted that the CE/FS Program works because of the support it receives from sportsmen's clubs around the state. The New Haven Raccoon Club is an outstanding example of club support, having hosted more than 50 classes in the last five years. DEEP Commissioner Klee presented club president Tommy Hinman with a certificate recognizing the New Haven Raccoon Club's support of the CE/FS Program.

"Frank embodies the volunteer spirit that all of our volunteers share," said Tom Donlon, a CE/FS Program Coordinator. "The instructors bring to the classes their passion for hunting and their desire to introduce new hunters to the tradition. Connecticut's dedicated corps of volunteers are the backbone of the CE/FS Program and the reason safe, ethical, and responsible hunters are brought into the sport."

Frank, like so many of Connecticut's instructors, sees volunteering to teach hunter safety classes as a way to "give back to the tradition of hunting that he has enjoyed for so many years." At each class, he invites students to get involved and share what they learn with others. "It's the only way we can continue the tradition of hunting as a safe and enjoyable activity," added Frank.

Congratulations to Frank Wasylink for reaching this impressive milestone! The DEEP Wildlife Division appreciates Frank's countless hours of service as he continues to share his knowledge and love of hunting with 10,000 students and beyond.

Another Long-time Wildlife Division Staff Member Retires

On September 1, 2014, Program Specialist Mark Clavette retired after nearly 34 years with the DEEP Wildlife Division. Mark takes with him a vast amount of knowledge and experience that will be impossible to replace, and his accomplishments and contributions have been many. This is Mark's opportunity to put some of his legacy in his own words. The Wildlife Division staff thanks Mark for his years of dedicated service and we wish him all the best while he enjoys his retirement.


P. J. FUSCO

Mark Clavette readily shared his knowledge of wildlife and hunting with Connecticut residents in many venues, including the Environmental Conservation Police Division's Turn in Poachers (TIP) trailer.

When did you begin working for the Wildlife Division and what different positions did you hold?

I started working with the Wildlife Division in November 1980 following a temporary ranger assignment with the U.S. Forest Service in Wyoming. My first job was as a seasonal deer check station operator, and then I was hired as a seasonal employee three more times to assist furbearer biologist, Joe Risigo. I was hired permanently as a Wildlife Biologist in May 1982, working under Assistant Director Peter Bogue. I was promoted to a Biologist 2 in 1985 and Program Specialist 1 in 1991.

Briefly describe some of your job responsibilities during your time with the Wildlife Division.

My job has left me with a variety of experiences and responsibilities. Initially, as a field biologist, those tasks were with land management, fur resource data collection, beaver trapping, and responding to nuisance wildlife assistance requests. My Hartford office tenure began as coordinator of the state's Pheasant Program and providing technical assistance to the public regarding hunting access programs, wildlife damage issues, land management projects, public access initiatives, and coordinating cooperative access programs with a multitude of private sportsmen's organizations. Over the years, the position grew to include many administrative functions, including land acquisition, recruitment of personnel, development of agency regulations and legislation, and supervision of special permitting programs such as Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators, Wildlife Rehabilitation, and wildlife possession/importation. For the past 10 years, I also supervised the Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Program, Connecticut's equivalent of hunter/trapper education.

Mark has a vast knowledge base of public hunting areas through his involvement with the Wildlife Division's pheasant program.

What were some of your major accomplishments?

I saw my job as an advocate for licensed hunters and trappers and a lot of my efforts were made to ensure that opportunities to enjoy their outdoor activities continued. Some of my most rewarding accomplishments included a successful defense of the Pheasant Program, resisting efforts to close areas to hunting, and opening up to public hunting thousands of acres of newly acquired lands and existing DEEP lands. I would also add my involvement in a variety of regulatory and legislative changes to benefit wildlife management and hunters. This included a recent comprehensive package of favorable changes adding the use of crossbow equipment for all bowhunters. More recently, a new federal aid project to purchase additional acreage for expanding existing Wildlife Management Areas has come to fruition and will ensure that wildlife-related recreation, including hunting, will be maintained as primary public uses. These accomplishments were the result of favorable relationships with our constituencies, including other DEEP Divisions.

What was your favorite animal to work with?

People – especially hunters and trappers. I never thought I would come into this career and not work with individual wildlife species. It took me some time to realize that how you deal with people is the most important quality you can bring to a wildlife job. I have always enjoyed helping others truly appreciate all that Connecticut has to offer in the outdoors.

What part of your job will you miss the most?

I will miss the working relationships and friendships I have developed with DEEP staff. They often looked to me for guidance and I'd like to think that the historical knowledge and insight I provided was more than just part of the job.

Coordinating public access and cooperative sportsmen's programs required Mark to have a great deal of interaction with a variety of constituents.

What will you not miss?

I will not miss being a supervisor. This was the only part of my job that truly caused me the most stress. Although I feel that I was a good and capable supervisor, it wasn't something I really wanted to do. Being a person in leadership often forces you to do things that make people unhappy.

What do you think are the three major issues currently facing the Wildlife Division?

1. As is probably true with any state agency, the lack of financial and labor resources while attempting to meet changing public demand and expectation for services is challenging. Position vacancies in both the Wildlife Division and Environmental Conservation Police Division should be filled.

2. There is too much reliance on federal funding and user fees generated by licensed hunters and trappers to support the vast majority of wildlife programs and projects, all of which benefit the general public at large. There needs to be a continuing increase in general funded support and a mechanism by which all members of the public pay into professional wildlife management.

3. An increased reliance on justification for public hunting based solely on the need to manage wildlife. This is really troublesome and boxes hunters and trappers into a tight corner. I ask myself, "what happens when hunters are no longer needed for managing overabundant species?" I don't enjoy hunting because I am providing a management service. I hunt because it is part of my heritage and because I enjoy putting food on the table.

What major differences/changes have you seen since you first joined the Wildlife Division?

When I started, we were essentially a "Game Division," supporting projects and programs that enhanced wise use of harvestable species. A lot has changed since then and the Wildlife Division, as with every other agency nationwide, increased its responsibilities over a broader array of species and brought on staff to focus on "nongame" wildlife. Outside of the Wildlife Division, our co-workers in Environmental Conservation Police Division no longer focus entirely on game law enforcement and have taken on the greatest change in responsibilities as the sole peacekeepers on all DEEP lands. Working with Conservation Officers, as they were once called, on a variety of fronts were some of the best days a biologist could ever have.

Has anything remained the same?

The only thing that hasn't changed is the passion that many of our staff has for the job they do, even under difficult times. Hunters and trappers should be proud to know that many of the professional staff share their same passion for the future.

What is the most memorable event that happened during your time with the Wildlife Division?

I would have to say the fatal shooting of Conservation Officer Jim Spignesi while he was searching for an illegal hunter in December 1998 in Scotland. As many of the public may not be aware, Jim was a respected and deeply admired deer biologist in the Wildlife Division for many years before he switched roles. He was my first supervisor, as well. That event will forever be ingrained in all of us. I take some solace in having a part in the effort to purchase the land upon which he was killed, as an addition to the Pudding Hill Wildlife Management Area, aptly renamed the James V. Spignesi WMA in his honor.

What advice do you have for your colleagues?

Be true to the real reason you decided to enter this field. Never forget that hunters and trappers are depending on you. Be sound scientific stewards, but remember the role that common sense should play in making important wildlife decisions!

What are your plans after retirement?

I was out in the woods for the opening of the fall archery deer/turkey season on September 15 and will hunt occasionally until December 31, ON MY OWN TIME! I also will be switching roles somewhat with my wife, Donna, as she picks up more work hours and I take care of some family needs at home. I plan to enjoy outdoors time with some previous retirees and help out more with hunter education classes as a newly-certified volunteer instructor.

Connecticut State Parks – The Next 42 Years

Written by Alan Levere, DEEP State Parks Division; photos from DEEP State Park archives

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) began its existence on October 1, 1971. On that day, Connecticut's Park and Forest Commission, established in 1913, ceased to exist and the State Park Division within DEP was born. The change brought an emerging culture of environmental responsibility where individual parks were understood to be part of, and contributors to, their surrounding ecosystems. Though the changes would be slow, the wheels were set in motion.

Continued Park System Growth

As if in deference to the earliest park visionaries, the first park properties acquired under the new DEP were based around water.

The 1973 gift of 40 acres in New Milford became the first park in the new DEP fold. This rocky real estate, which abutted and overlooked the north shore of the 1,300-acre Lake Lillinonah, came to be known as Lovers Leap State Park.

As with so many parks, the initial land is the seed that germinates, sometimes over decades, into the extensive park acreage the public comes to enjoy. That was the case at Lovers Leap, which expanded from its original gift to 160 acres, and similarly in two soon-to-follow locations – the many-segmented, multi-town Scantic River State Park and the 20-mile, six town, Hop River State Park Trail, which were both added in 1979.

No one, however, could foresee that as the 1970s concluded, there would be little expansion of the park system until the summer of 1992. It would be the leanest time of state park acquisition in State Park's first 100 years. Nonetheless, the park system could boast nine new parks embracing over 1,000 acres at the close of the 1970s.

While purchases may have been lean for those 13 years, Park staff was unusually busy accommodating the explosive growth in visitor attendance. Indeed, from 1979 to 1992, approximately 100 million visitors, or one fifth of all attendance ever tallied in the first century of Connecticut State Parks, came through the gates.

State Parks slowly got their acquisition legs back under them, beginning in 1992 with the transfer from the Department of Transportation of the Air Line Trail railroad bed. From there, State Parks embarked on a path of new additions that would total 13 in the next two decades and bring the total to 107 state parks at the time of the Park Centennial in 2013.

New park properties in the 1990s included the 225-acre Stillwater Pond State Park in Torrington, the 218-acre Mono Pond State Park in Columbia, and the 300-acre Trout Brook Valley in Easton. And though Connecticut River properties had always been sought after for State Parks, the river's tributaries, major coves, and tidal wetlands have also been desired.

Discussions about the acquisition of Lovers Leap began in 1944, but money was never set aside for purchase. The generosity of Catherine Hurd, prior to her passing, proved to be a boon to the citizens of the state as she left her rocky hilltop estate to the people of Connecticut for use as a state park.

Someplace Special Along the Salmon River

The opportunity to protect one such important cove along the lower Connecticut River Valley finally arrived in late 1998 when the 300-acre Echo Farm in East Haddam was becoming available. The farm featured 6,000 feet of frontage on the Salmon River and scenic vistas from its highest vantage points. Echo Farm was a premium parcel and, amid rumors of dense residential and/or commercial development, the State of Connecticut acquired the parcel. Today, the parcel is known as Machimoodus State Park, a designation the pre-European locals had bestowed upon it for the occasional, and still present, booming noises that emanate from the vicinity.

Ten years later, in 2008, upstream of and contiguous to Machimoodus, the site of the former Sunrise Resort became available. Generations had known this classic waterside vacation location as one of the best of several in the East Haddam area. But, as with so many of the local resorts, changes in summer recreation patterns slowly closed the window on a way of life that had existed on the site since 1916. The acquisition of the Sunrise Resort property in December 2008 added 143 acres to the neighboring 300 acres at Machimoodus State Park and an additional nine tenths of a mile of riverfront protection along the Salmon River.

In addition to State Park's ongoing objectives of protecting and providing access to Connecticut's waters and landscapes, another priority – historic preservation – rose to the forefront whenever the opportunity was presented.

Enter Fort Trumbull State Park

Hidden along New London's Thames River waterfront, the snug coastal site

of Fort Trumbull was little known even to most of its neighbors. For years, the fort was home to sensitive military research, which did not allow for public visitation. That changed in 1992 when the Naval Undersea Warfare Center moved from the fort to Newport, Rhode Island, and opened the way for a state-sponsored initiative to obtain, cleanup, and open the site. After years of restorations and enhancements, the renovated fort and its grounds opened to the public in 2000. Its addition to the park system added 15 scenic and historic acres and round-the-clock coastal access for saltwater fishing.

The sole new state park acquired in the 1980s brought 592 acres in Lebanon into the park system. Known as Red Cedar Lake State Park at the onset, the name was changed in 2000 to Mooween State Park in deference to Camp Mooween, which had been a beloved summer retreat from 1921 to 1960. The old road to the former camp is now a well-defined forested path that leads visitors into the depths of this park.

An Equestrian Experiment

Decades after the first State Park Police patrolled the beaches of Hammonasset on horseback in the 1920s, the idea of a horse patrol, which had slipped into history by the 1930s, was rekindled and reestablished in the early 1980s.

It was, however, only through sheer determination that Conservation Officers along the shore were able to bring the plan to fruition. Though adding horses was approved by the Park offices, no funds were provided. Nonetheless, excitement spread in the community and when horses, their tack, bedding, and even a trailer were generously donated by the public, the program become a reality at Rocky Neck State Park and later at Hammonasset Beach State Park.

Three horses constituted the ranks of the early mounted patrol. Ralph, a quarter horse, whose arrival in late 1982 got the 1983 program underway, was later joined by Sam, another quarter horse. Fred the Morgan horse rounded out the trio.

The elevated point of view from horseback boosted the officer's ability to see over crowds and improve parking lot surveillance. During the years that the horse patrol was active, both parks were able to document a sharp decrease in "vehicular vandalism."

Four-legged Ralph and Officer John Johnston attract an admirer at Rocky Neck State Park. Locating lost children, decreasing parking lot vandalism, and boosting the officer's public relations were the hallmarks of the 1980s Mounted Horse Patrol.

As the 1990s approached and the horses aged into retirement, so did the program. But, for the greater part of the decade it brought smiles to the faces of parents and delight to the world of many children.

Interpreting the Park Environment

Having park interpreters on site to help the public understand the significance of a location has long been a natural part of state park historic properties. Telling the story of Gillette Castle and Dinosaur State Parks has been integral practically from the start. However, the environmental education which we take for granted today was difficult to initiate.

Inklings of environmental interpretive programs began in the 1960s, but only to keep youthful summer campers at Hammonasset Beach State Park occupied over the course of their long stay. Those well-received programs caught on and, enhanced by the environmental awareness of the DEP era, their success inspired other shore front parks to do the same. Slowly, interpretive efforts grew to encompass trailside education, school group programs, and summer camps. Meigs Point Nature Center, now a tradition at Hammonasset Beach, started coastal environmental education; the nature center at Rocky Neck followed, and Sherwood Island joined in the 1990s as buildings and staff became available.

Wildlife in the Parks

Dating from 1971, when State Parks became part of DEP, the increased environmental well-being across the state and within State Parks has led to a growth in both the range and the diversity of Connecticut's wildlife. Today, in a state where human and wildlife population densities

A trail near the border of the abutting Machimoodus and Sunrise State Parks typifies the look and feel of the area which, in many places, is returning to its natural habitat unseen at the location for over 90 years.

Constructed from 1839 to 1852, Fort Trumbull is unique in the "Third System" forts for the Egyptian Revival features incorporated into its design. (Two earlier fort systems had been outdated.) The Fort never saw action in battle and by the end of the Civil War advances in fire power had rendered all Third System forts vulnerable. This 2000 photo shows the fort cleaned of its Cold War era office complexes and research buildings.

Opened in 2000, Fort Trumbull State Park today features the refurbished pre-Civil War granite-block fort, a world class, state-of-the-art visitor and interpretive center, and public-access saltwater fishing piers.

continue to increase, wildlife sightings in state parks are increasingly common. However, state parks were not always quite so healthy.

In 1954, when trees in parks and forests were being devastated by gypsy moths, it was a simple decision for the head of State Parks to combat the defoliation by aerial spraying of DDT. Fortunately, the long-term impacts of such actions have been realized and the recovery in the quality of air, land, and water following protective environmental laws has benefited more than just the people of the state.

At off-peak hours in today's state parks, it is not uncommon to experience large and small mammals, aquatic life, and bird populations so diverse that visitors come from hundreds of miles away to glimpse, hear, and photograph the multitude of species.

Friends of State Parks

The 100-year commitment to recreating in and preserving today's parks and forests has been made easier because of our "Friends." By any measure, State Parks' oldest friend and ally in this commitment has been the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA). Already 18 years old when the Park Commission began in 1913, CFPA remains the standard by which other Friends organizations are measured.

Sustaining a state park system has proven to be a heavy workload. Fortunately, as the years have passed, more Friends have helped parks flourish along the way. After the Sleeping Giant State Park Association initiated the concept of befriending a specific park location in 1924, six additional groups formed over the next 70 years to support their local state park lands. In 1994, those original seven organizations provided the foundation for the successful formation of a

This logo represents the statewide Friends of Connecticut State Parks, which continues to enhance our Parks through a combination of visitor education and political advocacy across the state.

The Salmon River today remains quietly attractive for outdoor recreation as it has been for nearly a century. This image was captured during late spring State Park Division No Child Left Inside® program.

Albert Turner is seen later in his career, with his ever present pipe in hand and inimitable knickers, proposing the location of the next state park.

statewide group – the Friends of Connecticut State Parks. By the time 2013 and the Connecticut State Park Centennial rolled around, our state could count 23 Friends groups that, in their own special way, have helped their respective parks, and the park system in general, be better, richer places for the public to enjoy.

100 Years

Phenomenal accomplishments of acquisition and maintenance have been achieved by the end of the State Parks' first 100 years. The early Park Commission's vision of making special lands available for public use is continually being fulfilled. At the end of its first century, Connecticut State Parks can boast 107 locations encompassing 32,500 acres. It is said that everyone in the state's population of nearly 3.6 million people is within a 15-minute drive of a state park. This must be so, because in recent years attendance figures show an average of eight million such visitors every year. And despite the challenges that Mother Nature and millions of visitors sometimes impose, it is only through the hard work and perseverance of park supervisors, maintainers, and other DEEP staff that the state parks remain pleasing destinations to enjoy year round.

December 22, 2014, marks 100 years since the original purchase of the five-acre, bankrupt beachfront property in Westport, the park system's first. With the vision of an expansive statewide park system, architect of the Connecticut State Park System. In early 1914, as he sat with the burden of constructing a park system to last the ages Turner wrote:

"I tried to imagine the changes of the next thirty years, and still future thirties … [and] I have formed the personal opinion that tomorrow will see State Parks in Connecticut as necessary as State Highways are today."

Turner's vision of a park system reflected the open Connecticut landscape of the 1870s and 1880s. Today, those who walk the beaches of Hammonasset at sunrise can share the view of open space Turner knew in the days of his youth; the view he defined early in 1914 and which he spent the rest of his life helping Connecticut's State Park System achieve.

Turner's vision and its growth have changed little in the 70 years since his death. But, for nearly 30 years his dedicated work set the tone for a park system that has weathered 100 years, brought recreational delight to more than 450 million visitors, and created the standard by which Connecticut State Parks moves into its second century.

In 2009, the Friends of Sherwood Island State Park and the State Park Division celebrated the opening of a new nature center which interprets the park's natural history for visitors of all ages.

The late 2000s brought wintering harbor seals to state park shores. This individual was seen basking in the sunshine at Hammonasset Beach in Madison.

Connecticut's State Parks have grown to include a remarkably diverse assemblage of woodlands, waterfalls, meadows, and historic grounds that today are enjoyed in ways as diverse as the visitors who make use of them.

A Close Look

A close look by today's park visitors will yield the spirit of Albert Turner, the first State Park employee, the park system visionary, and the nationally respected

This is the final installment of a 10-piece Connecticut State Park Centennial series. I offer a sincere 'thank you" to my colleagues at *Connecticut Wildlife* magazine for accommodating this lengthy story and for their excellent work in its production

– Al Levere, DEEP State Parks Division

Kensington State Fish Hatchery:
Central to Connecticut's Salmonid Fisheries Since 1930

Article by Mike Beauchene and Al Sonski, DEEP Inland Fisheries Division. Photos by Mike Beauchene

Augmenting Connecticut's recreational freshwater fisheries is a long-standing tradition dating back to the mid-1800s. Adequate spawning habitat and conditions exist throughout the state, allowing many species, such as bass, pickerel, sunfish, perch, and bullhead, to maintain self-sustaining fishable populations. Trout, limited by the availability of spawning habitat, cannot produce on their own enough fish of size or quantity to meet the demand of the angling public. To help fill this gap, Connecticut, like many other states, raises trout to be released at a catchable size. Connecticut raises trout in two state fish hatcheries – in Burlington and Plainfield – each will be featured in upcoming editions of the magazine.

The Early Days (1930-1960)

As best we can determine, the property for the Kensington State Fish Hatchery was purchased from a private fishing club in 1929. At the time, there was only a single stream-fed pond where club members presumably fished for brook trout. With the new acquisition and ideal water quality to raise trout and salmon, the State Fish and Game Commission began to expand the capability of the property by building the manager residence/hatchery office, meat house (fish were originally fed ground up meat instead of commercially produced fish feeds of today), and a workshop. Brook trout were the first coldwater species to be cultured with the small fish (fry and fingerlings) reared in hand-made troughs. Once the fish were large enough, they were moved to earthen ponds, which were dug in 1933 by the Works Progress Administration with horsepower provided by mule. Hand-dug wells and pipes made of banded wood (some still functioning today) offered a continuous supply of clean, cold, slightly alkaline water, perfect for raising trout and salmon. In addition, during this timeframe, some of the newly dug ponds at Kensington were used to support goals of the Pond Fish Restoration Program by rearing 180,000 calico bass (stocked for game fish forage) and 220,000 bullhead (stocked for human forage) annually.

More Demand (1960-1980)

Fishing as a recreational activity was ever increasing. The recommendation in the 1959 Lake and Pond Survey Report published by the State Board of Fisheries and Game was "*to add/reclaim as many trout waters (lakes and ponds) as possible.*" The eggs of brown, rainbow, lake, and cutthroat trout, as well as coho salmon, arrived at Kensington, shipped from other sister fish and game agencies, as well as private hatchery suppliers. Rearing more fish created a demand for more water and more space. The first drilled wells and concrete bottom ponds at Kensington were established in the 1960s, increasing the capacity for the hatchery to produce trout.

Era of Salmon, Part 1: Goal to Restore (1984-2013)

To support federal restoration efforts in the Connecticut River system, Kensington was designated an Atlantic Salmon Hatchery in 1984. Several key renovations, including drilling the largest and highest yielding well, were completed and, from 1986 to 1996, the facility and staff focused exclusively on Atlantic salmon (all trout production ceased). Kensington was the epicenter of Atlantic salmon, with as many as 3.5 million eggs spawned and 850,000 fry stocked within the tributaries of the Connecticut River system. Beginning in 1992, surplus and spawned salmon have been made available annually in select waters to provide a unique recreational fishery.

The Connecticut River strain of Atlantic salmon is the southernmost population in the world – an important biological resource in the face of climate change. The salmon kept at Kensington are direct descendants of these returning fish. With the demise of the restoration program and the closing of federal and other state hatcheries, the salmon at Kensington are the only representatives of this strain left in existence.

Browns Return (1992 and on)

Kensington had space available following yearly stocking of Atlantic salmon fry. To increase trout production for various fisheries management efforts, brown trout (Bitterroot strain) returned to Kensington. Unfortunately, this strain did not prove viable and was discontinued in 1998. Beginning in 1996, eggs of the Seeforellen strain of brown trout, reported to be a long-lived fish capable of reaching large sizes, were brought to Kensington from Michigan and from adults trapped in Nepaug Reservoir, New Hartford. Currently, the hatchery produces Seeforellen browns to support fisheries management programs with 400,000 fry, 5,000 adults, and several hundred surplus broodstock annually. It also cultures and contributes 50,000 catchable size brown trout (Cortland strain) annually from eggs obtained at the Quinebaug State Fish Hatchery.

The Kensington State Fish Hatchery is one of DEEP's best kept fisheries secrets. From a small bluff off of Hatchery Road, one can see a variety of small, uniformly brown outbuildings and a series of earthen ponds all spread across 46 well-kept acres. Since 1930, millions of fish have hatched and been distributed to waters across Connecticut and New England. For hatchery information, please call 860-829-8518.

Era of Salmon, Part 2: The Legacy Program (2013 and on)

While all Atlantic salmon are the same species, unique strains or races can be developed when they home to their own river generation after generation and become "reproductively isolated" from salmon in other rivers. For over 45 years, biologists have been breeding adult salmon that have returned to the Connecticut River as part of the restoration program. Fish that were originally stocked in the river came from Maine, but over time the genetic identity of the strain shifted as the fish adapted to their new river. It is important to maintain this strain, not only to support Connecticut's Atlantic Salmon Legacy Program and the broodstock fisheries, but also to preserve this unique genetic resource, the importance of which may go beyond the boundaries of Connecticut.

To keep the Legacy Program viable, 250 age-four Atlantic salmon broodstock are required. These fish generate 500,000 to 700,000 eggs each year. From these eggs, 100,000 fry are released into the Salmon River system and 150,000 fry into the Farmington River system. Surplus broodstock are still used to support the popular fishery in the Naugatuck and Shetucket Rivers, as well as in some lakes.

Students exhibit tremendous pride on release days when their efforts to raise each fish from an egg are rewarded when watching their fish swim away. Two Atlantic salmon fry are released into the West Branch Farmington River.

Future of Fisheries

One of Kensington's greatest contributions is continued support of programs involving the classroom rearing of salmonids. Each year, 20,000 eyed eggs of each species are donated to support the long-term educational programs, Salmon-in-Schools (Atlantic salmon) and Trout in the Classroom (brown trout). These programs provide students with real life examples of habitat, water quality, food webs, and life cycles, while also instilling stewardship of natural resources, species conservation, and inter-connectivity of people and the natural world.

Today, like every day, hundreds of thousands of trout and salmon are under the watchful eye of Fish Hatchery Supervisor Al Sonski and Environmental Protection Maintainer Tom Fitzgerald. Quietly and unassumingly they manage this 46-acre facility, maintaining a world class reputation in Connecticut and throughout New England – a true gem hidden in plain sight.

Pulse of Darkness - The Long-eared Owl

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

One of Connecticut's seldom seen denizens is the long-eared owl. It may be found here year-round, but it is secretive, well-camouflaged, and strictly nocturnal, making it one of the toughest birds to encounter in our state. It also is listed as a state endangered species because of its rarity and limited breeding occurrences.

Long-eared owls are normally found in dense conifer stands during the breeding season. In winter, thick stands of pine, spruce, and cedar are used for roosting. If suitable conifers are not available, the owls will make use of dense climbing vine tangles, including grapevine and bittersweet, that afford them protection from predators and the elements. The owls will often roost close to a tree trunk in dense cover. Favored roosting spots are dark and quiet. On cold winter days, long-eared owls may be found sleeping in the warm sun.

A long-eared owl starts its nighttime hunting forays from a woodland edge at twilight. An expert "mouser," the majority of this owl's diet is small rodents that are sometimes caught in complete darkness.

The "ears" of long-eared owls are not really ears at all. They are actually elongated feather tufts above the eyes that help them blend into their surroundings.

Long-eareds are medium-sized, and somewhat resemble their much larger great horned owl cousins. They are slender with bold crosshatched lengthwise streaking on the chest and belly. They have a rusty-colored facial disk, bright yellow eyes, and elongated ear tufts. The back is primarily dark brown, patterned with finely marked spots and reticulation. Long-eared owls have long wings and their flight is erratically buoyant and moth-like.

The characteristic ear tufts of a long-eared owl are held high when the bird becomes alarmed. When disturbed, the owl compresses its body feathers and elongates its posture to make itself appear to be a broken tree limb or to blend into the bark of a tree trunk. The owl freezes in place, sitting motionless until the threat passes. Cryptic plumage makes it very difficult for an observer or a predator to locate the owl. Long-eared owls are known to fall victim to larger birds of prey, including great horned owls and goshawks.

Long-eared owls rarely build their own nests, instead they usually use an old nest from a crow, hawk, heron, or squirrel that may be located in thick conifer cover or in deciduous trees. Here, the female will lay three to eight pure white eggs; most commonly four or five eggs. The eggs are incubated for about three weeks. Young owls begin to branch from the nest when about four to five weeks old. They will be capable of strong flight after they reach the age of eight or nine weeks.

Habitat

Hunting areas for long-eared owls are forest openings, fields, marshes, or agricultural habitats that have an abundance of small mammals or birds. Long-eared owls become active at dusk and will hunt throughout the night before

returning to heavy cover by daybreak to roost for the day. They hunt near forest edges and brushy fields, and in marshes with extensive open areas. The owls prey chiefly upon small mammals, including meadow voles, shrews, and white-footed mice. At times, they will take small birds, such as sparrows. They have an acute sense of hearing that enables them to hunt fields and catch mice and voles in complete darkness. The percentage of rodents in the diet is overwhelming, making long-eared owls one of our most beneficial raptors.

In late fall and winter, long-eared owls in Connecticut tend to move toward the coast from northern forest breeding areas, which may be as far away as Canada. They will show up near the coast for what will be the coldest and most stressful part of the year, from November through mid-April. The moderating influences of the shoreline help the owls make it through the winter. Favorable locations have habitat components of thick cover for roosting and nearby open habitat for hunting. Some areas with a good prey base have been known to harbor over a dozen individuals in a communal roost, although it is rare to encounter so many in one place in Connecticut.

The largest and best quality shoreline habitats left in our state are on public properties, including state and municipal parks, wildlife management areas, and national wildlife refuges. Dense brushy thickets with components of conifers, vines, and thick woody growth along the coast are critical for long-eared owls.

Winter is an especially vulnerable time for these birds. Roosting areas are sensitive to disturbance. If disturbance becomes frequent or intrusive, the owls may abandon an otherwise safe place, forcing them into a situation where it may be difficult to survive. Observers should always be mindful of proper owl viewing ethics to minimize disturbance to day-roosting owls, including the long-eared.

Long-eared owls become gregarious in winter, often roosting communally in dense conifer groves or, less frequently, in vine tangles. Note the crosshatched lengthwise streaking on the chest and belly, and the rust-colored facial disk.

Conservation

Long-eared owls have a circumpolar range. They are found in Europe, Asia, and some parts of Africa, as well as in North America. Their North American distribution is extensive, as they are found coast to coast from mid-latitude Canada to Baja California in the west and Virginia in the east. Wintering birds may be found as far south as northern Mexico.

Range-wide, long-eared owls are generally considered to be a fairly common species with low conservation concern. In Connecticut, it is a different story. Long-eared owls were formerly a common breeding species in the state where they nested in thick conifer stands and low brush thickets along the coast. These owls have been declining in Connecticut since the early 1900s and, today, the species is considered to be an uncommon winter visitor and an endangered breeder. Declines are due in large part to the loss and degradation of habitat. Undisturbed open field and brushy habitats with nearby dense conifer stands have been lost to development and forest succession, resulting in a reduction of available habitat. There is still much to be learned about the breeding distribution and population dynamics of long-eared owls in Connecticut. The one certainty is that the protection of good quality habitat is essential for these owls to maintain their presence in our state.

2014 Was a Banner Year for Nesting Piping Plovers

Written by Rebecca Foster, DEEP Wildlife Division; photos by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

The piping plover and least tern nesting season in Connecticut came to a close with the arrival of autumn. With the impending winter ahead, most plovers and terns have completed their lengthy migrations and are feeding at their wintering grounds from the southern United States down to the Caribbean.

The piping plover is a small shorebird that nests on sandy beaches along our shoreline. It is listed as a threatened species on both the state and federal level. The DEEP Wildlife Division actively manages piping plovers and their nesting habitat in the state. When quality nesting habitat, territories, and nests are located, the Wildlife Division places stake and string "psychological" fencing around the areas, complete with bright yellow signs that say "Please Stay Away." This prevents beachgoers from accidentally stepping on well-camouflaged nests and chicks, while also providing the nesting pair with a buffer from disturbance.

Piping plovers scrape a shallow depression in the sand in which they lay three to four tan and brown spotted eggs. After the fourth egg is laid, an "exclosure" may be installed around the nest. The exclosure, which is a large metal cage with fine netting covering the top, is effective in preventing predators from eating plover eggs. After 27-30 days, tiny precocial (feathered and able to move freely) chicks will hatch. DEEP staff and many dedicated volunteer monitors intensively observe the chicks for a month or more to determine the number of young that reach the age at which they can successfully fly (also called fledging). High piping plover fledge counts indicate a successful nesting season because more individuals are added to a population than are naturally lost.

2014 Results

The number of piping plover pairs returning to Connecticut to breed was the higher this year than last – 51 pairs compared to 45 in 2013. Over the last seven years, the number of plover pairs nesting in Connecticut has remained steady or increased slightly, averaging 47 pairs. This year, a new record number of plover chicks fledged in Connecticut – 116 – surpassing the previous high of 101 in 2008!

A number of factors likely contributed to this high level of fledging success. Overall, nest and chick losses due to inclement weather or wash-outs from high tides were low. Only seven nests statewide were washed over by high tides, and one of these was still able to hatch eggs. No "heat waves" or significant storms were reported during the peak plover nesting window and food availability seemed adequate.

Another important element contributing to piping plover success was the assistance of more than 400 people who monitor and protect Connecticut's threatened shorebirds. Partner groups include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Audubon Society, Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds, The Nature Conservancy, and the Bridgeport WildLife Guards, as well as municipalities, private landowners, and many other volunteers, like the Master Wildlife Conservationists. These volunteer monitors not only watch the nesting shorebirds and notify DEEP of urgent management concerns, but also educate hundreds of beachgoers about the plight of piping plovers and least terns (see article on page 16 to learn more). Nesting birds benefitted immensely from the increased level of public education, as well as the significant monitoring presence on nesting beaches and quick responses to address issues.

Historical nesting beaches continued to be the most productive for piping plovers in Connecticut; Old Saybrook, Milford, and West Haven again supported the greatest number of nesting plover pairs. In 2014, plovers nested on or attempted to nest on a few unexpected beaches as well.

Predators and Exclosures

Even with the overall successes of the nesting season, predators had a substantial negative effect on piping plover hatching and fledging rates at a few sites that historically have been productive. For example, all three attempted nests on a nesting beach in Stratford were lost to fox predation. Predator-related losses also were recorded at Groton, West Haven, and Old Lyme beaches. Predator pressure continues to be evaluated at these locations.

The use of nest exclosures has consistently proven to increase plover hatching success throughout the region. However, recently it has been observed that predators are "keying in" on the large metal cages. This happens when predators learn to associate the exclosure with a food source (i.e., eggs or adults), either from experience or observation of other predators. In areas where this is happening, the use of exclosures will be limited. This

This year, a new record number of piping plover chicks fledged in Connecticut – 116 – surpassing the previous high of 101 in 2008!

year, biologists observed piping plovers "refusing" exclosures on three occasions. "Refusal" means that after an exclosure is installed around a nest, the adults refuse to enter the cage and resume incubation. After a waiting period (determined by scientists to allow maximum opportunity for the birds to return but also minimizes exposure of the eggs to the elements), the exclosures were unassembled and quickly removed. In all three documented cases, the plovers immediately resumed incubation once the exclosure was removed.

Exclosures will continue to be used during the 2015 nesting season as an important management tool. However, exclosure use will be site-specific and based on predator history and the individual plover acceptance of the exclosure.

Overall, least tern productivity in 2014 was disappointing. Only 258 pairs attempted to nest statewide and 75 young fledged. One theory explaining the lack of success may be a possible shortage of food for young chicks.

Interesting Observations

This season, monitors made a number of unusual piping plover behavioral observations. For example, an exclosure was placed around a nest in which one pair of plovers laid four eggs. The birds returned to the nest and resumed incubation. On a subsequent visit, five eggs were counted in this same nest. While not unheard of, scientific literature states that five-egg nests are rare. In this instance, only four of the eggs hatched.

Another interesting observation was piping plover responses to high tide events inundating their nests. Most seasons, it is common for the higher tides to wash over a number of plover nests that are located on low-lying sandy beaches. In three such cases this year, plovers dug new nests further back from the high tide line and rolled their eggs into the new nests. All three pairs continued to incubate their eggs. Two of the nests failed to hatch, but one nest successfully hatched two of four eggs. Monitors and staff will continue to note atypical behaviors and incidents at nesting beaches.

Least Tern Numbers Low

DEEP also intensively manages and monitors another state threatened shorebird, the least tern. Least terns are colonial nesting birds that use the same sandy beaches as piping plovers. Similar to plover management, least tern management involves the use of wooden fencing and educational signage for protection of nesting colonies. In addition, large sections of heavy-duty metal fencing may be used on the most productive sites. The fencing encompasses an entire tern colony and prevents predators, like skunks and foxes, from preying on the terns' ground nests. The use of metal fencing is limited as installation is both difficult and labor intensive. In 2014, metal "tern fencing" was only used at one site.

Overall, least tern productivity in 2014 was disappointing. Only 258 pairs attempted to nest statewide and 75 young fledged. One theory explaining the lack of success may be a possible shortage of food for young chicks. While results from this year's fisheries surveys are still being analyzed, early indications are that some populations of small baitfish, which are food sources for chicks, still seem to be recovering from very low numbers in 2013.

While the poor least tern productivity over the last few years in Connecticut is alarming, biologists have looked at population numbers in neighboring coastal states (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Long Island, New York) to try to put Connecticut's situation into perspective. When considering least terns from a regional standpoint, the pooled number of pairs has stayed fairly consistent. Birds do not take state lines into account when they decide where to nest. Biologists are encouraged that regional populations have remained stable.

Locations in Connecticut with the largest numbers of nesting least terns included Old Lyme, Milford, Westbrook, and Waterford. The greatest fledging success was recorded at a site in Old Lyme with 30 fledges, followed by a site in Waterford with 28 fledges, and a site in Westbrook with seven fledges. DEEP will continue to manage the least tern population in Connecticut and work with conservation partners throughout the region to determine the factors limiting tern nesting and fledging success.

Looking Ahead to 2015

The Wildlife Division will be ready in 2015 to use all of the tools, data, and manpower available to effectively manage imperiled shorebird populations in our state. Anyone who wishes to become a USFWS piping plover/least tern volunteer monitor should contact the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds at ctwaterbirds@gmail.com. More information about the shorebird monitoring program is available on the Audubon Alliance website at www.ctwaterbirds.blogspot.com.

THANK YOU!

The Wildlife Division would like to thank the incredibly dedicated group of conservationists that made 2014 such a success for the piping plover!

Increasing Awareness About Beach-nesting Birds One Pledge at a Time

By Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe, Important Bird Area Program Coordinator, Audubon Connecticut

Connecticut beaches provide important nesting habitat for the federally and state threatened piping plover and the state threatened least tern and American oystercatcher. These species arrive in Connecticut from late March through early May and lay their camouflaged eggs in small scrapes in the sand. Young piping plovers are precocial; upon hatching they are mobile and can feed themselves but rely on the adults for protection from the elements and predators. Least terns chicks are fed by the adults until they are capable of flight. American oystercatcher chicks may stay with adults for up to a year while learning to use their strong bills to feed on mollusks. Disturbance by unaware beachgoers can have a real impact on the breeding success of these species. If beachgoers tread into nesting areas, eggs and chicks may get stepped on or adults may leave their young unattended. Dogs being walked on beaches during the nesting season has a similar effect, as these birds see dogs as predators, even when leashed. Birds scared off of nests by dogs will take longer to return to a nest than when disturbed by humans alone. Lastly, trash left on beaches attracts predators, reducing the survival of eggs and chicks.

This past summer, to increase awareness of beach-nesting birds, the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds, in partnership with DEEP and the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge and with support from the EPA's Long Island Sound Futures Fund, launched the "Be a Good Egg Program" in Connecticut. The program, which originated in North Carolina, establishes information stations staffed by volunteers at beaches where birds are nesting. The volunteers play a key role in increasing community awareness about beach-nesting birds, the threats they face, and the small actions people can take to help the birds successfully reproduce. Visitors to the beach are asked to take the "Be a Good Egg" Pledge, which is to 1) stay out of the string fencing areas where birds are nesting, 2) keep dogs off the beach during the breeding season, and 3) pick up trash that attracts predators.

Thirty-three volunteers, with assistance from Audubon and Stewart B. McKinney staff, worked tables at Sandy Point Important Bird Area (IBA) in West Haven, West Beach in Westbrook, and Long Beach in Stratford (part of the Great Stratford Meadows IBA) every other weekend from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Sandy Point and Long Beach are important nesting areas for shorebirds, while the Westbrook Barrier Islands IBA, just off shore from West Beach, is a significant nesting area for American oystercatchers. The Wild-Life Guards, 13 high school students employed for eight weeks this past summer as beach-nesting bird stewards at Bridgeport's Pleasure Beach, also shared their knowledge about beach-nesting birds with visitors.

G. JETTE for AUDUBON CONNECTICUT

"Be a Good Egg" volunteer Deborah Johnson stands ready to share information about beach-nesting birds with visitors to Sandy Point in West Haven.

Over the course of the summer, volunteers put in 186 person hours and engaged nearly 900 beachgoers. Over 600 people took the "Be a Good Egg" Pledge and volunteers reported seeing visitors picking up trash from the beach. So much can be gained from simply making people more aware about beach-nesting birds. Many people visit the beach every day and see the bird nesting signs and string fencing, but they are not necessarily thinking about the birds and instead are thinking about swimming or fishing. But, when you engage them face-to-face, they become more aware, understand what the string fencing protects, and are more likely to stay out of nesting areas. The beach visitors become familiar with the birds and want to give them the opportunity to breed, while enjoying the beach themselves. If you would like to take the pledge, visit: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ITJL3aOZ1A9qeWBEE-g4-GY0S-WgSQbaVikBztGeygc/viewform?c=0&w=1.

Those interested in volunteering for the "Be a Good Egg" Program at Sandy Point or Westbrook next summer should contact Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe (cfolsom-okeefe@audubon.org) or Kris Vagos (kristina_vagos@fws.gov), respectively.

THANK YOU!

We would like to thank the many volunteers from a number of organizations, including the Friends of the Westbrook Barrier Islands, the West Haven Watershed Restoration Committee, the New Haven Bird Club, Menunkatuck Audubon Society, and the Hartford Audubon Society, who helped make the "Be a Good Egg" Program a success. We would also like to thank the city of West Haven and the towns of Westbrook and Stratford for supporting this valuable program.

Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan -- Horseshoe Crabs

Written by Penny Howell, DEEP Marine Fisheries Division

DEEP is updating the Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan for 2015-2025 – a strategic plan to conserve wildlife and their habitats for the future. We are highlighting some of the efforts made under the original Plan approved in 2005 (previously known as the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy). Learn more at www.ct.gov/deep/WildlifeActionPlan and www.facebook.com/CTFishandWildlife.

One species benefiting from actions detailed in the 2005 Plan is the horseshoe crab, a key species whose abundance every spring, while spawning eggs in the sand on Connecticut's beaches, is a visible measure of the productivity of Long Island Sound. These "crabs" – an inaccurate name for an animal whose taxonomy and anatomy predate dinosaurs – are a "jack-of-all-trades:"

- Their blood is extracted by pharmaceutical companies for use as the most effective way to detect bacteria in drugs and implanted medical devices.
- Their eggs are a highly nutritious food source for migratory shorebirds, like the red knot.
- They provide harvestable biomass for commercial bait.
- And, most importantly, their successful nesting is a clear measure of the ability of our beaches to provide viable wildlife habitats undamaged by human development.

P. J. FUSCO

DEEP efforts to conserve horseshoe crabs included a study, funded through State Wildlife Grants from 2008-2011, to identify optimal spawning habitat along the Connecticut shore.

For these reasons, DEEP efforts to conserve these iconic animals included funding through State Wildlife Grants for a study from 2008-2011 to identify optimal spawning habitat along the Connecticut shore. This study allowed a UConn Master's candidate to develop a model which quantified preferred horseshoe crab spawning grounds and classified the entire Connecticut coastline based on characteristics such as beach gradient, substrate, and wave exposure. Model results identified 35% of Connecticut's coast as "high use" spawning ground, and another 20% as "medium use," indicating that our state's generous supply of excellent habitat plays a vital role in sustaining the horseshoe population.

You can provide input on future horseshoe crab conservation or the conservation of other species, by sending your comments on Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan to the DEEP Wildlife Division at deep.wildlifeactionplan@ct.gov. Visit the DEEP website to review revisions and drafts of the Plan at www.ct.gov/deep/WildlifeActionPlan.

How You Can Help with Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan

Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan is reviewed and revised every 10 years to make sure it reflects current needs and priorities for species of greatest conservation need and their habitats. The current revision will be completed by September 30, 2015. Participation by conservation partners, academic institutions, municipalities, and the public is a key to making the Wildlife Action Plan an effective tool for conserving Connecticut's wildlife diversity for future generations.

Read the original 2005 Plan, as well as updated and revised portions of the Plan. All of these documents can be found on the DEEP website at www.ct.gov/deep/WildlifeActionPlan. Then submit your comments to deep.wildlifeactionplan@ct.gov. Share your wildlife observations on Twitter @CT_SWAP and #CTSGCN, or on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/CTFishandWildlife.

State Wildlife Grants

The Sound's Fall Feast

Written by Penny Howell, DEEP Marine Fisheries Division; photos by DEEP Marine Fisheries Division

As we prepare for fall harvests and holiday feasts, many of the animals that live in and around Long Island Sound are doing the same. Sea birds, shorebirds, and the migratory and resident fish feast on the Sound's production of food in late summer and fall in preparation for the cold months ahead. Seals also will be swimming south from more northern waters into the Sound to enjoy a relatively warm winter here and a nearby buffet of fish species. Keeping track of the abundance of forage available in the Sound is tricky because the "all-you-can-eat fish buffet" is a spread of the more than 70 species regularly found in the Sound. The young of even large predators are prized food until they grow big enough to turn the tables; snapper bluefish are a good example.

The DEEP Marine Fisheries Division has developed two indices designed to measure the abundance of Long Island Sound's forage fish, not only to ensure that larger predators have enough to eat but also as a measure of the productivity and health of the Sound ecosystem. The forage base is often an early indication of detrimental or favorable environmental change. The two indices focus on 18 species which are very abundant, small in size, and well distributed throughout the Sound. The relative abundance of four of these species is measured in a September seine survey conducted at eight near-shore beach sites from Groton to Greenwich. The relative abundance of the remaining 14 species is measured in a fall (September-October) bottom trawl survey of open water throughout the Sound.

Together these two indices show that the forage base of the Sound has neither decreased nor increased since the early 1990s. However, abundance has not been steady, resulting in a forage rollercoaster with some very high and some very low years and little coherence between the two indices over time. This bust and boom pattern is common in many estuaries. As a result, the predators most at risk, primarily sea birds and shorebirds that feed only on a limited number of species, can experience wide fluctuations in growth or reproductive success, which are magnifications of these fluctuations in forage abundance.

The two forage indices have been above average in many recent years. However, 2013 was the lowest in the time series. Fortunately, it appears that years of very low abundance are single events; the time series of the two surveys has only dipped to a very low value briefly in the past, rebounding in the following year. So, the feasting should resume quickly.

A basket of butterfish captured in the Long Island Sound Trawl Survey.

Atlantic silversides captured in the Seine Survey.

Species Used in DEEP Forage Indices

Species are listed in rank order of abundance in Long Island Sound averaged over the time series from 1992 to 2013 (YOY = young-of-year; fish less than one year old).

Open Water Forage Species
Butterfish (YOY)
Long-finned squid
Scup (YOY)
Bluefish (YOY)
Weakfish (YOY)
Red hake
Atlantic herring
Silver hake
Spotted hake
Alewife
Atlantic menhaden
American shad
Hickory shad
Blueback herring

Near Shore Forage Species
Atlantic silversides
Mummichog
Striped kilifish
Sheepshead minnow

CT DEEP Forage Indices

Fall abundance of forage species in near shore and open deeper waters of Long Island Sound. The dashed line shows the average combined index value. Note that the 2010 Open Water index is only estimated due to incomplete sampling that year.

Red-spotted Newt

Notophthalmus v. viridescens

D. QUINN for DEEP-WILDLIFE

P. J. FUSCO

Above: Adult red-spotted newt

Below: Juvenile red-spotted newt, otherwise known as red eft.

Background and Range

The red-spotted newt (also commonly referred to as the eastern newt) is a widespread and familiar species in many areas of Connecticut. Newts have four distinct life stages: egg, aquatic larvae, terrestrial juvenile (or "eft") and aquatic adult. Their life cycle is one of the most complex of all the salamanders; starting as an egg, hatching into a aquatic larvae with external gills, then migrating to terrestrial habitats as juveniles where gills are replaced with lungs, and returning a few years later to their aquatic habitats as adults which retain lungs.

In Connecticut, the newt is found statewide, but more prominently west of the Connecticut River. The red-spotted newt has many subspecies and an extensive range throughout the eastern United States.

Description

The adult red-spotted newt has smooth skin that is overall greenish in color with small black dots scattered on the back and a row of several black-bordered reddish-orange spots on each side of the back. Male newts have black rough patches on the inside of their thighs and on the bottom tip of their hind toes during the breeding season. Adult newts are usually 3 to 5 inches in length. The juvenile, or eft, stage of the red-spotted newt is bright orange in color with small black dots scattered on the back and a row of larger, black-bordered orange spots on each side of the back. The skin is rough and dry compared to the moist and smooth skin of adults and larvae. The red eft stage can last from 1 to 3 years. The larvae have olive-colored skin, faint spots, a reddish-brown tail, and feathery external gills.

Habitat and Diet

Adult and larval newts inhabit a wide variety of aquatic habitats. They prefer sunny, weed-filled, slow-moving, and shallow bodies of water. A few known habitat types are slow meandering rivers, lakes and reservoir margins, pasture ponds, bogs, mill ponds, drainage ditches, vernal pools, and wooded swamps. Efts are found in deciduous and coniferous woodlands, pastures, and meadows. Soils of these woodlands vary from dry to soggy and waterlogged. Red-spotted newts require large areas of forested habitat adjacent to their breeding sites to support the multi-year terrestrial eft stage.

Adult newts feed on insects, leeches, crustaceans, mollusks, and small amphibians and fish. The eft will consume insects, spiders, mites, worms, and tiny mollusks, while larvae will consume aquatic microinvertebrates.

Life History

Adult newts can be active even before ice surfaces melt. Primarily, they are active February through October. Breeding occurs in late winter into early spring. After an elaborate underwater courtship, where the male holds his tail above his body and waves it in the water. After external fertilzation, the female deposits a few hundred eggs over several days, attaching them to submerged aquatic vegetation or fallen leaves in the water. Larval newts will hatch in 3 to 8 weeks, complete with external gills. Larvae will undergo metamorphosis to terrestrial efts in 2 to 5 months. The brilliantly colored efts will remain in nearby upland habitat for the next 1 to 3 years of their lives. Efts will often come out from cover on rainy summer days. During the latter eft stage, the tail will begin to flatten out, the coloration will change to green, and the newly-transformed eft will return to water to breed and live out its life as an adult newt.

Interesting Facts

This salamander secretes poisonous toxins on it skin to make it distasteful to predators, and the eft's bright coloration serves as a warning. However, some animals, like the ribbon snake, find ways around the toxins or are immune altogether and will prey on newts.

Courtship in newts is fascinating. The male will lure and entice the female with his many red spots and wiggling tail, which releases pheromones (specialized chemicals). The male, with his hind legs, will grasp the female just behind her forelimbs and then rub his chin along her snout just prior to external fertilization. Competition occurs in this species and "mating balls" can often be observed as multiple males fight over a female.

Mudpuppy

Necturus maculosus

D. QUINN for DEEP-WILDLIFE

The mudpuppy is the largest and only fully aquatic salamander found in Connecticut. It measures between 8 and 17 inches in length, and resembles a large larval salamander at maturity, as it never loses its external gills.

Background and Range

The distribution of mudpuppy populations is poorly understood in Connecticut and throughout most of New England. The earliest confirmed record of a mudpuppy in Connecticut was from Middletown in 1875. In Connecticut, mudpuppies are found in the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers, associated tributary streams, and riparian zones south from the Massachusetts border. The origin of the mudpuppy in Connecticut is still under debate and will require further scientific research to resolve whether it is a native species or was introduced into Connecticut waters.

The native range of the mudpuppy is believed to include sporadic populations from the southeastern United States north to New York, Vermont, and Quebec, and west to North Dakota.

Description

The mudpuppy is the largest and only fully aquatic salamander found in Connecticut. It measures between 8 and 17 inches in length, and resembles a large larval salamander at maturity, as it never loses its external gills. The mudpuppy is recognized by red to maroon-colored bushy gills; a gray-green and mottled back with blue-black spots and a gray belly; a broad flattened head and squarish snout; tiny eyes; a fin-like tail; and four toes on each foot. Larvae have a dark mid-back stripe bordered by a yellow band on each side. Larval coloration is maintained for up to three years.

Habitat and Diet

The mudpuppy occurs in a wide range of water conditions, including rivers and drainage ditches. In Connecticut, it is mainly found in deeper waters of the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers and associated drainages.

Mudpuppies feed on fish and their eggs, crayfish, aquatic insects and larvae, mollusks, snails, worms, spiders, plant material, and an occasional salamander. They are eaten by fish, turtles, herons, and water snakes.

Life History

Male mudpuppies seek out and mate with females in fall. By the following spring/summer, approximately 50 to over 100 eggs are deposited singly by the female under large logs or rocks. The actual dates of egg laying and development are dependent on water temperature. Development periods have ranged from one to two months. Females often remain with the eggs until they hatch. Larvae remain in the vicinity of the nest site for 6 to 8 weeks.

Interesting Facts

Mudpuppies attain sexual maturity in their sixth year at a length of 8 inches. They have been known to live up to 30 years in captivity. In the wild, an average life span of 11 years is more common.

Mudpuppies living in water bodies with lower oxygen have longer, larger gills than mudpuppies found in clear, highly oxygenated water.

Though primarily nocturnal, mudpuppies will come out during the day in dark or murky bodies of water. They are well camouflaged and walk along the bottom of the waterbody, but can swim in quick, short bursts. They are active throughout winter in deep water and are sometimes caught by ice fisherman.

The mudpuppy gets its name from a grunting sound it can make, which resembles the bark of a dog. Though it has lungs, the mudpuppy breathes primarily through its gills and uses its lungs to adjust its buoyancy.

What You Can Do

If you happen to catch a mudpuppy while fishing, release it immediately back into the surrounding water system. Do not release it somewhere else.

Work within your community to help keep Connecticut's water resources free of siltation and pollution.

Spread the word about salamanders! Knowledge is often the best tool for conserving these important amphibians.

Additional information about salamanders is available on the DEEP website at www.ct.gov/deep/salamanders.

Devastating Effects of Emerald Ash Borer Now Evident

Written by Jerry Milne, DEEP Division of Forestry

The emerald ash borer (EAB), an insect native to northeast Asia, was first observed in Michigan in 2002 and has since spread to almost 30 states and Canada. It has killed an estimated 50 million ash trees. EAB has the potential to wipe out the entire *Fraxinus* (ash) species with unknown ecological consequences. EAB was first discovered in Connecticut in 2012 in Prospect. Since then, it has spread to other parts of New Haven, Litchfield, Fairfield, Hartford, Middlesex, and New London Counties. It is not known how long EAB was in our state before it was first detected, but its effects on our ash trees are becoming evident.

White ash is estimated to comprise about three percent of Connecticut's trees overall. It usually grows on rich, moist but well-drained sites, where it can grow in much higher concentrations. White ash also is commonly found on roadsides and in yards. Literally, hundreds of thousands of ash trees could die in Connecticut within five years after infestation.

What to Look For

Some of the obvious symptoms include dieback of canopies and the stripping of bark by woodpeckers looking to eat the borers (called "blonding"). A closer look at the bark of infested trees will reveal "D-shaped" holes created by adult beetles when they exit the tree to feed on leaves. These holes can be hard to find because they are so small and ash bark can be very irregular. In addition, there will be serpentine tunnels just under the bark where EAB larvae feed on the tree's phloem (vessels that transport nutrients up and down the tree). It is this feeding by the larvae that kills the trees, not the nibbling of the leaves by the adults.

What Is Being Done

The DEEP Division of Forestry, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES), University of Connecticut, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and U.S. Forest Service have spent thousands of hours assessing the occurrence of EAB. Hundreds of ash trees were cut down and debarked by hand looking for the insect's serpentine tunnels. Hundreds of purple traps were installed along roadsides to capture EAB adults. On Connecticut State Forests, the strategy is to lower the percentage of white ash in our woodlands. This will reduce the amount of feeding material for EAB and slow its population buildup. In Naugatuck State Forest, at the epicenter of the initial EAB infestation, over 200 ash trees were recently sold to a logger before they died. By acting quickly, the Division of Forestry was able to salvage some economic value from the trees before they became worthless. When still alive, ash wood is valuable for lumber for many products, including baseball bats, furniture, and flooring.

Quarantines are in effect on moving all hardwood firewood, ash lumber and logs, and other ash wood products within Connecticut and out-of-state. Because the EAB situation is so dynamic, the CAES website (www.ct.gov/caes) is the best place to go to find the most recent information about quarantines. The purpose of the quarantines is not to eliminate EAB but to slow the spread to allow landowners and communities to plan for the impact and buy time to allow biological controls to take effect.

CAES is using state-of-the-art techniques by releasing two kinds of non-stinging wasps that kill EAB by parasitizing larvae or eggs. They are specific to EAB and control the population in their native China. The wasps were released under strict protocols set up by USDA/APHIS. Their effectiveness is being evaluated by CAES's Dr. Claire Rutledge.

What You Can Do

Don't Move Firewood! EAB was able to hopscotch around the country not by flying (it can only fly one mile a year), but by hitchhiking, primarily in firewood that people bring to vacation cabins and campgrounds. If you buy firewood, know where it came from. Everyone in Connecticut who transports firewood (not just commercial dealers) must have a document indicating where it originated and its destination. Certificates of transport and other information about firewood regulations can be downloaded from www.ct.gov/deep/forestry.

If you own woodlands and are unsure of how EAB could affect you, contact a DEEP Service Forester at 860-424-3630. You also can contact a private Connecticut Certified Forester (a list of Certified Foresters is at www.ct.gov/deep/forestry).

Those with ash trees in their yards can call a Connecticut Licensed Arborist for advice. The Connecticut Tree Protective Association maintains a list of its members who are licensed arborists (www.ctpa.org). There are insecticides that can protect ash trees from EAB. But, trees with more than 50% canopy dieback are unlikely to recover, even if treated.

Municipalities with questions about ash trees along roadsides and in public spaces can call DEEP's Urban Forestry Program (860-424-3178). EAB is the most devastating threat to our forests since Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight, and it will spread quickly. More information can be found at www.emeraldashborerinfo.org; www.ct.gov/deep/forestry; and www.ct.gov/caes.

G. MILNE, DEEP FORESTRY (2)

(Top) Woodpeckers have stripped the outer bark of this ash tree (called blonding), revealing D-shaped exit holes created by an adult emerald ash borer when it exited the tree to feed on leaves. (Bottom) A closer look at a D-shaped exit hole.

From the Woods to the Web: Hunters Providing Valuable Data

Written by Andy LaBonte, DEEP Wildlife Division

State wildlife agencies are responsible for monitoring population trends, estimating annual harvests, and establishing hunting regulations for game species. Harvest data are used to model population dynamics and for evaluating the need for changes in bag limits or regulations. Wildlife managers use numerous methods to obtain data, such as mandatory in-person check stations, mail questionnaires, surveys, mail-in harvest cards, toll-free telephone services, and online reporting.

Since the passage of Connecticut's Deer Management Act in 1975, biological data had been collected by Wildlife Division staff at select check stations throughout the state. To be most efficient with data collection, biological data were typically collected during the shotgun/rifle season. The data included sex, age, dressed body weight, number of antler points, and antler beam diameters of yearling bucks. Although the information was helpful in assessing the health of Connecticut's deer population in the past, other more cost-effective means of data collection now exist with advancement of the internet.

With the replacement of physical check stations with online and telephone reporting in 2013, the Wildlife Division has been relying on hunters to provide the critical information. When hunters harvest a deer, they are required to report that harvest through the DEEP's online or telephone reporting system. This requirement enables wildlife managers to collect much of the same information that was collected at check stations, along with other various types of information that were not previously collected. Additionally, information is now collected for the entire hunting season and not just during a peak days.

The biggest change from this new procedure is that the data collection process has moved from the managers' hands to the hands of the hunters, making it imperative that hunters report their harvest and also provide accurate information. Hunters should take pride in the fact that they are playing a key role in the success of deer management in our state.

The Wildlife Division recently conducted a survey of all state and provincial deer biologists to assess 1) changes in how harvest data have been collected over time; 2) regional differences in the type of data collected and methods used to collect data; 3) use and value of hunter-provided data; and 4) types of methods used to develop population estimates. We also are in the process of conducting a survey of Connecticut hunters to assess hunter opinions about deer harvest reporting, hunter harvest data collection, and satisfaction with deer management in Connecticut. The surveys will help with any necessary changes to future harvest reporting systems in Connecticut and across the country. Survey results will be detailed in a future issue of the magazine.

A. LABONTE, DEEP WILDLIFE

Hunters should take pride in the fact that they are playing a key role in the success of deer management in the state. Successful hunters are able to report their harvest on-line from a cell phone while they are still in the woods. It doesn't get more convenient than that.

P. J. FUSCO

Hunters used to be required to bring their deer to check stations where Wildlife Division staff would collect biological data, such as sex, age, dressed body weight, number of antler points, and antler beam diameters of yearling bucks.

Conservation Calendar

Programs at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center

Programs are a cooperative venture between the Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods. Please pre-register by calling 860-675-8130 (Mon.-Fri., 8:30 AM-4:30 PM). Programs are free unless noted. An adult must accompany children under 12 years old. No pets allowed! Sessions Woods is located at 341 Milford St. (Route 69) in Burlington.

Jan. 17 ..... **The Bobcat: CT's Secretive Wild Cat**, starting at 1:30 PM. Wildlife Division Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro will provide an introduction to the bobcat, Connecticut's only wild cat. This PowerPoint presentation will include information on the natural history of bobcats, including diet, breeding habits, and habitat requirements. Participants also will learn how to identify bobcat tracks. This program is suitable for ages 10 and older.

Hunting Season Dates

Sept. 15-Dec. 31 ..... Deer and turkey bowhunting season on private land and state land bowhunting only areas

Dec. 10-23 ..... Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Season on state land

Dec. 10-31 ..... Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Season on private land

Dec. 24-31 ..... Second portion of the turkey bowhunting season on state land

Jan. 26-Feb. 14 ..... Special late Canada goose hunting season in the south zone only (the portion east of the Quinnipiac River)

Consult the 2014 Connecticut Hunting & Trapping Guide and the 2014-2015 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide for specific season dates and details. Printed guides can be found at DEEP facilities, town halls, bait and tackle shops, and outdoor equipment stores. Guides also are available on the DEEP website (www.ct.gov/deep/hunting). Go to www.ct.gov/deep/sportsmenlicensing to purchase Connecticut hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as required deer, turkey, and migratory bird permits and stamps. The system accepts payment by VISA or MasterCard.

Special Note: Hunting and fishing license fees, as well as fees for various stamps, tags, and permits, have been reduced by 50% for 16 and 17-year olds. Check the DEEP website or the 2015 Connecticut Hunting & Trapping Guide and 2015 Connecticut Anglers Guide for specific details.

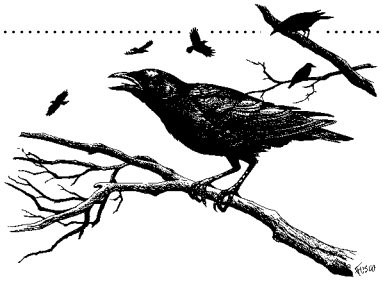
Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area to Open December 20, 2014

The Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area, in Southbury, opens for its 30th season beginning on December 20, 2014, running through Wednesday, March 4, 2015. The area is open for observations on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays between 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM. Although admission is free-of-charge, advance reservations are required and will be taken beginning on Tuesday, December 9, 2014. To make reservations for individuals, families, and groups, call toll-free at 800-368-8954 between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM on Tuesdays through Fridays.

The Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area is one of the top eagle viewing locations in New England. It is a popular spot for eagles in winter when turbulence below the dam keeps the water from freezing, and the fish below the dam provide a ready food source. Specialists will be on-site with high-powered spotting scopes to help visitors see the eagles in action and to answer questions. Visitors are encouraged to dress warmly because the observation area is unheated, and to bring binoculars, if possible, given the limited number of on-site scopes. The Shepaug Eagle Observation Area is run by FirstLight Power Resources, a GDF SUEZ Energy North America company, which owns and operates several hydroelectric facilities along the Housatonic River.

Find us on Facebook **www.facebook.com/CTFishandWildlife**

Connecticut Wildlife



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P. J. FUSCO

A northern harrier hunts along the edge of an overgrown farm field in western Connecticut.