September / October 2002

Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES ● WILDLIFE DIVISION

From the Director

Ever since I was a boy, our house has been inhabited by man's best friend. Always an English Setter, a Brittany or some mixed hunting breed with a gentle disposition and good with children. Devoted and eager-to-please creatures who assumed all the benefits of family membership, with none of the responsibilities. Pampered and overfed, they spent most of their time sleeping or resting ... until the days turned crisp and the leaves to gold.

With the onset of the fall hunting season, all of these dogs, regardless of their age or physical condition, have undergone a remarkable transformation. The sight of the Model 12, the smell of the old hunting vest and the sound of the bell were nearly more than they could stand. Panting and whining in near delirium as they apparently recalled memories of past days afield, with anticipation of more to come. Or perhaps they were responding subconsciously to some deeply embedded genetic trigger; their "call of the wild." Before I was old enough to go along, I felt somewhat jealous of this bond between my father and the dogs. Once I became a part of it, it was a milestone in my life.

Over the years, as we followed behind the dogs, we watched them work through thickets, zigzag through the goldenrod, then wheel on a dime and freeze on point. We never spent enough time training them and their behavior sometimes reflected our neglect, but their instincts were remarkable. With heads held steady, they would glance over anxiously to see us approach. I can still remember the apprehensive look in Becky's eye when my father sent me, an eight-year-old with a single shot .410, in behind her to flush my first pheasant. And, I never saw her prouder than when she found my first bird.

I guess the reason I am recalling such things is that it's that time of year again. The days have turned cooler and our two Brittanies are paying more attention to my every move. I don't have much time to take them these days, but that only seems to heighten their excitement. I don't know if I am doing it for them, or if they are doing it for me, but the sights, smells and experiences we share out there are probably good for all of us.

Hunting has its critics, but don't tell that to my dogs. We are hunting together on land that we have protected from development, in habitat that we have enhanced, for game birds that we admire, for the experiences of a lifetime, and perhaps a fine meal. Nothing could make them happier.

Dale W. May

Cover:

The saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow is the object of a study that was initiated over the summer along the Connecticut coast. See page 9 to learn more.

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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Resident Canada Goose Study Gets Underway

Written by Min Huang, Waterfowl Program Biologist

In late June, the Wildlife Division began work on a four-year study to assess the growing resident Canada goose population in Connecticut.

What Are Resident Geese?

Resident geese are geese that were hatched or nest in the lower 48 states, or in Canada below 48° latitude, excluding New Foundland. In Connecticut, Canada geese were not present as summer inhabitants until the early 1920s when a winter feeding program, established in Litchfield, attracted migrant geese. These migrants eventually stayed for the breeding season and became a small population of approximately 80 birds. In the 1960s, a small breeding population was established at Charter Marsh in Tolland. Additionally, adult geese and goslings were transplanted from New Jersey and placed throughout eastern Connecticut during this time frame.

More Resident Geese

Over the past 15 years, human development has created excellent goose habitat throughout Connecticut. As a result, the resident goose population has doubled in the past 10 years. With this population expansion has come an increase in nuisance, damage and health concerns. Resident geese have negatively impacted both property and agricultural interests. High densities of geese in urban areas have led to conflicts at parks, beaches, golf courses, athletic fields and residential lawns.

In Connecticut, hunting of resident geese during September and in late January through early February is a prominent tool for managing overabundant populations. These hunts are specifically timed to occur when migrant geese are not present in large numbers. Assessment of the efficacy of hunting to reduce goose-human conflicts is paramount in ultimately achieving the proper balance between goose numbers and human tolerance.

Studying Resident Geese

The new four-year study should help biologists better understand the dynamics of the state's resident goose population. Over the course of the study, the Wildlife Division hopes to: (1) determine seasonal movements and affiliations of resident Canada geese in the state, (2) determine whether resident geese stay here year round or whether they make short movements to neighboring states or Canada (molt migrations), (3) develop an independent population estimate of the resident goose population, and (4) determine survival rates of juvenile and adult resident geese.

In order to achieve these objectives, Wildlife Division staff will be capturing geese throughout the state and placing individually coded plastic neck collars and metal legbands on resident geese over the next four years. These fixtures, while causing no harm to the birds, will allow biologists to assess movement patterns, survival rates and population size.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Neck collars placed on Canada geese will allow biologists to collect important information about the state's resident goose population.

In 2002, DEP staff and volunteers captured 1,236 geese at 28 different sites throughout the state. A total of 500 yellow neck collars were placed on geese, with approximately 60 neck collars placed on geese in each of Connecticut's eight counties. Geese were caught during their annual flightless period. Canada geese, like all waterfowl, undergo an annual wing feather molt, when they shed all their flight feathers. During the period of regrowth, which lasts approximately four weeks, the birds lose the ability to fly. Geese were corralled into a portable net where data on age and sex were recorded and the collars and legbands were attached.

How You Can Help

The Wildlife Division is requesting that anyone who observes geese with yellow neck collars to report sightings to the Waterfowl Program at 860-642-7239 or min.huang@po.state.ct.us. Desired information includes the individual collar codes, number of collared birds present, number of uncollared birds present and the location and date.

Atlantic Flyway Mute Swan Survey

Every three years, states within the Atlantic Flyway conduct a summer survey for mute swans. The mute swan is an exotic species that originated in Europe and Asia. Beginning in the mid-1800s and through the early 1900s, mute swans were imported into this country as adornments for private estates and parks. Due to both their feeding ecology and aggressive behavior, mute swans pose serious problems to both native habitat and wildlife. Since their introduction, similar to other invasive, exotic species, mute swan numbers have grown and their range has expanded. The previous Atlantic Flyway survey in 1999 documented over 12,600 swans. Since 1986, numbers in Connecticut have grown at an approximate rate of 10.8 percent. Preliminary results from the 2002 survey in Connecticut indicate a minimum of 1,430 mute swans.

2002 Connecticut Duck Stamp to Be Last Collector Edition

Written by Min Huang, Waterfowl Program Biologist

2002 Duck Stamp Features Greater Scaup

Noted wildlife artist Robert Richert was commissioned to create the 2002 Connecticut Duck Stamp, which features a pair of greater scaup flying past the lighthouse at Penfield Reef off of Fairfield. The 2002 stamp may be purchased at town clerks' offices for $5.00. Full-color art prints and stamps for collectors may be purchased at many Connecticut art dealers. Funds raised from the sale of duck stamps are used only for wetland and waterfowl conservation in Connecticut.

Dollars for Ducks

Connecticut, like most other states, has experienced dramatic losses in both freshwater and tidal wetlands. It is estimated that 50 percent of our pre-settlement tidal wetlands have been lost to development and filling. Many of the tidal wetlands that remain provide a fraction of their potential wildlife benefit due to grid ditching, other human caused manipulations and exotic plant invasions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that over 74 percent of Connecticut's original inland wetlands have been lost. Thus, it is imperative for waterfowl and other wetland species that we protect what remaining wetlands we have and that restoration and enhancement of existing wetlands be pursued.

Since its inception in 1993, Connecticut Duck Stamp sales have raised over $1 million dollars specifically for wetland conservation in the state. Each year project proposals are submitted and those deemed most beneficial are funded. Some of these projects have ranged from the purchase of an important 75-acre freshwater marsh on the Connecticut River in Portland to tidal wetland restoration projects in Old Saybrook.

One major project just completed in 2002 was a 300-acre restoration project at the Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area at Great Island, located at the mouth of the Connecticut River (see article on page 12). The invasive plant, phragmites, was removed from over 200 acres of the marsh by herbiciding and mulching. The specialized machine that "mulched" the phragmites was one of the first purchases made with Duck Stamp funds. In addition to phragmites control, several ponds were created and many ditches were plugged. These plugged ditches will result in shallow water areas that are used by waterfowl and wading birds for feeding. The end result of this project will be a marsh that provides much improved habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Collectors Sales Have Declined

Duck Stamp revenues have been an important source of funds used for wetland restoration. In the early years of the Connecticut program, many people were interested in Duck Stamp artwork and purchased prints and "collector" stamps. Sales of Duck Stamp related artwork generated substantial funds. However, as expected, sales have declined over time. In recent years, very few prints and collector stamps have been sold. In fact, the cost of producing the artistic stamp and print now exceeds the funds raised from their sale. As a result, 2002 will be the last year that Connecticut will publish Duck Stamp prints and artistic stamps. In coming years, waterfowl hunters will still be legally required to purchase a stamp, but it will be a simple stamp (similar to the pheasant stamp). Sales of stamps to waterfowl hunters should continue to generate $30,000 or more annually that will be used for wetland conservation.

Buy a Connecticut Duck Stamp today and help habitat restoration and waterfowl conservation efforts in our state!

Chronic Wasting Disease: *What is it and should I be concerned?*

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program Biologist

What is CWD?

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a naturally occurring disease of the brain and nervous system in deer and elk. CWD belongs to the family of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE). It attacks the brain of deer and elk, producing small lesions that eventually result in death.

CWD was first recognized in the late 1960s in a herd of captive mule deer in Colorado. In 1981, it was discovered in a free-ranging elk in Colorado. Although the disease was discovered over 30 years ago, it recently has received much media attention because of its discovery in free-ranging deer in southern Wisconsin and western Colorado. Other related TSE diseases include mad cow disease in cattle, scrapie in sheep and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. Although CWD is similar to mad cow disease in cattle, there is no known relationship between CWD and mad cow disease and no known relationship between infected deer/elk and humans. However, scientists are researching this disease to **conclusively** determine if any link exists between animals and humans.

How does CWD spread?

How the disease spreads from one animal to another is unknown, but it is believed that CWD spreads directly through animal-to-animal contact or indirectly from animal-to-soil-to-animal contact. The persistence of CWD in contaminated environments may represent a significant obstacle to eradicating CWD from free-ranging populations. Scientists believe that the most likely mode of transmission from an infected animal is through saliva and feces. Most cases of CWD in wild animals seemed to be linked to game ranch facilities. Only three species, mule deer, white-tailed deer and elk, appear to be naturally susceptible to CWD. Domestic livestock and humans are not known to be naturally susceptible to CWD.

Where is CWD found?

To date, CWD has been found in captive herds of deer and elk at game ranches in Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, Kansas and in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada. It has been found in free-ranging wild populations of deer and elk in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin, New Mexico and in Saskatchewan, Canada. In Colorado, CWD has been present since the late 1960s. There are no known cases of CWD in the northeastern United States.

Concerns about CWD should not keep hunters from participating in Connecticut's deer hunting season. There have been no reported cases of CWD east of Wisconsin.

How do I know if an animal has CWD?

In the early stages of the disease, infected animals may show no symptoms. As the disease advances, infected animals begin displaying abnormal behavior, such as staggering or standing with very poor posture. Eventually, infected animals become emaciated and appear to be in very poor health. This symptom is how the disease got its name, "chronic wasting disease."

Infected animals often spend much time drinking large amounts of water and excessively salivating. However, an animal exhibiting these symptoms may have a disease other than CWD. The likelihood of observing deer with these symptoms is low. The disease takes two to three years to incubate in deer. Once signs of CWD appear, the animal can live anywhere from a few days up to about one year, and the outcome is invariably fatal. The only reliable method to diagnose CWD is to dispatch the animal and examine the brain tissue for lesions. No treatment is available for animals infected with CWD. Anyone observing a deer exhibiting symptoms of CWD should notify the DEP Wildlife Division (860-424-3011) or the DEP's 24-hour TIP hotline (1-800-842HELP). If the animal is dispatched, the head should be kept intact so that a brain sample can be collected for testing.

Should hunters be concerned?

The abnormal proteins (prions) that cause CWD have not been found in venison. Prions concentrate in the brain, spleen, tonsils, spinal cord and lymph nodes in elk and deer. Although no known link exists between CWD and humans, health officials advise hunters not to consume meat from animals known to be infected with CWD and recommend boning out meat. As usual, hunters should continue to employ normal precautions when field dressing deer, such as wearing rubber gloves. Concerns about CWD should not keep hunters from participating in Connecticut's deer hunting season. There have been no reported cases of CWD east of Wisconsin.

What is the DEP Wildlife Division doing about CWD?

Through various publications and the DEP website (http://dep.state.ct.us), the Wildlife Division will distribute current information on CWD to keep the public informed. In Connecticut and all other states in the Northeast, the importation of deer and elk has been prohibited to prevent possible infection of Connecticut's deer herd. Surveillance programs exist in states that have documented CWD. Connecticut and many of the northeastern states are developing surveillance programs to monitor for CWD in wild deer populations. Any animal that exhibits symptoms of CWD will be tested. Eventually, random testing of wild animals will occur during the hunting season. Testing of wild animals likely will occur first near any facilities that have captive deer or elk. Currently, if CWD is detected in free-ranging deer, the only method of disease control is depopulation.

A federal-state task force has been established to draft a plan to assist states in managing CWD. Also, the United States Congress is providing funding to the Department of Defense for prion research specifically for CWD. A website, kept up-to-date with the latest information about CWD is now online at http://www.cwd-info.org.

Get Ready for the Hunting Season

White-tailed Deer Season

Connecticut's deer population is healthy and harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2002 deer hunting season. Aside from the size of the deer herd, the abundance of acorns and weather conditions during the hunting season are variables that will influence hunter success.

Since 1995, a replacement antlerless tag system has been used to increase the harvest of antlerless deer in specific areas of the state where deer populations are growing. During the 2002 season, hunters who harvest an antlerless deer on private land and have permission to hunt on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12 (see the 2002 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide) will be eligible to obtain a free replacement antlerless tag for use during the shotgun/rifle or archery deer hunting season. A limited number of replacement antlerless tags will be available at designated vendor locations on a first-come, first-serve basis. Bowhunters who harvest a deer are still required to submit a kill report card at the vendor location where the replacement tag is obtained. The replacement tag program has resulted in an increased harvest of female deer in southwestern Connecticut and in many Connecticut shoreline towns.

Hunters are reminded that bowhunting is permitted during the shotgun/rifle deer hunting season in deer management zones 11 and 12 only. On private land in zones 11 and 12, bowhunters can deer hunt for three-and-a-half months (Sept. 16-Dec. 31).

2002 will be the fourth consecutive year that the antlerless only deer tag on private land shotgun/rifle and muzzle-loader permits will NOT be valid in deer management zone 4. This restriction was implemented after a four-year decline in the deer population in this area. The deer population in zone 4 seems to be responding favorably to this restriction. If the deer population in zone 4 continues to grow, the restriction on the antlerless deer tag may be loosened in 2003.

Finally, a reminder to **all bowhunters** that they are required to have a bowhunter safety certificate to be able to purchase an archery permit in 2002.

P. J. FUSCO

Connecticut's deer population is healthy and harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2002 deer hunting season.

Fall Wild Turkey Season

Connecticut's wild turkey population is healthy and harvest rates are expected to equal or slightly exceed last year's fall turkey harvest. Although the periods of rain and cold experienced this past spring may have reduced productivity, hunters still should find an abundance of birds statewide.

This fall, turkey hunters should initially concentrate their efforts on oak ridges where there are an abundance of acorns. Acorns are a major food source for wild turkeys during fall and, where available, turkeys will spend much time searching the forest floor for acorns. Fall turkey hunters also can have success by hunting areas adjacent to cornfields and forest openings with wild grapes and bittersweet. Hunters should scout several areas, prior to the seasons, to locate signs of scratching where birds have been feeding.

The fall bowhunting and firearms seasons, which will be open statewide, start on September 16 and October 19, respectively. During the bowhunting season, the bag limit is two birds of either-sex taken on either state or private land. During the firearms season, the bag limit will be one bird of either-sex on state land and two birds of either-sex on private land. Hunters who enjoy a challenge are encouraged to take a bow or shotgun in hand and pursue Connecticut's largest game bird.

Waterfowl Season

September Canada Goose Season: The special September Canada goose season will be held in the North Zone (portion of the state north of Interstate 95) from September 3-30, 2002. The South Zone (portion of the state south of Interstate 95) season will run from September 17-30, 2002. The daily bag limit is five geese.

The September goose season provides the opportunity to harvest resident Canada geese that breed and spend the majority of their lives in Connecticut. The season is timed such that most migrant geese have not yet entered the state. Connecticut's

growing resident goose population continues to cause substantial nuisance problems. While the September goose season helps address a growing management need, hunters should recognize that some citizens will not be aware of the early season. The DEP urges hunters to be judicious in selecting hunting sites and to be respectful to others who will be outdoors during this season.

Sportsmen will have the opportunity to harvest Canada geese during the September season, the regular season and the late season.

Ducks, Mergansers and Coots: There are several substantive changes in the duck seasons this year. Due to the lowest population count ever, the federal government has called for a restrictive, 30-day pintail season. Hunters are urged to use caution in duck identification, as many pintails are still in eclipse plumage during early to mid-October. Because of a low canvasback population estimate, the entire canvasback season has been closed in all four flyways. However, since black duck populations are doing better than in recent years, one black duck will be allowed during the early season in both zones.

Specific details on waterfowl season dates and bag limits can be found in the 2002-2003 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide available at DEP offices, town clerks' offices and the DEP website, http://dep.state.ct.us.)

Regular and Late Canada Goose Seasons: New for 2002-2003, the existing North Atlantic Population (NAP) hunt zone for Canada geese has been split into two zones--the NAP L-Unit, and the NAP H-Unit--based on differences in the proportion of resident to migrant geese between the two areas (see map on page 8 for boundaries of the Canada geese hunt zones). These zones were created to exert more harvest pressure on resident geese in areas (primarily southwestern Connecticut) where there have been persistent nuisance problems.

The Atlantic Population (AP) of Canada geese continues to recover. Breeding pair estimates were 164,000, above the objectives for this population. A late spring, however, resulted in poor production this year. Despite the poor production, it was felt that some liberalization of the season could occur. Thus, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has increased this year's AP goose hunting season to 45 days, with a two bird bag limit.

Sportsmen will also have the opportunity to harvest resident Canada geese during the special late season (in the South Zone only) from January 15 through February 15, 2003. No special permit is required for this season.

Specific details on the Canada goose season dates and bag limits can be found in the 2002-2003 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide.

Youth Waterfowl Day: Connecticut has designated two statewide Youth Waterfowl Days, one on Saturday, November 9 and the other on Monday, November 11. Participants must be 15 years of age or younger, possess a valid junior small game hunting license and a HIP permit and be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years of age. Adults must possess a valid hunting license; however, they are not allowed to hunt waterfowl. Ducks, geese, mergansers and coots may be hunted. Bag limits and shooting hours are the same as for the regular duck and goose hunting seasons.

A Few Reminders: All waterfowl hunters are reminded that, in addition to obtaining a hunting license, they are required to purchase a federal Duck Stamp, a Connecticut Duck Stamp and an annual Harvest Information Program (HIP) permit. Federal Duck Stamps are available from certain post offices for $15.00. State Duck Stamps ($5.00) and HIP permits ($2.00) can be purchased at all Connecticut town clerks' offices. A HIP permit is also required to hunt woodcock, snipe, coot and rails.

Hunters are reminded to please report waterfowl bands. Band returns provide vital information for the continued sound management of the waterfowl resource. Additionally, the Wildlife Division has begun a four-year resident Canada goose study. Anyone observing yellow neck collars on geese are urged to call 860-642-7239 with the location and individual collar code information (see page 5 for more information).

Small Game and Upland Bird Seasons

The Wildlife Division will purchase 18,935 adult ring-necked pheasants for distribution on public hunting areas during the 2002 pheasant season. The total is identical to the number of birds purchased in 2001. In addition to the adult pheasant purchase, 1,050 eight-week-old pheasants

continued on next page

Hunting Season,
continued from previous page

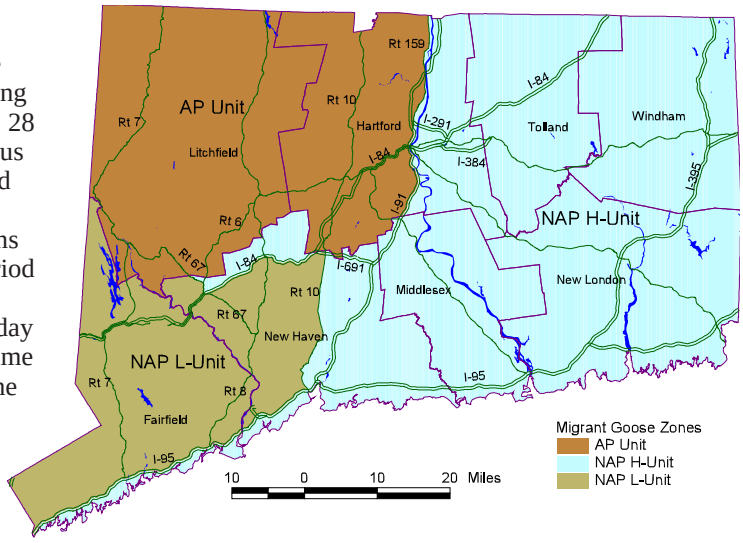
were purchased and distributed to the Norwich and Sprague Rod and Gun Clubs, where they have been reared for the eventual release on permit-required hunting areas in that region of the state.

The outlook for fall pheasant hunting opportunities remains good, as the ratio of birds stocked per hunter has remained relatively stable for many years. No major changes in areas to be stocked are anticipated for the upcoming season. Pheasants will be released regularly at designated state-owned, state-leased and permit-required hunting areas starting prior to opening day (October 19) and continuing through Thanksgiving Day. To obtain a list of major stocking areas, contact the Wildlife Division at 860-424-3011.

In response to results from a recent survey of pheasant hunters (see article in July/August 2002 issue) indicating preference for changes, a more equal distribution of pheasants will be provided during the upcoming season. A disproportionately large number of pheasants will **not** be stocked for opening day hunters. Nearly equal distributions of pheasants will be provided during the first several weeks of the season, followed by slightly smaller numbers stocked through Thanksgiving Day. Only 18 percent of the annual allocation will be stocked by opening day, compared to 28 percent in previous years. This should result in better hunting conditions over a longer period of time.

The opening day for most small game hunting will be the third Saturday in October (October 19). The gray squirrel hunting season opens September 2, providing an excellent hunting opportunity when most other hunting seasons are closed. Sportsmen pursuing woodcock are reminded that the woodcock season runs from October 26 to November 23, 2002. The rail season is from September 3 to November 4.

Connecticut Migrant Goose Zones



Attention Rabbit Hunters

The Wildlife Division encourages all rabbit hunters to support an ongoing research project documenting the distribution of New England cottontails in Connecticut. Hunters can participate by dropping off frozen rabbit heads at the Wildlife Division's Franklin (860-642-7239) or Sessions Woods (860-675-8130) offices, or by calling these offices for assistance. Information on the location (road and town), collection date, collector's name and contact phone number must accompany all rabbit specimens. This information will improve current knowledge about Connecticut's cottontail populations, as well as enhance our ability to better manage the cottontail resource.

National Hunting and Fishing Day--September 28, 2002

On September 28, 2002, National Hunting and Fishing Day (NHF Day) will be celebrated in Connecticut and throughout the nation. NHF Day events provide opportunities for outdoor-oriented people and urbanites alike to learn more about outdoor skills and activities. Many of the events will offer hands-on events for archery, firearms and muzzleloader shooting, fishing, canoeing, cooking or duck calling. Wildlife art and taxidermy, dog training, hunter and/or wildlife education and outdoor skills enhancement for camping, hiking, bird watching and photography also can be found at most events.

This year, NHF Day is saluting the 4-H Youth Development Program, one of America's premier youth organizations on its 100th anniversary. This salute has special meaning since, in 2002, the National 4-H Shooting Sports Education Program -- a program dedicated to developing responsibility, sportsmanship, ethical behavior and respect for safe conduct of shooting sports activities and environmental stewardship -- is marking its 25th anniversary.

NHF Day was established to recognize generations of hunters and anglers for the time and money they have donated to wildlife conservation programs—to date totaling over $2.2 billion and uncounted hours of work on habitat improvement and other projects. In Connecticut, sportsmen's hunting and fishing licenses, permit fees and excise taxes on equipment contribute $6.3 million annually to the conservation and management of the state's fisheries and wildlife resources. Sportsmen-financed programs have led to the dramatic comeback of many fish and wildlife species and the protection and management of their habitats. Hunters and anglers today provide more than 75 percent of the funding for state fish and wildlife agencies. During the past century, sportsmen have also worked countless hours to protect and improve millions of acres of vital wildlife habitat—lands also available for the use and enjoyment of everyone.

To learn more about NHF Day and possible events in your area, visit www.nhfday.org.

Conservation Education/Firearms Safety courses on firearms, bowhunting and trapping are offered year-round. To find a course near you, call 860-675-8130 or 860-642-7239, or visit the DEP's website at http://dep.state.ct.us.

Saltmarsh Sparrow Research Project Initiated

This past summer researchers at the University of Connecticut, in collaboration with Patrick Comins (Director of Bird Conservation at Audubon - Connecticut), began a study of saltmarsh sparrows along the Connecticut coast. This project is primarily being funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Long Island Sound Study, along with financial support from the DEP Endangered Species Tax Check-Off Fund and the DEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs.

The project has a variety of goals relating to the conservation of breeding populations of saltmarsh sharp-tailed and seaside sparrows, both of which are very high conservation priorities in southern New England. In particular the researchers are trying to develop better ways to monitor these species, and to determine exactly how abundant they are. They also are interested in learning more about movement patterns of these birds, both within and among marshes, during late summer and fall. Finally, they hope to learn more about the migration timing and distribution of a third species, Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, which only occurs in Connecticut during migration.

How Can Birders Help?

There are several ways in which birders can help the researchers. First, and most importantly, the researchers want information on resightings of birds that were banded during the summer. A major banding effort was undertaken at marshes in Guilford, Madison and Westbrook and several hundred birds were color banded this year. All birds have either two bands (one on each leg) or four bands (two on each leg). Birds born in 2002 have a US Bird Banding Lab metal band on one leg and a single colored band on the other. Older birds have a metal band and a color band on one leg, and two color bands on the other leg. Although seeing these bands can be challenging in the field, it is not impossible.

Birders visiting local salt marshes who see sparrows with leg bands are asked to note the band colors, which leg each color appeared on, and which color was on top on each leg. Other important information includes the species observed, where it was seen, when it was seen and what it was doing.

The saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow prefers the drier part of salt marshes.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

The seaside sparrow is usually found in the wetter portions of salt marshes.

Birders also can help compile information on the post-breeding distribution of the three species being studied. The researchers are looking for information about ANY sightings of seaside sparrows, saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows and especially Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow. Records of Nelson's sharp-taileds from previous years will also be very useful. In each case, observers are asked to note the location (if possible include a map marking the area), the number of each species, the date and time and what the birds were doing.

Bird resightings or count data should be sent to Carina Gjerdrum gjerdrum@uconnvm.uconn.edu.

General questions about the project should be directed to Chris Elphick elphick@uconn.edu.

For more information about the project, visit http://www.eeb.uconn.edu/faculty/Elphick/sparrows/saltmarsh_sparrows.htm.

Accipiters - The Forest Hawks

Written by Paul Fusco, Public Awareness Program

They are fast and agile, capable of flying through thick woods with amazing speed. Short, rounded wings and long tails give them the ability to dodge branches and accelerate with lightning quick bursts of speed in pursuit of their main prey--other birds. These fearless hawks are so aggressive that they frequently go crashing into brush to get at their quarry. Known for their high-strung nature and aggressive hunting style, these are the accipiters--the forest hawks.

There are three species of accipiters in the United States and all three are found in Connecticut. About the size of a blue jay, the smallest accipiter is the sharp-shinned hawk. The medium-sized Cooper's hawk is bigger, but the size of the male Cooper's and female sharp-shinned come close to overlapping, making correct identification between these two very similar birds difficult at times. Accipiters exhibit noticeable sexual dimorphism, where the male is smaller than the female, in all three species.

There is little doubt when it comes to identifying the largest accipiter, the northern goshawk. Bigger than a crow, it is a robust and powerful bird, easily capable of taking prey the size of a mallard. Goshawks will also prey on a higher percentage of mammals than the other accipiters. Their typical mammal prey includes squirrel and rabbit.

Most of the time, accipiters will hunt either from a perch or by coursing. Hunting from an inconspicuous perch, the hawk will wait for prey to come within striking distance, then make a quick attack to chase down their prey. Coursing involves flying low through the woods or along a habitat edge, looking to surprise a smaller bird or mammal. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks will often use an obstacle, such as a tree, hedgeline or even a building, as they course to keep from being seen, allowing them to burst upon their prey before the prey has a chance to flee.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

A blue-gray back, rusty barring on the breast and a dark crown are plumage characteristics of the adult Cooper's hawk.

Sharp-shinned hawks have a squarish tail tip, which can help separate it from the very similar Cooper's hawk, which has a rounded tail tip.

Rapid wing beats alternating with a glide is the characteristic flight style of the accipiters. This behavior can be seen from a long distance, making accipiters easy to discern from other hawks and falcons.

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Normally, sharp-shinned hawks nest in dense stands of conifers within large tracts of remote forestland that have nearby open areas. During the nesting season, this species is secretive and retiring, making confirmation of nesting problematic. Although very common during fall migration in our region, "sharpies" have a very restricted breeding range in Connecticut and are currently classified as state endangered.

Sharp-shinned hawks prey almost entirely on small birds. Throughout the winter, the Wildlife Division receives many calls of sharp-shinned hawks chasing after birds near backyard bird feeders. Many times their brazen pursuits result in window strikes that end their life. The victims are frequently immature hawks that are still in the process of refining their hunting skills.

Cooper's Hawk

Cooper's hawks will typically nest in conifer stands within second-growth woodlands. Nearby forest openings, wetlands or fields provide them with places to hunt for medium-sized birds, like blackbirds and doves, which are among their most frequent prey.

Cooper's hawks are widely distributed in Connecticut and their numbers have been steadily increasing in recent years. This is not surprising considering their preferred habitat is second growth forest, a habitat stage that makes up a large percentage of our state's land area. Reports indicate that some pairs have been nesting within well-populated suburban areas, showing that these birds are apparently much more tolerant of the presence of

humans than the other accipiter species seem to be.

Cooper's hawks will not tolerate the presence of sharp-shinned hawks in their breeding territory, which may be having an adverse impact on the breeding distribution of "sharpies" in our state. Some hawk watchers and biologists speculate that the increasing population of Cooper's hawks is also playing a part in the declining regional population of our smallest falcon, the American kestrel. Cooper's hawks have been known to prey on the smaller falcon, especially when both species are using the same routes and habitats during migration.

While the term can be applied to all of the accipiters, it is the Cooper's hawk that is the proverbial "chicken hawk" of American folklore that built a past reputation for itself among farmers who called it a "bloodthirsty" killer of poultry. This bad reputation, more than anything else, resulted in all hawks being labeled "harmful vermin," leading to their wide-scale persecution.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

The adult northern goshawk is mostly pale gray with a dark mask and white stripe over the eye. This large, powerful hawk is uncommon in Connecticut.

Northern Goshawk

Renowned for its power and fearlessness, the northern goshawk is the most impressive of the accipiters. It can move through the forest with such ease that the bird is also known as the phantom of the north woods. American naturalist John James Audubon once observed that the goshawk "passes like a meteor through the underwood."

Goshawks are uncommon breeders in Connecticut, with most nesting taking place in the northwest hills. They have benefitted from forest regeneration and maturation. Goshawks prefer remote, older growth forest habitat for nesting and they are at home in the deepest of forests.

Female goshawks will boldly defend their nest from intruders. They will aggressively dive at an intruder and may strike with their talons. Calling with a loud *Kek-Kek-Kek*, the goshawk will focus its attack at an intruder's head or back in an attempt to get the intruder to leave the nest territory. Some particularly aggressive individuals have been known to cause injuries to people that don't move away fast enough.

Conservation

With a past that includes unrestricted shooting, paid bounties, pesticide poisoning and habitat loss, these hawks have persevered and are no longer considered "harmful vermin," as was the case not too long ago. Today, they are protected by federal and state laws, and they are understood to be a valuable component of a healthy forest ecosystem. On occasion, their fearless and aggressive behavior will still get some individuals into trouble when they depredate farm poultry.

All three species of accipiters are doing fairly well in our region, despite the low numbers of breeding sharp-shinned hawks in Connecticut. Large unfragmented forest blocks need to be conserved, along with good forest management practices, to ensure that all three species of accipiters will continue to be a part of our landscape. Thus, the adventure of a "meteor passing through the underwood" will carry on.

Immature accipiters of all three species are mostly brown with streaked underparts, as seen in this young northern goshawk. Note the white stripe over the eye that helps to confirm this as a goshawk.

Marsh Restoration Project at Great Island Now Complete

Restoring Habitat at Great Island

This past June, work was completed on a three-year project to restore degraded coastal wetlands at the state-owned Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area at Great Island, in Old Lyme. Well-known to waterfowlers and birders, this 588-acre tidal marsh, located at the mouth of the Connecticut River, provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, especially birds. Unfortunately, the ecological value of the Peterson Wildlife Area and the area's use by wildlife had been greatly diminished from the effects of grid ditching and the encroachment of the invasive plant, phragmites.

Virtually all of Connecticut's coastal marshes were "ditched" in the 1930s. That is, ditches were cut into the surface of the marshes in a grid pattern to drain off water and remove mosquito breeding areas. Unfortunately, this process removed the open water habitats most attractive to wildlife, especially waterfowl. Grid ditching also resulted in decreased soil salinity, thus enabling the salt-intolerant plant, phragmites, to become better established and eventually displace native plants, reducing wildlife diversity.

To help remedy this problem, the Wildlife Division applied for funds through the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant program and received a $218,000 grant. This program is administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and provides funds for wetland protection, restoration and enhancement. NAWCA grant funds must be matched by contributions from project "partners." Partners for the Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area restoration included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, Valley Shore Waterfowlers, The Nature Conservancy, Connecticut Waterfowl Association and the Northeast Utilities' Foundation. The greatest portion of the matching funds was provided by supporters of Connecticut's Duck Stamp Program; that is, the hunters and citizens who have purchased state Duck Stamps. The value of a specialized amphibious mulching machine, which was purchased with Duck Stamp money, was used as the bulk of the matching funds. The mulching machine was used to complete much of the wetland restoration work. This public/private partnership helped restore tidal wetlands essential to Connecticut's migratory and nesting shorebirds, finfish and native plant species.

The goal of the Peterson Wildlife Area project was to restore 300 acres of degraded marsh habitat to a mixture of brackish meadows interspersed with shallow, open water areas, a condition that approximates the pre-ditched marsh environment. The restoration also involved the elimination of 200 acres of phragmites by plugging and

This photograph shows an aerial view of part of Great Island taken before ponds were created in the marsh to enhance habitat for wildlife.

P. CAPOTOSTO (2)

Taken in April, this photograph shows an aerial view of a portion of Great Island after ponds were created in the marsh over the previous winter. This site can be seen from the boardwalk observation deck at the DEP's Marine Headquarters, in Old Lyme.

filling ditches to restore the natural tidal flow of saltwater into the marsh. A 180-acre site at the Peterson Wildlife Area now has 30 new ponds with pannes and plugged grid ditches. Native plants and grasses have been able to return to the area, benefiting wildlife.

Restoration work at the Peterson Wildlife Area was conducted by the Wildlife Division's Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management (WHAMM) Program, with assistance from the USFWS McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. The WHAMM Program, established in 1994, was one of the first wetland habitat restoration programs in the country with dedicated staff and specialized, low-ground pressure equipment used exclusively in restoration activities.

P. CAPOTOSTO

A barge was hired to bring specialized equipment out to the wetland restoration site at the Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Area at Great Island.

What's Next?

Once the wetland restoration project was completed, staff from the WHAMM Program began monitoring birds, vegetation and water quality at the site. The WHAMM Program, in cooperation with the DEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs technical staff and Scott Warren of Connecticut College, will continue monitoring the site during 2003. Data collected during the monitoring period will be helpful to the WHAMM Program as it undertakes other proposed projects along the Connecticut River estuary.

Since the completion of the habitat restoration project at the Peterson Wildlife Area, a number of brackish plant species have been reestablished, such as cattail, bulrush, tearthumb, water hemp and marsh mallow. Several bird species also have been returning to the wetland, like black ducks, mallards, green-winged teal, egrets and rails. Other wildlife that has been observed include muskrats, meadow voles and deer.

Accidental Tourist Rattles Windsor Family

By Hank Gruner, Vice President Programs and Exhibits, Science Center of Connecticut

This past June a three-foot long timber rattlesnake accidentally hitched a ride from the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts to Windsor, Connecticut. The snake most likely crawled up into the engine compartment of a vehicle driven by Ms. Andrea Henchey. She discovered the snake in her backyard the following morning after she returned home from a stay in the Berkshires. With the help of some nearby construction workers, the rattlesnake was secured in a large garbage can. That proved to be the easy part! Convincing authorities that she in fact had found a rattlesnake turned out to be a bit more difficult. During the summer months, nature centers and town animal control officers routinely handle many "snake calls." Rarely do these involve venomous snakes. Connecticut is home to 14 different species of snakes; only two, the northern copperhead and the timber rattlesnake, are venomous. Both the copperhead and rattlesnake have limited distributions in the state, and Windsor falls outside the range of either species. However, eventually she reached the DEP and a volunteer venomous snake handler (myself) was dispatched.

Although once widespread throughout much of New England, timber rattlesnakes are now endangered in most of the Northeast. Only a handful of populations remain in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Through the cooperative efforts of the DEP's Wildlife Division, the Science Center of Connecticut, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy's Berkshire-Taconic Landscape Project, the location of the snake's den was determined and the snake was released after a brief quarantine period at the Science Center.

T. ANDERSON

To obtain a copy of the brochure *Snakes in Connecticut: A Guide To Snake Identification*, contact Julie Victoria at the Wildlife Division's Franklin office. You also can visit the Science Center of Connecticut, located at 950 Trout Brook Drive in West Hartford, to see live specimens of Connecticut's venomous snakes.

FROM THE FIELD

Friends of Sessions Woods Honors Eagle Scouts

The "Friends of Sessions Woods" is pleased to announce the display of a large plaque honoring Boy Scouts who have completed Eagle Scout projects at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington. Each young man completing a project has his name, troop number and the date engraved on a brass plate. Future projects will be added to the 25 currently completed.

To become an Eagle Scout, a Boy Scout must earn 21 merit badges and complete a project that demonstrates leadership ability. The project must be done for a church, community, state or nation. Most of the materials and labor for the projects at Sessions Woods were donated. Leadership, resourcefulness and the spirit of the Boy Scouts of America are reflected in each of the projects. The 25 projects completed so far have enhanced the opportunity for the public to use and enjoy the area. The Wildlife Division would like to thank each of these young men and all those who contributed their time and materials to assist.

The latest project to be completed was led by David Leisten of Troop 1 in Torrington. His project was to construct two small bridges over a branch of Negro Hill Brook along the Tree Identification Trail. The bridges will make spring stream crossing easier for trail users. A total of 228.5 hours of labor and all of the materials were donated to make this project possible.

Steve Jackson, Wildlife Supervisor

MWC Volunteers Take to the Field

Volunteers in the Master Wildlife Conservationist (MWC) Program provided valuable service to the Wildlife Division this summer by assisting with several projects and outreach efforts. The volunteers helped band Canada geese, monitor plover and tern nesting beaches, survey for butterflies and conduct the wetland bird call-back survey. They also helped man exhibits at several state and town fairs, provide educational programs for summer camps and continued to express interest for helping out at the next Master Wildlife Conservationist Program training.

Master Wildlife Conservationists attend 40 hours of training by the Wildlife Division in the fields of wildlife ecology, conservation, management and interpretation. To maintain their certification, they are required to provide 40 hours of volunteer service within one year of the training. In subsequent years, each volunteer is required to attend eight hours of advanced training and provide 20 hours of volunteer service each year. If you would like more information on the training program, contact Laura Rogers-Castro at Sessions Woods (860-675-8130) or email: laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

The Master Wildlife Conservationist Program is funded by the Wildlife Restoration and Conservation Program (WCRP).

Laura Rogers-Castro, Natural Resource Educator

CT Eagle Killed in NY

In mid-August DEP Wildlife Division biologists were notified by Peter Nye, a biologist with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), that a dead bald eagle had been found attached to the front of an Amtrak train engine when it reached the Rensselaer station. The train engineer reported that the bird was hit just north of the city of Hudson. Identified by its leg bands, the eagle had been born in Connecticut in 2001 in a nest on the Housatonic River in New Haven County.

The Wildlife Division has banded and examined most of the eagle chicks hatched in Connecticut since 1992 as part of the protective management program for this state endangered species. Attaching leg bands is a very useful tool for wildlife managers because it allows them to trace local movements, estimate population changes and determine a species' lifespan. Previous to this unfortunate outcome in New York, the chicks that fledged in 2001 (one in New Haven County and two in Hartford County) had not been seen in Connecticut or reported elsewhere.

Past issues of *Connecticut Wildlife* have reported on various Connecticut bald eagle sightings that have been reported to the Division. One particular Connecticut eagle, identified by the NYDEC, is a female born in 1994 that is now a breeding adult along the Hudson River, about 10 miles north of the city of Hudson. She occupies one of the four Hudson River eagle breeding territories and has successfully nested, produced and fledged three chicks of her own in 2000, two chicks in 2001 and three chicks in 2002!

Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist

Kellogg Environmental Center Offers Teacher Workshops

The DEP's Kellogg Environmental Center & Osborne Homestead Museum help teachers, students, families and community leaders learn about and experience the natural, cultural and historical environment. Please register for programs by calling (203) 734-2513.

Project WET: Teaching with Models, Fri., Oct. 11, 8:30 AM-3:30 PM, Grades 7-12, 0.6 CEUs. $35.

Project WET: Wonders of Water, Fri., Oct. 18, 3:00 PM-5:00 PM & Sat., Oct. 19, 9:00 AM–1:00 PM, Audubon Greenwich Nature Education Center, Grades K-5, 0.6 CEUs. $35.

WILD About Rivers!, Fri., Oct. 18, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM, Bent of the River Audubon Center, Southbury, Grades 4-8, 0.5 CEUs. $25.

Birds, Science and Technology, Thur., Oct. 24, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM, Grades 4–9, 0.5 CEUs. $35.

Food, Land and People, Fri., Oct. 25, 8:30 AM-2:30 PM, Blue Slope Farm, Franklin, CT, Grades 4–8, 0.5 CEU's.

Connecting Children's Literature & the Environment, Fri., Nov. 1, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM, Grades PreK-5, 0.5 CEUs. $35.

Gardening With Your Students, Fri., Nov. 8, 8:00 AM-12:00 PM, Grades 3-8, 0.4 CEUs. $25.

Long Island Sound in the Classroom, Fri., Nov. 22, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM, Grades 4-8, 0.6 CEUs. $35.

Bear Research Continued through Summer

Wildlife Division biologists have been trapping, marking and releasing black bears over the summer, primarily in northwest Connecticut, with financial assistance from the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP). Since June 2002, a total of 19 black bears (12 males, 7 females) have been marked with colored ear tags and released. Six of the females and one male have radio collars attached around their necks so that information about home range and habitat can be collected.

Bait stations and culvert traps are deployed on state forest and wildlife management area properties where frequent bear activity has been reported. Bait stations and traps are marked with signs to let people know that they are near a DEP research project. **Research areas should not be disturbed.**

Participation by the public in reporting bear sightings, along with ear tag numbers and colors is extremely helpful. The DEP encourages anyone who sees a bear to report it to the Wildlife Division at (860) 675-8130 or (860) 424-3011.

Henri Woods II, Research Assistant

P. J. FUSCO (2)

This bear, trapped at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington, was equipped with a radio collar and marked with ear tags before being released.

Butterfly Surveys Conducted at Two WMAs

Butterfly surveys are being conducted again this year at the Goshen Wildlife Management Area, in Goshen, and Babcock Pond Wildlife Management Area, in East Haddam and Colchester, to assist with management decisions for the properties. Each site is surveyed at least once a month from May to October.

Presently, about 40 different kinds of butterflies have been seen at each location using such food sources as shrub willow, spicebush, black cherry, milkweed, wild carrot, aster and the various grasses. Each site has had some of the same kinds of butterflies, as well as unique butterflies such as Acadian hairstreaks, striped hairstreaks and bronze coppers.

Transect surveys were also conducted at the two sites. These surveys involve walking along an established path and counting all butterflies seen within a few feet of the path. Although particularly challenging at Goshen with over 180 acres of field and shrubland habitat, the transect surveys will be valuable at both areas to compare pre- and post-management practices.

Laura Rogers-Castro, Natural Resource Educator

More Volunteers for Wetland Bird Call-back Survey

The wetland bird call-back survey for 2002 benefitted from the help of volunteers from the Master Wildlife Conservationist Program (see accompanying article). Master Wildlife Conservationists and several other volunteers surveyed seven wetland sites in the state for the presence of breeding wetland birds. Each site was visited five times between the months of May, June and July. Tape-recorded calls were played to evoke territorial responses by any male birds that were present. Many wetland-dependent birds, like bitterns and rails, are very secretive and difficult to census or study.

The Virginia rail is one of several wetland birds being sought in the annual wetland bird call-back survey.

The Wildlife Division appreciates the help of all dedicated volunteers who assist in the wetland bird call-back surveys. Without their continued assistance, it would be impossible for this statewide survey to continue. More volunteers are always needed. If you would like to help with next year's survey, please contact Geoffrey Krukar at 860-675-8130 or geoffrey.krukar@po.state.ct.us.

Geoffrey Krukar, Wildlife Technician

Preliminary Results for the 2002 Wetland Bird Call-back Survey

Species	# of sites heard at
American bittern	1
Least bittern	1
Virginia Rail	1
Sora	1
Clapper rail	1
King rail	1
Black rail	0
Common moorhen	0
Pied-billed grebe	1
Coot	0
Willet	1

Connecticut Wildlife Receives First Place in ACI Competition

Connecticut Wildlife was recently awarded first place in the one- to three-color newsletter category of the 2001 Association for Conservation Information (ACI) Awards Program. The ACI Awards Program is the only nationwide competition exclusively for conservation education, information and public relations professionals of state and federal agencies and conservation organizations. *Connecticut Wildlife* competed against 10 other similar publications, such as *DNR Review*, published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, *Project Web*, published by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, and *Wyoming Wildlife News*, published by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. The *Connecticut Wildlife* staff is pleased with this accomplishment, as it demonstrates that our efforts to enhance the publication are being recognized.

Connecticut Wildlife has participated in the competition for the past several years and placed third in the 1999 competition. One benefit of the Awards Program is that the judges, who are professionals from the private sector, provide written, constructive critiques. The critiques offered in previous contests have helped us make improvements to *Connecticut Wildlife*.

The annual awards contest is one of the most popular and successful ACI programs in that it recognizes excellence in more than 20 categories and promotes craft improvement through competition.

The Wildlife Division's Public Awareness Program, which publishes *Connecticut Wildlife*, is a member of ACI. Membership in the association consists of the information, education and public affairs staffs of state, federal and Canadian wildlife conservation, parks and natural resource agencies. Many private organizations, corporations and individuals with similar functions also belong.

Wild Turkey Display Completed at Sessions Woods

The Wildlife Division's Public Awareness Program staff, along with help from other Division staff members, has completed a new educational display on Connecticut's wild turkeys at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. Thanks to the generosity of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Wildlife Division was able to create a detailed, colorful display that provides a complete historical summation of the wild turkey in Connecticut, from a dramatic disappearance to a remarkable return. The display is complete with spectacular photos, wild turkey mounts, dioramas and informational text. From design conception to the final construction process, the Public Awareness Program staff has created the first major display for the Session Woods exhibit area. James W. Warner, Field Assistant

P. J. FUSCO

Take the Wildlife Challenge!

Guess which animal is described in the challenge and enter into a drawing to win a free wildlife poster. 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 to katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us. Postcards for this issue's contest must be postmarked by **October 30, 2002**. Email answers must also be received by that date.

Congratulations

go to Barbara Johnson who was chosen as the winner of the July/August challenge. Barbara gave the correct answer of "mute swan." Thanks to all readers who sent in postcards with answers to the Wildlife Challenge. Please keep trying!

September/October Wildlife Challenge

This issue's wildlife challenge was uncommon in Connecticut from 1700 to approximately 1900 due to overharvesting and loss of habitat caused by the extensive clearing of the land for farming. It is now found in fields, forests and edge habitat and eats grasses, forbs, nuts, apples, twigs, buds and leaves. Males weigh about 150 pounds while females weigh 110 pounds. This animal can be a nuisance, but is usually admired for its stately and graceful appearance. What is this month's wildlife challenge?

Piping Plover/Least Tern Report for the 2002 Nesting Season

Written by Rebecca Foster, Research Assistant

A Good Piping Plover Season

The piping plover breeding season has ended, and the birds started heading south for the winter in late August. This past season, 31 pairs of plovers attempted to nest in Connecticut, one pair less than last year. The number of successful fledges (58) increased from the number of fledges last year (39). The total fledge success for the season was extremely high at 93.5 percent, with only four chicks lost all season. This is a very encouraging result. The 2002 average of 1.87 chicks per nesting pair is similar to results from 2000 (1.86 chicks per nesting pair).

The number of plovers using the Connecticut shoreline has remained either constant or increased over each of the last five years. Beaches traditionally used by plovers range from Waterford to Stratford. In 2002, Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, Long Beach in Stratford and the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center in Milford had the greatest breeding success.

In 2002, plovers nesting within roped and signed areas experienced a minimal amount of human interference.

Piping Plover Protection Plan

The piping plover is a state and federally threatened species and is protected under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1986 and the Connecticut Endangered Species Act. There are very specific and carefully researched procedures in place to protect these birds. Initially, beaches designated as breeding grounds are fenced off with string to encourage people and dogs from disturbing birds in the area. Educational signs, "keep away," and "no dog" signs also are posted around these areas. When individual plover nests are located, a wire "exclosure" with a net top is erected around each nest. The "exclosure" is designed to keep dogs, skunks, raccoons, weasels, foxes and avian predators from reaching the eggs. Because plovers generally walk more than fly, they are able to easily enter and exit the exclosure through the small fence openings. The success rate for nests that were exclosed was 70 percent this year, versus a success rate of 30 percent for unexclosed nests.

P.J. FUSCO

Least tern numbers have been declining in Connecticut over a five-year period, beginning in 1998 with 447 pairs to the low this year of 221 pairs.

Plovers Face Many Challenges

Overall, 28 plover nests were not successful. Plovers require sandy, vegetation-free beach areas where they lay their eggs in a small depression in the sand. Unfortunately, there is a diminishing amount of this type of habitat available for piping plovers, and very few of the remaining areas are left undisturbed. Many plovers nested below the storm high tide line, making the nests vulnerable to wash-outs during spring high tides. Twelve nests were destroyed by wash-outs this year. To counter these losses, many plovers nested within the vegetation zone of the beach this year, which may have resulted in greater predation rates. Fourteen nests were lost due to predation by foxes, feral cats, raccoons, rats and avian predators. Of the 14 depredated nests, five were located within fairly dense beach vegetation.

Finally, human disturbance can play a role in nest failure. In 2002, plovers nesting within roped and signed areas experienced a minimal amount of human interference. All of the volunteers who assisted with public education and safeguarded nesting areas should be commended on an excellent effort.

Least Terns Didn't Fare as Well

Least tern numbers have been declining in Connecticut over a five-year period, beginning in 1998 with 447 pairs to the low this year of 221 pairs. Only 38 tern chicks had fledged by the end of the summer. However, the number of terns within the state, as well as the number of fledged chicks, was higher than in 2001. The decline in the breeding success of the least tern is alarming to many biologists and birders, as the tern is a state threatened species.

Like Plover, Like Tern

Least terns are colonial nesters and are usually found near or among piping plover nests. However, in 2002, there were no instances of plovers and terns nesting together. Like piping plovers, nesting least terns face many obstacles--loss of suitable habitat, predation, wash-outs and human disturbance all contribute to nest failures. Terns are especially vulnerable to human disturbance--prolonged or excessive disturbance can result in the abandonment of the nesting area by the entire colony. Several cases occurred this year, one in which evidence of a large bonfire was found less than five feet from the rope-fencing and "please keep away" signs.

Just for Kids

Sly as a Fox

Connecticut is home to two kinds of foxes, red and gray. Red foxes live where there is a mix of forests and fields and can also be found near cities and towns. Gray foxes prefer forests, thickets and swampy areas.

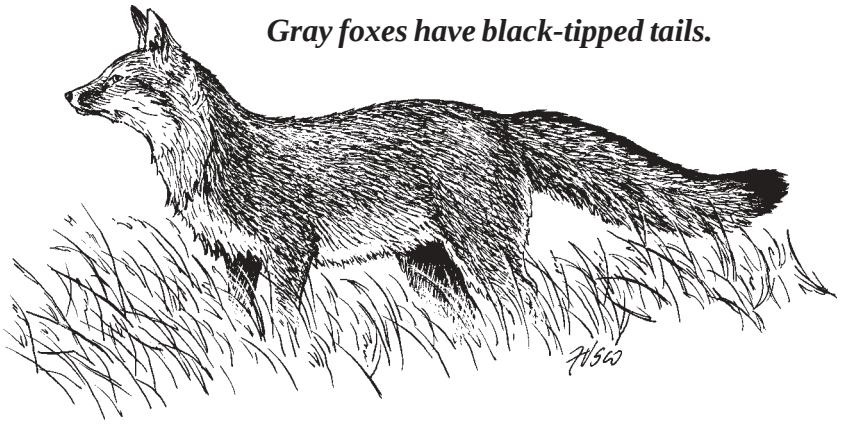
Which Fox? (Circle the correct answer)

Can climb trees	*gray*	*red*
Has a more valuable fur	*gray*	*red*
Uses an underground den	*gray*	*red*
Is seen less often	*gray*	*red*

Family Dens

Foxes have four or five pups each year. They usually have more than one den and will move their young if disturbed. Both adults care for the young by bringing food and guarding the den site.

Gray foxes have black-tipped tails.



Mice for Dinner?

Foxes are carnivores or meat-eaters, but will eat other food, such as fruit and garbage. All carnivores have long, pointed canine teeth for tearing their prey. Carnivores also have special teeth that are sharp and act like scissors to cut their food. Red foxes hunt mice by pouncing on them.

Have You Seen a Fox?

Foxes are normally quite secretive and not easy to see. Sometimes foxes living near towns become used to people and may be seen more often.

Red fox tails are often tipped with white fur.

Dog Gone-It!

Foxes are related to dogs. Two of their larger cousins are the coyote and wolf. Coyotes are common, but wolves are no longer found in Connecticut.

Answers to *Which Fox?*:

1. gray; 2. red; 3. red & gray; 4. gray

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

Sept. ..... 2002 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices ($10.00 for 10 tags).

Sept. 3-30 ..... September goose hunting season in the north zone.

Sept. 3-Nov. 4 ..... Rail hunting season.

Sept. 16-Nov. 19 ... First portion of the archery deer and turkey hunting seasons.

Sept. 17-30 ..... September goose hunting season in the south zone.

Sept. 27-29 ..... Visit the Wildlife Division's exhibit at the Durham Fair. Division staff and Master Wildlife Conservationist volunteers will be giving short, informative demonstrations on wildlife at various times during the fair. For more information on the fair, visit the Durham Fair website at http://www.durhamfair.com.

Sept. 28 ..... National Hunting and Fishing Day (see page 8 for more information).

Sept. 30 ..... Report use of bat houses to the Wildlife Division. Call 860-675-8130 for more information.

October ..... Most adult mosquitoes disappear after the first hard frost.

Oct. 6 ..... **Wild Mushroom Fair**, from 11:00 AM-5:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. Sponsored by the CT Valley Mycological Society. Learn more about edible and poisonous mushrooms. There will be guided walks, great speakers, mushrooms on display, a mushroom cooking demonstration and a kiddy corner. A donation of $1.50 for adults and $.50 for children is requested. Call 860-675-8130 for more information.

Oct. 6 ..... **Fall Foliage Wagon Rides**, from 12:00 noon-5:00 PM, sponsored by the Friends of Sessions Woods. In addition to enjoying the Wild Mushroom Fair, take a wagon ride along the trails at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington, to view the fall foliage. A donation of $3.00 per person is requested. Rain date will be October 20. Call 860-675-8130 for more information.

Oct. 9 ..... Early duck seasons begin (Consult the 2002-2003 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide, available at DEP offices, town halls and at the DEP website: http://dep.state.ct.us).

Oct. 19 ..... **National Orienteering Meet**, from 11:00 AM-4:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington. This meet is sponsored by the Western CT Orienteering Club and is open to the public. Come to compete, learn or watch. Entry fees apply. Call 860-675-8130 for more information.

Oct. 19 ..... Small game hunting season opens.

Oct. 19-Nov. 2 ..... Fall firearms turkey hunting season.

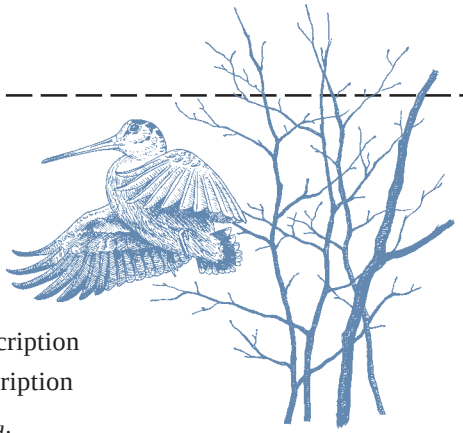
Oct. 26-Nov. 23 .... Woodcock and snipe hunting season.

Nov. 3 ..... Trapping season begins (except for the beaver trapping season, which begins Dec. 1).

Nov. 9 & 11 ..... Youth Waterfowl Hunter Training Days (see page 7 for more information).

Nov. 7 ..... **Invasive Plants in Public Landscapes--Meeting the Challenge**, from 8:00 AM-4:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. This event, sponsored by the CT Invasive Plant Working Group, will have exhibits and informative talks on invasive plants, retail landscaping, nursery industry issues, designing landscapes naturally and practical applications and solutions. A registration fee applies. For details and a registration form, go to www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg.

Nov. 16 ..... **Guided Walk through a Clearcut**, starting at 9:30 AM, at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington. DEP Forester David Irvin will lead participants on a walk through a one-year-old, 14-acre clearcut at Sessions Woods while discussing the goals and benefits of this forest management technique. A brief tour of a prescribed burn site, American chestnut plantings and a 10-year-old clearcut that has regrown will be included. Dress for the weather and wear suitable footwear for stepping through woody debris. Call 860-675-8130 to preregister and for more information.



Fall is probably the best time of year to observe members of the hawk family, as most species are migrating south for the winter. Connecticut's north-south running ridges and valleys and the coastline are good migration paths for hawks. Therefore, Connecticut has many great hawk watching locations. This immature Cooper's hawk was photographed near Lighthouse Point in New Haven.

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