July/August 2005

Connecticut Wildlife

PUBLISHED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION

From the Director

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." So wrote Henry David Thoreau more than a century and a half ago as he left the civilized world of his day to search the meaning of life through Nature. In a word, Thoreau was trying to "connect" and, in doing so, find his place.

If Thoreau thought the world was too civilized in 1845, imagine what he would think if he saw us today. Ironically, our modern society seems driven by its desire to "connect." We are connected electronically by email, satellites, cell phones, and the Internet. Our food comes from far away and our nature experiences are as close as the TV remote. If technology continues to advance at this pace, we might evolve to live quite comfortably without ever having to go outside. Though we are more connected to each other than ever, we are increasingly disconnected from Nature.

People who are concerned about the environment are concerned about the widening chasm between our culture and our roots. Why don't kids play in the woods anymore? It's true they can be preoccupied with electronic gadgets, organized activities, and other things. While it's easy to blame this on the children, I believe it is more a function of opportunity. Most children have an innate interest in Nature. This interest can last a lifetime if cultivated and encouraged at a young age by parents, teachers, mentors, and other adults. If it takes effort, it is an effort well spent.

One of DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy's priority initiatives is entitled "No Child Left Inside." The focus will be to emphasize the many ways our citizens can enjoy the natural beauty of Connecticut. State parks and forests, trails, wetlands, and the coastline offer abundant and highly available opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. By getting outside and hiking, camping, paddling, fishing, hunting, or simply observing wild things, today's children will develop a love for Nature that results in tomorrow's stewardship of our natural resources. We need to foster that stewardship. It's really as simple as connecting children with the opportunities that surround them. That's our obligation to them.

Dale W. May

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you like sunshine flows into the trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you and the storms their energy while cares will drop off like autumn leaves." – John Muir

Cover:

Wildlife Division Technician Geoff Krukar climbs to an eagle nest so that he can carefully lower the eagle chicks to the ground, each in a canvas sack. Once on the ground, the chicks are examined and fitted with identifying leg bands before they are returned to the nest. To learn more, see the article on page 4.

Photo by Paul J. Fusco

Connecticut Wildlife

Published bimonthly by
State of Connecticut
Department of Environmental Protection
www.dep.state.ct.us

Gina McCarthy ..... *Commissioner*
David K. Leff ..... *Deputy Commissioner*
Edward C. Parker ..... *Chief, Bureau of Natural Resources*

Wildlife Division

79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127 ***(860-424-3011)***
Dale May ..... *Director*
Greg Chasko ..... *Assistant Director*
Mark Clavette ..... *Recreation Management*
Laurie Fortin ..... *Wildlife Technician*
Brenda Marquez ..... *Secretary*
Shana Scribner ..... *Office Assistant*
Chris Vann ..... *Technical Assistance Biologist*

Eastern District Area Headquarters
209 Hebron Road, Marlborough, CT 06447 ***(860-295-9523)***
Robin Blum ..... *Habitat Management Program Technician*
Ann Kilpatrick ..... *Eastern District Biologist*
Carrie Pomfrey ..... *Habitat Management Program Technician*
Paul Rothbart ..... *District Supervising Biologist*
Jane Seymour ..... *Belding WMA Steward*
Judy Wilson ..... *Private Lands Habitat Biologist*

Franklin W.M.A.
391 Route 32, N. Franklin, CT 06254 ***(860-642-7239)***
Paul Capotosto ..... *Wetlands Restoration Biologist*
Mike Gregonis ..... *Deer/Turkey Program Biologist*
Min Huang ..... *Migratory Bird Program Biologist*
Howard Kilpatrick ..... *Deer/Turkey Program Biologist*
Kelly Kubik ..... *Migratory Bird Program Technician*
Andy LaBonte ..... *Deer Program Technician*
Heather Overturf ..... *Office Assistant*
Winnie Reid ..... *Secretary*
Julie Victoria ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist*
Roger Wolfe ..... *Mosquito Management Coordinator*

Sessions Woods W.M.A.
P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 ***(860-675-8130)***
Trish Cernik ..... *Secretary*
Jenny Dickson ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist*
Peter Good ..... *Supervising Wildlife Biologist*
Jason Hawley ..... *Furbearer Program Technician*
Shannon Kearney ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Technician*
Christina Kocer ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Technician*
Geoffrey Krukar ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Technician*
Dave Kubas ..... *CE/FS Program Coordinator*
Peter Picone ..... *Western District Biologist*
Kate Moran ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Technician*
Paul Rego ..... *Furbearer Program Biologist*
James Koert Riley ..... *Field Assistant*
Laura Rogers-Castro ..... *Education/Outreach Program*
Laura Saucier ..... *Wildlife Diversity Program Technician*
Jim Warner ..... *Field Assistant*

Connecticut Wildlife
Kathy Herz ..... *Editor*
Paul Fusco ..... *Media Designer/Photographer*

Wetlands Habitat & Mosquito Management Crew
51 Mill Road, Madison, CT 06443
Steven Rosa ..... *Mosquito Control Specialist*
Daniel Shaw ..... *Mosquito Control Specialist*

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.*

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is an equal opportunity agency that provides services, facilities, and employment opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, physical and mental disability, national origin, ancestry, marital status, and political beliefs.

CT's Only Foster Eagle Chick Found Nesting in NH

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

As reported in the last issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*, the DEP Wildlife Division and volunteers have been monitoring 10 bald eagle nests located throughout the state. This is quite a jump from 13 years ago, when a bald eagle pair that successfully raised two chicks in Litchfield County became the first pair to nest in the state since the 1950s. Every year since that first successful nesting, even as the number of eagle nests has grown, biologists have been placing leg bands on the chicks raised in Connecticut. The color and codes on the leg bands enable biologists from different states to identify the eagles and determine where the birds originally came from.

The Wildlife Division has received sighting reports over the years of eagles raised in Connecticut. However, this year, the Division received a report that an eagle banded in Connecticut in 1993 was confirmed to be nesting in Hinsdale, New Hampshire. In mid-May 2005, when a team of New Hampshire biologists and volunteers were examining, banding, and obtaining blood samples from a five-and-a-half-week-old bald eagle chick at its nest, they also were able to finally read the leg bands on the adults.

P. J. FUSCO

In 1993, a foster eagle chick was placed in Connecticut's only eagle nest at the time. Twelve years later, this eagle was found nesting in New Hampshire.

The adult male eagle has been present at the nesting territory in New Hampshire since 2000, but biologists were unable to make a positive identification of the leg bands until this year. It was known that the color band had W-like characters on it. It wasn't until biologists used a high-power telescope that they were able to read the last two characters on the black federal band, "55." These numbers were cross-referenced and it was confirmed that "WW" had "55" on his black band. By the positive identification of the leg bands, "black WW" was identified as a 12-year-old eagle that was raised in northwestern Connecticut in 1993.

This eagle has an interesting story of its own. Although raised in Connecticut, the male eagle didn't actually hatch from Connecticut's only eagle nest at the time. The year before, the adult pair had successfully raised two young. The next year, the pair only produced one chick, a female. Therefore, the Wildlife Division decided to foster a captive-bred chick that was available for placement. Foster chicks had been successfully placed in nests as part of an eagle restoration program in Massachusetts. The foster chick was captive bred in Massachusetts by Captain Tom Ricardi, who was an Environmental Conservation Police Officer with the Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Division at the time, and also a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Tom was caring for six adult bald eagles that were unable to be released into the wild in his captive breeding program.

After the foster eagle chick was placed in the Litchfield County nest with the wild-hatched chick, volunteers kept watch at the nest to make sure the foster chick was accepted and cared for by the adults. By late July 1993, the two chicks flew from their nest, remaining with the adults for several more weeks, relying on them for food while honing their own hunting skills.

The only other confirmed identification of the captive-bred eagle after if flew from the nest was in 1994 along the Delaware River in New York. This sighting was made possible because, at the time of banding, Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria had placed black electrical tape on the silver band of the foster chick. She did that so that the volunteer observers could differentiate the wild chick from the captive-bred chick once they fledged from the nest, and thus confirm that the chick was successfully cared for by the adults. When the eagle was observed a year later in New York, the black electrical tape was still attached to the band, thus aiding in this bird's identification.

Although it always is hoped that eagles raised in Connecticut will return to the state when they are old enough to breed, it still is encouraging to find out that one of our eagles has survived to adulthood and has a nest of its own somewhere in the region. The Connecticut male and his mate (originally from a 1993 nest on The Oxbow on the Connecticut River in Northampton, Massachusetts) are one of 10 pairs of eagles currently being monitored in New Hampshire. Like Connecticut, New Hampshire has seen its breeding population of bald eagles steadily grow.

Fourteen Bald Eagle Chicks Raised in CT in 2005

Ten pairs of bald eagles have been under the close watch of the DEP Wildlife Division and the volunteer Bald Eagle Study Group since early spring. These close observations have revealed that one pair did not nest, one nest failed, and eight pairs successfully produced chicks. The eight successful nests were visited from late May into early June, before the chicks were old enough to fly, so that biologists could examine the eagle chicks and place identifying bands on their legs. In all, 14 chicks hatched from the eight nests; 12 of the chicks were examined and banded by biologists. Of the eight successful nests, one was in Litchfield County, two each were in Middlesex and New London Counties, and three were in Hartford County.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Bald Eagle Study Group member Mike O'Leary (left) holds an eagle chick while Wildlife Division Technician Shannon Kearney (right) takes a blood sample, with assistance from Dr. Richard French (center), a veterinarian from the University of Connecticut.

Banded eagles can be identified by using a spotting scope to read the letter/number code on the black leg band.

Reaching the nests to gain access to the chicks is no easy task. Just ask Wildlife Division Technician Geoff Krukar, the person who makes the precarious climb up each nesting tree. There are many hazards along the way and, in Geoff's opinion, the worst he has encountered are tangles of poison ivy vines. No matter how hard he tries to protect himself, Geoff seems to get a bad case of poison ivy every year. But, it is worth it to climb the trees, despite the poison ivy and branches that get in the way, just to be able to see and handle the eagle chicks up-close. Fortunately, the adult eagles, as upset as they may be with the human intrusion, stay far away. They take to flying overhead, waiting for the intruders to leave so that they can get back to the job of feeding and caring for their young.

This year, Geoff was able to reach seven of the eight nests. One nest in a cottonwood tree proved too dangerous to reach so the decision was made not to examine and band the two chicks in that nest. The easiest tree to climb was the one in Litchfield County -- no poison ivy and just a few branches to cut out of the way. The best part about that nest was that after lowering the two chicks to the ground, each in their own canvas sack, Geoff was able to sit in the nest while he waited for the biologists below to finish checking the chicks.

Once the chicks were on the ground, Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria, with the help of several others, went about the task of collecting data on each chick. First, a weight was taken. Then measurements were taken of the beak, foot pad, and wing feathers to help in determining the sex of each chick. A blood sample was collected to test for the presence of several chemicals and any infections. Dr. Richard French and Dr. Inga Sidor, veterinarians from the University of Connecticut, monitored each chick's breathing and heart rates, examined the eyes and ears, and checked the crop for the presence of food. The last step in the process was to attach individually coded leg bands to help in identification. Attaching leg bands is a useful tool for wildlife managers because it allows them to trace local movements, estimate population changes, and determine an individual's lifespan.

The use of leg bands has provided useful information to the study and management of this federally threatened and state endangered species. The Wildlife Division has been attaching leg bands on most of the eagle chicks hatched in the state since 1992. One such leg band aided in the identification of a foster eagle chick from Connecticut that has been nesting in New Hampshire (see article on page 3).

Keeping Watch Over Connecticut's Bald Eagles

Volunteer Bald Eagle Study Group dedicated to eagle conservation

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

Don Hopkins founded the Bald Eagle Study Group in 1975 after an adult bald eagle was observed in Connecticut during the breeding season. Don has been faithfully monitoring Connecticut's eagles ever since.

Thirteen years ago, in 1992, Connecticut celebrated the first successful hatching of bald eagle chicks since the 1950s. Every year since then, eagles have nested or attempted to nest in the state and the number of pairs has grown from one to 10. Through it all, a very active group of raptor enthusiasts has been keeping a close watch on Connecticut's bald eagles, annually submitting a written report of observations to the DEP Wildlife Division. This volunteer group, known as the Bald Eagle Study Group, was started by Don Hopkins in July 1975 after an adult bald eagle was observed on the Upper Farmington River during the breeding season. Don began his work in July 1975 to determine the status of eagles in that area of Connecticut and, with the help of several more volunteers who have joined him, the study and data collecting have been ongoing.

The purpose of the Bald Eagle Study Group is to enjoy bald eagles, educate others, and, most of all, provide timely information to the Wildlife Division on the location of eagle nests, egg laying, and hatching dates. Group members also help with the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, which is conducted every January. This informal group has a membership of about 50 individuals, although a membership list is not kept, dues are not collected, and there are no meetings. The only qualification for being a member is that you either show an interest in bald eagles or provide information on an eagle sighting or nest location.

Over the years, members of the Bald Eagle Study Group have volunteered countless hours to locate bald eagle pairs and their nests and to then observe the nests throughout the nesting season to document egg laying, incubation, hatching, and the eventual fledging of the young eagles. The group's observations, as well as the long-term data that have been collected and submitted to the Wildlife Division, have been invaluable. The rigorous observations also help pinpoint the actual date when eagle chicks in the various nests hatch, thus helping the Wildlife Division determine the best time to visit the nests and examine and band the young eagles (see article on page 4). Some of the study group members have even written and published papers on their eagle observations in various publications like "The Connecticut Warbler," a journal of the Connecticut Ornithological Association.

"To call the efforts of the Bald Eagle Study Group invaluable to the Wildlife Division doesn't begin to describe how much I appreciate all the work that they do," insists Julie Victoria, a Wildlife Division biologist. "Because I have such confidence in their observations and documentation of eagle nesting chronology, I am able to devote my time and efforts to other wildlife species that don't have a study group monitoring their status."

Bald Eagle Study Group founder Don Hopkins has been watching the pair of eagles in Litchfield County since nesting activities were first observed in 1990. Every year since, Don has been checking the nest, with the help of a spotting scope, one to two times a week during the nesting season. As the number of eagle nests has grown in Connecticut, other Bald Eagle Study Group members have stepped up to carefully observe those nests from a distance and keep records of their observations. "I have had such a strong partnership with this group for so many years that I tend to forget that they are volunteers," added Victoria. "And, in a year like 2005, when there are 10 eagle pairs in Connecticut, I fear that my demands on the group may be too much. Fortunately, this group is not afraid to do more. And, for that, we can all be thankful."

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Mike O'Leary, a very active member of the Bald Eagle Study Group, helps with eagle banding, as well as osprey and Canada goose banding. Mike also prepares the annual report submitted by the Bald Eagle Study Group to the DEP Wildlife Division that summarizes eagle observations recorded by the group.

The Wildlife Division greatly appreciates the efforts of the Bald Eagle Study Group to monitor Connecticut's bald eagles. Their dedication to this species is apparent in the many hours they spend watching the birds and in helping with surveys, year after year.

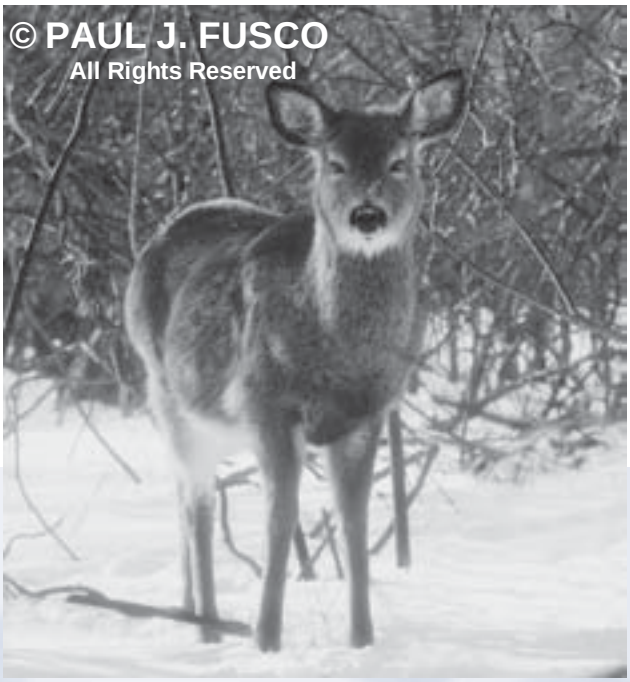
Chronic Wasting Disease: Connecticut on Alert

Written by Andrew LaBonte, Deer Program Technician

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a neurological (brain and nervous system) disease that belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies that affects some members of the deer family. This disease attacks the brains of infected animals and produces small lesions that eventually result in death. However, no cases of human disease have been associated with CWD. Examination of the available data has led the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization (WHO) to conclude that there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans. As a precaution, the WHO recommends that people or other animals should not eat any part of a deer or elk that has been diagnosed with CWD.

In March 2005, New York documented its first case of CWD in an adult white-tailed deer at a captive facility located in Verona, in Oneida County, about 180 miles from Connecticut. A second confirmed case of CWD was found at another captive facility, located in the same town about five miles from the original facility. Both captive deer herds were euthanized and additional testing revealed three more deer infected with CWD. It is unclear at this time how CWD became established in New York. However, the transport of animals among captive facilities is believed to be the main source of transportation.

Efforts were made by the New York Department of Conservation (NYDEC), along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program, to sample about 400 free-ranging deer within a five-mile radius of the captive facilities. Intensive monitoring was completed on April 30, 2005. The effort resulted in 290 samples of wild deer from Oneida County, two from neighboring Madison County, and 25 wild deer from the Town of Arietta, in Hamilton County. Two free-ranging white-tailed deer tested positive for CWD from Oneida County, documenting the first occurrence of CWD east of Illinois. Since 2002, NYDEC has conducted statewide sampling of wild deer for CWD. When combined with sampling efforts in Oneida and Hamilton Counties, DEC has collected more than 3,700 samples from wild white-tailed deer.



P. J. FUSCO (2)

Because CWD is invariably fatal to cervids (members of the deer family), persists in the environment for an unknown amount of time, and has the potential to dramatically impact deer and elk populations, the Connecticut DEP, along with other New England states, continues to monitor for the presence of CWD, as well as develop guidelines to prevent CWD from entering the state.

In August 2002, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture enacted emergency regulations to ban all importation of cervids into Connecticut. In February 2003, permanent regulations restricting the importation of cervids were enacted. Existing regulations prohibit the possession or transportation of any cervid in the state without authorization from the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture. Anyone who has information pertaining to the illegal movement or importation of deer or elk in Connecticut should contact DEP Emergency Dispatch at 860-424-3333.

Currently, Connecticut has 28 registered captive cervid facilities in 24 towns with fallow deer, red deer, reindeer, white-tailed deer, and elk. Based upon molecular similarities, CWD potentially could be transmitted to all species in the deer family. Research is being conducted on red and fallow deer in other parts of the country to determine if these animals can become infected with CWD after long-term exposure to CWD-infected elk and mule deer.

In 2003, the Connecticut DEP began its first intensive CWD monitoring program. A total of 233 deer were collected statewide and all tested negative for CWD (see the September/October 2004 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*).

In 2004, the DEP developed a CWD surveillance program that focused on areas of the state that were considered to have "high-risk" populations. High risk populations were defined as areas with high deer densities, a high number of captive cervid facilities, and were located along the New York border. New York has more than 400 captive deer facilities with nearly 10,000 deer and elk.

Federal random surveillance guidelines require that at least 295 samples are needed. A total of 375 samples were collected from deer harvested during the archery, shotgun/rifle, or crop damage seasons and from deer found on roadways in deer management zone 11. A total of 298 testable samples were collected from zone 11. Samples (105) were collected from hunter-harvested deer during the archery season or at state-operated deer check stations during the firearms hunting season. Samples (89) also were collected from butcher shops during the archery and firearms deer hunting seasons from September 2004 through January 2005. Additional samples (83) were collected from deer killed by motor vehicles and from deer harvested through crop damage permits (21) throughout the year. An additional 19 samples were collected from throughout Connecticut, but from unknown

locations. The 317 samples tested at the University of Connecticut's (UCONN) Department of Pathobiology and Veterinary Science all tested negative for CWD.

In addition to random surveillance, the DEP has increased its efforts to test free-ranging cervids statewide that exhibit any symptoms consistent with CWD (emaciation, abnormal behavior, excessive salivation). Four deer exhibiting these symptoms were collected by DEP staff and tested at UCONN. Results from two animals were negative and we are waiting for the test results for the other two animals.

In the fall of 2005, the DEP plans to collect at least 596 samples for CWD testing. A total of 298 samples will be collected from the high-risk population (all deer management zones bordering New York). In addition, 298 samples will be collected from the remaining deer management zones in the state (moderate-risk) in proportion to zonal deer densities to obtain a statistically valid sample. Samples will be collected from hunter-harvested deer at deer check stations during the firearms hunting season. Samples also will be collected from butcher shops and from hunters during the archery deer hunting season. In areas of expected low harvest, additional samples will be collected from deer killed by motor vehicles and from deer harvested through crop damage permits.

Hunters interested in donating deer heads for testing this coming season should contact the Wildlife Division's Franklin office (860-642-7239) or Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130), Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM. All heads should be kept in a cool place or refrigerated (not frozen) until a pickup can be arranged.

Sampling efforts will continue to include the testing of all deer observed with symptoms consistent with CWD. Anyone who observes deer displaying symptoms consistent with CWD should contact DEP Emergency Dispatch (860-424-3333), or the Wildlife Division's Franklin or Sessions Woods offices.

The DEP has published a brochure that contains information about CWD, the symptoms, how it is spread, where it's found, and what's being done in Connecticut. Copies of this brochure have been distributed to hunters, law enforcement agencies, and the general public. Anyone interested in receiving a copy of the brochure can contact the Division's Franklin or Sessions Woods offices or check the DEP website at www.dep.state.ct.us. More information about CWD can be found at the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance website at www.cwd-info.org.

The DEP would like to acknowledge all participating hunters, meat processing facilities (Hiller Brothers, Large Game Company, Amato's Meat Processing), town Police and Public Works Departments (Bethel, Bridgeport, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, New Fairfield, Newtown, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Shelton, Sherman, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Weston, Westport, and Wilton), and the Connecticut Department of Public Works (New Canaan, Westport, and Trumbull) for their time and cooperation in assisting with the monitoring of CWD in 2004.

Connecticut Envirothon 2005 Held at Peoples State Forest

Written by Peter M. Picone, Habitat Management Program

The weather was cool but sunny as high school teams from across Connecticut came together to compete in the 14th annual Connecticut Envirothon held at Peoples State Forest in Barkhamsted. This year's top scoring team was Litchfield High School; Thomaston High School placed second and Bacon Academy was third.

During the Envirothon, students, in teams of five, were tested in four subject areas--forestry, wildlife, soils and aquatics. The teams also had to give oral presentations.

The teams had 30 minutes to answer a 100-point test in each of the four subjects, using their knowledge and teamwork skills, and then communicate solutions to an environmental issue using oral presentations and visual media. Preparation for the Connecticut Envirothon occurs during the school year where each team studies the environmental subjects and attends workshops to hone the team members' knowledge and skills. Discussions at workshops not only provide a definition of terms, but also hands-on identification and applied science questions.

The top scoring team in the 2005 Connecticut Envirothon was from Litchfield High School.

The Litchfield High School team will go on to participate in the 2005 Canon Envirothon, which will be hosted at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, from July 18 to 24, 2005. The team will be competing against top scoring teams from across the United States and Canada.

The mission of the Connecticut Envirothon is to promote environmental awareness, knowledge, and active personal stewardship among high school students through education and team competition. For more information, please visit the Connecticut Envirothon website at http://www.geocities.com/ctenvirothon/contacts.htm.

Wood Duck Box Checks Yield Important Data

Written by Kelly Kubik, Waterfowl Program

The wood duck is considered by many to be the most beautiful and striking of all waterfowl in North America. It is the third most abundant breeding waterfowl species in Connecticut behind only the mallard and Canada goose. The wood duck reached alarmingly low population levels by the turn of the 20th century, but the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918 allowed the dwindling population to recover by ending unregulated market hunting and protecting remaining wood duck habitat. Through wildlife management, including the implementation of nest box programs, the wood duck population has recovered.

Habitat

Throughout the year, wood ducks will use a variety of habitats, including beaver ponds and flowages, riparian corridors, and emergent herbaceous and shrub-scrub wetland systems. While wood ducks are distributed throughout Connecticut, the highest densities occur in the northeastern and northwestern portions of the state. Wood ducks use both natural tree cavities and nest boxes in wooded areas along lakes, rivers, and vegetated wetlands. Wetlands adjacent to nesting areas, with thick cover and an abundance of invertebrates, provide optimum habitat for brood rearing. Because naturally occurring nesting cavities in suitable wood duck habitat are often scarce, it is essential to augment the habitat with nest boxes.

Nest Boxes

The first recorded use of wood duck nest boxes was in 1937 by the U.S. Biological Survey at the Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge in central Illinois. Over the next two years, Frank Bellrose and Arthur Hawkins erected over 700 wood duck boxes throughout Illinois. Their research indicated that over half of the newly erected nest boxes were used by wood ducks, thus revealing the potential wildlife management implications of nesting structures for conservation purposes.

In many areas where natural cavities are lacking, nest boxes provide an alternative nesting site for wood ducks. Those who build, install, and maintain nest boxes can help to sustain or bolster wood duck populations in their area.

Checking Nest Boxes

The DEP annually checks wood duck nest boxes located on Connecticut state lands. Box checks and maintenance are conducted prior to the initiation of the new breeding season. In the winter of 2004-2005, DEP Wildlife Division staff checked 411 wood duck boxes statewide. Over 86% of the nesting structures checked this past winter were classified as being in good condition.

In areas west of the Connecticut River, wood ducks used 47% of the boxes that were in good condition, while in the eastern portion of the state wood duck box use was 53%. Productivity on the eastern side of the state was slightly higher than that of the western portion. The mean number of eggs successfully hatched in the east was 3.15 per box. In the west, the mean number of eggs hatched was 2.48 per box.

The hooded merganser, which is the smallest of the North American mergansers, is another waterfowl species in Connecticut that uses wood duck nest boxes. The hooded merganser population was in decline at the turn of the 20th century due to unregulated market hunting and logging. However, this species' ability to also use nest boxes has allowed it to expand both its breeding population and range. In the western portion of the state, hooded mergansers were found in 7% of the usable boxes, while on the eastern side, only 2% of the boxes were used by hooded mergansers.

P. J. FUSCO

Wildlife Division resource assistants Stephan Jonas (left) and Jeremy Leifert use a canoe to check a wood duck nest box in the beaver marsh at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington.

In many wetland areas where natural tree cavities are lacking, nest boxes provide an alternative nesting site for wood ducks. By installing and maintaining nest boxes, the local wood duck population can be sustained or bolstered.

Spring Weather Affects Breeding Waterfowl Survey Results

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

DEP Wildlife Division staff completed the annual breeding waterfowl survey in April. Since its inception in 1989, the states from Virginia north to New Hampshire have participated in this important survey. The survey is ground-based and targets randomly-placed square kilometer plots. In the northern states and Canada, breeding waterfowl surveys are conducted from the air along fixed transects. The spring breeding waterfowl survey provides part of the data that drives the Eastern Mallard Adaptive Harvest Management models. Outputs from these models determine the waterfowl hunting season lengths and bag limits in the Atlantic Flyway. In addition to providing an estimate of the breeding population, the survey provides managers with an index to both habitat condition and waterfowl production.

P. J. FUSCO

For the fourth straight year, black ducks were only observed along the coast and not at all inland during the breeding waterfowl survey.

Initial spring habitat conditions in 2005 were good for breeding waterfowl. An extremely wet winter resulted in good water levels during the early nesting period. Breeding waterfowl were greeted with favorable nesting conditions during the early portion of the nesting season. However, a series of "feast or famine" spring rainfalls resulted in variable waterfowl nesting conditions throughout the state. Several monsoon-like rainstorms in April likely resulted in nest failure in many areas. Flooding of initial nests was particularly heavy along the coast and the major river systems that flooded two or three times in late March and April. As an example, in the northwestern part of the state, goose pairs were just beginning to nest in mid-May, while in other parts of the state, goslings had already hatched. Most inland wetlands either had good water levels or very high water levels. As a result of the weather and the likely high incidence of re-nesting, statewide waterfowl production will likely be only average across the state.

Overall, breeding waterfowl numbers were lower than in 2004. For some species, such as mallards, the estimates were substantially lower. As is typical, mallards and Canada geese dominated the survey. Mallard breeding pair estimates were 13,772, a 32% decrease from 2004 and 22% below the five-year mean. Despite the one-year drop in the breeding pair estimate, mallards continue to be Connecticut's most abundant breeding species. Canada goose pair estimates were 10,957, an 11% decrease from 2004 and a 9% decrease from the five-year mean. Despite the one-year drop in the goose pair estimate, the overall trend continues to show no signs of decline.

Wood duck breeding pair estimates also were down in 2005. The statewide estimate was 5,859 pairs, 22% lower than last year, but similar to the five-year average of 6,045. The trend for wood ducks since 2000 is stable. For the fourth straight year, black ducks were not observed inland. The coastal black duck estimate was 291 pairs. Statewide, the black duck pair estimate was 44% higher than last year's estimate but still below the five-year mean of 538.

Rare Connecticut breeding species, such as gadwall, green-winged teal, and blue-winged teal, also were observed during the survey. As has been the case in the past couple of years, common mergansers and hooded mergansers also were detected during the surveys. Both common and hooded mergansers have been expanding their breeding range, and their recent appearances in the breeding counts bear witness to that expansion.

Mute swans, an introduced and deleterious species, were observed in three plots during the survey. Interestingly, only one of the six coastal plots contained swans in 2005. Half of the coastal plots had swans in 2004. This may have been a function of the flooding that occurred along the coast in 2005. The breeding pair estimate from the 2005 breeding waterfowl survey for mute swans was 534.

Due to the Wildlife Division's concern about the inland proliferation of swans, a separate, statewide breeding survey for swans was initiated in 2004. This swan-specific survey covers approximately one-third of the state, and provides much more precise breeding pair estimates than the breeding waterfowl survey, which is tailored toward ducks. The statewide breeding pair estimate in 2005 from the specific mute swan survey was 234.

A Pair of Yellowlegs

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Program

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Greater yellowlegs may be encountered foraging in salt marsh habitat along Connecticut's coast. They are alert and noisy shorebirds with a loud, ringing alarm call.

The spring and fall migration seasons bring many species of shorebirds through Connecticut, including two closely related species of long-legged shorebirds. They are very similar in appearance and in voice, so wildlife watchers need to take care when attempting to identify them. They are known by their most prominent feature, their bright yellow legs. These are the two species of yellowlegs; one is the greater and the other the lesser.

Differences in size and proportions are the best way to tell them apart, although sometimes that can be tricky. Their voices are similar, but, with experience, an observer can use the calls to separate them. The greater yellowlegs has a loud series of three or more *tew* notes, while the call of the lesser yellowlegs is a higher pitched, shorter *tu, tu*, given three or less times, often twice. Yellowlegs are historically known as "tattlers" because their loud, ringing calls alert other species to impending danger, frequently sending alarmed flocks rocketing into flight.

Both yellowlegs are long-necked, long-legged, medium-sized, wading shorebirds. Obvious when standing side by side, the greater yellowlegs is noticeably bigger than the lesser, standing half-again taller. When seen individually, the relative size difference is not so apparent.

One of the most reliable ways to tell the two apart is by studying the bill. The lesser yellowlegs has a straight, mostly black bill that may have a small amount of color at the base. The bill is similar in length to the bird's head. The greater yellowlegs has a two-toned bill that is longer than the length of the bird's head. The bill is usually slightly upturned as opposed to the straight bill of the lesser. There may be some birds that do not show typical characteristics, so it's always a good idea to use more than one field mark for an identification when confronted with questionable individuals. The legs of the lesser yellowlegs are thin and spindly, while the greater's legs have a heavier structure with a thicker leg joint.

Plumages

Plumages on the two yellowlegs are very similar and do not make good field marks for identification to species. However, in late summer, plumage is useful in determining the age of the bird. In late summer, most adults are molting and will look worn and tattered, while juveniles will have fresh, sharp looking feathers.

The months of August and September are an excellent time to study plumage differences on shorebirds. Some adults may still be wearing breeding feathers, while others may already be in their dull winter plumage. A full range of in-between molting may be observed, along with the crisp look of the juveniles.

Occurrence

Neither species of yellowlegs breeds in Connecticut, although a few nonbreeders may be found here during early summer. Both yellowlegs species nest to our north in the muskeg/tundra belt of middle Canada and Alaska. They nest on the ground and always near water.

During spring migration, the most likely time to find these birds in Connecticut is from late March through mid- to late May. Lesser yellowlegs have a much higher population level than greaters, but they are not as common in Connecticut during the spring migration as are greaters. During spring migration, the bulk of the lesser yellowleg population travels north up the Mississippi River valley while greaters tend to migrate in a broad front, which includes both coasts. During May, both species may be found at numerous inland

Greater yellowlegs actively feed by chasing down their prey, including small fish.

wetlands in Connecticut, as well as at shoreline marshes.

The fall migration for shorebirds in Connecticut begins in July, when numbers of both yellowlegs species start to show up on their southbound journey. First the adults come through, followed by the juveniles a few weeks later. Most lesser yellowlegs are gone from Connecticut by the end of August, while greaters continue to been seen into October. Occasionally, a few hardy individual greater yellowlegs may still be found in midwinter at some Fairfield County shoreline areas. Look for wintering individuals in the tidal marshes of Stratford or at coastal locations in Greenwich.

P. J. FUSCO (4)

A lesser yellowlegs feeds on invertebrates while wading in shallow water.

Feeding Behavior

Yellowlegs feed in shallow water, frequently wading up to their belly while foraging. Food items include small crustaceans, arthropods (including dragonfly nymphs), and small fish. Both species sometimes use a "scything" (side to side) motion with their bill while feeding, as well as a direct strike method to catch food. Greater yellowlegs may be seen, sometimes in small groups, actively chasing prey by running through the water with their neck stretched out, striking at prey with their long bill.

Conservation

Like most species of shorebirds, yellowlegs may be found in either fresh or salt water wetlands. In Connecticut, they are most numerous at coastal salt marshes during migration. Yellowlegs use shallow, open water habitats for feeding and roosting. They also may be observed in open areas using water pools that form after heavy rains.

All shorebirds depend on habitats that provide food and resting areas, known as migration stopover areas, along their migration paths. These areas frequently attract large numbers of birds during peak migration times and are critical to the birds' survival.

Wetland restoration projects, made possible through federal and state Duck Stamp Programs, have improved large amounts of habitat for shorebirds, as well as waterfowl. Conservation efforts and the protection of wetland habitats have enabled shorebirds, including yellowlegs, to come back from historic exploitation, but some threats remain. Habitat loss and degradation are the major factors affecting shorebird populations today. On a national level, both species of yellowlegs are considered to be species of moderate concern due to population declines in the case of lesser yellowlegs and a fairly low overall population in the case of greater yellowlegs. Connecticut's Wetland Restoration Unit continues to improve coastal and inland wetland habitats by restoring marshes and other wetlands, helping to improve the outlook for shorebirds, such as yellowlegs.

I.D. by Bill

- **The greater yellowlegs has a slightly upturned two-toned bill. The lesser has a straight, thin bill, which appears black in the field.**
- **The typical bill length of the greater yellowlegs may be twice the length of the bird's head, while the lesser yellowlegs' bill is about the same length as its head.**
- **Young greater yellowlegs with underdeveloped bills can be confusing. This situation may be encountered in late summer with juvenile birds.**

The lesser yellowlegs has a thin, straight bill that is roughly the same length as the bird's head.

Juvenile greater yellowlegs with a short, but slightly upturned bill.

Typically, the greater yellowlegs has a two-toned, slightly upturned bill that is as much as twice the length of the bird's head.

Being a Volunteer Plover Monitor

Written by Henry Perrault, Resource Assistant and Master Wildlife Conservationist

P. J. FUSCO

This piping plover and its nest are protected by a wire mesh exclosure that keeps out predators and prevents beach visitors from stepping on the well-camouflaged nest.

It all began in early April. As a Master Wildlife Conservationist eager to log some volunteer hours, I sat in with 30 or so other volunteers for piping plover/least tern monitor training at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point. There we learned that piping plovers and least terns are both threatened species in Connecticut that need to be protected if they are to successfully nest and fledge young.

Representatives from the DEP Wildlife Division and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave us tips on how to recognize these birds, as well as taught us about their life histories, breeding behavior, and all about monitoring procedures. Areas that are monitored from April through August are the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge and Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford, Long Beach in Stratford, Pleasure Beach in Bridgeport, and Sandy Point in West Haven.

The monitoring process begins with noting weather conditions (temperature, wind, cloud cover, precipitation) and the tide. It is important to have a good pair of binoculars or a spotting scope so that the birds can be observed from a distance. The less the nesting birds are disturbed the better.

Presence and behavior of the plovers are noted, as well as the location of any nests. The nests are nearly invisible. They are just shallow depressions in the sand and the three to four eggs blend in perfectly with the surroundings. When piping plover nests are found, exclosures are quickly erected around them to protect the nest from predators.

Monitoring activities also include educating beachgoers, noting signs of predators, reporting suspicious behavior to authorities, and listing other wildlife observed. Each volunteer submits a detailed report of his or her monitoring activities and receives periodic updates of nesting and fledging activities at all of the monitored areas. (Watch for a summary of piping plover and least tern nesting and fledging results in a future issue of *Connecticut Wildlife.)*

In general, the public has been respectful of nesting birds when the situation is explained to them. Fortunately, in the three years that I have been monitoring nesting beaches, I have not had any serious negative encounters with the public. The Fourth of July holiday is another challenge, however. Extra volunteer monitors are needed during the holiday due to the large crowds of people gathering for fireworks displays and picnics at the beach.

One of the fringe benefits of plover monitoring is the opportunity to see other wildlife, mostly shorebirds, raptors, and waterfowl. On one occasion I encountered a brant entangled in fishing line, struggling across the beach trying to get to the water. As it struggled, it became obvious to the nearby gulls that there was a potential meal. As a dozen or more gulls circled like vultures, I was able to grab an end of the fishing line and "reel in" the brant and free it from the entangled line, thus depriving the gulls of an easy meal.

What Is an Exclosure?

An enclosure is meant to contain something. An exclosure, on the other hand, is meant to keep something out. In the case of the piping plovers, an exclosure is put up around the nest to keep out predators, as well as prevent beach visitors from stepping on the well-camouflaged nests. Once a plover nest is located, the exclosure is erected in about 15 minutes because it is important to minimize the time the plover is off the nest. The exclosure is constructed from fencing with openings small enough to keep most predators out and large enough to allow the plovers to walk through. (Piping plovers, though they can fly, usually walk from the nest to the waterline to feed.) The top of the exclosure is covered with netting to prevent avian predators (gulls and crows) from entering.

What You Can Do

Human disturbance can be devastating to nesting piping plovers and least terns. When they are disturbed they leave the nest, exposing the eggs or newly hatched chicks to the hot summer sun or to predators. Beach walkers should respect the nesting areas by keeping away from the signed fences and exclosures. Dogs, even on a leash, are a major disturbance. Trash or any form of food should not be left on the beach because it attracts predators.

The Quest to Find an Endangered Bat

Written by Christina J. Kocer, Wildlife Diversity Program

The small, pink-nosed, Indiana bat may not seem all that different from other small brown bats that you'll see flying around in search of insects at night. However, the Indiana bat deserves special attention – this species has been in a state of decline since the 1960s. The reasons for this decline are not completely understood. Indiana bats were reported in Connecticut through the mid-1940s. They disappeared from the Connecticut landscape until the mid-1990s when one was located sharing a winter hibernaculum with other bats. To date, Indiana bats still have not been found in Connecticut during summer.

A project is being conducted by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a number of state agencies from the area (including the Connecticut DEP), Canada, and many volunteers, to better understand this species in the northeastern part of its range.

The quest to find Indiana bats began in the winter while the bats were hibernating. During this time, wildlife biologists entered various hibernacula to count individuals of all species of bats, closely watching for the characteristic pink noses of the Indiana bat among the clusters of bats hanging above. Bats hibernate in tight clusters that can contain hundreds or even thousands of individuals, challenging even the most experienced biologist's identification skills.

The population of Indiana bats totals approximately 360,000 individuals. Approximately 87% of the population winters in seven to nine locations, making this species extremely vulnerable to habitat destruction. Roughly nine percent of the entire population of Indiana bats spends the winters in New York caves, amounting to about 33,000 individuals in all. When a population of Indiana bats is discovered, the specific hibernaculum is noted so that biologists can return when the bats emerge in the spring.

As temperatures warmed this past spring, the hibernating bats in New York awoke and emerged into the night. Wildlife biologists from all around the area were there, ready to capture and track the bats. Female Indiana bats emerge before the males, and may travel long distances to congregate in summer maternity colonies to raise their young. These maternity colonies may be located under loose bark or in crevices of dead or injured trees. The specific locations of these maternity colonies remain a mystery, so the primary goal of the project is to locate these colonies. Finding the maternity colonies is a high priority because to begin to understand why the species is declining, it is necessary to know where Indiana bats spend the summer. To aid in finding maternity colonies, female bats were captured and fitted with radio transmitters.

C. KOCER

Using surgical adhesive, radio transmitters were attached to the back of captured female Indiana bats, allowing biologists to track their movements from several miles away.

In April, 18 female Indiana bats were captured and radio marked at a site near Kingston, New York. Using surgical adhesive, transmitters were attached to each bat's back, allowing biologists to track their movements from several miles away.

After being fitted with radio transmitters, the bats were released at night while an airplane equipped with GPS mapping software circled overhead. Crews of biologists and volunteers also were stationed at high points near the release site, equipped with antennas and receivers, anxiously waiting for the call announcing the release of the bats. As the bats flew, receivers began to beep, indicating that a bat was near. Directions and approximate locations were recorded on a map for every detected individual.

On the following day, the airplane flew again in an attempt to pinpoint where the bats stopped to roost for the day. Once they were detected, searches were conducted on the ground to determine each bat's exact roost location. Then, in the evening, crews returned to the roost site. If only one bat left the roost, it suggested that the roost site was only a short stop on the path of migration. However, if a number of bats emerged, it suggested that the bat was at her summer maternity roost site. Ground and air crews continued to track the bats for about three weeks until the batteries of the radio transmitters died and the adhesive weakened, allowing the transmitter to fall off.

At the time of printing, the results of this study were still being processed. Unfortunately, none of the radio marked female bats were tracked into Connecticut. However, biologists are still hopeful that in the coming years this endangered bat will appear in the state. At least one individual was located at a temporary roost site approximately 12 miles from the Connecticut state line. In a pilot study conducted a few years ago, biologists followed a transmitter-equipped bat through New York to the Connecticut state line where the signal was lost.

Because of the decline in Indiana bats, especially in the southern part of this species' range, more intense monitoring has been conducted over the past few years, resulting in new discoveries and more observations of Indiana bats in the northern part of its range. Hopefully, this will lead to the documentation of Indiana bat summer roosts in Connecticut.

FROM THE FIELD

Ruffed Grouse Research Continues

DEP Wildlife Division staff and volunteers conducted 30 ruffed grouse drumming survey routes between April 15 and May 7, 2005 (drumming is part of the ruffed grouse mating ritual). The purpose of the survey was to collect baseline data on distribution and population trends. Each five-mile route was randomly selected in wooded habitat across Connecticut. Ten listening points were set up at one-half mile intervals along each route. Participants were instructed to listen for four minutes and record the number of drums heard and the number of birds heard drumming. Each survey started one-half hour before sunrise on days with calm winds and temperatures over 40 degrees F. Grouse were heard drumming on three of 30 randomly selected routes.

You can assist the Wildlife Division in gaining a better understanding of Connecticut's grouse populations by providing grouse sighting information to the Division. All grouse observations (drumming or actual sighting) should be sent to michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us. Please include the date, town, nearest road and intersecting road, and whether the observation was a sighting or drumming activity. This information will be included in a statewide database. Be sure to look in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife* for more information about grouse.

Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

MWC Training Completed

Twenty-one participants completed the spring 2005 Master Wildlife Conservationist (MWC) training sponsored by the DEP Wildlife Division. The training included presentations by Wildlife Division biologists and a University of Connecticut Extension Forester. The topics covered were vast, ranging from wildlife management success stories to increasing wildlife habitat in Connecticut's forests.

The new MWCs anticipate assisting the Division with various research projects and outreach efforts. In the past, MWCs have helped corral Canada geese for banding, conducted various bird surveys, monitored piping plover nesting beaches along the coast, manned Division displays during the Woodstock and Durham Fairs, and presented wildlife-related programs to scout, school, and general public audiences. The Wildlife Division greatly appreciates all the help MWCs provide and looks forward to working with the new "recruits" in the near future.

Archery Hunting at Centennial Watershed State Forest

Archery hunting for deer will be permitted this year on approximately 1,850 acres of land located in the Centennial Watershed State Forest along the north and west sides of Easton Lake Reservoir and along the north and west sides of the Saugatuck Reservoir. Aquarion Water Company of Connecticut and the DEP manage these lands. The deer management program will take place from September 15 through December 31, 2005. The season framework will follow state regulations.

An access permit is required to participate in this program. A limited number of access permits, valid from September 15 through December 31, 2005, will be issued free-of-charge on a first come, first served basis. In order to receive an access permit, you must have a valid 2005 Connecticut archery deer permit.

The Conservation Land Committee will issue the access permits and related materials via U.S. mail or email. Send your name, address, and email address to: Aquarion Water Company, Attn: Archery Hunt, 714 Black Rock Road, Easton, CT 06612, or by email at watershed@aquarionwater.com in order to receive an application form. You also can download an application form from the hunting and trapping page on the DEP Wildlife Division's website (www.dep.state.ct.us). Questions concerning this program should be directed to the Aquarion Water Company's Aspetuck Environmental Center at (203) 452-3511.

Wetland Restoration Project at Bluff Point

Bluff Point Coastal Reserve in Groton is often associated with the subject of deer management efforts by the DEP. However, the DEP's Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management (WHAMM) Program has set its sights on Bluff Point for another reason -- to reestablish natural salt water and brackish tidal marsh vegetation, wildlife, and invertebrates by restoring tidal flow to a degraded marsh that was extensively grid ditched in the 1920s. Grid ditching eliminated all standing water on the marsh surface. The marsh has since developed into a breeding site for mosquitoes due to the decreased exchange of tidal salt water. There is a need to restore the marsh so that wildlife and saltmarsh/brackish vegetation can once again dominate the site.

This project involves the installation of three new culverts and a new channel to reconnect the tidal wetlands with the neighboring estuary (Poquonock River). The new culverts and open channel will increase the exchange of fresh and saltwater and thus inhibit the spread of the invasive plant, Phragmites, making it possible for native plant species to expand and eventually dominate the site. With the return of brackish and salt marsh vegetation, as well as ponds and pannes, to the area, wildlife use is expected to increase. Waterfowl, like black ducks, will use the ponds, while shorebirds, wading birds, and passerine birds will be found in the natural brackish vegetation.

Several partners have provided funding for this project: Save the Sound ($27,000), CT Duck Stamp Program ($20,000), DEP WHAMM Program ($4,000), DEP WHAMM Program In-kind Match ($5,000), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ($18,000 non-match federal funds), and the Natural Resource Conservation Service WRP ($30,000).

Paul Capotosto, Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management Program

Waterfowl Hunting Season Dates to Be Finalized in August

Waterfowl and Canada goose hunting seasons are just around the corner. The special resident Canada goose season will start in early September, but will be closed during the Labor Day weekend (September 3-5). Final season dates will be determined in August and will be published in the 2005-2006 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide. The guide can be obtained at various DEP and all town clerk offices, as well as on the DEP's website (www.dep.state.ct.us). In addition to listing season dates, the guide also will contain information on new Connecticut and local regulations.

Avoid the last minute rush. Take the Conservation Education/ Firearms Safety course during the summer. To learn about class dates and locations, contact the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods (860-675-8130) or Franklin (860-642-7239) offices or check the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

The Big Hunt

Written by Jenny Dickson, Wildlife Diversity Program

On June 3 and 4, a pack of inquisitive scientists descended on East Hartford, armed with nets, binoculars, vials, traps, and more. The reason? BioBlitz 2005. BioBlitz is one of the largest science-based events that occurs in Connecticut. It is a scientific inventory that stresses education in a fun, festival atmosphere. Its concept is simple . . . scientists race against the clock and, in a good-natured way, against each other, to find and identify as many species as possible in a 24-hour period.

This year's BioBlitz sent 170 scientists out to explore a 2.5-mile radius around the CREC Two Rivers Magnet Middle School. Teamed up with students, the researchers hunted habitats, ranging from paved parking lots to parks to the Connecticut River to floodplain wetlands and more. The starting gun sounded at 3:00 PM on Friday, June 3, and, by 3:00 PM Saturday, June 4, a total of 1,791 species had been recorded. This is quite an impressive number when one considers that 75% of the 20 square mile area surrounding the magnet school is developed. The public joined in the adventure on Saturday starting at 10:00 AM and learned about biological inventories and research and asked lots of questions about all aspects of the event.

The DEP fielded several teams of scientists who did everything from fish sampling to mammal trapping to mist netting bats. DEP scientists also randomly reported birds, frogs, invertebrates, plants, and any other biotic life that crossed their paths. Staff members from the DEP Fisheries Division gave lectures, displayed electroshocking boats and gear, and gave researchers transportation along the river to expand the search. The DEP Environmental and Geographic Information Center aided participants in reporting rare or state-listed species. In addition to searching high and low for species, the DEP Wildlife Division staff also presented talks on bears, coyotes, bobcats, and bats, and led a small mammal tracking expedition.

As BioBlitz 2005 drew to a close, participants were field-weary, yet satisfied. The event had sparked the interest of students and visitors alike, making the concept of biodiversity come to life.

L. SAUCIER

Wildlife Division resource assistant James Fischer teaches a fascinated audience how to play "wildlife detective" by examining mammal tracks along a muddy path.

Notable Species

- **Clay-colored sparrow (a rare Connecticut visitor/nester)**
- **Peregrine falcon (which displayed its hunting prowess to a packed audience)**
- **Cobra clubtail dragonfly (the first confirmed report in several years was made by a student participant)**
- **Fat-head minnow (not native to Connecticut)**

Sessions Woods Public Program Series

The DEP Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods have planned several educational programs for the upcoming months at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Those interested in participating should preregister by calling the Sessions Woods office at 860-675-8130 (Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM-4:30 PM). Programs are free unless noted. An adult must accompany children under 12 years old.

Children's Program: All About Deer, August 10 (Wednesday), at 9:30 AM. -- The white-tailed deer is commonly seen throughout Connecticut. What makes Connecticut perfect deer habitat? Come to this program and find out! Children, accompanied by caregivers, can participate in an indoor program followed by an outdoor walk.

Of Sassafras and Shadblow: Celebrating Our Native Trees and Shrubs, September 20 (Tuesday), at 7:00 PM. -- This multimedia program is photographer Edith (Duffy) Royce Shade's view of the beauty, folklore, and many uses of a variety of trees and shrubs that are native to Connecticut. Duffy is a Wildlife Division Master Wildlife Conservationist and has offered to provide an "armchair exploration" of forest-covered hills, brilliant autumn foliage, and snow-frosted pines at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. Each of Duffy's programs uses two projectors showing color slides, with taped music accompanying the presentation. This special treat is a "must see" for all who love Connecticut's landscape.

Halloween in September, September 25 (Sunday), from 1:00 to 3:00 PM. -- Children and their families are welcome to attend this very fun open house, hosted annually by the Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods. There will be crafts, activities, and special presentations on Halloween critters. Come meet a snake, a big brown bat, and various Connecticut spiders. This is the opportunity to dispel some of the myths associated with creepy crawlies! Costumes are encouraged.

2005 Statelands Habitat Program Field Update

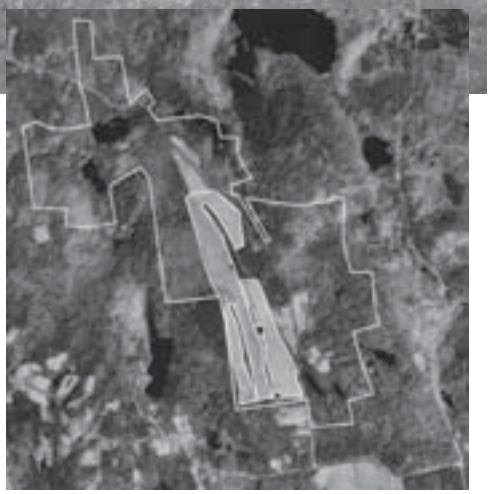
Written by Paul Rothbart, Habitat Management Program

The goal of the DEP Wildlife Division's Statelands Habitat Management Program is to provide habitat diversity for maintaining stable, healthy, and diverse wildlife populations throughout Connecticut. The benefits of a successful program include wildlife diversity, healthy ecosystems, and improved opportunities for wildlife-based recreation.

During the upcoming year, activities will continue to emphasize early successional habitat management. Such sites are rapidly declining due to the loss of farmlands, increasing development, and the absence of fire within the Connecticut landscape. Wildlife species that use early successional habitats (i.e., young forests, old fields, grasslands) include woodcock, ruffed grouse, indigo buntings, blue-winged warblers, northern orioles, rufous-sided towhees, turkeys, bluebirds, American goldfinches, deer, bats, bobolinks, savannah sparrows, and eastern meadowlarks. The management of the remaining early successional habitats helps assure abundant and diverse wildlife populations throughout Connecticut. The Wildlife Division uses a variety of techniques, such as prescribed burning, tree cutting, brush mowing, herbicide treatments, forest management practices, and grassland seedings to restore, enhance, and maintain these important habitats.

P. ROTHBART

This special low ground pressure mower was used to mow the wet meadows at Goshen WMA. It leaves no tracks and does not impact the wetland soils in the meadows.



This aerial view of the Goshen WMA shows where mowing to maintain and enhance grassland habitat was conducted (shaded area). This project was made possible through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Completed and scheduled management activities for this field season include:

- This past spring, 100 acres of early successional stage wildlife habitat were treated with prescribed burning. Prescribed burning controls vegetative growth, recycles soil nutrients, enhances warm season grasses, increases invertebrate populations, and reduces potential wildfire fuels. Areas treated include Babcock Pond Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (Colchester), Higganum Meadows WMA (Haddam), Bartlett Brook WMA (Lebanon), grasslands at Shenipsit State Forest (Stafford Springs), old fields at Naugatuck State Forest (Naugatuck), and grasslands at Pachaug State Forest (Voluntown).
- The Goshen WMA (Goshen) contains over 150 acres of grassland habitat. Using a grant provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 131 acres of maintenance/enhancement mowing was completed.
- The Division received seven new Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) contracts to address early successional habitat enhancement, with an emphasis on management of non-native invasive plants. Management techniques will include mowing, mulching/mowing with a brontosaurus, warm season grass seeding, and herbiciding. Projects are scheduled for the 2005 field season at Goshen WMA, Quinebaug WMA (Plainfield), Flaherty WMA (East Windsor), Housatonic River WMA (Kent), Robbin Swamp WMA (Canaan), Harkness State Park (Waterford), and Higganum Meadows WMA.
- Brush mowing will be used to manage 350 acres of old field and grassland habitat this field season.
- The Wildlife Division continues to work towards implementation of its Tier II Landowner's Incentive Program grant. This program will allow the Division to deliver financial and technical guidance to enhance species and habitats at-risk on private lands. The Division anticipates conducting sign-ups and undertaking enhancement projects during the 2005 calendar year.
- There are plans to develop and enhance public access sites at Goshen WMA, Housatonic River WMA, Cromwell Meadows WMA (Cromwell), and the Moore and Eight Mile River WMAs in Salem.

The Wildlife Division extends its appreciation to all of its conservation partners who have helped to accomplish many of these management projects. Special acknowledgment is extended to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Connecticut Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Connecticut Waterfowl Association, and other DEP units, including Support Services, Parks, and Forestry.

Seven Peregrine Falcon Nests Monitored this Year

Written by Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program

Seven pairs of peregrine falcons nested in Connecticut this year, fledging a total of 15 chicks, the highest number of birds fledged in recent history. The well-known Travelers Tower pair in Hartford successfully nested after failing to produce young for the last four years. The nesting activity of these birds and the eventual hatching of four chicks were captured by live webcams on the site. The webcam was launched in 2000 as a collaborative initiative between St. Paul Travelers, the Science Center of Connecticut, and the DEP. *Peregrine Watch at Travelers Tower*, as the webcam is known, can be accessed at http://falconcam.travelers.com, or through the Science Center's website (www.sciencenterct.org) or the DEP's website. The webcam includes two cameras that provide a live close-up of the nest, as well as a wider shot of the ledge outside the Travelers Tower's 21st floor where the nest box is located.

"The program represents a true partnership opportunity to broaden conservation and education efforts through the use of new technology and the Internet," said DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy. "The use of the webcam enables teachers, students, conservationists, and birders, from any location in the world, to be a part of the peregrine's recovery."

Historically, high rocky ledges in towns such as Avon, Meriden, and Guilford served as homes to peregrine falcons, but the birds began to disappear in the 1920s and 1930s due to the widespread use of the pesticide DDT. The Travelers Tower has the distinction of being both a historic and current nesting site since the last documented nesting in Connecticut occurred there in the late 1940s.

Other nesting locations in 2005 included a second pair in Hartford County that fledged three chicks and a pair in Middlesex County that fledged two. For the second year in a row, four chicks hatched in a nest box erected in 2002 in the Devon section of Milford at an NRG power plant along the Housatonic River. The pair that nests on the P. T. Barnum Bridge in Bridgeport produced two chicks for the sixth year.

This year, the DEP Wildlife Division examined and banded 13 of the 16 chicks that hatched. Since 1997, most of the peregrine chicks that have hatched in Connecticut have been banded as part of the management program for this state endangered species. Attaching leg bands allows wildlife managers to trace local movements, estimate population changes, and determine an individual bird's lifespan. The use of leg bands has provided useful information to the federal recovery program for this federally threatened species.

J. FRONTE / CT DOT

One of two peregrine falcon chicks that hatched this year on the P.T. Barnum Bridge in Bridgeport.

Update on Stolen Peregrine Egg

In April 2005, two Wesleyan University students from Middletown were arrested by DEP Environmental Conservation Police Officer Bill Myers after one of the students removed an egg from a peregrine falcon nest (see the May/June 2005 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*). The students were charged with criminal trespass in the 3rd degree for climbing out on a bridge where all trespassing is illegal. However, the trespassing charges were nulled in Middletown court.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Agent Tom Ricardi also charged one of the students for "Attempted Take" under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The student who was charged paid a $250 fine for taking the egg from the nest. Fortunately, the two men were caught in the act of taking the egg and the egg was returned to the nest where three eggs remained. Only three eggs successfully hatched from the nest. However, there is no way of knowing if the egg that didn't hatch was the one that was stolen and returned to the nest.

P. J. FUSCO

Charles and Duck Islands Closed to Public Access

The DEP issued an emergency closure of Charles Island in Milford and Duck Island in Westbrook in July to prevent the continuing human disturbance of several state-listed nesting birds at these islands, including snowy egrets, great egrets, glossy ibises and little blue herons. The islands, which will be closed to public access until September 9, 2005, will be patrolled by DEP Conservation Officers. Anyone caught trespassing on the islands will be arrested. The public can help in this effort to protect the nesting birds by following the emergency closure and reporting any observed violations at 1-800-842-4357.

Just for Kids

Ruffed Grouse

What's Up with Grouse?

Good question! Biologists are studying grouse to see where they are living in our state.

Ruffed grouse are chicken-like birds that live in forested habitat.

Grouse are Gamebirds

People hunt grouse. Many wild animals also eat grouse, including foxes, bobcats, coyotes, hawks, and falcons. Because grouse populations have declined, hunting seasons for grouse have been shortened.

Habitat for Grouse

Do you know of any good grouse habitat? Look at what grouse need below and see if you can find any good places for grouse to live.

Grouse eat seeds, buds, fruits, and insects.

Grouse like to live where forests are growing, with young trees and open spaces.

Like all animals, grouse need water in their habitat.

If you can find habitat that has all of the above, then you have great grouse grounds!

Thunderous Take-off

Hikers are surprised when they startle a grouse in the woods. The ruffed grouse sounds like thunder when it takes off from the forest floor.

Dramatic Drumming

In spring, male grouse attract females by beating air with their wings to create a drum-like sound. The sound is very unique and is similar to an old tractor starting up when heard at sunrise in the woods.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

July ..... Federal Duck Stamps are available at post offices.

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

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

..... Dispose of fishing line in covered trash receptacles. Improperly discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife.

August 10 ..... **Children's Program: All About Deer**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington, starting at 9:30 AM. (See page 15 for more information)

August 13-14 ..... **Sharon Audubon's Summer Festival**: Mark your calendars and save the date! The 38th Annual Sharon Audubon Festival is taking place at the Sharon Audubon Center located on Route 4 in Sharon. Both days offer information for adults, children, and families on a variety of nature-related topics. Learning your birds? Take a bird walk with a birding expert. Interested in pond life? Sign up for the canoeing program! Live raptors and reptiles are always a big hit as well. Music, food, and fun are included in the festival, so check the newspapers closer to the date for the full festival supplement, or call the Center at (860) 364-0520 for more information (www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/sharon).

Sept. ..... 2005 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices ($14 for 10 tags).

Sept. 1 ..... Early squirrel hunting season opens.

Sept. 2-5 ..... Visit the DEP Wildlife Division's booth in the Agricultural Building at the Woodstock Fair.

Sept. 15 ..... Report use of bluebird nest boxes by sending in a Bluebird Nest Box Network survey card to the DEP Wildlife Division. Cards are available by calling (860) 675-8130.

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

Sept. 20 ..... **Of Sassafras and Shadblow: Celebrating Our Native Trees and Shrubs**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington, starting at 7:00 PM. (See page 15 for more information)

Sept. 24 ..... **National Hunting and Fishing Day** (To learn more, visit the National Shooting Sports Foundation website at www.nssf.org)

Sept. 25 ..... **Halloween in September**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington, from 1:00-3:00 PM. (See page 15 for more information)

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

Step Up to the Plate for Wildlife...

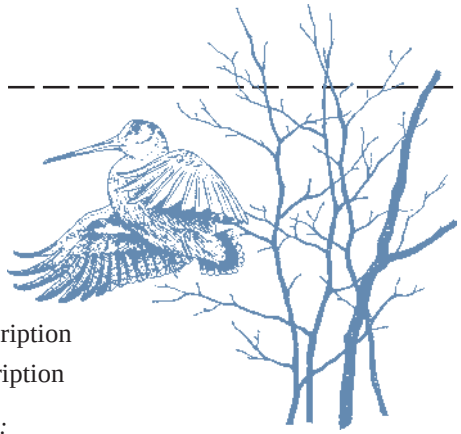
and show your support by displaying a wildlife license plate on your vehicle.

There are two great designs to choose from: the state-endangered bald eagle or the secretive bobcat.

Funds raised from sales and renewals of the plates will be used for wildlife research and management projects; the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, and management of wildlife habitat; and public outreach that promotes the conservation of Connecticut's wildlife diversity.

Application forms are available at DEP and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at www.ct.gov/dmv.

Connecticut Wildlife



Subscription Order

Please make checks payable to:
Connecticut Wildlife, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013

Check one:

☐ 1 Year ($6.00) ☐ 2 Years ($11.00) ☐ 3 Years ($16.00)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ *State:* _____

Zip: _____ *Tel.:* _____

Check one:

☐ Renewal
☐ New Subscription
☐ Gift Subscription

Gift card to read:

_____

_____

P. J. FUSCO

Connecticut's beaver population continues to grow, while at the same time human development encroaches on beaver habitat. As a result, more Connecticut citizens and communities are faced with the challenge of coexisting with beavers. This challenge involves efforts to minimize the problems beavers cause while also realizing the benefits of the wetlands these animals create and enhance.

Bureau of Natural Resources / Wildlife Division
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106-5127

STANDARD
PRESORT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BRISTOL, CT
PERMIT NO. 6

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER