March / April 2002

# Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES ● WILDLIFE DIVISION

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# From the Director

*I'm often asked for guidance on how one becomes a wildlife biologist. The idealized concept of working with wild animals in wild places is appealing to many. Some are contemplating a career change, while others are students or recent college graduates looking to get started. Herein, I offer my viewpoint on state agency employment to give the readers of* Connecticut Wildlife *a better understanding of our profession.*

*Wildlife management is a science-based profession and candidates for jobs need to possess a strong academic background in the biological sciences. A Bachelor's of Science degree in wildlife ecology or a closely related biological field is a minimum requirement to be competitive for employment opportunities. The Wildlife Society (www.wildlife.org), which is the professional organization of wildlife scientists, has created a certification program that many universities have used to develop their curricula. It is interesting to note that the mandatory courses for certification are not restricted to the sciences. In recognition of the increasingly social dimension of our profession, courses that emphasize written and verbal communication and policy development are also required. Advanced, thesis-based degrees that teach the scientific method and take the student from project design through data collection and analysis, conclusions, recommendations and publication in a peer reviewed journal, are desirable qualifications for many positions.*

*In addition to academic training, experience is a very important factor. There are many excellent university programs graduating hundreds, perhaps thousands of wildlife students per year. Given the scarcity of openings, this creates a very competitive job market. Quite often, the deciding factor is a candidate's experience with respect to the specific duties of the particular job being filled. To some degree, this can be a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Last, and just as important, are the candidate's "intangibles," such as an intimate knowledge of nature, love for the outdoors, and a healthy dose of common sense.*

*Connecticut's Wildlife Division currently employs 18 wildlife biologists who have earned degrees from a number of fine institutions, including: University of Connecticut, University of Maine, West Virginia University, Frostburg State University, University of Maryland, Louisiana State University, University of New Hampshire, University of Massachusetts, Colorado State University, Yale University, Eastern Connecticut State University, Colgate University and the University of Wisconsin. Several have achieved regional and national recognition based upon their work here. As a densely populated state with many immediate challenges, Connecticut is often on the cutting edge of wildlife management issues. In addition, many of our former seasonal employees have used the experience earned in Connecticut to obtain permanent employment with other agencies.*

*In summary, one becomes a wildlife biologist through training, experience, dedication and persistence. This rigorous preparation fosters a strong sense of pride in the profession and a commitment to science-based wildlife stewardship.*

Dale W. May

## Cover:

*Spring turkey hunting for gobblers requires a great deal of skill to be successful. Hunters should also make sure every field adventure is safe and enjoyable. To learn more, see page 16.*

*Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco*


# Connecticut Wildlife

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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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# New Hunter Education Dollars at Work in CT

*Written by Peter Bogue, Assistant Director*

The passage of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000 by Congress provided special grants for the enhancement of state hunter education programs under Section 10, Firearm and Bow Hunter Education and Safety Grants. Section 10 dollars are intended to supplement existing hunter education allocations, thereby enhancing hunter education efforts. These funds can be used to hire additional staff; provide materials for hunter education courses; enhance and modernize materials as needed; investigate new technologies and delivery methods; develop and evaluate home study courses; create advanced hunter education courses; evaluate and monitor hunter education classes; and improve and enhance training for hunter education instructors.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service apportioned these Section 10 funds using the same formula as other Wildlife Restoration Hunter Education funds. In the first year, Connecticut was apportioned $129,619 under Section 10 (funds were obligated through September 30, 2001). These funds were used by the Wildlife Division's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program to enhance hunter education efforts in three general categories: shooting/training facility improvements, distance learning opportunities and program materials and supplies.

### *Shooting/Training Facility Improvements*

Major improvements and enhancements are underway at the Franklin shooting range/training facility, which is located at the Division's Franklin Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This facility is dedicated solely to training CE/FS students and instructors. Over the years, the shooting decks, shooting benches, storage building and training structures have deteriorated and are being replaced under this project. Additional training structures are also being added.

### *Web Learning and Home Study*

Connecticut has joined with the International Hunter Education Association to develop an Internet-based program to enhance existing hunter education programs and to facilitate the recruitment of new hunters. In addition, a pilot home study program will be implemented and evaluated in the upcoming year. The home study program will allow the students to work independently. Students will be required to read the hunter education manual and complete the home study workbook before attending a mandatory field day. "Hands-on" and written testing will occur at the field day, prior to completion of the program.

### *Program Materials and Supplies*

Funds were used to purchase items to benefit several administrative and training efforts of the CE/FS Program:

- Program administration has benefitted from the purchase of a color printer, video projectors, laptop computers with printers and digital cameras.
- To enhance instructor development, new incentives were developed for volunteer instructors, additional reference materials for instructors were acquired and instructors were given special shirts that identify them with the CE/FS Program.
- Student education was enhanced through the purchase of training supplies and materials, including a Laser Shot Training system, laser training gun/video kits, upgraded shotguns and rifles for the mandatory live-firing portion of the program and new classroom chairs and tables for the Franklin facility.
- Specialty training efforts benefitted from the purchase of Global Positioning System (GPS) units for specialized student/instructor training.

The CE/FS Program staff is currently finalizing its plans for use of the 2002 Hunter Education Section 10 grant. These additional dollars will allow the Program to annually enhance the training of hunter education students and volunteer instructors.

# Volunteers Needed to Help Plovers and Terns

The Wildlife Division's Wildlife Diversity Unit is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help educate Connecticut beach visitors about nesting least terns and piping plovers and to patrol nest sites, thus limiting human disturbance to these state-threatened birds. Volunteers will be needed on weekends, starting May 1 until August 1, 2002, and they will patrol coastal beaches between Bridgeport and West Haven. All volunteers are required to attend a morning training session on April 6, 2002, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon. Interested volunteers should contact (before April 1): The Nature Conservancy, 55 High Street, Middletown, CT 06457; (860) 344-0716 ext. 324.


P. J. FUSCO

# Connecticut's Secret, Silent Salamanders

*Written by Kathy Herz, Editor*

Spring is just around the corner and, with the arrival of the first spring rains comes one of the best times to find creatures that are little known to many Connecticut residents. Secretive and silent, many salamanders emerge from their forest homes on rainy spring nights, making their way to nearby wetlands or temporary pools of water to find mates and lay their eggs. If you live near one of these breeding areas, you can go out at night, with a flashlight, and spot one of these interesting creatures.


P. J. FUSCO (3)

**The bright color of the red eft is considered a "warning" to potential predators that the animal contains toxins which can cause severe reactions.**

## *Lizard or Salamander?*

Maybe you have found a salamander before while raking leaves in spring or fall, or when turning over rocks and logs, or while exploring the woods as a child. Many who come upon a salamander think they have found a lizard. At first glance, salamanders and lizards look a lot alike—small animals with four legs, a tail and a similar body shape. However, up close, salamanders and lizards are very different.

First of all, these two animals live in different habitats. Salamanders prefer cool, moist places, while lizards prefer dry, warmer places. A lizard's body is covered with tough scales, while a salamander's body is smooth and slippery. Most salamanders do not have claws on their feet, while lizards do. Although lizards and salamanders look alike, they are not closely related. Lizards are reptiles and are more closely related to snakes and turtles. Salamanders are amphibians, the same as frogs and toads.

## *Why Are Amphibians Special?*

Amphibians spend part of their lives on land and part in water. They have two lives, a larval stage and an adult stage that are usually very different from one another. The larval stage is typically aquatic, while the adult stage is terrestrial. Amphibians are cold-blooded, which means their body temperature is the same as the surrounding air, soil or water. Amphibians can adjust their body temperature by choosing warm or cold places to rest. They become inactive when it is cold, but they can tolerate low temperatures.


**With the arrival of warm temperatures and rain in March and April, spotted salamanders head by the hundreds or thousands to nearby vernal pools to breed.**


**The patterning on the male marbled salamander is white, while it tends to be more grayish on the female.**

Most amphibians have lungs. However, some species of salamanders do not have lungs, including Connecticut's most-common salamander, the red-backed. All amphibians use their thin, moist skin to take in oxygen. Many breathe through gills, especially when in their larval stage.

## *Why Are Salamanders Special?*

All salamanders are carnivores. They eat insects, worms, small animals and even other salamanders. With the help of their eyesight and good sense of smell, salamanders find their prey.

Compared to the often noisy frogs and toads, salamanders are completely silent because they have no vocal cords.

Salamanders have glands under their skin that produces mucus to keep their skin moist. Other glands make poisons that can be distasteful or harmful to predators. A salamander's bright colors warn predators that it's probably distasteful or poisonous.

Most salamanders lay eggs. Because these eggs do not have shells, they must be laid in water or in moist places on land. The eggs are laid in a mass, string or individually. The larvae that hatch from the eggs look similar to tadpoles. However, tadpoles have large round heads, while larval salamanders have long, narrow heads. Tadpoles have two gills that are hidden within gill slits and are not obvious. Salamander larvae have very visible gills.

## *Where Do Salamanders Live?*

People rarely see most salamanders. That is because, as adults, salamanders spend most of their time in forested areas, living under rocks, fallen logs and in underground burrows. The time of year to see these creatures is in the spring when they move to wet areas to lay their eggs. These wet areas include ponds, ditches, marshes, meadows and a special, but little known habitat called a vernal pool. A vernal pool is a low spot in a forest or meadow that fills with water during winter and spring and then dries out by late summer. It can be big or small. Because these pools are temporary, fish cannot survive in the pools and thus eat the eggs laid by salamanders.

## *Connecticut Salamanders*

Twelve species of salamanders are found in Connecticut (there is only one native lizard, the five-lined skink). Some of the more interesting or more common salamanders are described here.

**Spotted Salamander**: This common salamander can be identified by its dark coloration marked with bright yellow spots. It spends most of its life in the forest, under leaf litter or logs, or in burrows under the ground. However, mainly in March and April, with the arrival of warm temperatures and rain, the salamanders make their way to the surface and head by the hundreds or thousands to vernal pools. The males and females perform special courtship dances in the water before the eggs are laid. Spotted salamander eggs look like globs of jelly and are usually attached in one large ball to twigs under the water. Each ball is about the size of a tennis ball and can have up to 250 eggs in it. After one to two months, the salamander larvae hatch. They must develop quickly over the summer into young salamanders before the vernal pool dries up. They eventually leave the pool to find a home in the nearby forest.

**Marbled Salamander**: This distinctly marked black-and-white (or black-and-grayish) salamander lays its eggs in late summer or early fall, unlike most other salamanders. The 60 to 200 eggs are laid in dried up vernal pools and they are not connected by a jelly substance. The female usually stays with the eggs until autumn rains begin to refill the pond. The eggs hatch within a few days of being covered with water. The larvae and any unhatched eggs will overwinter in the pool. Marbled salamander larvae begin to change into young salamanders in late spring and, by May or June, they have left the pool to live in the forest.

**Red-spotted newt**: This salamander has a complex life cycle with four stages: egg, larva, eft and adult. The eggs are laid in water. After the larvae hatch, they spend three to four months growing and developing in the water. They eventually lose their gills, develop lungs and move onto land. This stage is called the red eft stage. The eft can be brilliant orange-red to green-brown. The eft remains on land for two to three years. Efts can be seen in daylight and, during rainfall they may be observed moving to new areas.

Usually in autumn, efts transform into adults. The newts then migrate to ponds or lakes. The adults spend the rest of their lives in water, living in a variety of wetlands (they may overwinter on land). Adult newts have an olive green to yellowish brown upper body with a row of bright red spots circled in black along each side. They also have a fin-like tail. Newts produce noxious skin secretions that help deter predation.

**Redback Salamander**: This most common salamander can be found just about everywhere in Connecticut and it is recognized by its blue-black body marked with an obvious stripe down the back. The stripe is usually red but can be gray. The redback spends its life on land, laying its eggs (3-14) in a moist depression under a decaying log or leaves. The female remains with the eggs while they incubate. Her moist body keeps the eggs from drying out. The larval stage occurs within the egg; upon hatching, a young, miniature redback emerges.

**Dusky Salamander**: This medium-sized, stout salamander is brown to black in color with a series of small, white spots along the sides of the body. A light line can be seen running diagonally from the eye to the corner of the mouth.

Dusky salamanders live in and near streams, seeps and springs, favoring areas with organic material, mud and fallen logs. Eggs (up to several dozen) are laid sometime during June through September, under a stone or log, close to water. They are brooded by the female. After hatching, the larvae enter the water (usually in September), remaining there throughout winter and spring.

In Connecticut, the dusky salamander has become scarce in developed areas. This may be due to the destruction of springs and seeps, as well as the frequent flooding of streams, which removes most organic materials needed by the dusky salamander. Stream flooding in urban areas is result of rapid water run-off from numerous roads and other large paved areas.

**Common Mudpuppy**: This large salamander, which can be eight to 16 inches long, lives its entire life in water. It has a brownish body with dark spots and three, red-colored external gills on each side of the head. Adult mudpuppies court in fall, but the females do not lay eggs until spring. The small, yellow, globe-shaped eggs (30-200) are attached

*continued on next page*

***Salamanders,***
*continued from previous page*

individually to the undersides of logs or flat stones in shallow, quiet sections of lakes or rivers. The female remains with the eggs until they hatch. In Connecticut, the mudpuppy is only found in the Connecticut River.

## *Threats to Salamanders*

The greatest threat faced by Connecticut's salamander populations is the loss of habitat. Habitats are usually destroyed during development or are degraded by pollution (i.e.; the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides), increasing fragmentation and the introduction and invasion of non-native plants.

Several species of native salamanders are currently experiencing a long-term decline. Many species are localized and restricted to specific habitat types. Unfortunately, when these habitats are destroyed, the salamanders found there disappear too. With few exceptions, salamanders do not relocate long distances to new habitats. Even if suitable habitat is located nearby, migration is very difficult due to the numerous roads that dissect Connecticut's landscape. When these slow-moving creatures cross roads (particularly during spring migration to breeding pools), hundreds are killed every year by cars.


P. J. FUSCO

**The common mudpuppy, which spends its entire life in water, is only found in the Connecticut River in our state.**

## *What You Can Do*

There are actions you can take to conserve salamanders and their habitats:

- Observe, but do not collect salamanders. Learn more about them and help others understand and appreciate these fascinating creatures.
- Discover vernal pools and other important salamander habitats in your area. Promote stewardship, the preservation of open space and wise land-use planning in your community.

**To learn more about Connecticut's salamanders, obtain a copy of *Amphibians and Reptiles in Connecticut, A Checklist*, or *Amphibians and Reptiles of Connecticut and Adjacent Regions*, both by Michael W. Klemens (available at the DEP Store 860-424-3555). *A Field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools* can be obtained from MassWildlife Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (508-792-7270, ext. 200). These three publications were used as references for this article.**

# Preliminary Harvest Results for the 2001 Fall Turkey Seasons

*Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program Biologist*

Fall hunters once again took to the Connecticut woodlands with bow and gun to harvest the elusive wild turkey. More permits were issued in 2001 than 2000, and the harvest increased for both the firearms and archery seasons. The increased harvest may be a result of a relatively warm and dry spring, which increased wild turkey poult survival. Therefore, more young birds were available for fall turkey hunters to harvest.

The 13-day fall firearms season resulted in a reported harvest of 287 birds, representing a 52 percent increase from the 190 birds harvested in 2000. The 2001 fall firearms harvest (287) was also just three birds short of the record harvest of 290 birds taken in 1999. Overall, 3,060 firearms permits were issued and 203 hunters took at least one turkey, for a seven percent success rate. Private land hunters (2,563) harvested 273 birds, whereas state land hunters harvested 14 birds. Hunters reported harvesting at least one bird from 80 of 169 Connecticut towns. Lebanon and Woodstock recorded the highest harvest of 26 and 11 birds. The highest state land harvest was reported in Salmon River State Forest. In addition, turkey management zones 9 (60 birds) and 5 (43 birds) reported the highest zonal harvest. Of the 287 birds taken, 140 were males and 147 were females; 56 percent were adults.

During the fall archery season, 2,395 permits were issued and 73 birds were harvested (a 70% increase from the 43 birds harvested in 2000). Sixty-one archers took at least one bird. The statewide success rate was 2.5 percent. Wild turkeys were taken from 46 towns, with Preston (4), Coventry (3), Lyme (3), Stonington (3) and Tolland (3) reporting the highest harvest. Turkey management zone 11 (10 birds) recorded the highest harvest. Of the 73 birds taken by archers, there were 40 males and 33 females; 51 percent were adults.

The fall turkey harvest continues to increase in eastern Connecticut, while the harvest appears to be stabilizing in the western part of the state. Although a variety of fall hunting opportunities exists, a small group of dedicated hunters chose to enjoy the challenge of hunting Connecticut's largest game bird during the autumn season.

# Nominations Being Accepted for GreenCircle Awards

The GreenCircle Award Program was first announced in 1997 by former DEP Commissioner Sidney J. Holbrook. The Program recognizes businesses, institutions, civic organizations and individuals which have undertaken projects to improve the quality of Connecticut's environment. The objective is to encourage groups and individuals to create innovative ways of preventing pollution or increasing environmental awareness.

In April 1998, under the direction of Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr., the DEP implemented the GreenCircle Award Program. Those eligible to apply for the Program, and some eligible activities, include:

- Businesses – large and small, in the commercial, industrial and service sectors which increase access to waterways, improve energy efficiency or implement pollution prevention techniques in their operation;
- Government and other nonprofit institutions, such as municipalities, state agencies, schools and hospitals, which compost, limit pesticide use through better management techniques or convert buses or other fleet vehicles to natural gas or electricity;
- Individuals, citizen groups, school classrooms and other volunteers who improve community areas, lands and gardens, sponsor river clean up days, implement habitat enhancements for fish and wildlife on private property or volunteer time to environmental instructional programs.

Many groups and individuals donate significant quantities of their time and resources in an effort to develop safer and cleaner methods of conducting business, create environmental programs for their students or sponsor river cleanups. These efforts have a significant, measurable effect on the state's environment and warrant recognition. The Program acknowledges these activities and promotes them as positive examples for others within the community to follow.

Nominations are screened by DEP staff and then forwarded to the GreenCircle Advisory Board. For final selection, an Advisory Board of representatives from environmental organizations, municipalities, law firms and Connecticut's General Assembly review GreenCircle applications and determine qualified applicants. Since the Program began in 1998, more than 500 awards have been granted to businesses, institutions, civic organizations and individuals for their dedicated involvement in over 700 projects. Award recipients are presented with a certificate of commendation and a window decal, and are recognized at a public ceremony.

***The Department of Environmental Protection is currently accepting nominations for the 2002 GreenCircle Award Program. Interested persons are welcome to fill out a GreenCircle Award application and submit it to the DEP. Be sure to check out the DEP web site at http://dep.state.ct.us/pao/grncrc/greencircle.htm. Questions about the GreenCircle Awards program should be directed to Robert Hannon of the Office of the Ombudsman, at (860) 424-3245.***

# National Wildlife Week -- April 22-28, 2002

P. J. FUSCO


"Explore Nature in Your Neighborhood" during National Wildlife Week 2002. This annual outreach effort by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and its field offices and state affiliates includes on-line activities and games, a Nature in Your Neighborhood Fun Book and Poster, articles and activities in NWF's children's magazines, special events and contests. All these pieces combine to teach students about the environment. The goal of National Wildlife Week is to educate participants about wildlife conservation issues. By learning about wildlife and conservation efforts in their community, students and adults learn how they can become a positive influence on the environment.

For more information on Wildlife Week, you can email wildlife@nwf.org or call 800-822-9919. You can also visit NWF's website (www.nwf.org) or call Connecticut's NWF affiliate, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, at 860-346-2372.

# Bluebird Bulletin

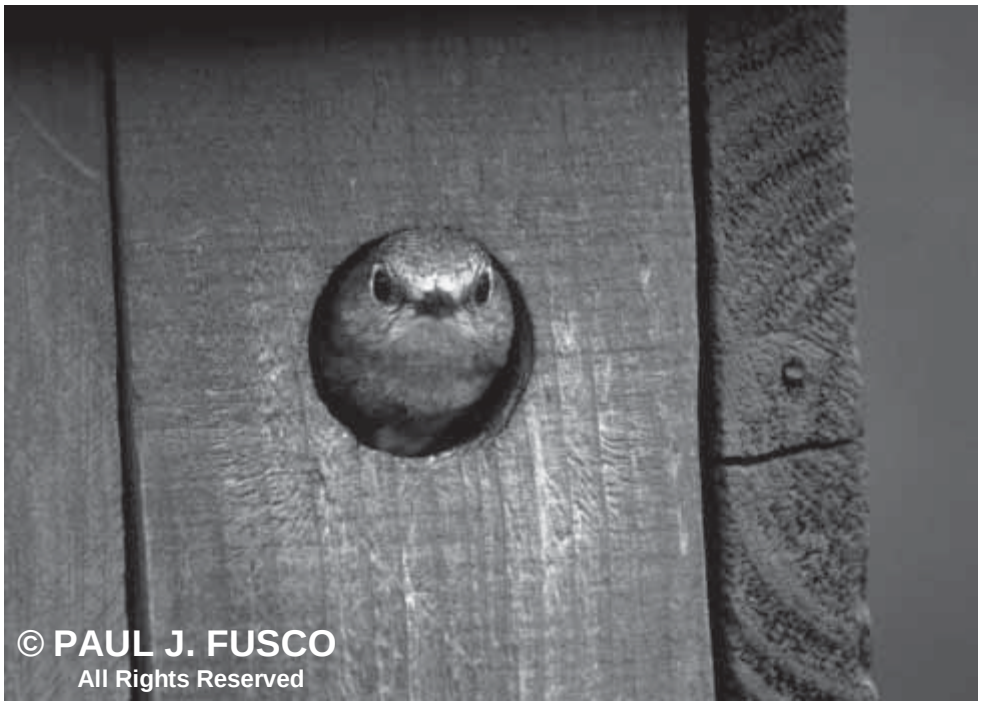
## 2001 Bluebird Nesting Season Summary

Connecticut's Bluebird Restoration and Wood Distribution Project was initiated by the Wildlife Division in 1980 in an effort to increase the state's eastern bluebird population. Through this project, the Division has provided educational materials, plans and assistance to community service organizations, school groups and others for the construction and installation of bluebird nest boxes.

Data collected from the bluebird box survey cards indicate that 2001 was a very successful year for bluebird box users. Approximately 97 percent of the boxes reported on survey cards were used for nesting. Tree swallows continued to be the most prevalent box inhabitants, with almost 37 percent of boxes occupied by them. Bluebirds and house wrens were a close second and third, with 27 and 20 percent respectively.

Unfortunately, house sparrows and predators continued to be a problem in 2001 as in previous years. House sparrows were reported to have attempted nesting in 10 percent of the boxes. This number dropped slightly from 2000 but still represents a significant threat to native cavity-nesting birds. In addition, the number of reported predator problems was up from 2001, with 11 percent of project participants experiencing predation at one of their boxes.

P. J. FUSCO




**In Connecticut, nest boxes with openings greater than 1.5 inches should not be used if you want to attract bluebirds.**

## Get Ready for the Bluebird Nesting Season

The following tips will help you get your nest boxes ready for the 2002 bluebird nesting season:

- Be sure to clean out your nest boxes before the bluebirds return to Connecticut in early March. Nests left over from last year, as well as any mouse nests that were built over the winter, should be removed to make room for new nests.
- Check your boxes for signs of damage. Be sure to replace any split, rotten or broken pieces. Large holes or cracks in the box can allow rain to get in, which could chill the nestlings. Also, inspect the entrance hole. Some mammals, such as squirrels, will chew around the opening to make it larger so that they can gain access to the box. If the entrance hole has a diameter greater than 1.5 inches, the front piece of the box will need to be replaced.
- Thoroughly inspect your predator guards. Make sure they are still secure and will continue to keep predators from your boxes. Look for signs of predator activity on your boxes. Scratch marks and fur on the box indicate that the predator guards are not working correctly.

**The "Bluebird Bulletin" is a special supplement to *Connecticut Wildlife* which reports on the activities of the Bluebird Restoration Project. Prepared by Wildlife Technician Geoffrey Krukar, the Bulletin also provides helpful suggestions and innovative ideas on helping bluebirds continue their comeback. If you would like to join the hundreds of participants in Connecticut's Bluebird Nest Box Network, contact Geoff at (860) 675-8130.**

# New Threat to Bluebirds?

According to an article first published in *Purple Martin Update* Volume 9 (3), cavity nesting birds may be facing a new threat. The threat comes in the form of the European paper wasp (*Polistes dominulus*). This non-native insect was first recorded in Massachusetts in 1980 and has spread to neighboring states, including Connecticut (1996). Some researchers believe that this wasp will deter cavity-nesting birds, such as the bluebird, from using nest boxes. These wasps have been shown to construct a large number of nests in one area and will readily use bluebird boxes for nest sites.

As wasps build a nest in a bluebird box, bluebirds look to other places for nesting sites. The extent to which these wasps have taken over nest boxes is currently unknown and is the focus of recent research.

For more information, see www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Aug98/WaspQueen.bpf.html, or contact Dr. Eugene S. Morton, Conservation and Research Center, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution, 1500 Remount Road, Front Royal, VA 22630.


P. J. FUSCO

## *Did You Know?*

**It was recently reported in the winter 2002 issue of Bluebird that researchers from Rutgers University have discovered that a third of all starling nests contain at least one egg dumped by another starling. This dumping behavior could potentially have a negative effect on our native birds, like the bluebird. Starling eggs have reportedly been found mixed in with eggs in bluebird nests.**

# A Quick Comparison of Nest Boxes

Much research has been done over the years to find the best bluebird box. Researchers have tried changing the shape and dimensions of the box, as well as the shape and size of the entrance hole in an attempt to find the most attractive box for bluebirds. Recent studies compared the standard North American Bluebird Society (NABS) box with a 1.5-inch round hole, the NABS box with a larger oval hole, the wedge-shaped Troyer box with a large (4-inches wide) slot opening and the Gilwood box with a 2.25-inch round hole bisected by a metal rod. From this comparison, researchers have discovered that bluebirds seem to prefer (or make more nesting attempts in) boxes with larger openings. However, when conducting these studies, researchers failed to account for box usage by undesirable birds.

In Connecticut, nest boxes with openings greater than 1.5 inches should not be used. Gilwood boxes have a high rate of use by European starlings (non-native) and slot-opening nest boxes, like the Troyer box, are used heavily by house wrens (a native competitor of the bluebird). Wrens find it very easy to place small twigs inside a nest box when given a horizontal entry hole. Oval-shaped entrances should be avoided on standard NABS boxes because they allow European starlings to enter; however, they may work on triangular Peterson style boxes. Although starlings can enter Peterson style boxes with oval entrances, the interior box dimensions are too small for the starlings to construct nests.

# For More Information . . .

The Wildlife Division has published an eight-page fact sheet on the eastern bluebird which contains information about the life history of the bluebird, nest box plans and box installation tips. This publication and postage-paid nest box survey cards are available free-of-charge to Connecticut residents and may be obtained by writing to: Wildlife Diversity Program, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013, or by accessing the wildlife section of the DEP's web site at http://dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife.

Information on bluebirds can also be found on the North American Bluebird Society's web site: http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org, or by writing to the North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530.

A U.S. Forest Service publication, "Cavity Nesting Birds of North American Forests," can be found at http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/wildlife/nesting_birds. This publication is out of print and only available at the web site.

# Move Over Plover

*Written by Paul Fusco, Public Awareness Program*

With the exception of the sound of lapping waves and the distant muffled noise from a boat, all seems still and quiet while walking along a remote stretch of Connecticut beach early on a foggy April morning. Nothing seems to be moving and even the nearby salt marsh is tranquil. Then, a soft sound is heard coming through the mist. It's a delicate, simple sound with a harmonic piping quality to it. The sound is being made continuously by a bird that's flying above the beach ahead. Barely visible through the fog, the bird is seen flying in large figure-eight flight patterns over one section of the beach as it makes its piping calls. Lap after lap, it flies around nonstop for 15 minutes at a time. This bird is a male piping plover, calling as it makes its nuptial flight. He's claiming this quiet section of the shoreline for his breeding territory where he will attract a mate, scrape a nest site in the sand and raise young.


P. J. FUSCO (2)

**About the size of a robin, piping plovers can be found on some of Connecticut's sandy beaches during spring and summer.**

As the sun inches its way higher in the sky and the fog begins to burn off, the sounds of plover and waves are replaced by the sounds of traffic and barking dogs. It's realized that this Connecticut beach isn't remote after all, but sits in a moderately urbanized area. With each passing day, as the season progresses into summer, this stretch of beach will become less and less remote as it gets more and more recreational use by people. By mid-July, the plover and his mate will have had a difficult time raising their brood on this beach, which in April appeared to be so inviting.

The piping plover is one of five regularly occurring species of plovers that can be found in Connecticut. It's one of two plover species that breed here. The other is the more common killdeer.


**Found throughout the state, the killdeer is known for its loud call of *"kill-deer, kill-deer!"***

Three other plover species can be found traveling through Connecticut as migrants. They are the black-bellied, American golden and semi-palmated plovers. These three are long distance migrants that breed in the Arctic. They are powerful flyers and travel in flocks. Some of these birds make incredibly long journeys, including enduring flights over water.

Closely related to sandpipers, plovers are medium to small-sized shorebirds, with long pointed wings, short tails and compact bodies. They have proportionally large eyes and thick necks. Their short, pigeon-like bills are used to capture their prey of small invertebrates, including worms, insects and crustaceans. Their flight is strong, swift and direct. Plovers are often seen along the shoreline, exhibiting their distinctive behavior of alternately running, then standing still.

All plovers nest on the ground and use distraction displays to lure predators away from their nest or young. By feigning a broken wing and flapping on the ground, the adult plover is sometimes able to trick intruders, such as foxes, raccoons and humans, leading them away from their nest and young.

## *Killdeer*

Our most common and widespread plover, the killdeer, is found throughout the state breeding in open habitats with little or low vegetation. It favors such areas as airports, meadows, farm fields, athletic fields, grassy areas and along the shoreline. Killdeer are short distance migrants. Most end up spending the winter in the southern U.S., although some may be found in Connecticut coastal areas during winter.

This medium-sized plover has two distinctive black bands across its breast. Its loud call of *kill-deer!, kill-deer!*, is familiar to anyone who spends time outdoors.

## *Black-bellied Plover*

The plaintive whistling call of the black-bellied plover epitomizes the essence of wildness and the wide open far away places where this species is found. The wary nature of migrating flocks kept this species from the slaughter inflicted upon most of the other shorebird species by the market gunners of the late 19th century.

Breeding on the expansive Arctic tundra, the black-bellied winters as far south as southern Argentina. The largest of our plovers, it is a fairly common migrant in Connecticut, with some hardy individuals remaining here through winter.

## *American Golden Plover*

In its breeding plumage of black and spangled gold, the American golden plover is regarded as one of North America's most beautiful birds. Some golden plovers make a stop in Connecticut on their fall migration, but at this time of year, the adults have lost their best plumage and the young are sporting their plain juvenile wear.

Normally traveling in flocks during spring migration, American golden plovers come north from southern South America and move up the Great Plains of North America before spreading out to their Arctic tundra breeding grounds across northern Canada and Alaska. In late summer they will flock to begin their southward journey, which will take them first east to the Canadian Maritimes, then remarkably, most will fly out over the Atlantic Ocean, nonstop to the northern coast of South America. That's a distance of over 2,000 miles. Large numbers of American golden plovers are not seen in Connecticut because the state is not on their regular migration path. The ones seen here are usually stragglers or those that have been blown off course by strong easterly winds.


P. J. FUSCO (2)

**The semi-palmated plover is most common in Connecticut during August and September when flocks can be found at shoreline locations as they migrate south.**

## *Piping Plover*

This small, pale plover is familiar to observant Connecticut residents who frequent coastal beaches during summer. Each year between 20 and 40 pairs of piping plovers can be found scattered across our coastline. Their cryptic sand-colored plumage makes them difficult to see in their beach habitat. In fact, these birds depend on camouflage in order to survive and to reproduce successfully.

Nesting on the beach, females plovers lay four pale gray eggs in the sand. These eggs have black and purple speckles, making them virtually invisible on the sand. Piping plovers will also line the depression where the

*continued on next page*


**The black axillar (underarm) feathers of the black-bellied plover are a distinguishing field mark in all plumages and can be seen from a long distance when the bird is flying.**

***Plover family,***
*continued from previous page*

eggs are laid with tiny bits of shells, adding to its concealment.

Listed as a state and federally threatened species, the Atlantic coast population of piping plovers was originally imperiled by the loss of habitat to development and recreational use. Its breeding habitat is the same beachfront property that humans relish. Aggressive management and nest protection coordinated by state wildlife agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have stabilized the plover population on the Atlantic coast, benefitting these birds.


P. J. FUSCO (3)

**In full breeding plumage on its Arctic tundra nesting grounds, the male American golden plover is one of the most striking of North American birds.**

## *Semi-palmated plover*

Similar in size and appearance to the piping plover, the semi-palmated is found in Connecticut only as a migrant. It breeds in the Arctic tundra regions of North America. In Connecticut, this fairly common migrant is more likely to be found in muddy areas of salt marshes and intertidal zones than the piping plover, which frequents the sandier coastal locations.

## *Conservation*

Shorebirds, including the plovers, have a storied history. Their large migrating flocks were among the favorite targets of market gunners before the turn of the 20th century. Once the great flocks of passenger pigeons disappeared, the market gunners turned to the Eskimo curlew and American golden plover, whose flocks during migration were so numerous they were said to sometimes darken the sky. By the time protective measures were put in place, the once abundant American golden plover was at the edge of extinction. Today its numbers are still recovering, almost a full century after the shooting was stopped. Because of habitat limitations they will never reach their former numbers. The Eskimo curlew didn't fare as well, it never recovered and is now widely thought to be extinct.

Today, plovers are mainly threatened by predation and disturbance from recreational use at their beach nesting areas. Critical stopover sites where these migratory birds find food and refuge are being identified and protected by both government agencies and non-government organizations. If these stopover sites were lost, many of the plovers would not be able to complete their migrations and would most likely suffer extreme population declines.

Ongoing measures are undertaken and maintained each year to protect the piping plover. These efforts have been successful in our region. If you would like to help protect the piping plover in Connecticut, please contact the Wildlife Diversity Unit at the Wildlife Division's Franklin office.

## *Identification of Juveniles: American Golden vs. Black-bellied*

**Correctly identifying these two similar large plovers can be difficult.**

**The black-bellied is slightly larger and has a bigger, heavier bill. The clear, white patch on the lower flank area of the black-bellied plover is diagnostic.**

**The golden plover has a higher forehead profile, smaller bill and the lower flank shows markings. The golden plover also has a strong eyebrow stripe.**

**While the black-bellied has a grayer appearance on average, some juveniles can show some yellowish color on their backs, making this an unreliable field mark by itself. The color appearance can also be influenced by the light the bird is being viewed in.**

**Another diagnostic field mark is the color of the axillar (underarm) feathers, which are black on the black-bellied plover (see photo on previous page) and light-colored on the golden.**


**Juvenile black-bellied plover**


**Juvenile American golden plover**

# Your Questions Answered???

*I have a serious problem with woodpeckers. I have lived in my house for 30 years and this past fall woodpeckers started pecking holes in my house. I purchased the owls with rotating heads and placed shiny objects all around. Whenever I move the owls to the front of the house, they go to the back and so on. What am I to do? D.V.N., Ridgefield*

There are a variety of reasons why woodpeckers are attracted to houses, causing problems with their pecking habits: 1) drumming to attract mates and mark territory, 2) to find food and 3) to drill holes for nesting or roosting.

Most of the complaints about woodpeckers that are received by the Wildlife Division involve several common species, the downy, hairy and northern flicker. Typically one or sometimes several woodpeckers, often males (as identified by the red spot on the back of the head), drill numerous holes about the size of a quarter through the siding on houses. These holes are often concentrated high up on the house, just under the eaves or near a corner. Hole drilling usually occurs in spring, coinciding with the breeding season. Nesting has been reported in such holes by northern flickers.

Damage from drilling by woodpeckers has also been reported in fall. These holes may be used for roosting or they may be a result of woodpeckers searching for food. Nighttime roosting in these holes by downy and hairy woodpeckers has been observed.

Drumming, the loud "jack hammer" pecking done repeatedly during the spring breeding season to establish territories and attract or signal mates, is generally done on resonant dead tree trunks or limbs. However, metal rain gutters, signposts and downspouts also may be used. Although drumming usually results in little damage, the noise can be quite annoying.

It is important to remember that woodpeckers consume large quantities of insects and are thus an important part of the ecosystem in managing insect populations. In addition, it is necessary for people to learn to live with and tolerate the wildlife that shares their yards. However, when it becomes necessary to control woodpecker damage, as it is in your case, a homeowner should take prompt action and use a combination of control methods as soon as a woodpecker starts to drill.

**Frightening Devices**: Visual and auditory types of frightening devices, when used as soon as a woodpecker starts drilling, can sometimes be effective. Bird flash tape (bright silver and red-sided metalized plastic tape, about one-half inch wide) can be installed in strands over or near the areas being damaged. The tape should be attached so it spirals and flashes brilliantly in a light breeze. Bird control balloons, mylar party balloons and shiny aluminum foil strips may also be used. Do not leave these objects up over a long period of time as many birds can become habituated to their presence and lose their fear of them.

Hawk silhouettes and plastic owls, some even with rotating heads, can be used as frightening devices. These are not always effective, but they seem to work better if they are placed high up, on or near the building, such as on the roof or a tree limb. Most importantly, the silhouette must be obvious and the devices need to be moved to new locations at least once a week.

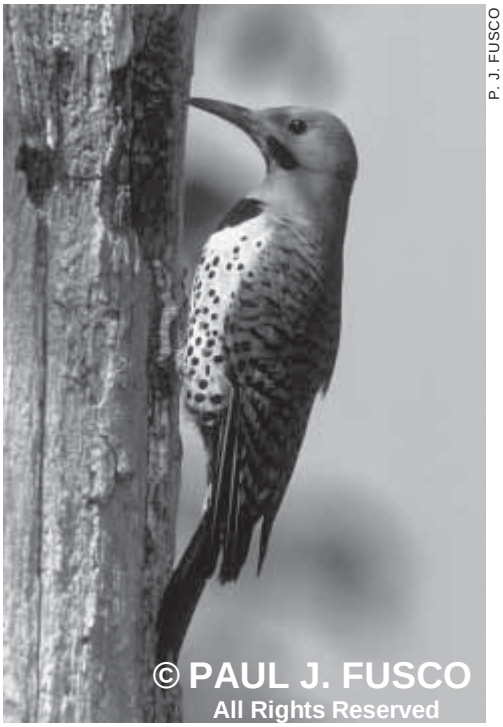
Loud noises (smacking sneakers together, starter pistol or special birdbangers) may also be used to frighten woodpeckers, disrupting their drilling or drumming activity. Bird distress call tapes may also be used as long as they are species specific.

**Exclusion**: Temporarily covering any holes with plastic sheathing, flashing or any other barrier may help discourage woodpeckers. More permanent barriers, like sheet metal or heavy wire screen painted to match the color of the house, can also be used. Bird netting is suggested for use in peaks and other hard to reach areas of a house which may be repeatedly damaged and is almost invisible from the ground. Netting should be attached at an angle, leaving approximately three inches of space between it and the building.

**Repellents/Toxicants**: Most repellents are ineffective and not recommended. There are no registered toxicants for controlling woodpeckers.

As a last resort, woodpeckers causing extreme damage may only be killed by the authority of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special permit.

The Wildlife Division licenses Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators (NWCOs) who provide services to people experiencing wildlife problems. To obtain the names of licensed NWCOs who may be able to assist you with a woodpecker or other wildlife problem, contact the Wildlife Division (860-424-3011) or check your local yellow pages.




P. J. FUSCO

**Pecking and drilling by the northern flicker are sometimes the source of complaints to the Wildlife Division.**

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

**Please send it to:**

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

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

# Rare Plant Recovers

*Written by Ken Metzler, DEP Plant Ecologist, and Ann Kilpatrick, Wildlife Division Biologist*

Parker's pipewort (*Eriocaulon parkeri*), a state-threatened plant in Connecticut, is once again thriving in Chester Creek, located in Chester. It has been two years since the Wildlife Division trapped five beavers and removed their dam, which was threatening to eliminate one of only four populations of this rare plant that remain in Connecticut.

## A Plant in Trouble

Parker's pipewort is a globally significant species and considered rare or local throughout its range. Occurring sporadically from the estuaries of Quebec and New Brunswick, Canada, south to North Carolina, it is absent from New Hampshire and historically occurred in New York and Pennsylvania.

Field observations in Connecticut indicate that Parker's pipewort is confined to a narrow zone within the upper limits of tidal influence in freshwater tidal rivers. Its distribution within this zone is not always contiguous, as fairly large tracts of what appears to be similar habitat exist where few or no plants occur. Of the 12 historic populations recorded from Connecticut, only four currently exist, all within the lower Connecticut River.

Throughout the range of the Parker's pipewort, the habitat of this plant has been described as "muddy shores within tidal limits," or as "brackish mud along estuaries." Although both of these accounts associate the occurrence of the plant with muddy substrates, recent studies indicate that Parker's pipewort favors a stable substrate where erosion and deposition are in balance. This balance is reflected in the habitat preference of Connecticut's populations, sandy and gravelly tidal flats with little or no silt accumulation.

Plant ecologists believe that the threats to Parker's pipewort include pollution, dredging and development, and the apparent negative influence of excessive siltation and the extent of development along the watercourse and surrounding areas. These threats have presumably resulted in the decline and disappearance of most of the historic populations, many of which are now located in developed areas.

G. MORRISON © 2002

**Parker's pipewort**

## Discovery at Chester Creek

Parker's pipewort was first observed in Chester Creek in 1995 during a botanical inventory of freshwater tidal marshes. At that time, hundreds of plants were observed growing on gravelly intertidal flats near the confluence of Great Brook.

In June 1999, staff members from the DEP's Natural Diversity Database conducted a field check of Chester Creek as part of a research study to determine the plant's habitat requirements. Reaching the site, they observed that the gravel flats previously occupied by the pipewort were under water. Assuming that the flooding was caused by the tide, they checked another location and returned to the site at a later time. Upon returning to the site, they were surprised to find the area still flooded. While wading in the creek, they heard the unmistakable slap of a beaver's tail and then observed the dam. Because permanent flooding and siltation would be disastrous to the survival of pipewort at this site, they were immediately concerned.

## The Beavers Move In

In 1999, plant ecologists were not the only ones investigating Chester Creek. During the same year, the Wildlife Division responded to a call from a landowner that lived just upstream from the beaver dam. He was concerned about the presence of the beavers and the possibility that flooding would contaminate his well. An inspection revealed that the pipes that normally drained water from the landowner's property into the Creek were partially inundated by water. At the time, there appeared to be no immediate threat posed to his property, given the drought conditions experienced that summer. Beaver activity was periodically monitored over the next month.

In mid-August 1999, the Wildlife Division again met with the landowner and discussed his concerns about the potential for greater flooding with increasing rainfall and extreme tides. Initially, the Division installed two water level control devices (each consisting of an 8-inch diameter, 10-foot long PVC pipe enclosed by wire fencing at one end) at the dam site to alleviate the flooding. This required the Division to apply for a Certificate of Permission (COP) from the DEP's Office of Long Island Sound Programs.

## Finding the Best Solution

During the COP review process, the Division learned of the documented presence of Parker's pipewort in the area impounded by the beaver dam. DEP Plant Ecologist Ken Metzler recommended that the dam be removed from the site prior to the spring freshet to allow the natural hydrology of the intertidal system to reestablish itself and restore the habitat. DEP Fisheries

Division Biologist Steve Gephard also noted the importance of the creek to anadromous fish, including strong runs of alewife, blueback herring and sea lamprey. Although anadromous fish had been observed upstream from the beaver dam since its creation, the numbers and frequency of observations were much reduced. Gephard also stated that the complete removal of the dam would be in the best interest of the fisheries resources of the creek.


K. METZLER

**The state-threatened plant, Parker's pipewort, growing in its natural habitat (gravelly substrate).**

The Wildlife Division's intention at that point was to try to lower the water level in the Creek by about one foot to alleviate the flooding until the regulated trapping season in December. Over the next few weeks, contact was maintained with the landowner and the site was monitored. During that time, a combination of increasing precipitation, extreme high tides and beaver activity at the dam site resulted in an increase in the level of impounded water in the creek. The pipes that drained the landowner's property were now completely inundated. The Chester Town Sanitarian was consulted for his opinion on the flooding of the property. He stated that the prolonged flooding did pose a risk to the landowner's well. At that point, the Division issued a special authorization to a licensed, volunteer trapper to trap the beavers.

Following the removal of the dam in March 2000, Metzler was optimistic that the pipewort would reestablish itself in the creek. Because his observations of other study sites indicated that annual populations of pipewort naturally fluctuate and that the plant produces numerous seeds, he was hopeful that there was a substantial seed source in the flooded sediments and that recolonization would occur once natural tidal flow was restored.

## *Parker's Pipewort Returns*

In late summer 2000, Metzler and his co-workers again visited Chester Creek and carefully searched the site. The creek bed and tidal flats appeared very disturbed. The gravel bars were poorly developed, there was little intertidal vegetation present, and the creek bed appeared to be hand excavated, presumably by people looking for artifacts. Glass and pottery remnants were littered throughout the stream. Discouraged, they walked downstream toward the remains of the beaver dam and were pleased to see three pipewort plants on the creek bank. Seeds had survived the flooding, and regeneration, albeit small, had occurred.

This past summer (2001), Metzler and his coworkers again visited Chester Creek. Scouring the first gravel bar, they saw a few vegetative Parker's pipewort plants, then several more, then several in flower and fruit. After a careful count, they estimated 50 small plants on an area of about 100 square feet. Continuing downstream, they immediately noticed that there was a marked improvement in the natural condition of the creek bed, as compared to the previous year. No glass or pottery was observed and the gravel bars seemed well-developed and vegetated. The next flat they observed had hundreds of robust pipewort plants, with this concentration extending downstream throughout all available habitats. The population estimate for this flat was over 1,000 plants, a remarkable change from the previous year. The recovery of Parker's pipewort in Chester Creek now appears certain.


J. WILSON

**DEP staff members remove the beaver dam from Chester Creek. The dam was about 5 feet high, 6 feet wide and stretched 50 feet across the creek.**

# Safety Comes First While Hunting Turkeys in Spring

Connecticut's spring turkey hunting season will be here soon, and now is the perfect time to practice and prepare. Spring turkey hunting requires a great deal of skill to be successful, and the best way to "learn the ropes" is to heed the advice of seasoned turkey hunters and to practice. Hunters should also make sure every field adventure is safe and enjoyable.

One way to prepare is to attend a turkey hunting safety seminar in early spring. The Connecticut Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Wildlife Division's Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Program, as well as many local sportsmen's clubs, sponsor training seminars every year.

These seminars usually cover hunting techniques, but they stress safety and ethical hunting most of all. There are several basic safety rules that all turkey hunters must follow while out in the field:

- Prior to the hunt, pattern your shotgun to determine the best shotshell to use for a given distance.
- Absolutely identify your intended target and what lies beyond before pulling the trigger. Be positive it's a legal turkey and make sure the shot path to the bird and beyond is safe. Pre-select a zone of fire. Shoot at a turkey only in the predetermined zone, and only when you are certain it is safe.
- Always stay fixed in your location and call the bird to you. Never stalk a turkey or turkey sound. Movements or sounds you think are a turkey may be another hunter. Be patient.
- Do not think you are alone in the woods. Assume every noise and movement is another hunter. If there's any doubt whatsoever, don't shoot.
- Always position yourself in a spot that makes you completely invisible from the back side, such as against a tree trunk that is at least shoulder wide. For your own safety, you may choose to wrap and secure a four to six-inch wide fluorescent orange safety band around the tree, about six feet up. This band should alert other hunters of your sitting position.
- Shout "stop" to alert approaching hunters. Never move, wave or make turkey sounds to alert hunters of your position. Your movements may look like the movement of a turkey.
- Eliminate red, white, blue or black from your hunting clothing. Red, white and blue are found on the head and neck of mature gobblers, and all turkeys have black bodies. It is a good idea to have a fluorescent orange vest to wear while walking out of the woods and an orange wrap for the harvested bird.

Hunters should also be aware of several activities that are prohibited while turkey hunting:

- The use of bait, electronic calling devices, live decoys or animals (including dogs) to hunt wild turkeys is prohibited.
- You may not call turkeys for another hunter unless you possess a valid turkey permit with at least one unused tag.
- You may not attempt to take turkeys by participating in a cooperative drive.
- You may not shoot turkeys from a building or other permanent structure.
- Turkeys roosting in trees are not allowed to be shot.

Hunting is a safe and enjoyable activity. Thinking before you react will keep it that way. Remember, once the trigger is pulled, there is no calling back the shot.

The 2002 spring turkey hunting season runs from May 1 to 21. Consult the 2002 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for more detailed information. The guide can also be found on the DEP's website at http://dep.state.ct.us.

## *Calling All Gobblers*

**The key to a successful spring turkey hunt is to call in a gobbler. There is a wide variety of turkey calls available on the market. Depending on preference and abilities, a hunter could use a diaphram mouth call, a wooden box call or a friction type call made from slate, exotic woods or plastic.**

**Most experienced turkey hunters prefer the mouth call. This simple device is made from vinyl plastic and a stretched latex membrane which, when held in the mouth and a breath is drawn or blown across, sounds like a turkey. This simple call takes quite a while to master. Besides excellent control, the advantage of the mouth call is that it allows the free use of both hands and does not require any detectable motion to operate it. Yelping or "purring" like a hen is preferable for bringing in a tom. A gobbler call is not recommended as it may attract nearby hunters and thus present a potentially dangerous situation.**

**Head and hand motion is a basic downfall of the inexperienced turkey hunter. The box call and slate-type calls require movement of the hands or fingers to operate, which, if you are not careful, may give away your position. An advantage of these devices is that they are generally easier to operate by a novice and they do a fairly good job of consistently replicating the sounds of a lovelorn turkey. In any case, the more practice the better.**

## *Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Seminar --*

***April 7, starting at 1:30 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. Wildlife Division biologist Mike Gregonis will discuss the natural history and management of the wild turkey. Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Senior Instructors Gary Bennett, Ray Hanley and David Sanford will cover turkey hunting techniques and safety. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.***

Just for Kids

# On the Bluebird Trail

***Eastern bluebirds are seen more now than they were 20 years ago. They nest in cavities (like holes in trees), which became less common when land was cleared for development. Also, when two foreign birds, the European starling and house sparrow, were released in this country, they competed with the bluebird for the nest cavities and the bluebird lost.***

## Sky on his back and earth below....

**The male eastern bluebird has a blue back and rusty-colored chest. Females are less blue than the males. Henry David Thoreau, a famous writer, thought the bluebird wore the sky on his back and the earth on his breast.**

### Watching and Listening for Bluebirds

***Bluebirds are easy to spot. The males have a beautiful call that sounds like "tru-al-ly" and both birds can usually be seen perched on a wire, tree branch or post. They will fly down to the ground to catch an insect and then quickly fly back to the perch. This type of behavior is common to bluebirds.***

## Habitat Hunt

**Bluebirds live in orchards, parks, farmlands and meadows with low plants and a few trees. Sometimes this habitat is hard to find in Connecticut where there are many forests.**


## Nifty Nest Boxes

***People can help bluebirds by making nest boxes, avoiding pesticide use and planting favorite bluebird foods, such as dogwood and shadbush. If you would like to make a nest box, call the Wildlife Division (860-675-8130) for plans.***

## Bugs and Berries

***Bluebirds eat insects and spiders in spring and summer and fruits, like berries, in fall and winter.***

# FROM THE FIELD

P. J. FUSCO

## 2002 Bluff Point Deer Management

In January 2002, the DEP Wildlife Division implemented the fifth deer removal program at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve, in Groton. Prior to 1996, wildlife biologists had documented deer dying of overwinter starvation, stripping bark from trees and over-browsing the plant community at Bluff Point. Deer management activities were initiated to reduce the deer population down to a level that could be supported by the habitat (habitat carrying capacity). Starting in 1996, the deer population was reduced through several deer removal efforts from almost 300 deer down to about 25 deer. Currently, only a few deer need to be removed annually to maintain the deer population at maximum habitat carrying capacity (about 25 deer).

In one-and-a-half days in January 2002, 10 deer (6 females, 4 males) were removed from Bluff Point by DEP staff. Eight of the 10 deer removed were antlerless. Assessment of fat deposits on deer removed from Bluff Point indicated that most deer were in excellent condition. Fat indices were highest in 2002, compared to all previous years. For the first time since 1996, fat indices for young-of-year deer have shifted into the "excellent" range.

Since 1996, deer population health indices have continued to improve, while deer damage to the vegetation has been greatly reduced at Bluff Point. During the winter of 2002, aerial deer surveys were conducted at Bluff Point to generate a post-removal deer population estimate. A comprehensive report summarizing biological data collected from deer removed from Bluff Point will be prepared and available this summer. The DEP will continue to maintain the Bluff Point deer population at or near carrying capacity.

## WCRP Project Updates

Many new conservation and education projects are currently underway, thanks to the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) funds received by the Wildlife Division. Following is a short update on the progress of some of the projects.

**Estimating the Black Bear Population:** This project was initiated so that the Wildlife Division could develop a baseline estimate of Connecticut's black bear population. To accomplish this objective, DEP staff began live-trapping black bears, which were marked with noticeable yellow ear tags before being released.

The trapping effort began on September 19 and ended on December 21, 2001. During that time, eight black bears were captured (one was recaptured). All eight were marked with ear tags and three bears had radio collars placed around their necks. Of the collared bears, two were large males and one was a female with two cubs. One of the male bears was able to remove his collar shortly after being released. The female bear was later found poached in Massachusetts, just over the Connecticut border from Winsted. Her cubs were not found.

The bear trapping and tagging effort will resume later in 2002, after the bears have emerged from their winter dens.

**Urban Schools Small Habitat Project:** The purpose of this project is to enhance wildlife habitat and provide technical assistance at 10 urban schoolyards by providing native plants. These schoolyard habitats will provide an opportunity for students, teachers, parents and local communities to learn about urban wildlife and small-scale habitat enhancement techniques. To get this project off the ground, information packets and grant applications were mailed to 166 schools in five of Connecticut's largest cities. Enhancements will begin this spring at schools chosen during the application process.

**Wildlife Habitat Enhancement for Urban Parks:** The goal of this project is to enhance wildlife habitat at urban parks to foster an appreciation and understanding of wildlife among local residents. Grant applications to participate in this project were recently mailed to park managers in 10 of Connecticut's largest cities.

## New Waterfowl Biologist Hired

The Wildlife Division would like to welcome the new Waterfowl Program biologist, Min Huang. Min started in February and is based at the Franklin Wildlife office. He has a B.S. in Wildlife Management and a B.A. in English from the University of Connecticut, as well as a M.S. in Wildlife Management from Frostburg State University in Maryland. Since 1997, Min has worked as a wildlife biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, being responsible for a variety of species, ranging from waterfowl to elk. From 1995-1997, he was employed as a wildlife biologist for the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. In 1992 and 1993, Min also was a seasonal resource assistant with the CT DEP Wildlife Division. Min has an impressive record of professional experience and accomplishments that have prepared him well to lead the Waterfowl Program.

# Take the Wildlife Challenge!

Guess which animal is described in the challenge and enter into a drawing to win a free wildlife poster. Clearly print your answer on a postcard, along with your name, address and phone number and send it to: CT Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013, **Attn: Wildlife Challenge**. The answer and winner will be printed in the next issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*. **Official Rules:** Only one postcard will be accepted per household, per challenge. Postcards for this issue's contest must be postmarked by **April 6**, 2002. Only one winner will be chosen for each challenge. Each winner will be chosen at random from all correct entries received by the postmarked deadline.

## Jan./Feb. Answer

***The winner of the January/ February challenge will be announced in the May/June issue. The correct answer was the fisher. There was an overwhelming response from readers who sent in postcards with answers to the Challenge. Please keep trying!***

## March/April Wildlife Challenge

*The March/April wildlife challenge can be heard in early spring calling from woodland pools throughout the state. This animal is at the southern part of its range in New England and emerges from its winter dormancy far earlier than others. Sounding like a "quacking" duck and having a "raccoon" mask, our current wildlife challenge is many animals in one! At certain times of its life, this animal eats algae, bacteria and microscopic animals while as an adult it eats primarily insects. Lifespan of adults is at least three years. Can you name this wildlife challenge?*

# Wildlife Calendar Reminders

March ..... Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2001 CT Income Tax form.

March 16 ..... **Backyard Wildlife Habitat**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 1:30 PM. Wildlife Division biologist Peter Picone will present information on plantings, techniques and resources for attracting wildlife to your backyard. Find out how to register your backyard wildlife habitat with the DEP. This program includes both an indoor and outdoor portion. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

April 3 ..... **Butterfly Gardening**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington, starting at 7:00 PM. Carol Lemmon, State Entomologist, from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, will discuss butterfly gardening, butterflies, how to identify butterfly families, caterpillar food plants and other ecological information. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

April 7 ..... **Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Seminar** (see page 16 for details)

April 22 ..... Earth Day

April 22-28 ..... National Wildlife Week (see page 7).

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

May 11 ..... **International Migratory Bird Day Event**, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center, in Burlington. Call (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

..... **Early Morning Bird Walk** at 6:30 AM

..... **Bird Banding Demonstration** throughout the morning.

..... **Birdwatching for Kids**, starting at 9:00 AM; an introduction for kids and their parents.

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


Connecticut Wildlife

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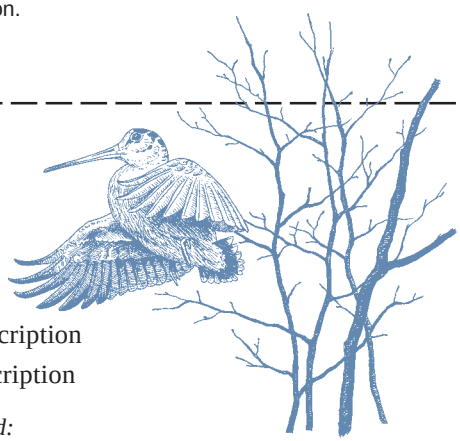


P. J. FUSCO

**This singing yellow-rumped warbler is a reminder that International Migratory Bird Day is just around the corner. On Saturday, May 11, come to the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center to celebrate this special day with the Wildlife Division. Several wildlife events are scheduled. See the Wildlife Calendar Reminder section on page 19 for more information.**

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