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Connecticut Wildlife

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From the Director

As reported in recent issues of Connecticut Wildlife, *there is a great deal of excitement over the prospects of new federal funding to benefit wildlife species in the greatest need of conservation. If the new funding materializes into a predictable, annual source of revenue, it will complement the long-established Pittman-Robertson program to allow wildlife agencies to manage* ***all*** *wildlife species. This indeed is the necessary formula for comprehensive wildlife management.*

However, the anticipation of a new source of funds should not obscure the fact that hunters and trappers continue to be the cornerstone of the wildlife management model. Throughout the country, the number of licensed sportsmen is declining at varying rates. There are a variety of reasons for this trend, most of them directly related to the continuing urbanization of our citizenry. However, it is a trend that must concern everyone who is concerned about the long-term welfare of wildlife in the United States.

The most obvious reason is economic. Hunters in Connecticut, through the purchase of licenses, permits, and stamps, generate more than $2 million per year. In addition, Connecticut's portion of the sportsmen-generated Pittman-Robertson fund averages more than $1.6 million per year. These two sources of revenue combine to fund more than 80% of the Wildlife Division's programs, including many that benefit nongame species and wildlife habitats. Also, many sportsmen's organizations are national leaders in generating funds for wildlife habitat protection. However, the greatest economic impact is more subtle. By paying for the privilege to take an annual regulated harvest of game animals, hunters and trappers provide the best tool for balancing wildlife populations with ecosystem health and human values.

Despite any forthcoming advances in techniques, such as fertility control, the fact is that virtually any option other than hunting and trapping for controlling wildlife populations is going to be costly and impractical over a large geographic area. In the absence of hunting and trapping, landowners and the public will have to bear the cost of controlling overabundant and potentially destructive species, such as deer, geese, and beavers. As a result, public appreciation for wildlife will decline. Also, because of the costs of control, many ecological problems will not be addressed until they become extreme. The desired balance between wildlife, habitats, and humans will be nearly impossible to attain.

Given these concerns, should state wildlife agencies be concerned about recruiting and retaining hunters? The answer is clearly yes, at least to a degree. Agencies should promote opportunities for new hunters to learn legal, safe, and ethical hunting practices. In addition, experienced mentors from the hunting community must continue to step forward to perpetuate wildlife conservation and their hunting heritage.

Dale W. May

Cover:

Red-shouldered hawk populations are believed by many to be on the rise in Connecticut, but without the scientific data to back it up, no one can know for sure. The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy will work to collect information, protect declining species and keep common species common. To learn more, read the article on page 3.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

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Arthur J. Rocque, Jr. ..... *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 (Assessment)*
Mark Clavette ..... *Recreation Management*
Laurie Fortin ..... *Wildlife Technician*
Brenda Marquez ..... *Secretary*
Shana Shafer ..... *Office Assistant*
Chris Vann ..... *Technical Assistance Biologist*

Eastern District Area Headquarters
209 Hebron Road, Marlborough, CT 06447 ***(860-295-9523)***
Ann Kilpatrick ..... *Eastern District Biologist*
Paul Rothbart ..... *District Supervising 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 ..... *Waterfowl Program Biologist*
Howard Kilpatrick ..... *Deer/Turkey Program Biologist*
Heather Overturf ..... *Program Assistant*
Winnie Reid ..... *Secretary*
Julie Victoria ..... *Wildlife Diversity Unit Biologist*
Roger Wolfe ..... *Mosquito Management Coordinator*

Sessions Woods W.M.A.
P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 ***(860-675-8130)***
Trish Cernik ..... *Program Assistant*
Jenny Dickson ..... *Wildlife Diversity Unit Biologist*
Peter Good ..... *Supervising Wildlife Biologist*
Geoffrey Krukar ..... *Wildlife Technician*
Dave Kubas ..... *CE/FS Coordinator (West)*
Peter Picone ..... *Western District Biologist*
Paul Rego ..... *Furbearer Program Biologist*
Laura Rogers-Castro ..... *Education/Outreach Unit*
Jim Warner ..... *Field Assistant*
Judy Wilson ..... *Private Lands Habitat Biologist*

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.*

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Wildlife Conservation Takes a Giant Step Forward in Connecticut

Written by Karen Terwilliger, of Terwilliger Consulting, Inc.

Wildlife conservation has a long and strong history in the United States. With its serious beginnings in the early 1900s, we have witnessed nearly a century of impressive wildlife restoration efforts. History has shown that major advancements in conservation have resulted from a combination of science, a deep commitment, and a stewardship ethic. This is exemplified by great conservation programs under the leadership of such notables as Aldo Leopold and Theodore Roosevelt. We again stand at the threshold of an unparalleled opportunity for comprehensive wildlife conservation at the national and state level as all 50 states are poised to develop their own Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS).

P. J. FUSCO

Members of the Connecticut Invertebrate Species Scientific Advisory Committee discuss habitat issues and long-term conservation concerns at a recent CWCS meeting at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office.

Paving the Way

The conservation of wildlife can be viewed as much an art as a science. It requires a multifaceted approach and talents to address the changing landscape that we, the burgeoning human population, have sculpted. Changes in the amount, patterns, and structure of forests, fields, and wetlands have placed wildlife species in a new setting and context, one seldom far from encroaching human populations. This creates additional stressors and challenges to our native wildlife, as well as to the government agencies charged with the responsibility to conserve it. Adding to the complexity of this scenario, wildlife conservation tends to be on the short end of funding and attention. Federal and state agencies have done amazingly well with small budgets and few resources.

Historically, conservation efforts have been targeted at certain categories of wildlife. For example, the early and highly successful game and sport fish restoration programs of the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson /Wallop Breaux Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Acts provided for the successful restoration of many species. The establishment of the Wildlife Refuge System, Migratory Bird (Hunting Stamp) Act, and other important wetland legislation provided for the conservation of significant wetlands and wetland birds. The passage of the federal Endangered Species Act (as well as other important environmental legislation in the 1970s) established protection for the most critically endangered species.

And the story goes on….each piece of new legislation responding to a need or gap in the grand scheme of conservation, resulting in a new program with a new focused emphasis. As time goes on, the gaps narrow and the pieces start to come together. Although fragmented and piecemeal by default, wildlife conservation programs have come far and been carried by enthusiasm and commitment to this greater cause of natural resource stewardship.

Each program, targeted to address a piece of the broad spectrum of conservation, has made great strides forward but has seldom provided the funding and resources to effect holistic conservation. The term "unfunded mandates" certainly has had its place in wildlife conservation. Even though adequate funding hasn't been there, each piece of legislation provided an additional tool for the conservation toolbox.

Then, in 1980, came a big tool with a broader scope, but still no funding. This was the visionary Forsythe-Chaffee Act, commonly referred to as the Nongame Act. This legislation paved the way for more holistic conservation--one that would fill the biggest gap yet. The intent of this program was proactive and preventative: to keep common species common and, most importantly, to keep them from becoming endangered. What a great new approach for broad-based conservation.

But states were struggling to deliver such comprehensive conservation with limited resources. As a result, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), like most other state conservation agencies, has struggled to deliver comprehensive wildlife conservation for its citizens. The DEP has done a remarkably good job considering all the aforementioned hurdles and the shocking fact that

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Connecticut is still ranked 48th out of 50 in the amount of funding for wildlife diversity (nongame) programs. Fortunately, Yankee ingenuity and intense commitment by Wildlife Division staff has helped pull together a DEP wildlife conservation program that rivals other larger states.

Help Is on the Way

Now help is on the way--a practical and efficient way to deliver conservation at the state landscape level. This opportunity, presented by the federal State Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program and its predecessor, the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP), is being welcomed to the fullest extent possible by the states and their conservation partners.

P. J. FUSCO

Species of state and regional conservation concern, such as the wood turtle, will benefit from new projects made possible by the State Wildlife Grants Program.

The impetus behind this was that Congress recognized, with the Forsythe-Chafee Nongame Act of 1980, that new sources of federal funding for state wildlife conservation programs were needed to complement game and sportfish funding provided through the Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Programs. The unparalleled success of theses programs has been long-term funding stability. This ensures equitable and reasonably predictable annual allocations on which to base program development, and safeguards against diversion of such funds from the purposes established by Congress. Now, an unprecedented national grassroots coalition, comprised of the states and their governmental and nongovernmental partners in conservation (the Teaming With Wildlife coalition, TWW), has encouraged Congressional support for such funding for all wildlife. This support was reflected in substantial one-year appropriations to the states under WCRP and SWG in fiscal years 2001 and 2002. (See the 2003 Year in Review report in the January/February 2004 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*, which summarizes the work that has been accomplished through these programs.)

In the legislation for SWG and WCRP, Congress called for "Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies," which would aid states in identifying their conservation priorities and provide critical funding for this work. Congress identified the required elements of the CWCSs in the WCRP and SWG legislation. CWCSs must identify and be focused on the "species of greatest conservation need," yet address the "full array of wildlife" and wildlife-related issues (see sidebar on page 5).

Public participation and partnerships are essential elements of developing and implementing these Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies. Clearly, it is in Connecticut's best interest that this public/private partnership be used effectively to produce a CWCS which establishes clear guidance to meet Connecticut's wildlife conservation needs for the 21st century.

This federal funding enables and empowers states to tackle broader conservation with the fervor and skill demonstrated during last century's early restoration efforts. As originally intended, funding for the 1980 Act was to be similar to that of existing Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop Breaux federal grant programs to states. The TWW coalition of over 3,000 groups continues to push for the long-term stable funding so desperately needed. In the meantime, these annual appropriations represent a significant shot in the arm to states struggling to fund critical programs and to keep species from becoming endangered.

The Planning Process

What it means for Connecticut is good news all around. It means that the DEP Wildlife Division is leading the charge and embarking on the development of its CWCS. It starts with a new vision of Connecticut's landscape and wildlife for future generations. It means rolling up sleeves, putting pencils to paper, and charting a bold new course that takes the best of Connecticut's existing efforts to the next step of identifying and filling in the gaps. It means bringing together the conservation experts from agencies, universities, private conservation groups, and many walks of life to craft a strategy that identifies those species and habitats of greatest conservation need. Input from interested groups and individuals is now being solicited. The Wildlife Division has acquired the services of Bristol native, Karen Terwilliger of Terwilliger Consulting Inc. to coordinate the effort.

Thus far, a series of meetings has been held with the various units of the DEP, including the Office of Long Island Sound Programs (OLISP), other state agencies, and the Office of Policy and Management Conservation and Development to collect existing information. A series of outreach meetings with the many public and private conservation partners of the DEP Divisions of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Forestry are underway to solicit information on existing programs and efforts relating to conservation data on species and habitats across the state. This information is being inventoried and compiled using the latest Geographic Information System tools to identify any gaps in knowledge.

This effort makes use of current conservation planning efforts, such as the DEP's 10-year Forest Management Plan project and the OLISP Management Strategy, as well as all of the current national and regional wildlife conservation recovery plans and programs.

Technical conservation mapping tools, such as the DEP Environmental and Geographic Information Center's Environmental Conditions Online and Natural Diversity Data Base, Southern New England GAP Analysis Program, The Nature Conservancy's Blueprint for Conservation and Ecoregional Planning, Farmington River Valley Association's Biodiversity Program, Green Valley Institute's Heritage Corridor, Audubon's Important Bird Areas, and the University of Connecticut's Land Use/Land Cover and Forestry Fragmentation analyses--to mention a few--are being incorporated. Suffice it to say, considerable information and programs exist, but have not been integrated or used in such a comprehensive or coordinated landscape level approach.

P. J. FUSCO

Helping to keep Connecticut's common species, such as the wood thrush, common is the driving force behind the SWGs and the development of CWCSs nationwide.

Further, significant data exist for our more charismatic vertebrate species, such as eagles and black bears, than for less visible organisms, like the smooth green snakes or various invertebrates. Compiling what is known about these species is critical to making this vision work.

Existing national, regional, state, and local efforts have developed methods to identify the priority species and habitats that are being reviewed. A joint effort with the USFWS this past fall resulted in the integration of such richly scientific initiatives as the Mid-Atlantic/New England Maritime Waterbird Conservation Plan, Partners in Flight Physiographic Plans, North American Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Grassland Bird Plan, Forest Interior Bird Plan, Breeding Bird surveys, and censuses that emerged from scientific experts who have spent decades developing these programs. We are also incorporating the expertise of a number of Northeast Wildlife Technical Committees, as well as Connecticut's own scientific advisory committees that review the state's threatened and endangered species list.

Exceptional work by Connecticut's birding organizations has provided useful, long-term local and statewide information on the status, distribution, and trends of native birds. The Breeding Bird Atlas, surveys, censuses, and birding activities have produced a wealth of bird information from which to draw.

On the other hand, there are species, largely the invertebrates--that make up 90% of the state's wildlife and food chain--that remain virtually unknown. A paucity of data exists for certain invertebrates. The Connecticut Butterfly Atlas has just compiled and mapped information on species distribution of these creatures across

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Required Elements of Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies

The U.S. Congress is requiring that all 50 states develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy that includes the following eight elements:

1) *What's here now?*--information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife species. Focus on low and declining species that are indicators of the health of the state's wildlife.

2) *Health check*--location and condition of habitats and community types that are vital to conserving priority species.

3) *Threats*--identifying problems that may harm wildlife species and habitats, and priority research and survey efforts for conservation actions.

4) *Actions*--prescriptions and priorities for conserving wildlife species and habitats.

5) *Monitoring*--how to assess and measure effectiveness of conservation actions.

6) *Review*--assessment at intervals not to exceed 10 years.

7) *Coordination*--involvement of federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.

8) *Public participation*--required by law and essential for success in developing and carrying out plans. *You are need now--and later, too!*

the state. Additional data exist for freshwater mussels, another small group of invertebrates.

Considerable pieces of this grand conservation puzzle are starting to come together. All of the hunting, fishing, and trapping data provide significant information on trends of harvested species. Stream surveys conducted by the DEP's Water Bureau and Inland Fisheries Division collect data on freshwater species and certain habitat parameters. The efforts of local watershed groups and associations provide excellent examples of joint public and private non-governmental organization activities, resulting in meaningful conservation efforts, including important decisions of local planning and conservation councils.

As the pieces of the puzzle are gathered and assembled, the missing pieces are becoming more apparent, just as are those species of greatest conservation need. The beauty of this approach is to capitalize on existing tools, existing natural ecological associations, and efforts. Economy of scale comes into play when species are viewed with their habitat/ecological associations and are grouped into "biotic communities." The theory here is to maintain and conserve the integrity of these imperiled systems and recognize their interdependence.

Chances are that some biotic communities will have an indicator, keystone, or umbrella species that can be used to monitor the health of the system. Just as we use a stethoscope to monitor aspects of the health and pulse of the human circulatory system, monitoring one species or a suite of species may enable us to monitor the overall health of the natural system.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

Learning more about Connecticut's less common species, such as the willow flycatcher, is a key part of the conservation process.

And so, the Wildlife Division has been doing its homework and soliciting input in developing a list of species and communities of greatest conservation need. Once priority species and habitats are identified using the best science and considerable expert input from across the state, an overarching conservation strategy will be developed with input from as many interested groups and individuals as possible.

The red bat, a species of special concern in Connecticut, is one of several species that will receive more conservation attention.

Looking for Input

This is an ongoing process that will continue throughout the summer and culminate in a draft CWCS in the fall of 2004.

The Wildlife Division is also specifically looking for examples and suggestions on how to gather and distribute conservation information and tools at the municipal level. Survey results from a series of workshops conducted by the Metropolitan Conservation Alliance, focusing on reptile and amphibian conservation, indicate that municipalities are looking for specific conservation data and tools they can use locally. Meetings with the state Office of Policy and Management and a review of Connecticut's Conservation and Development plan further indicate the statewide need and interest in conservation priorities and data.

We sincerely hope that this effort results not only in a strategy that will bring considerable conservation dollars to Connecticut and meaningful comprehensive efforts to fill identified data gaps, but also recognizes the importance of and engages the various interested groups and partners that have helped to carry the ball in the conservation arena. Special thanks go to all these conservation groups and individuals and to the DEP staff for their continuing commitment to the greater conservation cause. The CWCS will bring us one step closer to an effective wildlife conservation vision for Connecticut. Truly, there is the opportunity for a giant step forward for conservation in Connecticut.

Information on the plan will be available for viewing and comment on the DEP's web site in the next few months. If you would like to receive information about the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy by mail, contact the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods office at P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 (860-675-8130, Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM).

Watch Nature Unfold in Front of Your Eyes

Written by Peter Picone, Habitat Management Program

Hunters sit quietly most of the time and watch nature unfold in front of their eyes. Picture a dark, damp, foggy forest with a shimmer of the sun's glow on the eastern horizon. It is opening day of spring turkey hunting in Connecticut. The early morning stillness gives way to the gobble of the wild turkey. Wild turkey hunters have waited all year to hear this beautiful sound again. As I listen to the gobbling, I think about the variety of interesting wildlife observations I have made while hunting.

Better than a Nature Show

My son and I had just gotten comfortable sitting back against a big oak tree when a cottontail rabbit came zipping by, nearly hitting my right foot. I was just about to say to my son, "see that?" when a red fox barreled in and skidded in the leaves. The red fox was in pursuit of the cottontail. This type of wildlife experience leaves a permanent impression on you. You may see something similar on television nature shows but nothing compares to being there only a few feet away. Hunting can take you into the realities of nature.

Another day, while we were hunting, a young buck with velvet-coated antlers barely showing about four points showed up. It sniffed our hen turkey decoy and continued closer. We watched it stick out its tongue, lick its front shoulder and gradually walk away as it browsed young green sprouts.

There are so many other up-close wildlife observations I have made while hunting: a pileated woodpecker going from tree to tree to hammer away for insects; bluebirds gobbling down berries from a winterberry shrub; a soaring red-tailed hawk that then swooped down on a meadow vole on the edge of a field; a secretive red fox scent marking a rock along its hunting path; a red fox eating apples in an abandoned apple orchard and then showing an aggressive posture to another red fox a few minutes later; a nocturnal flying squirrel scurrying up to its daytime shelter in a hollow tree; hearing the booming wings of a ruffed grouse only a few feet away on a downed log; listening to the hooting of a barred owl as it made its way back from its nighttime hunt; a fisher busily moving about and sniffing along a log; hearing the flutelike song of a wood thrush or the "teacher teacher teacher" song of the ovenbird; a gray squirrel chasing another and using my tree stand as a spring board; a wily coyote sniffing along a stone wall and stopping to scratch its face on a rock; and hearing the swoosh of a sharp-shinned hawk as it landed on a branch two feet above my head. Nature reveals itself in a variety of ways while you are sitting quietly in one spot for hours.

A Tense Moment

Another early, dark morning I walked over to the field's edge to find a suitable tree to sit up against during a spring turkey hunt. I was just getting settled in when I saw a whitish object coming across the field and heading in my direction. The whitish object came closer and closer. Is it the neighbor's cat? Is it a snowshoe hare still in its winter color? Is it an albino cottontail ? No, none of the above. It was a predominantly white SKUNK! The skunk appeared to be headed directly towards me. I sat there nervous, feeling almost paralyzed and knowing that it was too late to jump up and move away to avoid being sprayed. Knowing a little bit about skunk behavior, I didn't make any rash moves, but my pulse was increasing and sweat started coming down my brow. I sat there as the skunk came within about 10 feet and made an abrupt right turn and proceeded to dig in the ground. It dug for about a minute, which seemed an eternity from my standpoint. The skunk finally walked over to an adjacent tree and disappeared into a hole at its base. Luck was on my side that morning because what would have happened if I had picked the next tree over?

P. J. FUSCO

While hunting wild turkeys during the spring season, the author has enjoyed the added benefit of being able to immerse himself in the nature around him and become an almost invisible observer of wildlife. The opportunity to observe so many different animals going about their daily lives is all part of the hunting experience.

End Note

With today's demanding schedules, it is sometimes too easy to just pop a nature tape into the VCR or tune into a nature show on TV. Getting out into the fields, woods, and streams, and seeing nature in front of your eyes is rewarding and refreshing to your mind, body, and spirit. Go out and enjoy the natural wonders of Connecticut's wildlife and share it with others whenever you can.

If You Care, Leave It There

Good intentions can create great harm when it comes to picking up seemingly abandoned, orphaned or otherwise misplaced young wildlife. A person may think the rescue of a baby wild animal is helpful or humane, but many times it creates more problems and maybe even a death sentence for the young animal.

Wild animals often leave their young unattended for several hours or more, usually while they are foraging for food, but rarely will they abandon their young. The adults usually attempt to conceal their young from humans and other animals in order to protect them while they are alone. If people handle or move young animals, the likelihood that the parents may abandon them or be unable to find them increases. In situations where young animals are found, it is important to keep in mind that the adult is probably nearby watching and will not return until the 'intruder' leaves.

The best advice is to leave young animals where they are found.

Do not intervene unless you are certain that the animal is orphaned, obviously injured, or in immediate danger. If you suspect that an animal is orphaned, watch from a distance for a minimum of several hours to observe if it reunites with its mother.

Young wild animals many times appear harmless; however, they can bite or scratch anyone attempting to handle them. They may also attempt to protect themselves if cornered. Direct contact may expose you to rabies or other diseases carried by wildlife. Be aware that even a young animal can carry and transfer the rabies virus in its saliva. Handling a potential rabies carrier, such as a baby raccoon, without proper precautions may require that the animal be euthanized for rabies testing.

Occasionally, people attempt to adopt wild young animals as pets. However, it is illegal to keep wild animals as pets. And, raising wildlife for successful return to the environment requires considerable knowledge of appropriate feeding formulas, hours of care and sufficient facilities, in addition to the required state and federal permits. Improper care results in underweight and undernourished animals or animals that are not releasable because they have become too accustomed to being around people.

P. J. FUSCO

Most white-tailed deer fawns that are found are not orphaned! If you care, leave it there.

Be Cautious!

Never touch any wild animal if it can be avoided. Always keep children and pets away. If you must touch an animal, always wear gloves. This will protect both you and the animal. Any mammal that bites or scratches a person will need to be killed for rabies testing.

If an animal appears to be sick, it is not safe to handle it! Any mammal that is found stumbling, staggering, walking in circles, dragging a limb or the hind end, or if it is acting strangely (approaching people or pets in an aggressive manner), call your Animal Control Officer, Police Department or DEP Emergency Dispatch (860-424-3333) immediately to get assistance.

There are approximately 225 volunteer rehabilitators with the appropriate skills, training, and state authorization to temporarily care for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. To obtain the names of wildlife rehabilitators in your area, contact your local nature center, the DEP Wildlife Division, at (860) 424-3011, or DEP Emergency Dispatch, at (860) 424-3333 (after hours or on weekends). Names also are listed on the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

Distressed Deer

Most white-tailed deer fawns that are found are not orphaned! Does give birth to their fawns from May until the end of June. The doe will rarely be found near her fawn for the first few weeks of its life because her presence may attract predators. Does only feed their fawns three or four times a day for about 15 minutes each time. The fawn is able to hide from predators because it is well camouflaged and has very little odor. Often times, young fawns are found in and around yards. This is not abnormal.

During the first five days of its life, a fawn's instinct is to remain perfectly still even to the point of allowing people to come close or handle it. A fawn should never be handled unless a dead doe is found nearby or the fawn is seen calling out in distress for a period of more than 24 hours. If you touch a fawn, rub a towel in the leaves or grass and then wipe the fawn off with the towel. Then, while wearing

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Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Conducted by DEP and USFWS

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

The midwinter waterfowl survey has been an important part of the annual and long-term waterfowl population monitoring program on both a flyway and continental scale. The survey has been conducted since the 1940s and represents the longest running operational survey in North America. The original intent of the survey was to provide an index to duck populations, and to identify winter distribution and habitat use.

Recently, however, the overall utility of the survey has come into question. Many species, such as mallards, are now censused through the use of breeding surveys, which provide a better population index. Regulations for most waterfowl species are now developed based upon breeding populations, rather than on wintering populations. Currently, in the Atlantic Flyway (which includes Connecticut), data from the midwinter inventory are used only for setting annual hunting season regulations for Atlantic brant and, in North Carolina and Virginia, tundra swans. However, until a more complete breeding survey is developed and made operational for black ducks, the midwinter survey will continue to provide critical population data for the management of this species. The second intent of the midwinter survey--to relate winter distribution and habitat use--has never been undertaken. However, an effort through the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is beginning and will likely rely upon current data, not historic data.

Regardless of the utility of the midwinter inventory, until a mutually agreed upon alternative can be developed, the survey will continue. The DEP Wildlife Division conducts the midwinter survey with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). A Division biologist flies the survey along with a USFWS pilot/biologist. The 2004 midwinter inventory was conducted in early January. The survey route in Connecticut consists of the entire coastline, the Thames River to the Route 2A bridge, the Connecticut River to Salmon River Cove, the Housatonic River to the Derby Dam, and select inland reservoirs. The 2004 survey was conducted in the midst of the first prolonged cold snap of the winter season. All of the inland reservoirs were frozen, as was the Connecticut River and most of the Thames and Housatonic Rivers.

P.J. FUSCO

The highest ever count of Atlantic brant, 1,548, was recorded in the 2004 midwinter waterfowl survey.

The numbers for puddle ducks were average, although the black duck count of 2,150 was the highest in four years. The mallard count of 1,013 was average. Just as in years past, a few wigeon and gadwall were seen. One interesting observation was that of a raft of 200 black ducks in the middle of Long Island Sound, similar to what would be observed of diving ducks, such as scaup.

Diving duck numbers were good, albeit nothing like historic wintering numbers when Connecticut harbored 50,000 to 60,000 diving ducks. Common goldeneye and bufflehead counts, however, were the highest in over 30 years. Over 1,200 goldeneye and 1,600 bufflehead were counted. Continuing the downward trend of the past 20 years, scaup numbers were again depressed. Only 1,900 scaup were observed during the count. Historically, over 40,000 scaup wintered in the state. The continental scaup population is declining and is about three million below the goal established by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The highest ever count of Atlantic brant, 1,548, was recorded in 2004. The Canada goose count, 4,500, was also very high along the survey route. Frozen conditions inland likely pushed many geese towards the coast and the relatively open water.

*Connecticut Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Results for Major Species**

Species	2003	2004	Five-year Average
Atlantic Brant	100	1,600	200
Black Duck	1,000	2,200	2,100
Bufflehead	1,100	1,700	400
Canada Goose	2,600	4,600	3,000
Canvasback	100	0	600
Mallard	1,000	1,000	700
Merganser	900	500	1,200
Mute Swan	1,200	1,000	1,000
Old Squaw	100	50	100
Common goldeneye	300	1,200	500
Scaup	2,400	1,900	3,200

**rounded to nearest hundred*

Birds of a Feather - The Blackbirds

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Unit

Spring officially begins for some people in Connecticut when the first small flocks of blackbirds arrive in mid- to late February. At this time, male red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds start showing up in mixed flocks at backyard feeders and in scattered wetlands. In March, as the wetlands thaw out, the blackbird flocks get bigger and noisier. Backyard feeding stations get cleaned out by the hungry hoards as the bulk of these gregarious birds move through on their quest to reach their breeding grounds. By early April, the flocks break up and adult males stake claim to the best breeding territories, waiting for the arrival of the females.

The *"konk-la-reee"* song of the red-winged blackbird can be heard in virtually every wetland in Connecticut. While freshwater wetlands are the preferred breeding habitat of red-winged blackbirds, the birds will also nest in grassy fields adjacent to wetlands. Their nests are typically built in vegetation, either a short distance above the surface of water in wetlands, or on the ground in fields.

While red-winged blackbirds are closely associated with wetlands and nest close to the ground, common grackles are most often found nesting higher up in conifer trees, sometimes in loose colonies. Residential or agricultural areas that are in close proximity to water are their preferred breeding habitat. They will also nest in dead stump cavities in beaver marshes and ponds. Common grackles forage on the ground, frequently along the edges of wetlands, including rivers and streams. They are also commonly seen foraging on lawns.

P. J. FUSCO

Red-winged blackbirds can be found in virtually every wetland area in Connecticut.

There are two types of common grackles, the bronze grackle and the purple grackle, which were considered to be separate species until the 1950s. A full array of intermediate forms also exist. The designation of bronze or purple refers to the color of plumage iridescence on the birds' back and belly. In general, the bronze grackle is highly migratory and occurs over most of the eastern United States and Canada, while the purple grackle is found more commonly in the south and in a pocket of the mid-Atlantic region. In Connecticut, the bronze grackle is most common, along with intermediates, but there are also purple grackles in southern parts of the state.

One blackbird that has benefitted from the clearing of the great eastern forests for agriculture and livestock during colonial times is the brown-headed cowbird. This species was probably most abundant on the great plains, but spread eastward during the 18th and 19th centuries, and today, with suburbanization coupled with forest fragmentation, the cowbird is firmly entrenched in the eastern United States.

Many species of birds naturally expand their range with changing environmental conditions. Because the brown-headed cowbird is a brood parasite that lays its eggs in other birds' nests and lets the surrogate parents raise their young, its human-enhanced expansion has occurred at the expense of other birds, mostly migrant songbirds. Not having evolved with cowbirds, most of the victimized species in our area have not had the chance to develop a defensive adaptation to cowbird nest parasitism, and thus may have been and still are suffering population declines contributed to by the abundant cowbird.

For some woodland species, population declines are attributed at least in part to the brown-headed cowbird. Forest fragmentation has made it easier for

The Icteridae Family

The *Icteridae* family of New World songbirds, which consists of blackbirds, orioles, bobolinks, and meadowlarks, has a wide distribution throughout the Americas. Members of the family are characterized by their strong conical bills, strong feet, and at least some black in the plumage. Many have a bright primary color that contrasts with the black plumage. Many, but not all, are migratory.

Taxonomically, the *Icteridae* family is a more recently evolved group of songbirds and, thus, the members are usually positioned toward the end of field guides and checklists.

cowbirds to infiltrate forested areas, resulting in the nest parasitism of woodland nesting birds, such as black and white warblers. Other species, including the yellow warbler and eastern towhee, may be developing behavioral adaptations that help them recognize and mitigate the intruder. Yellow warblers have been known to build entirely new nests on top of old ones that have had cowbird eggs laid in them. On one occasion in Connecticut, eastern towhees recognized and cast aside the larger cowbird eggs that were laid in their nest.

Three Blackbirds Not-so-common in CT

One of the newest additions to Connecticut's list of state breeding birds is the boat-tailed grackle. This larger cousin of the common grackle is a coastal species whose range extends from Long Island to Texas. It first started breeding in Connecticut eight or nine years ago at a shoreline marsh in Stratford. Currently, there are an estimated two or three breeding pairs and maybe more. Each year, 12 to 15 boat-tailed grackles are found overwintering in Stratford.

Another uncommon, but regularly occurring blackbird in Connecticut is the rusty blackbird, named for its rusty brown winter plumage. In the summer, males are jet black and females are slate gray. It is found here only as a migrant and is usually seen in wooded wetlands and shrub swamps, occasionally mixing with migrating red-winged blackbirds.

A very rare blackbird that has been documented as visiting Connecticut only a handful of times over the last 100 years is the yellow-headed blackbird. The males of this western species have black body plumage, which sets off its brilliant yellow head and neck feathers.

P. J. FUSCO (3)

Noisy bands of common grackles arrive at backyard feeders in Connecticut by late February and early March on their way to breeding areas.

Female and young male boat-tailed grackles have similar brownish plumage in winter.

Cowbird Nest Parasitism--How It Works

Cowbirds are nest parasites that choose smaller birds, including warblers, vireos, and sparrows, to victimize. The cowbirds' eggs are larger than the eggs of the host species in the nest and, once hatched, the larger young cowbird hoards food from the host parents, keeping the rightful young from getting enough food to grow at a normal rate.

The aggressive cowbird chick grows fast and, in a short time, is too big to share the nest with the rightful offspring. This frequently results in the smaller chicks being bumped out of the nest and left exposed on the ground to die. Even if one or two of the host birds' young survive long enough to develop and grow, their rate of growth will probably be slowed, putting their survival in jeopardy.

The parent birds see the cowbird chick as their own and will continue to feed it until it fledges. Often the result is that the parent birds do not raise any of their own young to bolster their species population and the cowbird population is enhanced.

Photo: This red-eyed vireo is unaware that one of its nestlings is actually a brown-headed cowbird. The cowbird chick is the bigger one on the left.

Ringed Bog Haunter

My First Experiences with this Rare Connecticut Dragonfly

Written by Mark S. Szantyr, a research contractor for the DEP Wildlife Division

I was asked to survey for the ringed bog haunter (*Williamsonia lintneri*) by the Connecticut DEP and Dr. David Wagner of the University of Connecticut as part of a continuing study of this state endangered dragonfly. My task was to investigate known locations to confirm the continued presence of this species and to search out new locations or attempt to confirm the species' presence at previously studied locations where, while suspected, no ringed bog haunters had yet been found.

While I've been studying birds for nearly 30 years, this was my first season formally surveying for this, or any, dragonfly. To prepare, I studied all I could find about this dragonfly's requirements and behavior, and I met with experienced field researchers to discuss methodology and data gleaned from their years of study. Linda Ruth, who had previously done this survey for several years, was a treasure trove of useful information on this species. By sharing her extensive knowledge gained by years of field work, Linda provided a better focus to my search. Mike Thomas, a well-known Connecticut entomologist, and Dr. Dave Wagner, renowned entomologist at the University of Connecticut, both were invaluable for their background information, access to their specimen collections, and for their patience in answering what must have seemed like an endless series of questions. Because of their generosity, I was able to study several adult and larva specimens so as to be prepared for the coming field season.

M. SZANTYR (2)

The state-endangered ringed bog haunter has the been the focus of a study to identify areas where this dragonfly occurs.

This male ringed bog haunter was observed on June 10, 2003, a new late date for finding this dragonfly in Connecticut.

Several traits about the ringed bog haunter make it difficult to accurately and conclusively understand its distribution and population status in Connecticut. The species has a limited flight period and specific habitat requirements. The flight period in Connecticut prior to this season was listed by Dr. Wagner and Mike Thomas, as April 25 to June 5, with most records being in the later part of May. This species is found in association with sphagnum bogs and acid fens and often in proximity to Atlantic white cedar. Access to such locations is limited in Connecticut and, where access is available, terrain conditions often preclude in-depth and accurate accounting. As such, there may be more populations of this species than are currently known. This is one of the items this survey was intended to investigate. The ringed bog haunter is most active when daytime temperatures exceed 60 degrees Fahrenheit (F), and the more over 60 degrees F, the better. Most sightings have been made in the late morning and early afternoon, when the sun has had a chance to warm up the surroundings.

2003 Field Season

During the flight period for the ringed bog haunter in late April until early June of 2003, Connecticut experienced unseasonably cold and wet conditions, with mid- and late May daytime temperatures often beginning in the 40 degree F range and not exceeding the low 60 degree F range by mid-after-

noon. Likewise, heavy rains made for high water conditions and limited access to some likely habitats. These were not good conditions for finding ringed bog haunters and, in fact, there was no significant dragonfly movement noted until the first week of May and numbers did not increase until well into the month. Surveys focused around a few known locations in eastern Connecticut. I reasoned that if I could gain familiarity with this creature, observe it in its expected habitat, and study its behavior, I might have a better chance of locating new populations. I believed that I would be better able to recognize suitable conditions for this elusive dragonfly in areas that have either been under surveyed or not surveyed as of yet.

My first success was on May 15. After observing beaverpond baskettails (*Epitheca canis*), white corporals (*Ladona exusta*), and Hudsonian whitefaces (*Leucorrhinia hudsonica*), I came upon a small to medium-sized, drab and docile dragonfly perched on a boulder on the edge of an extensive area of sphagnum bog. My preparation allowed me to immediately identify it as *Williamsonia lintneri*. Success! This creature allowed me to approach it quite closely and get a good series of identifiable photographs. Further inspection revealed it to be a male. I was immediately taken with the amazing eye color, a pale bluish-gray. I was told by Mike Thomas about the uniqueness of this feature and his word was corroborated by this experience. The ringed bog haunter allowed study for as long as I remained, only moving a few meters in weak and slow flight to perch on the edge of a sandy dirt road or on the sunny trunk of a nearby white oak.

Flight style is something that Mike Thomas discussed with me in his hours of mentoring. In his experience, the ringed bog haunter shows two distinctly different ways of flying. There is the low, weak and fluttery style I observed on May 15, but this species can also move very quickly and elusively, high over bogs and fens. Mike warned me about getting lulled into searching for a quiet and lethargic insect, especially as the season progresses.

Luck was with me again on May 19. At another known location, I came upon three more individuals. The first sighting was of a pair initially found sitting on leaf litter in the sun on a raised abandoned railroad bed adjacent to a small bog and a larger marshy pond. This pair allowed close approach like the individual I had observed a few days earlier, but the two dragonflies soon engaged in very rapid flights out over the pond. This was the aforementioned "other" flight style. In this flight, one individual seemed to be pursuing the other. The dragonflies would disappear for minutes at a time and then reappear on the same sunny perches. At times, the male and female would switch perches and occasionally they were seen to vie for the same, seemingly preferred perch on a small twig a foot or so over the water. A third individual, a male, was found at the same location, sunning on the side of an oak, a good distance from the pair.

On this same day, I returned to the site of my first success and found yet another ringed bog haunter, this time a female, perched on the same rock as the previous male. This insect exhibited the lethargic flight discussed earlier. Four bog haunters on the same day allowed me to feel very fortunate, indeed.

During further surveys, I again observed a male at the first site on May 29, and again on June 10. The sighting in June, which was well documented by photographs, furnished a new late date for Connecticut. We have so much to learn about these creatures!


M. SZANTYR

While searching for ringed bog haunters, a state-listed butterfly, Henry's elfin, was observed at two new sites.

Surveys at numerous other locations during this season produced no other sightings of *Williamsonia lintneri*. Some of these areas had been anecdotally rumored to have the species, at least historically, and there is a historical specimen from yet another location that was surveyed, but I was unable to turn up any more records.

This survey work was far from fruitless, however. Of nearly as great significance was the identification of two new sites for a state-listed butterfly, Henry's elfin (*Callophrys henrici*). The habitat required by this species shares some features with the habitat used by *Williamsonia lintneri*.

Summary

In spite of the bad weather during the field season and my fantastic ride on the learning curve with this wonderful insect, I think the important and good news is that there are still at least two active populations of ringed bog haunters in eastern Connecticut. It is good news that more individuals were found this year than in the last season and that the sites where these dragonflies are found continue to exist in nearly the same condition as previously noted.

The ringed bog haunter is a very uncommon dragonfly in Connecticut. Even when surveying habitat that is ideal for the species and known to harbor a current population, locating adults can be difficult. But by searching these habitats slowly and steadily and by working the proper perch sites methodically during the flight period and on days of moderate warmth and sunlight, chances of seeing bog haunters improve. The real difficulty seems to be identifying all the possible small habitats that are suitable for the species and then accessing them. In many cases, the bogs and fens don't show up on topographic maps. Searching for these areas on the ground is incredibly time consuming and, at times, near to impossible, either due to landownership issues or physical inaccessibility. It could be that the ringed bog haunter is more numerous than we know. In previous surveys, it has been suggested that this species is on the brink of extirpation in Connecticut. I do not think it is possible to say or know this based on what limited information we have on the distribution of this insect in the state. With continued research and more access to habitats, it may be possible to find several relatively small but stable populations like those located this past field season.

Prepare for Spring Turkey Hunting Season

The 2004 spring turkey hunting season opens on May 5 and runs through May 29. Hunting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise until 12:00 noon. On state land, hunters may harvest two bearded birds, while private land hunters may harvest three bearded birds. More detailed information on the hunting season and regulations can be found in the current *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*, available at town clerks' offices, Wildlife Division offices, or on the DEP web site, at www.dep.state.ct.us.

P. J. FUSCO

DEP Wildlife Division biologist Mike Gregonis, along with volunteer hunter safety instructors, will present a seminar on wild turkey hunting and safety techniques on Sunday, May 2, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center.

Wild Turkey Hunting Seminar

To prepare for the spring turkey season, sportsmen and any other interested individuals are encouraged to attend a wild turkey hunting seminar being sponsored by the DEP Wildlife Division's Conservation Education/ Firearms Safety (CE/FS) Program. The seminar will be held on Sunday, May 2, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington.

CE/FS Program senior instructors Ray Hanley, Gary Bennett and Dave Sanford will join DEP Wildlife Division biologist Mike Gregonis in presenting a program on wild turkey hunting and safety techniques. There also will be information presented on wild turkey natural history. Participants may bring a shotgun and ammunition for patterning their gun, weather permitting. This program is offered free-of-charge. Please call the Division's Sessions Woods office, between 8:30 AM-4:30 PM on Mondays through Fridays, at (860) 675-8130, to preregister.

Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day

Junior Hunter Training Days are scheduled before the opening of various regular hunting seasons (deer, turkey, waterfowl, and pheasant) to provide an opportunity for licensed junior hunters (ages 12 to 15) to learn safe and effective hunting practices from experienced hunters. On these designated days, junior hunters may hunt when accompanied by a licensed adult hunter 18 years of age or older. The adult mentor may not carry a firearm.

The 2004 Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day has been scheduled for Saturday, May 1. Both the junior hunter and adult mentor must have a valid spring turkey permit for either private or state land. If hunting on private land, both must also have written consent from the landowner. While hunting, the adult mentor may assist in calling turkeys. For more information on this special day, consult the current *Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide*.

Your Questions Answered ???

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

I am a deer hunter and reside in zone 1 (northwestern corner of the state). I have hunted white-tailed deer for more than 30 seasons in both New York and Connecticut. Both last year and this year I have heard a loud scream or two, followed by the appearance of deer. It is like no sound that I have heard before, nor does it seem consistent with the barks and grunts that I have previously experienced from deer. It is like the word "chow," but like a screech or a scream. There are predator tracks in the snow and bobcats do reside here. I am at a loss and hope you can give me some insights. - Marvin Carson, New Preston.

There are a few possible animals that may be responsible for the unidentified screams that you've described. One is a red fox. Many people do not realize that red foxes make a screaming, barking sound. It is typically a single syllable and is repeated at regular intervals. We receive many phone calls each year from people who have heard foxes and want the sound identified.

Another possibility is a barred owl or great horned owl. Both of these birds can emit some peculiar screams. Some sounds may be a single syllable, but they are usually mixed in with calls that are multiple syllables.

Bobcats do have a call that has been described as a woman's scream. It is usually longer and drawn out.

If you are able to get photos of the tracks you have seen, we would be glad to identify them. Of course, the tracks may or may not be from the animal making the noise.

If You Care,
continued from page 8

gloves, return it to the original location where it was found. If the doe is around she will come back to feed her fawn in the evening when no one is around. If a fawn is definitely orphaned, contact a rehabilitator authorized to care for fawn deer.

Rehabilitating an injured, adult deer is prohibited due to the potential dangers to humans and to the lack of success in trying to confine an adult deer for long-term care. If an injured adult deer is found and cannot move off on its own, contact the local Police Department or DEP (860-424-3333) for assistance.

Distressed Small Birds

Every spring and summer, the Wildlife Division receives numerous phone calls about young birds hopping around in yards. Most of these birds are old enough to leave the nest, but are still not efficient fliers. If you find a fully feathered, young bird that is unable to fly, it is best to leave it where it was found. The adults are probably still coming around to feed the bird and it should be capable of flying within a few days. During this time, keep pets indoors and leave the young bird there!

Good intentions can create great harm when it comes to picking up seemingly abandoned, orphaned or otherwise misplaced young wildlife.

If you find nestlings that appear to not have feathers, look for a nest. If a nest is in a nearby tree, put the birds back in it. If the nest has fallen on the ground, make a new nest with a wicker basket and hang the basket with the nestlings in it in a nearby tree or shrub. The adults will not be scared away by your smell if you touched the nestlings because most birds have a poorly developed sense of smell. The adults will usually continue to feed their chirping nestlings if they can find them. If the adult birds don't return in 24 hours or more, then assume the young birds are orphaned and contact an authorized rehabilitator. Rehabilitators that work with migratory songbirds, hawks, owls, ducks and geese are required to have special permits. Most of these birds are protected by state and federal laws.

Distressed Small Mammals

Squirrels: Occasionally, young squirrels fall from their nest onto the ground. Before bringing these animals to a rehabilitator, try reuniting them with the adults by placing them in a basket and hanging it in the original nesting tree. Wear gloves to avoid direct contact with the young squirrels. If they are not retrieved within 24 hours, contact a rehabilitator.

Cottontail Rabbits: Rabbits tend to hide their young and visit them just a few times in a 24-hour period. If a nest of rabbits is disturbed, place the young rabbits back in the nest, cover them with leaf litter and place an "X" of string over the nest. Check it 12 to 24 hours later. If the female rabbit has returned to feed her young she will have moved the leaf litter. Consequently, the string will no longer be in the shape of an "X." If the female does not return, contact a rehabilitator. It is important to know that young rabbits leave the nest and are able to eat on their own within three to four weeks even though they are extremely small. If their eyes are open and they are eating solid foods, they are not orphans! In this case, the rabbits **should not** be moved or brought to a rehabilitator.

Distressed Bats

Because of their potential to carry rabies, specialized protocol dictates how to handle situations that involve bats. If a bat has bitten or scratched a person or pet, or is found in a situation where exposure cannot be ruled out, contact the DEP Wildlife Division at (860) 424-3011 or DEP Emergency Dispatch at (860) 424-3333 for advice. An example of a situation where exposure cannot be ruled out is when a bat is found in the same room as a sleeping individual or a very young child. If a juvenile bat or injured bat is found and it has not come in direct physical contact with a person or pet, you should contact a rehabilitator authorized to handle bats.

Make a Difference for Wildlife

As winter becomes more of a memory and we are now able to spend more time enjoying the outdoors, it is important to remember that our actions can sometimes cause harm to wildlife. Here are a few steps you can take to help rather than hurt our state's wildlife:

Keep Your Cat Indoors: By keeping your cat indoors, you help protect small mammals (chipmunks, squirrels, moles), birds, and snakes from being killed as prey. House cats hunt whether they are hungry or not and each year they unnecessarily kill thousands of wild animals. Keeping your cat inside also protects it from diseases, being injured in fights with other cats, and being killed by coyotes (a common complaint to the Wildlife Division).

Don't Litter: Litter is still a common sight along roadways, in parks, and at the beaches. Litter can kill wildlife! Tangled fishing line left along waterways and at lakes and beaches can get wrapped around birds and other animals, causing serious injury or death. Animals can also get tangled in six pack yokes and string from helium balloons that were released. Helium balloons can cause their own problems, especially when they land in Long Island Sound. They may be eaten by ocean animals and sea turtles that may mistake the popped balloons as prey. Mammals, like skunks, can get their heads stuck in food cans and yogurt containers when they try to eat any food remaining in these items. What can you do? Secure all trash in a heavy duty container that cannot be opened by wildlife. Pick up after others who are thoughtless.

Do Not Disturb Nesting Birds: Every year the Wildlife Division tries to inform residents how important it is to keep their distance from birds and their nests. Yet, every year problems are reported. Several nesting areas throughout the state are posted to protect such state-listed birds as piping plovers, least terns, herons, egrets, and bald eagles. If you encounter educational signs or protective fencing, please respect these important areas and help the birds have a successful nesting season.

FROM THE FIELD

International Migratory Bird Day--May 8, 2004

Set on the second Saturday in May, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is an invitation to celebrate and support migratory bird conservation. Each celebration focuses on a certain theme; the 2004 theme explores the fascinating variety and habits of colonial birds, as well as the conservation issues for these birds.

Birds of a feather…nesting together. Congregatory nesting behavior has been a successful strategy evolutionarily for one in eight species of birds worldwide. Many colonial-nesting species are aquatic birds, such as herons, egrets, gulls, and terns, but several landbirds, such as swallows and blackbirds are also colonial. Colony sites take many forms: mud nests plastered on vertical surfaces, a stretch of depressions in a sandy beach, or bulky stick nests forming a woodland rookery. What defines them is the close proximity and social behavior of the colony members.

Why do birds gather together to nest? It is believed that coloniality evolved in response to shortages in suitable, safe nesting sites within range of food sources. Birds nesting in colonies may enjoy "safety in numbers," for example, when colony members cooperate to chase off predators. Also, colonial nesters may learn about spotty and scattered food supplies from observing their neighbors. Congregatory nesting behavior does have disadvantages: colonies may actually attract predators, foster higher rates of disease or parasitism, and members may experience increased competition for nest materials and food.

Coloniality also increases population risks by concentrating birds in a limited area. In other words, a single event or incident can affect the nesting success of a large number of birds. There have always been natural threats to colonies, such as storms and predators, but human activities have brought many new threats to colonies. The introduction of exotic species to breeding areas, disturbance of colonies, and outright loss of breeding habitat threaten many species of colonial birds.

For example, colonial bird nesting sites face threats of their own here in Connecticut. The DEP Wildlife Division has been fencing and posting heron and egret nesting areas on offshore islands in Long Island Sound, as well as least tern nesting sites on shoreline beaches, for several years. These efforts are undertaken to protect these state-listed birds from human disturbance and predation. Despite some success, there have been instances when the public disregarded the protective measures and, as a result, populations have suffered.

Fortunately, colonial birds and their colonies are often highly visible and impressive, and thus can garner positive public attention and support. Join other IMBD celebrants in 2004 to help the public get to know colonial-nesting birds and the ways people can help them survive!

For more information on International Migratory Bird Day, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's web site at http://birds.fws.gov/IMBD/.

National Wildlife Week--April 19-25, 2004

National Wildlife Week--a celebration of wildlife and wild places since 1938--encourages kids and adults across the country to learn and experience nature, starting in their own community. This educational event is sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), the nation's largest member-supported conservation group, uniting individuals, organizations, businesses, and government to protect wildlife, wild places, and 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.

National Wildlife Week has tackled many important environmental issues like pollution, endangered species, and water quality. By focusing on the theme of Exploring Nature in Your Neighborhood, National Wildlife Week will emphasize these important topics and many more.

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

Friends of Sessions Woods Purchases Hands-on Materials

The Friends of Sessions Woods recently purchased hands-on educational materials for the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. These materials include animal pelts, skull replicas, track molds, field guides and scat replicas. The items will be available for educational use by teachers and the public visiting Sessions Woods. The Wildlife Division is currently developing classroom space in the exhibit area of the Conservation Education Center where the new materials will be located and available for use.

Some of the recently purchased materials will also be included in two backpacks available for loan to visitors hiking the trails at Sessions Woods. The backpacks will feature field guides and flash guides (similar to field guides but more compact), a beaver pelt, and other items visitors can use to learn more about the wildlife found at Sessions Woods.

Laura Rogers-Castro, Wildlife Outreach Unit

Be a Volunteer Plover Monitor

Those interested in volunteering as monitors for piping plover and least tern nesting areas at coastal beaches are invited to attend a volunteer training session for the 2004 season. The session will be held on April 3, from 9:00 AM-12:00 noon, at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point. For more information or to register, contact Sara Williams of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (860-399-2513).

Volunteers will be trained to recognize piping plovers and least terns. They also will learn about these species' life history and breeding behaviors, as well as about monitoring procedures.

Bridgeport Peregrine

On New Year's Day, 2004, a wildlife rehabilitator in Greenwich received a call about an injured adult male peregrine falcon in Stamford. One of the peregrine's wings was injured extensively, and only time will tell if it will regain full wing function. Interestingly, the bird was banded and thus was identified as one of two chicks born on the P. T. Barnum Bridge in Bridgeport in 2001. This peregrine may be one of the birds that nested last summer in Stamford on Bayview Towers (see article in the July/August 2003 issue), as it could not be determined if the nesting peregrines in Stamford were banded. Look for updates on the fate of this injured adult and the nesting attempt of the Stamford peregrines in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*.

Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Unit

The Wildlife Observer

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

Please send it (and any photos) to:

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

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

(submitted photos will be returned at your request)

be in the box, and feared they might spring out and land on her face at the top of the shaky ladder. Judy decided to heft the box to see if it felt like there were more passengers. There were. She gently shook the box to entice them to leave.

However, it didn't work. Only a sluggish fourth squirrel peeked out, but wouldn't leave. I took a quick picture of him in the box and then took the box and its contents up the ladder. As I climbed the ladder, I kept praying that another panicked squirrel evacuating the box wouldn't use my ear canal as a temporary haven. I gingerly hung the nest box, and before we left the area, we saw one of the squirrels return to it immediately.

We've heard the nocturnal squirrels many times at night chirping to each other. None of us ever expected they would reside in a woodpecker box that was billed as "squirrel proof" because of a slate piece around the opening. I guess it was gray squirrel proof."

Surprise Guests

Reader John Lamb sent in the following wildlife observation and photographs:

"A year or two ago, our family mistakenly hung a downy woodpecker nest box on a large maple tree just 15 feet away from our deck. We've since found out that woodpeckers like a more remote location to nest.

So, in mid-December (2003), my future mother-in-law, Judy Pagach, decided to hang the nest box elsewhere. While removing the box, some 10 feet off the ground, it erupted with activity as she lifted it off the nail. Not really certain what had happened, Judy quickly climbed down the ladder and put the box on the ground just as a second flying squirrel ran out and up the tree. The squirrel went to the same place the nest box was formerly located.

Judy ran in the house and yelled for me to grab the camera. I then took the picture of the one that ran up the tree. We observed the squirrel for a bit and noticed how flying squirrels have noticeable folds of skin on each side of their body that are used for gliding, as well as their flat tails.

We decided the box should stay on that tree for the squirrels to use. But first, Judy wanted to see if there were any more in the box. She attempted to open the clean-out trapdoor on the side. Not realizing that squirrels nest together, I was skeptical there were more inside until a third squirrel came scurrying out, almost running up her arm that was holding the box, which struck me as funny. Then in a flash, it headed toward my nice warm pant leg--not so funny. Fortunately, at the last possible second, or so it seemed to me, the squirrel chose the tree instead of my leg.

At this point, we were both wary of how many more might still

Occasional Visitor

Robert Moreau, of South Meriden, sent the Wildlife Division a note and some photographs of a ringed turtle dove that appeared suddenly in his backyard in August 2003. He wrote that the bird stayed for a couple of hours and then left, not to be seen again. However, a ringed turtle dove also paid a brief visit to one of his bird feeders about a year ago.

According to *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of Birds*, the ringed turtle dove is domesticated throughout the entire world and its origin is unknown. It is commonly kept as a pet. Ringed turtle doves were introduced in the United States in Los Angeles, California, where there is now an established population. Pairs and nests of ringed turtle doves also have been discovered in Florida and in New York City, near where some had been released. The birds are often seen visiting bird feeding stations.

Just for kids

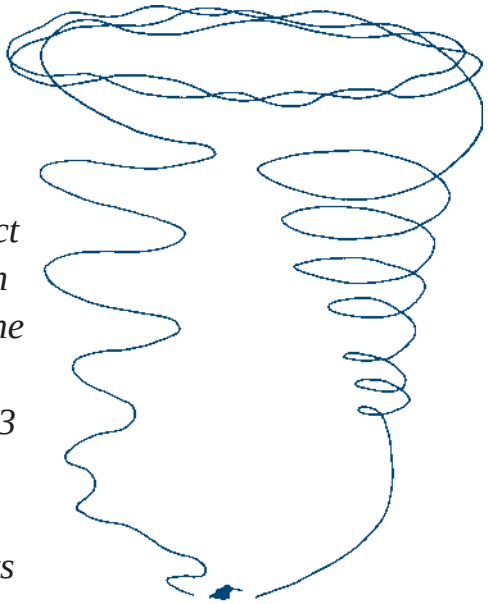
Ways of Woodcocks

What Is a Woodcock?

A plump bird with a body about the size of a dove.

P. J. FUSCO

Sky Dancer



Woodcocks have an amazing way to attract a mate. From an open spot on the ground, the male makes a nasally "peent" sound every 3 to 4 seconds. After peenting for about a minute, the male starts flying upward in circles to about 300 feet high. At the top of his flight, the male will chirp and warble and then zig-zag to the ground, chirping as he returns to the same spot from where he started.

Worms for Woodcocks

A woodcock has a long, probing beak for finding worms. Woodcocks eat mostly worms, but they may also eat seeds, slugs, and several kinds of insects.

Fact or Fiction

1) **Woodcocks are shorebirds.**
2) **Another name for a woodcock is "timber-doodle."**
3) **Loss of habitat is not good for woodcocks and other animals.**
4) **It is legal to hunt woodcocks.**

See next page for answers.

Where in the Wild Are Woodcocks?

Woodcocks use many types of habitats during their life. They need open areas for their mating dance, young forests for nesting, and moist areas for finding worms.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

March ..... Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2003 Connecticut Income Tax form.

Early March ..... Clean out bluebird nest boxes and install new ones.

March 15 ..... State land lottery deadline for the deer hunting season.

March 24 ..... **Black Bears in Connecticut**, starting at 7:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. DEP Wildlife Division biologist Paul Rego will present a fascinating program on black bears. Paul will describe the history, biology, and management of bears, as well as discuss recent findings of a current bear research project in the state. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

April 3 ..... Training session for volunteer plover monitors (see page 16 for more details).

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

Late April ..... Respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas when visiting Connecticut beaches from late April until late summer. Also, keep dogs off of shoreline beaches to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

April 17 ..... **Vernal Pools**, starting at 1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. DEP Wildlife Division natural resource educator Laura Rogers-Castro will present an informative program on vernal pools. Participants will view a short slide presentation, followed by a two-mile roundtrip hike to a vernal pool. Wear comfortable walking shoes and dress for the weather. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

April 19-25 ..... **National Wildlife Week** (see page 16 for more details)

April 22 ..... Earth Day

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

May 1 ..... Spring Turkey Junior Hunter Training Day (see page 14 for more details)

May 2 ..... **Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Seminar** (see page 14 for more details)

May 4 ..... **Educator Workshop: Neotropical Migratory Birds** (see description below).

May 5-29 ..... Spring Turkey Hunting Season

May 8 ..... **International Migratory Bird Day** (see page 16 for more details)

June 12 ..... **Insects (and Spiders) of Sessions Woods**, starting at 1:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Families are invited to attend an invertebrate search at Sessions Woods with Wildlife Division natural resource educator Laura Rogers-Castro. Participants can expect to discover fun facts about insects, spiders, and millipedes and try their hand at catching these diverse critters. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

Educator Workshop: Neotropical Migratory Birds

The DEP Wildlife Division is sponsoring an educator workshop that will introduce the world of Neotropical migratory birds through a morning field walk and discussion. The workshop will be held on Tuesday, May 4, 2004, from 7:30 AM-11:00 AM, at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Participants will receive lessons to use in the classroom. To preregister for the workshop, call natural resource educator Laura Rogers-Castro at (860) 675-8130 (Mon.-Fri. from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM) or send email to laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

QUIZ ANSWER

All are fact.

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The winter of 2004 was one of the best for eagle viewing in Connecticut. Because temperatures were so cold, many lakes and rivers to the north of Connecticut were frozen, causing bald eagles to move farther south to find open water where they could hunt for food. Many eagles were observed at the mouths of Connecticut's major rivers and along the shoreline where there was open water.

Bureau of Natural Resources / Wildlife Division
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
79 Elm Street
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