May/June 2004

Connecticut Wildlife

PUBLISHED BY THE CONNECTICUT DE[illegible] OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
BUREAU OF NATURA[illegible] WILDLIFE DIVISION

From the Director

At long last, spring has arrived and cries of "step up to the plate" are being heard on ball fields all across the state. In 2004, Connecticut drivers are also being asked to "step up to the plate" for a different reason – to hit a home run for wildlife. This catchy slogan was developed to announce the availability of our long-awaited wildlife conservation license plate.

Connecticut becomes the 42nd state to offer a license plate where a portion of proceeds are used to fund wildlife programs. Thirty-five dollars from the sale of each $50 wildlife plate will be deposited into the Wildlife Conservation Fund to benefit species in need of conservation. In addition, $10 of each $15 plate renewal will be deposited into the fund. If the plate is as successful as we hope, the Wildlife Conservation Fund will be the primary source of state funds that are required to match the federal State Wildlife Grants. Projects funded under the State Wildlife Grants will be used to implement proactive conservation strategies to stabilize or reverse declines of wildlife populations.

The Department worked closely with the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to create an attractive plate that will enhance the appearance of any vehicle. Not only does the plate generate critical funding, it allows drivers to publicly display their support for Connecticut's wildlife with some eye-catching artwork. In fact, it proved so difficult to select a single plate design that two versions are being offered. Thanks to the support of DEP Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr., and DMV Commissioner Gary J. DeFilippo, drivers can choose between the majestic bald eagle and the secretive bobcat. Both species are representative of the DEP's efforts to protect Connecticut's wildlife and its habitat.

Bald eagles, while still an endangered species in Connecticut, are making a comeback due to improvements in the quality of the environment and active management. Last year, six pairs of nesting bald eagles fledged 10 chicks. The DEP is working with landowners and local authorities to protect nests from disturbance and biologists band all the young each year to assist in population monitoring. Eagle watching is becoming an increasingly popular winter activity, especially along the lower Connecticut River. Bobcats are a symbol of all that is wild in Connecticut. Solitary and secretive, these seldom seen predators are a vital remnant of our natural heritage. Their presence is indicative of a healthy ecosystem and Wildlife Division biologists are collecting data to clarify the status of bobcats in the state.

I hope you will join my family and me by purchasing a license plate (or two) and proudly displaying your support for Connecticut's wildlife.

Dale W. May

Cover:

Wildlife Diversity Unit biologist Jenny Dickson displays the two designs of wildlife license plates now available. See page 4 to find out how to purchase wildlife license plates and help Connecticut's wildlife! Special order forms are also included.

Photo by 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.*

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

Tracking the Endangered Indiana Bat

Connecticut's most endangered mammal, the Indiana bat, is the focus of a research project that began in April 2004 in Rosendale, New York. What does a study on Indiana bats in New York have to do with Connecticut? Well, researchers are trying to find out where female Indiana bats go to have their young after leaving their winter hibernaculas in New York, and one of those places is suspected to be Connecticut. Connecticut is suspected because during a previous small-scale study of radio-tagged bats from these same hibernaculas, a signal was lost from a bat once it arrived at the Connecticut/New York border near New Milford.

This ambitious new project has the support of several government agencies, including the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, Connecticut DEP Wildlife Division, MassWildlife, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U. S. Forest Service. In addition, some financial support is being provided under Section 6 of the federal Endangered Species Act, as the Indiana bat is listed as a federally endangered species throughout its range in the eastern half of the United States.

S. VONOETTINGEN - USFWS (2)

Members of the Indiana bat research team take turns releasing bats fitted with radio transmitters. A newly-released Indiana bat can be seen near the center of the photo.

This Indiana bat, a state and federal endangered species, sports a new wing band that will help identify it in the future.

The first part of the study was initiated in late March, when researchers began monitoring two hibernaculas in Rosendale, New York. Bats were livetrapped about every third night once they started to leave the hibernaculas. Researchers are hoping to confirm suspicions that female Indiana bats do not migrate in large numbers until the arrival of warmer weather.

Female Indiana bats were livetrapped in mid-April. Each bat was banded and data were collected on weight, forearm length, band number, sex, reproductive condition, and time of capture. The captured bats were sorted and maintained by weight class and condition. They were fed mealworms and crickets and given water through an eye dropper at least three times a day, and kept covered in a quiet, warm location between feedings. Any bat that refused to feed was immediately released.

Once approximately 20 female Indiana bats in good health were trapped and the torrential April rains subsided, the bats were fed one more time before having small radio transmitters attached to their bodies. The bats were then released and the research version of "hide-and-seek" began.

Biologists assumed that the bats would head to low elevation, warm areas, most likely south or east, but possibly northeast along the Hudson Valley. Immediately following release of the bats, researchers with radio receivers began tracking the bats from an airplane throughout the night. The plan was to determine the initial direction of travel for each of the bats at three miles from the release point and to continue to collect movement data as the bats dispersed. The data gathered allowed researchers to locate the roosting sites of the bats the next day. Location data from the monitoring planes were passed on to a crew on the ground which then located the bats' roosts and collected habitat information, such as tree species, tree height, canopy cover, diameter at breast height of the roost tree, tree condition (live, dead, dying), a photograph with scale, property ownership information, Global Positioning System coordinates, and a description of location.

Once roosts were located, exit counts were conducted each evening of the study period. Staff recorded their arrival time, the exit time of each bat at the roost, and the exit time for the radio-tagged bat.

Follow-up surveys focused first on confirming the locations of previously located bats. Searches for missing bats were also made. The researchers continued exit counts and roost identifications as long as the transmitters functioned.

As this project is still ongoing, stay tuned to future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife* to find out what the researchers discovered.

Step Up to the Plate for Connecticut's Wildlife

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

An article in the November/December 2003 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* announced the establishment of a wildlife license plate program to help raise funds for wildlife research and management projects. Starting in May 2004, Connecticut motorists will have the opportunity to purchase the license plates and display their support for the state's wildlife. Motorists can choose from two great designs depicting either a state endangered bald eagle or the elusive bobcat.

These wildlife conservation commemorative license plates will enhance public awareness of efforts to conserve wildlife species and their habitats in Connecticut. Money raised from the sales and renewals of the wildlife license plates are earmarked for Connecticut's Wildlife Conservation Fund. This fund will be used to:

- Undertake wildlife research and management, particularly efforts that emphasize those wildlife species of greatest conservation need. Projects involving many of these animals, like the least tern, have never had funding or have been underfunded in the past
- Inventory wildlife populations and undertake projects that help restore low or declining populations
- Acquire, restore, enhance, and manage wildlife habitat
- Enhance public outreach to promote the preservation of Connecticut's wildlife diversity.

The money raised from the license plate program will enable the DEP to provide the required state match for approximately $700,000 in annual federal funding that is available for fish and wildlife conservation programs in Connecticut. The state must match those funds by 25% or 50%, depending on the project.

Motorists who purchase wildlife license plates are making a wise investment that will benefit species from butterflies to box turtles to bobcats and many others in between.

Buy a wildlife license plate today and help ensure that:

- The state endangered bald eagle will continue on its road to recovery in Connecticut
- More is discovered about elusive mammals such as the bobcat
- Grasslands will be preserved for rare songbirds like the grasshopper sparrow
- Redstarts, scarlet tanagers, cerulean warblers, and other colorful songbirds continue to grace Connecticut's woodlands.

How Can You Get a Wildlife License Plate?

Wildlife license plates are easy to order. Just mail in an application form and the required fees and you'll receive your plates in the mail. An application form has been included in this issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*. In addition, applications can be found at most Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) and DEP offices or downloaded from the DMV's website: www.ct.gov/dmv.

Vehicles with passenger (including handicapped), commercial, combination, camp/boat trailer, and camper registrations are eligible for wildlife license plates. The Wildlife Conservation Fund will receive $35 for each set of plates purchased. Your current plates can be replaced with new "off-the-shelf" plates for a $50 fee. Vanity, low number, and current marker plate numbers can be transferred to the wildlife background for $70. New vanity plates can be ordered on a wildlife background for $135.

It will cost an additional $15 to renew the plates every two years, with $10 of that fee also going into the Wildlife Conservation Fund. (The cost of each set of wildlife plates and their renewal includes an administrative cost. The remainder is a contribution to the Wildlife Conservation Fund, which may be tax deductible--consult your tax specialist for specific information.)

For more information on the Wildlife Conservation Fund and the projects it supports, visit the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

Purchase your wildlife license plate today!

Thanks to Donation, 144 Acres Added to Barn Island WMA

The Estate of Sarah Ann Martin recently donated funds to the Department of Environmental Protection that will be used to help purchase a 144-acre addition to the Barn Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Stonington. In addition to purchasing land, the donation also will provide funding for educational, scientific and research projects at Barn Island WMA.

Property, consisting of a single family dwelling adjacent to South Cove in Old Saybrook, was originally left to the State of Connecticut by Sarah Ann Martin in her will "for use as a focal point for the study and preservation of Connecticut's coastal wetlands and/or other environmentally protective, nondevelopment uses." The State could not use the dwelling and had no authority to sell the property. The executors of the will successfully petitioned the court to allow them to sell the property and donate the proceeds.

The DEP Division of Land Acquisition and Management, Office of Long Island Sound Programs, and Wildlife Division submitted two proposals to the Executors of the Estate of Sarah Ann Martin for the use of funds from the sale of property in Old Saybrook. The DEP received a donation of approximately $429,000. From these proceeds, approximately $248,900 will be used to complete the acquisition of the addition to Barn Island WMA. The remaining money will be used to fund educational, scientific and research projects at Barn Island as part of a stewardship account.

The 144-acre acquisition was initially conceived as part of a grant application through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Grant Program to expand Connecticut's premier coastal wildlife management area to 1,013 acres. Barn Island WMA contains a variety of important wildlife habitats, including tidal salt marsh, forested swamps, and upland coastal forest.

Landowners interested in partnering with DEP to leverage funds for land conservation through financial contributions or land donations should contact Elizabeth A. Brothers, Assistant Director of the DEP's Land Acquisition and Management Division, at 860-424-3016.

P. J. FUSCO

The great blue heron is just one of many waterbirds that can found in the diverse wetland habitats at Barn Island WMA.

Staghorn Sumac - Misidentified and Persecuted

By Peter Picone, Habitat Management Program

As songbirds migrate south for winter and return north for spring and summer, they feed on different berries found along forest edges and in the understory. A group of plants frequently used for feeding during migration is the red-berried sumacs. Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), smooth sumac (*R. glabra*), dwarf sumac (*R. copallina*), and fragrant sumac (*R. aromatica*) have red berries that provide great fall, winter, and early spring food for migrant and resident birds.

Red-berried sumacs have been maligned because of their unfortunate association to poison sumac. However, poison sumac (*R. vernix*) doesn't look anything like the red-berried sumacs. It has white berries and grows in moist soil. Red-berried sumacs tend to grow in open sunny edges of forests or in hedgerows along fields. During severe winter weather, you can observe birds, like bluebirds and northern flickers, going to patches of the red-berried sumacs to feed. If you do any snowtracking, you will also find telltale round droppings of cottontail rabbits piled up next to debarked sumac stems. Cottontails frequently use sumac stems for winter food and cover.

According to Edible Wild Plants, by Lee Allen Peterson, the red berries of sumacs can be used for making a cold drink that is similar to pink lemonade. When landscaping your property to benefit wildlife, planting the red-berried sumacs will encourage a natural landscape and add to the ecological diversity. Michael Dirr, in his Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, notes that Europeans have long-appreciated the presence of red-berried sumacs in landscaping. Here in Connecticut, we can start appreciating the red-berried sumacs and disassociate the negative connotation that they have had over the years. You can make a difference for wildlife right in your own backyard. Be a good habitat manager by encouraging the planting of native plants, such as the red-berried sumacs, to create a better environment for wildlife.

Deer Management at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

Thirty-six deer were harvested at the Bluff Point Coastal Reserve, in Groton, during January 2004. The venison from the harvest was donated to a local food bank. The harvest was part of an effort to manage the deer population at a level compatible with the available habitat. Deer management activities have been ongoing at Bluff Point since January 1996 when the population was estimated at 284 deer (227 deer per square mile). The goal of the management program was to reduce and maintain the deer herd at about 20 deer per square mile to reduce impacts of the excessive browsing on the natural plant community at Bluff Point.

A public controlled hunt was first used in January 1996, which reduced the deer herd from 284 to 55 deer in 13 days. Between 1997 and 2002, DEP staff harvested deer at Bluff Point using standard hunting methods. These methods were successful at reducing the deer population to 20 deer per square mile, but they required significant staff time and resources.

In January 2004, the DEP used new authority under Public Act 03-192 to take deer using methods consistent with acceptable wildlife management practices. PA 03-192 provided the Department with additional tools to manage overabundant wildlife to protect native ecosystems.

Using these new tools, deer were removed at night, after the park was closed to the public. In past years, deer removal efforts were conducted during the day, thus infringing upon the public's daytime use of the park. The DEP used newly authorized wildlife management techniques, including attractants, spotlights, and noise suppressed firearms to reduce staff resource needs and increase program efficiency. On average, four Wildlife Division staff members and two DEP conservation officers were used per night. The 36 deer were removed over four nights in late January and early February. By using these new deer removal methods, the cost and staff needs were reduced dramatically (see table).

Based on population surveys conducted at Bluff Point in November 2003, the deer population was estimated at 61 deer. Reducing the deer population by 36 was necessary to maintain the desired population size of 25 deer and balance the deer population with the available habitat. Without that balance, overbrowsing by deer significantly impacts the area's plant and animal diversity.

All 36 deer were examined by Wildlife Division biologists to assess overall herd health. The biological data collected continued to show improvements in the overall health of the Bluff Point deer herd since management activities were initiated in 1996. As the population was reduced from almost 300 deer down to about 25 deer, fat indices, body weight, and reproductive rates have all improved, reaching levels consistent with deer taken statewide. In addition, habitat conditions at the reserve have improved dramatically.

All venison from this management effort was donated to local food charities via the Hunters for the Hungry Program. The Wildlife Division would like to thank Mr. Warren Speh for coordinating the processing and distribution of harvested deer to food charities. About 9,300 pounds of venison have been provided to charities since deer management was initiated at Bluff Point in 1996.

Harvest and cost comparison for deer removal at Bluff Point Coastal Reserve, from 1996-2004.

Year	No. deer removed	No. hrs. to remove	Person hrs. for LE*	Estimated cost	Person hrs. per deer removed	LE hrs. per deer removed	Cost per deer removed
1996	233	1,613.0	486.2	$36,819	6.9	2.1	$158
1997	35	462.0	268.7	$10,098	13.2	7.7	$289
2000	74	1,539.0	474.0	$40,347	20.8	6.4	$545
2001	63	1,520.0	273.0	$40,100	24.1	4.3	$637
2002	10	307.5	74.2	$8,115	30.8	7.4	$812
2004	36	125.5	35.5	$3,312	3.5	1.0	$92

** LE=Law Enforcement*

2003 Deer Hunting Season Results

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

When Connecticut's 2003 deer hunting season came to a close this past winter, the DEP Wildlife Division tabulated that almost 13,000 deer were harvested. The 2003 harvest was six percent greater than 2002's harvest of almost 12,000 deer. Over the past 10 years, the number of deer permits issued has fluctuated between 60,000 and 63,000 annually. Over the past five years, the total deer harvest has fluctuated between 11,000 and 13,000.

Weather conditions and the fall acorn crop probably play the biggest role in influencing annual hunter

success rates. During years with poor acorn crops, deer travel more to feed, increasing their vulnerability to hunting. The presence of snow cover also increases deer visibility, making them more vulnerable to hunting. Snowcover was present during the second half of the shotgun-rifle season and much of the muzzleloader and late archery season. In 2003, the muzzleloader season harvest increased by 41% and the archery season harvest increased by 13%. During the shotgun-rifle season, windy conditions countered any benefits from the snowcover, resulting in a similar harvest between 2002 and 2003.

In deer management zones 11 (Southwest CT) and 12 (shoreline towns) where deer populations are high, efforts to employ aggressive deer management techniques to control deer population growth continue. In December 2002, the archery season was officially extended in zones 11 and 12 to include the entire month of January (2003). However, some hunters probably were not aware of this change, which may have reduced participation in the January 2003 season. Extension of the archery season was better publicized this past year, resulting in more deer being harvested (a 133% increase) in January 2004 compared to January 2003.

As of October 2003, hunters were allowed to use bait for hunting deer in deer management zones 11 and 12. This law was changed to increase harvest rates in areas with high deer densities, especially where access to private land is limited.

In December 2003, the replacement antlerless tag program was extended to include the muzzleloader deer hunting season in zones 11 and 12. In the past, free replacement antlerless tags were available to hunters in certain zones who harvested an antlerless deer during the shotgun-rifle or archery deer season only. During all deer hunting seasons in 2003, just over 1,000 replacement tags were issued in zones 11 and 12 and one in every three tags issued resulted in the harvest of an additional antlerless deer. This program has been effective at focusing hunter effort on removing female deer in those areas of the state where deer populations are higher than desired. Removing one female deer during the fall hunting season will effectively reduce next year's deer population by three (1 adult doe and 2 offspring). Expansion of the replacement tag program and the ability to use bait in zones 11 and 12, combined with the presence of snow cover, boosted harvest rates during the 2003 deer season.

In many other areas, deer populations are relatively stable at reasonable levels. However, because of relatively low deer numbers in deer management zone 4A (northern Tolland County), restrictions were set in place five years ago to limit the harvest of antlerless deer. This restriction is starting to show a rebound effect on deer population growth in this area.

To learn more about the 2004 deer hunting season, hunters should consult the 2004 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide, available at town clerks' and DEP offices, or on the DEP website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

Deer-Vehicle Accidents: How Many Really Occur in CT?

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

A collision between a deer and a vehicle, especially at high speeds, can be dangerous and costly. The frequency and distribution of deer-vehicle accidents, along with many other indices, are used by the DEP Wildlife Division to identify areas where deer populations may be too high.

When a state, local, or DEP law enforcement officer responds to the scene of a deer-vehicle accident and observes a dead deer, a Deer Kill Incident Report (DKIR) is completed and submitted to the Wildlife Division. The Division uses DKIRs to keep track of how many deer are killed by vehicles along Connecticut roadways. Reports of deer-vehicle accidents have continued to climb, from just over 500 in 1975 to around 3,000 in 2000. Recent reports indicate that the number of roadkilled deer has remained relatively stable.

To assess how many deer are being killed by vehicles but are not reported, the Wildlife Division initiated a study comparing three data sets for deer-vehicle accidents. The first data set was the number of reported vehicle-killed deer, based on DKIRs submitted by law enforcement officials to the DEP. The second data set was the number of dead deer retrieved from roadways by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT). This data set included all dead deer found on roads (dead deer reported and not reported by law enforcement officials). The third data set was the number of deer-vehicle accidents that the Connecticut State Police responded to, regardless of whether a dead deer was found at the scene of the accident.

First, the data from DKIRs (reported vehicle-killed deer) was compared to DOT data (reported and unreported vehicle-killed deer). It was found that for every one deer reported by law enforcement officers on DKIRs, five additional deer were hit and killed by vehicles but not reported to law enforcement officers. Secondly, the number of deer-vehicle accidents that the State Police responded to was compared to the number of dead deer that were reported at the scene of each accident. It was found that for every one deer found dead at an accident, three additional deer were hit by vehicles but could not be confirmed as dead or alive.

In summary, although 3,000 deer are reported killed by motor vehicles on Connecticut roadways, a more realistic estimate would be that about 18,000 deer are killed annually. This is equivalent to about 49 deer per day being killed on state roadways. Also, for every one deer reported dead, three additional deer are hit by vehicles and their fate is unknown. This study clearly demonstrates that the risk of being involved in a deer-vehicle accident is much higher than previously assumed.

Reproduction and Survival Fuel Bear Population Growth

Written by Paul Rego, Furbearer Program

In March of 2003, DEP Wildlife Division biologists visited the dens of seven female black bears as part of a project to more accurately determine Connecticut's growing bear population. All seven of the bears had been fitted with radio collars in the summer of 2002. The radio collars enabled biologists to find the bears' dens over the winter and check to see if the females had given birth to cubs. Upon checking the dens, it was discovered that all seven females had given birth to a total of 17 cubs.

This project to assess bear reproduction and survival was continued in March 2004. Biologists once again set out to visit the dens of all seven female bears with radio collars, this time to determine if last year's cubs, which are now yearlings, were denning with them. (Young bears will spend their second winter denning with their mothers before going out on their own the following summer.) At the same time, dens of four additional sows, that were trapped and fitted with radiocollars during the summer of 2003, were to be located so that biologists could determine if they had given birth to cubs.

P. J. FUSCO

Wildlife Division biologist Paul Rego attaches a radiocollar to a yearling female black bear. The collar will allow biologists to follow her travels. She should become independent by midsummer and den alone next winter.

Starting in midwinter, researchers first made a scouting trip to find the den sites. Armed with a receiver and antenna, they followed the beep of the collars--an electronic radio trail that leads to the dens. The location and type of den were determined for each bear, as well as the best route for a later approach.

A team of biologists then returned to the dens in March to attempt to immobilize the sow with drugs and, if present, the yearlings, too. (Yearlings are given injections after the drug takes effect on the sow.) In most instances, a slow, stealthy approach allowed a biologist to close within six to eight feet and use a syringe pole to inject an immobilizing drug into the bear. Some dens required a belly crawl through the snow to access the bear in the den. At the same time, other personnel with dart rifles moved to within 10 to 20 yards in case the bear attempted to run off. There is always the possibility that a denned bear may detect the presence of humans and bolt from the den.

Dens of five of the seven sows that had given birth in 2003 were visited. (Two dens were not visited; one because of radiocollar failure and the other sow had left her den prior to the visit.) By inspecting the five dens, biologists hoped to determine the survival of 12 of the cubs born in 2003. Inspections revealed that 11 of the cubs were present after surviving the first and probably most dangerous year of their lives. Although this is a small sample size, the high survival is impressive. Weights were taken for each of the yearlings, ranging from 30 to 60 pounds. After all data were collected, the sows and yearlings were placed back in their dens.

When captured last summer, the four new sows were relatively small. Their weights, which ranged from 80 to 110 pounds, indicated they were young, raising doubts if any would breed and have cubs over the winter. None showed evidence of past breeding. In New England, most sows do not have their first litters until they are three to five

Be Bear Aware

To avoid problems with bears:

- Remove bird feeders in early spring.
- Store garbage in secure containers or keep it indoors. Periodically clean garbage cans to reduce residual odor.
- Avoid leaving pet food outdoors.
- Clean barbecue grills of grease and store inside a garage or shed.
- Avoid placing meat scraps, sweet foods, and other leftover food items in compost piles.
- Protect beehives, livestock, and berry bushes from bears with electric fencing.

The Wildlife Division monitors the black bear population through sighting reports received from the public. Anyone who observes a black bear in Connecticut is encouraged to report the sighting on the DEP website, www.dep.state.ct.us, or call the DEP's 24-hour dispatch line, at (860) 424-333, or the Sessions Woods office, at (860) 675-8130.

years old. Visits to the dens of the new sows revealed that two had given birth. One had two cubs and another had a single cub. Young sows typically have small litters. Born in January, the cubs were small, about four to eight pounds in weight, and not very mobile. Therefore, they were not given an immobilizing drug. The cubs were weighed and sexed. Other measurements also were taken before the sow and cubs were returned to the den.

The yearlings checked this past March will leave the sows by summer to go out on their own. The yearling males will travel much longer distances than the yearling females to find a new territory. The three cubs checked this past March will remain with the sows until the summer of 2005.

There are plans to check the dens of the radiocollared sows next winter to determine if they give birth to a new group of cubs. If female bears in Connecticut continue to reproduce as successfully as the bears monitored in this project, then the dramatic increase in the bear population that has been seen in recent years will probably continue.

P. J. FUSCO

Two yearling bears are measured and tagged after being immobilized with drugs in their winter den. The adult female was also drugged, but remained in the rock den seen in the background.

J. DUFFY

A young female chose this hollow yellow birch for a den.

Where Do Bears Den?

Bears choose a wide variety of sites for dens. Dens found this past March varied from ground nests to tight crevasses formed by tumbled rock slabs. Dens are frequently associated with large woody debris, such as the large branches or trunks of wind-toppled trees or slash piles left from logging. Ground nests are usually just a sparse mat of leaves and twigs and are typically located in thick vegetation, such as mountain laurel. One sow chose a hollow tree. Tree dens are not commonly used in New England but are used more frequently by bears in the southeastern states.

P. J. FUSCO

This tight enclosure, formed by rock slabs, served as a den for a sow and two yearlings.

P. J. FUSCO

Before being returned to its winter den, this yearling was marked with ear tags. The tags help biologists identify the young bear after it becomes independent by summer.

Connecticut's Talented Songsters - The Forest Thrushes

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Unit

One of the most beautiful sounds emanating from a Connecticut forest is the ethereal song of the wood thrush. As a matter of fact, all members of the thrush family are brilliant songsters, from the peaceful, flutey *ee-o-lay* of the wood thrush to the liquid, rolling song of the veery. Even the familiar backyard thrushes, robins and bluebirds, have melodious songs. It is, however, the forest thrushes that are the finest singers.

Six species of forest thrushes can be found in Connecticut either breeding or during migration. All six have a mostly white underside with variable spotting and a brownish or rusty top side. All are about the same size--a little smaller than a robin--and all are typically found in the understory of forested habitats. However, each has its own niche during the breeding season.

A brilliant songster, the wood thrush can be identified by its rust colored back, large round spots on the breast, and white eye ring.

Wood Thrush

The wood thrush is one of Connecticut's most common thrush species. It is found statewide during the breeding season in areas with moist deciduous forest, especially near streams and other forest wetlands. Mature forest habitat with heavy undergrowth, moist ground, and heavy shade conditions are ideal for wood thrushes.

Veery

While absent from coastal and urban areas, the veery is a very common breeder in Connecticut, and occurs almost statewide. Dense lowland forests and swamps are its preferred habitat. It favors wetter habitats than the other thrush species. The veery will use early successional woodland, while the wood thrush usually will not.

Hermit Thrush

The hermit thrush is a less common breeder in Connecticut. It can be found during the breeding season at higher elevations, most notably the northwestern hills of Litchfield County. Hemlock and white pine forest habitat is preferred. Hermit thrushes will use areas with edge and a more open forest understory than the other thrush species. Also, they are found in drier forested areas than the veery or wood thrush.

Swainson's Thrush

The Swainson's thrush favors coniferous forests with spruce and fir. It is found at higher elevations in white pine

Neotropical Migratory Songbirds

Neotropical migrants are birds that live in the tropical areas of the New World (Central and South America, and the Caribbean), but migrate to North America for the breeding season. These birds make incredible journeys each year to take advantage of the massive food supply (mainly insects) that is available when they raise their young. Many species of neotropical migrants, including forest thrushes, are dependent upon large forested habitats to successfully reproduce. The loss and degradation of forest habitats can adversely affect these bird populations, many of which have been steadily declining for years.

Habitat loss and forest fragmentation are the primary causes behind the decline of warblers, tanagers, thrushes, and other neotropical migrants. When large blocks of forest are chopped into smaller pieces by roads and development, populations of these birds experience tremendous stress. Forest fragmentation opens a path into the forest for nest predators, cowbirds, and human disturbance. The bird populations cannot withstand being squeezed into smaller, less desirable space without being affected in a negative way.

Not only are Neotropical migrants losing habitat on their North American breeding grounds, but they are also losing habitat in their South American wintering areas. Habitat conservation for these songbirds is critical.

and hemlock habitat in the northwestern corner of the state. Breeding in Connecticut is suspected, but has not been confirmed. The main breeding range extends along the boreal forest belt of the extreme northern United States and southern Canada.

Gray-cheeked Thrush

The gray-cheeked thrush has the most northerly range of the group. It breeds in boreal forest and tundra scrub habitat as far north as Newfoundland and Labrador in the east, and westward, across northern Canada and through Alaska. This bird can be found in Connecticut during migration; however, it does not breed here.

P. J. FUSCO (2)

The veery has a rolling liquid, flute-like song. It can be identified by its rusty back, indistinct breast spotting, and lack of an eye ring.

Bicknell's Thrush

Closely related to the gray-cheeked thrush, Bicknell's was long thought to be a subspecies of the gray-cheeked until it was determined to be a distinct species in 1995. Ornithologists reasoned that because it has slightly different physical characteristics, different breeding and wintering ranges, and a different song than the similar gray-cheeked thrush, it was deemed to be a separate species.

Bicknell's thrush is a secretive bird that breeds in thick mountaintop forests of stunted spruce and fir at elevations from 1,500 to 3,000 feet. Its breeding range is in suitable habitat from New York's Catskill Mountains, north to the St. Lawrence River, and east to Nova Scotia.

Bicknell's thrush can be found in Connecticut only during migration, but extreme care is needed to identify it because of its close resemblance to the gray-cheeked.

Thrushes eat insects, worms and berries. Berries are an important food source during fall migration.

Conservation

Habitat loss on both the breeding and wintering grounds is the biggest threat facing the forest thrushes. Most of the thrush species are dependent upon large blocks of unfragmented forest habitat to ensure optimal breeding success. When breeding habitat of forest interior birds is fragmented by road building and development, populations of thrushes and other forest interior birds decline. Habitat needs are only met by maintaining larger blocks of forest unfragmented by development. Long-term land use planning that includes intact blocks of large forest will benefit these birds for the future.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, through its *Birds in Forested Landscapes Program*, estimates that the wood thrush has experienced a steady, long-term population decline of about 43% since the mid-1960s. A 30% decline is estimated for the veery. The Bicknell's thrush has regional, but small, breeding and wintering ranges that make its population vulnerable.

All of the forest thrushes are neotropical migrants (see sidebar), with the exception of the hermit thrush, which is a short-distance migrant. Neotropical migrants, as a group, are subject to a wide range of survival pressures, including stopover habitat loss, predation, and the physical demands of long distance migration. Areas for migrants to stop so they can rest and refuel are critically important habitats to protect and conserve.

Migratory Bird Surveys Continue in 2004

Written by J.T. Stokowski, Contracted Researcher for the DEP Wildlife Division

2004 marks the final survey season of the DEP Wildlife Division's three-year Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat Project, which was funded by the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. The study was initiated to increase our knowledge about critical stopover habitats used by migrating birds. Loss of these critical habitats can result in greater distances between "refueling" stops for migrating birds, which can significantly increase their mortality. This project parallels the previous Silvio O. Conte Stopover Habitat Survey that was performed along the upper Connecticut River in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, and it also highlights additional areas along the Housatonic, Naugatuck, Thames, and mid- to lower Connecticut Rivers. The Division will use data from these surveys to help identify Connecticut's priority sites, as well as guide conservation efforts at state and local levels. The 2004 spring surveys began on May 1, relying once again on the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteer conservationists.

P.J. FUSCO (2)

J.T. Stokowski, a researcher contracted by the Wildlife Division, marks survey points for the Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat Project.

Some of the more interesting reports from survey volunteers conducting the 2003 surveys included yellow-throated and warbling vireos, screech and barred owls, golden eagle, black vulture, and common raven, as well as northern parula, cerulean, worm-eating, Tennessee, hooded, blackburnian, pine, bay-breasted, Connecticut, and golden-winged warblers. Volunteers have observed more than just birds on their survey routes. Along with the thousands of birds recorded, there were reports of an airborne flying squirrel, coyotes in search of food, and a black bear that approached the trail of one observer before bounding into the woods for cover.

A total of 41 sites were surveyed throughout the state, each consisting of 10 survey points. Surveys were conducted on six scheduled dates in spring and five in fall for a total of 451 surveys and 4,510 survey points. Preliminary analysis shows that over 20,000 individual birds were counted, averaging over 1,000 birds per square kilometer in the spring of 2003. A combination of approximately 41 volunteers and 11 staff members of the Wildlife Division tackled this enormous task. For such a small group to work so hard shows a strong dedication to the conservation of wildlife and its habitat.

Chestnut-sided warblers can frequently be found in early successional habitat.

While there are many hardworking volunteers, more are always needed to conduct the surveys. On the scheduled days, volunteers must commit to making one visit to each of 10 points and conducting a 10-minute survey of all birds seen or heard at a point. The surveys require participants who are familiar with bird identification by sight and sound. Other projects are available for volunteers with less birding experience. Once an area has been assigned, a survey can be conducted by an individual or a small team. Surveys of one area may also be split between individual surveyors. Volunteers can commit to as much or as little time as they like. Those that only have time to do a couple of surveys are also encouraged to take part and fill in for volunteers with other commitments.

For more detailed information on this and other volunteer opportunities, please visit www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/geninfo/volunteer.htm or call J.T. Stokowski at 860-675-8130 (birdsurveys@po.state.ct.us).

Hunter Education Instructors Honored at Annual Ceremony

Connecticut's Conservation Education/Firearms (CE/FS) Program honored its volunteer instructors on March 21 at the Annual Awards and Recognition Dinner. This year's event marked the 22nd anniversary of Connecticut's CE/FS Program. Since 1982, 103,206 students have graduated from one of the three programs: firearms, bowhunting, and trapping. The 320 volunteer instructors honored at this event donated 12,885 hours without compensation to conduct 165 courses for 3,881 students enrolled in basic firearms, bowhunting, and trapping programs.

At the dinner, two instructors were also recognized from each of the firearms, bowhunting, and trapping programs who have made exceptional contributions during the past year. An award of merit was given to instructors Lawrence King, Francis Wasylink, and Jules Perreault for their outstanding efforts in teaching classes in all three categories. The CE/FS Program coordinator chose instructors, Paul Hiller and William Collins, to recognize for their individual contributions to hunter education. In addition, a Junior Assistant, Salvator Renzuella, was recognized for his outstanding contribution to the program.

P.J. FUSCO (2)

Award recipients at the 22nd Annual CE/FS Recognition Dinner: (standing, l to r) Mark Clavette (DEP Wildlife Division), Mark Fowler, Francis Wasylink, Jules Perreault, Lawrence King, Warren Speh, Frederick Becker, George Finch, and David Kubas (CE/FS Program Coordinator); (seated, l to r) John Gowak, David Shelberg, Francis Hasuly, William Collins, Alan Lovejoy, and Salvator Renzuella.

DEP Deputy Commissioner David Leff commended the volunteer hunter education instructors for their dedication to Connecticut's CE/FS Program.

Special recognition for their contributions and support to Connecticut's CE/FS Program was also given to the Riverside Yacht Club and the Moodus Sportsmen's Club. The Coalition of Connecticut Sportsmen and the CT Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation received Organization Awards for their special contributions on behalf of hunter education in Connecticut.

The DEP Wildlife Division is proud of the hundreds of instructors who donate their time and expertise to educating Connecticut's citizens to be safe and responsible hunters. Connecticut's program continues to be recognized as one of the best in the nation, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers.

Top honors for 2003:

Firearms
Mark Fowler, Warren Speh

Bowhunting
Francis Hasuly, Richard Potter

Trapping
George Finch, Jr., Frederick Becker

Award of Merit
Lawrence King, Francis Wasylink, Jules Perreault

Special Recognition
Paul Hiller, William Collins

Outstanding Junior Assistant
Salvator Renzuella

Organization Awards
Coalition of Connecticut Sportsmen
CT Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation

Club Awards
Riverside Yacht Club
Moodus Sportsmen's Club

FROM THE FIELD

92 Bald Eagles Counted in Midwinter Survey

On January 9-10, 2004, volunteers from private conservation organizations, the Wildlife Division's Master Wildlife Conservationist Program, the DEP, and the general public braved the cold to conduct the annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey. The 153 volunteers recorded all eagles seen at areas traditionally used by the birds and areas of suitable wintering habitat. This year, 92 bald eagles--50 adults, 41 immature eagles and one unknown--were recorded.

The count of 92 eagles is a jump from the 77 seen in 2003 and is a reflection of the harsh winter weather at survey time. Bald eagles usually migrate south from the northern states to find areas of open water where they are able to catch fish, their main food item. Because the number of eagles was higher this year, the northern states will probably report a lower number of eagles observed during their surveys.

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is not a complete census of the entire wintering population in Connecticut, but it is an index of the species' use of Connecticut, which can be compared year to year.

The Wildlife Division extends its thanks to all of the volunteers who withstood the zero degree temperatures to donate their time to the survey and report their observations.

Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program

Turtles and Roads Are a Bad Combination

P. J. FUSCO (2)

A box turtle's shell may protect it from predators, but not from being killed by cars on roadways.

Recent research suggests that some turtle populations are declining, in part, because of car and turtle collisions on the numerous roads that dissect our landscape. In Connecticut, hundreds of turtles, particularly eastern box turtles, are killed on roadways every spring and summer. Box turtles have become so rare in the state that they are a species of special concern on Connecticut's Threatened and Endangered Species List.

You can help by watching for turtles that are crossing roads. If possible (without jeopardizing your safety), help them across the road in the direction they were headed before they get struck by cars.

2003 Fall Turkey Hunting Season Results

The 2003 fall firearms turkey hunting season resulted in a reported harvest of 134 birds, representing a 29% decrease from the 188 birds harvested in 2002. The harvest may have dropped because of lower turkey numbers. The relatively cold and wet weather during the springs of 2002 and 2003 may have reduced the survival of hens and poults, meaning less birds in the fall. Fewer hunters and less young birds have an impact on the overall fall turkey harvest.

Of the 3,337 hunters with permits, 101 took at least one turkey, for a three percent success rate. Private land hunters (2,719) harvested 120 birds, whereas state land hunters (618) harvested 14 birds. Hunters reported harvesting at least one bird from 59 of 169 Connecticut towns (35%). The towns of Sharon (6), Litchfield (5), and Woodstock (5) recorded the highest harvest. The highest state land harvest was reported in Cockaponset State Forest, East Swamp Wildlife Management Area, Mattatuck State Forest, and Nassahegon State Forest, with each recording a harvest of two birds. Highest overall harvest occurred in turkey management zones 1 (18), 5 (15), and 9 (15). Of the 134 birds taken, 71 were males and 63 were females; 55% were adults.

During the 2003 fall archery season, 2,296 permits were issued to hunters and 58 birds were harvested (a 9% decrease from the 64 birds harvested in 2002). Fifty archers took at least one bird. The statewide success rate was 2.2%. Wild turkeys were taken from 37 towns, with Easton (6), Lebanon (3), Newtown (3), and Redding (3) reporting the highest harvest. Turkey management zones 11 (18) and 4 (8) recorded the highest harvest. Of 58 birds taken by archers, there were 37 males and 21 females; 69 percent were adults.

To learn about the upcoming 2004 wild turkey hunting seasons, consult the 2004 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide, available at town clerks' and DEP offices, or visit the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us.

Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

Check Out Connecticut Audubon's Live Osprey Cam

Web surfers have the opportunity to view an active osprey nest on Connecticut Audubon's Live Osprey Cam. The Osprey Cam is located at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point. Ospreys have been returning to this nesting platform for six years, which is ideally located in the Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area salt marsh. To view the osprey nest, go to http://ctaudubon.org/ospreycam.htm.

The Wildlife Observer

Rooftop Turkey

Mary Albro, a volunteer for the Wildlife Division's Master Wildlife Conservationist Program, sent in the following interesting wildlife observation:

"A wild turkey appeared on the Hartford Public Library (500 Main Street, downtown Hartford) roof one very cold and snowy morning this past January (2004) and stayed into the afternoon of the following day. From the staff break room, you can step out on or look out at the building's roof.

To me, more curious than the turkey on the roof, was the number of my coworkers who asked me how it could have gotten there--not realizing turkeys can fly. You never know when you will have the opportunity to do some wildlife education. My coworkers now know more than they care to about wild turkeys.

Two other unusual bird sightings at the Library were a brown creeper that dropped down during a heavy rain one October and a wood duck drake that landed on the terrace."

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)

Backyard Bobcat

The following wildlife observation and photo were submitted by Connie Bleiler of Burlington:

"There's always something going on in our backyard in Burlington. More often than not, the activity is limited to the usual suspects—birds, deer, turkeys, and, alas, an ever-growing population of squirrels. In fact, the summer of 2003 even brought us frequent visits from at least two different black bears. Needless to say, we enjoy the myriad animal activity.

However, when a bobcat showed up one evening late in August it was an extra special event and we were captivated by its every move.

It was about 6:45 p.m. when we stepped out onto our raised sun porch and noticed the bobcat lying in the grass only a few feet away. It was taking in the last few moments of the sun and seemed quite content.

We were immediately struck by its beautiful markings; the wonderfully bobbed tail and tufted ears were the stuff of Audubon pictures. It just lay there, with the green grass framing its body, and casually soaked in the last rays of the day's sun.

Suddenly, as the bobcat's ears perked up, it was obvious that something had caught its attention. Then we noticed, too. An unsuspecting squirrel came bounding out of the woods, probably looking for a last morsel of fallen birdseed before nightfall.

As the squirrel drew closer, the bobcat crouched ever lower and got ready to pounce. Then, within about six seconds amid a flurry of dust, the bobcat captured the squirrel. It was amazing how a serene sunbathing cat had transformed into a skillful hunter. It took the prey and pranced into the back woods.

The bobcat reemerged about 10 minutes later and again found a fleeting ray of sunlight. With a full stomach, serenity had returned. It washed and then rolled around with obvious contentment. The bobcat stayed until it grew dark and then casually walked off.

We haven't seen a bobcat since; though, with the surplus of squirrels we have around, I would be pleasantly surprised if it did return."

To the Editor from Iraq

February 15, 2004

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for the issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*. I have passed them around to other soldiers in the Company. We also have a DEP officer from Tennessee who enjoyed the magazine very much. The stories and pictures of Connecticut are great reminders of home and also help us to explain to people from other states what Connecticut is really like. Most people have the idea that Connecticut is Greenwich, a rich New York suburb, Hartford, the Insurance Capitol, or New Haven, the home of Yale. Most had no idea that we have a coastline with salt water, that the Connecticut River is so large, or that we have deer, bears, bobcats, coyotes, and other critters.

With a little luck, we will be heading home in the next 30 or so days. It is a slow process having us disengage from our activities, turn over our equipment, and then out process. We should be in Fort Drum, New York, by the end of March. There are other Connecticut units that will be heading here and I will send you their addresses. I am sure there are people in those units who will appreciate news from home.

Sincerely,
Marc J Youngquist, Master Sergeant

Good News for Connecticut's Private Lands Program!

Wildlife Division awarded USFWS Tier II LIP grant

Written by Judy Wilson, Private Lands Habitat Program

The DEP Wildlife Division has been awarded a Tier II Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under a competitive grant system. The LIP Tier II grant of $848,000 dollars will be used to carry out on-the-ground habitat projects to benefit wildlife species at-risk on private land. The program is being designed to conserve, enhance, restore, and protect priority, privately-owned wildlife habitats by providing willing landowners the technical expertise and funding to carry out high-quality habitat projects.

"Species at-risk" (both animals and plants) includes all of the federally-listed species found in the state, all state-listed threatened, endangered, and special concern species, as well as others considered "at-risk" by the Wildlife Division. Because the majority of the state's species at-risk are dependent on early successional and wetland habitats, LIP Tier II project funding will be directed toward these "priority habitats" and the imperiled communities found within them (see the November/December 2003 issue for specific background information).

To effectively and efficiently benefit the majority of species at-risk, there will be three main components to the program: an early successional habitat management component, a wetlands habitat management component, and a conservation easement component. The Connecticut River and its watershed, which support a high proportion of the state's species at-risk, will define the broad project area for the program. Resources will be focused primarily on priority habitat projects within the lower Connecticut River tidelands area (south of Portland/Cromwell), which contains nationally recognized tidal wetlands, and the Eightmile River watershed area, which is an important tributary to the lower Connecticut River.

Examples of eligible projects under the early successional component of LIP include old field and shrubland restoration, native warm season grass plantings, cool season grass plantings, and selective herbiciding to kill/control exotic invasive plants. Eligible wetland projects could include invasive vegetation control (i.e., phragmites, purple loosestrife), riparian zone restoration, open marsh water management, and the creation of shallow potholes. All projects should clearly benefit species at-risk. Because funding for easements is very limited, it is anticipated that conservation easements will only be carried out when matching funds are available from other conservation partners.

LIP Tier II funding will provide up to 75% of the cost of a project, but a 25% non-federal match is necessary. The Wildlife Division will use a variety of means to meet the match requirement, including DEP personnel and equipment, contributions from partner conservation groups, monitoring and in-kind services by volunteers, in-kind labor from landowners, and landowner funds.

P. J. FUSCO

The eastern meadowlark is just one of the species of grassland specialists considered "at-risk" in Connecticut.

Project Applications and Project Ranking

Landowners interested in seeing their land enhanced, improved, or managed for wildlife species at-risk will need to apply to the Wildlife Division. Project application forms are under development and will be available on the DEP's website (www.dep.state.ct.us) and at the four DEP Wildlife Division offices in the near future. The Private Lands Program Coordinator for the Wildlife Division and the LIP Ranking Committee will rank all applications received. Criteria for ranking/selecting projects are under development and will include the following considerations:

Project Area/Focus Area: Does the project fall within the Connecticut River Watershed Project Area, and the lower Connecticut River tidelands and/or Eightmile River watershed area?

Priority Habitat: Does the project benefit priority early successional or wetland habitats?

J. WILSON

Landowner Incentive Program funds will be used to manage for high quality, privately-owned grasslands.

Imperiled Communities: Does the project manage/restore an imperiled community within a priority habitat?

Species At-risk: Will the project benefit a suite of at-risk species present on site or potentially on site?

Species Conservation Status: Does the site contain species that are state-listed as threatened, endangered, and/or special concern (as documented by the DEP's Environmental Geographic Information Center Natural Diversity Database)? To what degree will the species indirectly benefit?

Level of Current Protection/ Proximity to Protected Habitat: Is the site currently protected from development (i.e., existence of a conservation easement, ownership by a conservation organization or sportsmen's club, development rights purchase program for agricultural land)? Is the site adjacent to protected (from development) land?

Conversion Potential: What is the potential for the site to be developed?

Habitat Function: What is the quantity and quality of current and restored habitat? What quantity and quality of habitat is found elsewhere near the site?

Landscape Function: What function does the site play in the local or regional level of habitat and species conservation (i.e., core habitat, buffer to core habitat, migratory habitat, proximity to known habitat supporting species at-risk, etc.)?

Project Cost/Benefit and Restoration Potential: Does the project have a high potential to succeed? Can the project be accomplished at a reasonable and acceptable cost?

Partnerships: Does the project bring multiple cooperating partners (established conservation groups/ sportsmen's groups) together to help provide funding and/or technical expertise?

Landowner Match Availability/In-kind Services Commitment: Are the landowners able to provide the necessary match and/or in-kind labor? Are the landowners willing to actively maintain the restored habitat, if necessary?

Landowner Commitment/Term of Agreement: How long are the landowners willing to commit to maintaining the project?

Look in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*, as well as in publications from conservation organizations, for updates on the Private Lands Program. A section on the DEP's website that features LIP, along with other potential funding sources, will be developed in the coming months, keeping pace with the development and implementation of this exciting new program to benefit species at-risk and their supporting habitats.

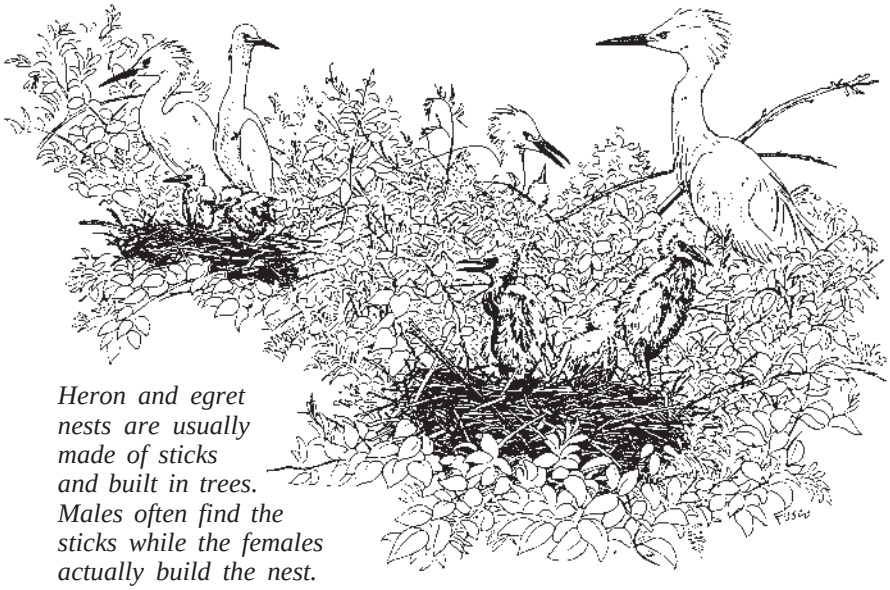
Just for Kids

Island Birds Need Protection!

Did you know that some of the islands along Connecticut's coast have unique birds nesting on them? Large birds called herons, egrets, and ibises return each year to the islands to build their nests near each other. These colonial nesters need YOUR help to protect them!

What Is a Rookery?

Birds that nest near each other are called colonial nesters. All the birds and their nests together are called a rookery. Heron rookeries are not very common in Connecticut or in many other places.



Heron and egret nests are usually made of sticks and built in trees. Males often find the sticks while the females actually build the nest.

What You Can Do for the Birds

- *Stay away from the fences put up to protect the birds.*
- *Avoid island rookeries during summer.*
- *Leave your dogs at home.*
- *If you do see a nesting bird, be sure to leave the bird alone.*
- *Educate others about the birds.*

The Wildlife Division and the birds say THANKS!

Bonfires and Birds Don't Mix!

Because rookeries are important places for birds, people have to be careful when they are near them. Cookouts, bonfires, unleashed dogs, and even well-meaning people can all disturb nesting birds. If an adult bird leaves its nest, the eggs or young may die due to the weather and predators. Young birds that get scared may even fall out of the nest and die.

Match the Bird to Its Description

1. Black-Crowned Night-Heron	☐	*State-threatened; large, white wading bird. Has a yellow, pointed bill, black legs and feet.*
2. Snowy Egret	☐	*State-threatened; medium-sized, white wading bird. Has a black, pointed bill and bright yellow feet.*
3. Great Egret	☐	*Special concern species; medium to large wading bird with a curved, long bill used to probe the mud for food.*
4. Glossy Ibis	☐	*Medium-sized, stocky, short-necked wading bird; active at night.*

See next page for answers.

Your Questions Answered ???

Beaver Parasite Beetles

I found thousands of tiny, flat, reddish-brown, insect-like creatures on the skin of a beaver. What are they?

What you have found are very interesting beetles, known scientifically as *Platypsyllus castoris*, and commonly as "beaver parasite beetles." These remarkable beetles do not look like beetles at all. In fact, their lack of developed wings and flattened appearance makes them look more like lice than beetles. Trappers sometimes refer to them as "beaver fleas," which, of course, is incorrect because they are not fleas. Like lice and fleas, however, beaver parasite beetles are ectoparasites, living on the "outside" of their hosts. They feed on dead skin and secretions but do not harm the beaver or damage the beaver pelt. Ectoparasites are usually extremely adapted for living on their hosts. In this case, the beaver beetle is flat, "wingless," and does not have any eyes. It has no need to leave its host unless something happens to the host. This is when beaver parasite beetles become more visible, especially to trappers, as they move about looking for new hosts on which to live. Insects truly are the most diverse animals on earth--beaver parasite beetles simply add to this diversity!

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

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

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

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

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

June 5 ..... **National Trails Day**, sponsored by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA). Events are planned across Connecticut, in parks, forests, and at nature centers. Hike, learn about trails and history, do trail maintenance, ride horses, or orienteer. For a brochure or more information, call CFPA at (860) 346-2372 or email info@ctwoodlands.org.

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.

July 4 ..... While viewing fireworks displays at Connecticut coastal areas, respect fenced and posted shorebird nesting areas and offshore rookeries.

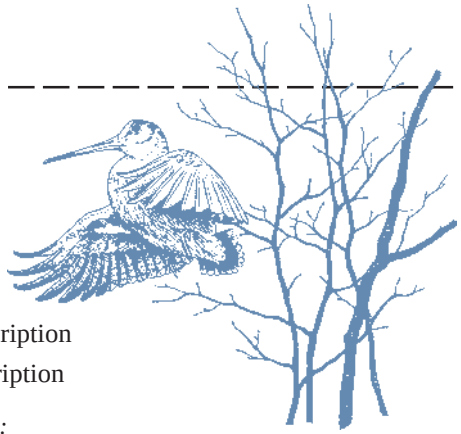
July 14 ..... **Educator Workshop: Connecticut's Endangered Wildlife**, from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Educators can learn about endangered species and discover sample activities to use in the classroom. Preregistration is required. Contact Laura Rogers-Castro at the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 or laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

August 4 **Educator Workshop: Insects of Connecticut**, from 9:00 AM-12:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. This popular workshop introduces participants to insect diversity, research projects, and activities to use in the classroom. Preregistration is required. Contact Laura Rogers-Castro at the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 or laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

QUIZ ANSWER

The descriptions match the following order: 3, 2, 4, 1.

Connecticut Wildlife



Subscription Order

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

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

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A young wood duck doesn't want to share its resting log with a painted turtle. Wood ducks are cavity nesters and frequently make use of nest boxes installed and managed by the DEP Wildlife Division on freshwater wetland properties across the state.

Bureau of Natural Resources / Wildlife Division
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
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