

Wildlife

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Celebrating 30 Years of Keeping New Jersey's Wildlife in our Future

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DEP Commissioner Announces Stronger Protections for Endangered Species

Celebrates 30 years of wildlife protection with innovative exhibit

Under the leadership of Governor James E. McGreevey, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell has announced plans to propose new regulations to protect the habitats of New Jersey's threatened and endangered species, making New Jersey a national leader in wildlife protection.

"New Jersey was among the earliest leaders in species protection. New Jersey's law actually predated the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, but our landmark law was never implemented through regulation," Campbell said.

"I have directed my staff to develop needed standards, 30 years overdue, that will extend protection for New Jersey's threatened and endangered species to upland habitats. This will not only put New Jersey at the forefront of endangered species protection, but it also will be an important tool in Governor McGreevey's war on sprawl."

Campbell made his announcement at Liberty State Park in Jersey City during a July celebration of the 30th anniversary of New Jersey's Endangered Species Conservation Act and the creation of the DEP's Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

Existing regulations do a good job of protecting listed species that occur in wetlands and in the Pinelands area, but the regulations often fail to protect species found elsewhere, Campbell said. Critical habitat regulations to be proposed later this year will use the state's Landscape Project -- a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database of known habitats for threatened and endangered species developed by the Endangered and Nongame Species Program -- to also protect upland habitats.

The regulations will be incorporated into the Blueprint for Intelligent Growth (BIG) Map, one of the department's prime tools in combating sprawl. The color-coded map will allow for expedited development in appropriate areas, while clearly identifying areas where builders and developers will be subject to tougher standards.

The planned regulations Campbell outlined would require habitat conservation plans whenever new development occurs in

environmentally sensitive areas that serve as habitat for threatened or endangered species. These provisions would be comparable to protections extended to federally protected species, protections that deem habitat destruction equivalent to the taking of a species. The planned regulations also would eliminate uncertainty concerning threatened and endangered species protection in smart growth areas, and minimize impacts to traditional farming and forestry practices.

"The proposed upgrade of our regulations is the most significant development for the preservation of endangered, threatened and nongame New Jersey wildlife and their habitats since the passage of the state Endangered Species Conservation Act 30 years ago," says Larry Niles, chief of the Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

Signed into law on Dec. 14, 1973, the New Jersey Endangered Species Conservation Act preceded the federal Endangered Species Act by two weeks. The state law directed the DEP to protect, manage and restore the state's endangered and nongame wildlife species. Over the past three decades, state biologists have made New Jersey a leader in bringing key species back from the brink of extinction -- species such as the bald eagle, peregrine falcon and osprey.

Governor McGreevey has already strengthened protection of threatened and endangered species by, for the first time, designating waters that provide critical habitat for endangered species as Category One waters. This designation provides the state's highest level of regulatory protection and ensures that water quality in these areas will not be degraded.

At the July celebration, Campbell also was joined by the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey in unveiling the New Jersey Endangered Wildlife Traveling Exhibit, an interactive collage of video, audio and graphics that showcases the 30-year history, achievements and challenges of endangered species protection in the state. (See Page 6).

Each month, the DEP is highlighting a different "species of the month" on its Web site. For more information, see www.nj.gov/dep.



Gov. James E. McGreevey with a New Jersey bald eagle fledgling.

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ENDANGERED AND NONGAME SPECIES PROGRAM MISSION

"To actively conserve New Jersey's biological diversity by maintaining and enhancing endangered and nongame wildlife populations within healthy functioning ecosystems."



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New Hope for Declining Shorebirds

Message from Larry Niles, Chief,
Endangered and Nongame Species Program

This spring, the world turned for the better for embattled shorebirds on the Delaware Bay. With impressive swiftness, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection led fishermen and the New Jersey Marine Fish Council to establish a major reduction in the harvest of horseshoe crabs, including a 50 percent harvest decrease and a harvesting ban between May 1 to June 7.

That sparked the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Horseshoe Crab Board to act decisively to recommend regional restrictions, including a 50 percent reduction in Delaware and a sizable reduction in Maryland. The board also responded to recommendations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Shorebird Technical Committee which agreed with conclusions of biologists with the DEP's Endangered and Nongame Species Program that the Delaware Bay stopover was in jeopardy.

Hopefully, these decisive actions will lead the way towards a recovery of the horseshoe crab population to levels that can support the spring migration of shorebirds.

Unfortunately, though, a recovery may take years. Numbers of red knots, the species most dependent on horseshoe crab eggs, have plummeted in the last three years. Red knots use the eggs to build fat to fuel the final leg of their 10,000-mile journey to Arctic breeding areas.

These declines in red knots could presage similar declines of at least five other shorebird species, all of which are relatively long-lived and normally produce few young. Once adults are lost from a population, it takes years to replace them.

For these reasons, conditions on the Delaware Bay this past May were cause for great concern, creating a "perfect storm" for migrating shorebirds.

Low water temperatures made the crabs reluctant to come ashore, and the number of crabs and spawning activity hit new lows, leaving few eggs on the beaches for birds to feed upon.

The combined effect of the diminishing numbers of birds and the poor crab spawn resulted in a decrease in the number of red knots that survived the migration to the Arctic. Over the last three years, the number of nests and birds on our Southampton Island study area in the Arctic has declined consistently.

This year wasn't the first time that there was unusually cool water temperatures on Delaware Bay. The resulting reduction in crab eggs is the chief motivation for conserving crabs. With double the number of crabs, we would have had double the amount of spawning in May and the birds could have limped along.

With water temperatures and horseshoe crab population both low, the birds will continue to suffer from reduced availability of these important eggs.

This is not an encouraging set of circumstances for managing this valuable resource. The harvest restrictions imposed this spring are the first step to improve conditions.

We must also continue our work to reduce habitat disturbances for all foraging shorebirds. This year, the Department of Environmental Protection imposed unprecedented restrictions on recreational use of bay shore beaches. A dedicated corps of volunteers patrolled those beaches and helped improve awareness of the shorebirds' plight.

We must also investigate possible steps we could take to improve and restore bay habitat for shorebirds. Unlike Atlantic coast towns, sparsely populated or wild Delaware Bay beaches that may have eroded over the years receive little or no sand replenishment, either by natural processes or through beach replenishment. A little sand of the right kind on any of these beaches could restore spawning areas for crabs and improve conditions for shorebirds.

Now that the marine fish agencies have acted, it is necessary for all conservationists to join in the restoration of the feeding and resting habitat for migratory birds on the Atlantic Flyway, one of the most important features of New Jersey's natural heritage. Get involved by supporting organizations dedicated to shorebird protection or become a Wildlife Conservation Corps Citizen Scientist by contacting Larissa Smith at 609-628-2103. Information on becoming a volunteer can also be obtained at www.njfishandwildlife.com.



A red knot nesting in the Arctic.

ENSP Update

Cold, wet spring impacts and delays nesting

New Jersey's unusually cold and wet spring weather evidently affected a number of state endangered and threatened bird species by delaying their nesting success, reducing it, or both.

Here's an update:

Piping plovers: The plovers reached their breeding grounds in late March and early April, right on schedule, but they began nesting later than usual. Principal zoologist Dave Jenkins of the Endangered and Nongame Species Program believes that reduced food availability caused by unseasonably cool water temperatures contributed to the delay. Heavy rains and storms that raised tidal levels also flooded some nesting attempts two or three times. The result: Chicks often didn't hatch until late May through mid-June, when there was a higher likelihood of human disturbances on the birds' nesting beaches. While the number of nesting pairs remained about 138, nest productivity was certainly compromised.

Least terns: The terns' story is similar to the piping plovers, said Todd Pover, biological assistant with the program. Even in late July, full-moon tides and heavy rainstorms reduced some tern colonies and claimed some chicks.

Black skimmers: They were extremely late in arriving. And even though the skimmers had concentrated in as many as four large colonies previously, they gathered in only two large colonies this year. Their nesting was also about a month late, with some birds not laying eggs until late July.

Ospreys: Colder water temperatures resulted in lower fish stocks, and rainstorms caused cloudy waters that likely made the ospreys' hunt for fish more difficult, said Kathy Clark, one of the program's principal zoologists. As a result, surveys this year revealed a lot of nest failures, and most chicks biologists found were younger than expected, suggesting the osprey had been forced to re-nest. Consequently, preliminary data suggest recent years' productivity average of one fledgling per nest was probably halved this year.

Peregrine Falcons Return to Their Historic Cliff Habitat

For the first time since the now-banned pesticide DDT eradicated them from the entire eastern United States, peregrine falcons this year successfully nested on a New Jersey cliff. A pair of the state-endangered raptors nesting on the Palisades along the Hudson in northern New Jersey fledged one chick this spring.

"The significance can't be overstated," said Kathy Clark, principal ENSP zoologist. "Even though we've had nesting peregrines in New Jersey for the past 23 years, we've wanted to see them return to nesting on cliffs, their natural nesting habitat."

This year's cliff nesting did not come as a surprise, however. Last year, one pair nesting on the Palisades north of the present successful nest laid a clutch of four eggs, but a downpour flooded the cliff ledge and washed out the eggs. There was also a pair of subadults displaying territorial behavior at the cliffs last year, but they didn't lay eggs. Those falcons might even be the pair that fledged the chick this year. In addition, another pair nested, albeit unsuccessfully, south of the successful nest.

The two nests pushed this year's total statewide to 18 pairs, which fledged 33 young – both post-DDT records for New Jersey.

During the late 1970s, biologists released young peregrines near their former historic ranges. But peregrines released at cliff sites often fell prey to great horned owls. State biologists then began releasing the young peregrines from manmade platforms in coastal marshes.

In 1980, a pair of peregrines nested at the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, the first nesting attempt in New Jersey and the eastern United States, in nearly a quarter century. The marsh platforms, major bridges and tall urban buildings became their preferred nesting sites until they returned to the Palisades during the past two years.

"It's a definite milestone for the peregrine population," Clark said of the cliff nesting. "This event depended on an abundance of these birds. We know there are extra unmated adults vying for nest sites, and that's what it took to push them back to their natural habitat."



An adult peregrine falcon male (top) and his mate fly above their juvenile, the first to fledge off a New Jersey cliff in decades.

Photo by Beth Balitzer, The Record

Watchable Wildlife

Don't miss Higbee Beach

If you go to Cape May State Park to watch migrating hawks this fall, be sure to check out nearby Higbee Beach.

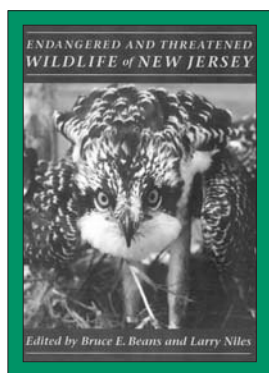
A one-and-a-half-mile stretch of beach and the last remnant of coastal dune forest on the Delaware Bay shore, the state Wildlife Management Area is one of the world's best birding spots during autumn. With freshwater marshes and a pond, a hardwood swamp, upland woods and fields, it's ideal habitat for migrating songbirds, butterflies and raptors pausing to rest.

Directions: At the southern end of the Garden State Parkway, take New Jersey Route 109 west to Route 9. Turn left onto Route 9, to first traffic light. Turn left on County Route 626 (Seashore Road). Proceed to New England Road, turn right and follow for one mile to Hidden Valley Ranch parking area on left. Continue another mile to end of New England Road and beach access parking areas.

Information: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife: 609-628-2436.

Wildlife Conservation Corps: Citizen Scientist opportunity

A hawk watch is being conducted at the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Morris County through Nov. 15. Coordinator Bill Gallagher needs volunteers to help staff the daily count. A basic knowledge of birds is required. Gallagher will train volunteers, who will record sightings and weather data. If you are interested, contact ENSP's Larissa Smith at 609-628-2103 or at llsmith@gtc3.com.



Our guide to

Endangered & Threatened Wildlife of N.J.

Have you gotten your copy of *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife of New Jersey*, a richly illustrated, 336-page color guide to the state's 73 endangered and threatened wildlife species produced by the Endangered and Nongame Species Program?

"It's really a wonderful tribute, not only to the work of the Division of Fish and Wildlife but to the challenges that lie ahead," says Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell.

The 7-inch x 10-inch paperback retails for \$29. All author royalties benefit the Conserve Wildlife Foundation. It is available: in bookstores; via online booksellers; or directly through Rutgers University Press (RUP) at <http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu> or by calling RUP at 1-800-446-9323 or 732-445-7762. For phone orders, there is a \$5 shipping charge per book within the U.S. Shipping is free for online orders.

September

Third week:

- Peak of bats returning to their wintering caves/mines.

Fourth week:

- Raptor migration peaks on Cape May peninsula, through first week in October.

October

First week:

- Wood turtles return to streams for breeding and hibernation.

Fourth week:

- Snow geese begin arriving.

November

First week:

- Bald eagles migrating through Higbee Beach north of Cape May Point.

Third week:

- Peak of snow geese migration at Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

2003 Conserve Wildlife Foundation Golf Classic

A Hole in One!

On May 27, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ held its fourth annual golf tournament at Stanton Ridge Golf and Country Club in Hunterdon County. Although the weather was cool and rainy, our spirits were not daunted. In fact, it was one of the most exciting tournaments we had because of our Hole-in-One winner, Charles Sapienzo of Egg Harbor Township. Charles aced the tough 185-yard 7th hole, where for most golfers just hitting the green is an accomplishment. The prize was a 2003 Toyota Prius donated by James Toyota/Hummer Outlet, Flemington, N.J. This year's event raised \$70,000 in support of rare wildlife conservation. Our thanks to all our sponsors, players and volunteers who helped make this event such a great success!



(r-l) James Botsacos, President of James Toyota Hummer Outlet, Flemington, NJ congratulates Hole-in-One winner Charles Sapienzo, Jr.

Bald Eagle Title Sponsor

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For more than a century, Anheuser-Busch Companies have been making a difference in the communities where they do business through their many environmental programs. In addition to its support of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ, Anheuser-Busch also partners with major conservation organizations such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Conservation Fund, Living Lands and Waters, American Forests, and the Rainforest Alliance.

"We are proud to sponsor the Conserve Wildlife Foundation Golf Classic for the third year in a row," says John Hannafin, General Manager, Northeast Region. "Our company is committed to supporting the environment and natural resource conservation. These New Jersey biologists work hard to protect habitats for endangered wildlife, and we are glad we can assist them in that effort." To learn more about Anheuser-Busch's environmental efforts, visit www.abenvironment.com.



(l-r) Joanne Brigandi, South Jersey Gas; Linda Tesauro CWF; John Hannafin, Anheuser-Busch, Inc.



DKB foursome: (l-r) Ted Haverkost, Marc Liloia, John Manos, and Bob Lettiere.



NJEA foursome: Nancy Volpe, Steve Wollmer, Joyce Powell, and Sue Maurer



Conectiv foursome: Charles Sapienzo, Jr., Lance Landgraff, Lee Wasman, and Tim Stevenson.

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Conserve Wildlife Foundation News

MESSAGE FROM LINDA TESAURO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Don't miss N.J. endangered wildlife traveling exhibit

- Learn more about New Jersey's 73 endangered and threatened species
- Explore New Jersey's many beautiful and diverse landscapes
- Take the "Wise Up About Wildlife Trivia Challenge"

These are just a few of the things you'll do when you visit the New Jersey Endangered Wildlife Traveling Exhibit. The Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, unveiled the traveling exhibit with Commissioner Bradley Campbell on July 15 at Liberty State Park in Jersey City. And what a wonderful day it was.



This beautiful exhibit far exceeded our expectations and drew a crowd of more than 150 people. What makes this exhibit so unique is the I-Wall, an interactive sliding screen that uses video, sound and wildlife photos to tell the story of the Endangered and Nongame Species Program's successful work in bringing the eagle, osprey, peregrine and other species back from the brink of extinction.

We extend our appreciation to the contributors who made this exhibit possible: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, PSE&G, and supporters like you!

Please visit the exhibit when it comes to a town near you.

Exhibit Schedule 2003~2004

9/12 - 10/27 Tuckerton Seaport, Tuckerton
10/29 - 11/25 Somerset County Park Commission Environmental Education Center, Basking Ridge
11/26 - 1/30 Meadowlands Environment Center, Lindhurst
3/1 - 3/30 Newark Liberty International Airport
Final Destination: Pequest Trout Hatchery, Oxford

A special welcome to Waldwick Plastics Corporation of Waldwick, N.J., a new member of Corporations for Conservation of Wildlife and to the Muschett Foundation. Other companies and organizations that have renewed their memberships include South Jersey Gas Company, Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation, ExxonMobil and the Garden Club of Long Beach Island. For more information about how you or your company can join the Conserve Wildlife Foundation, please call 609-292-3707 today!

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