

Wildlife

Newsletter of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program

www.njfishandwildlife.com

Summer/Fall 2002

Tough Job: Bald Eagle Recovery Continues

Governor James E. McGreevey witnessed it first hand while attending the banding of a bald eagle chick this past May: The comeback of the bald eagle in New Jersey continues to be one of the great success stories of the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

This year a record 34 pairs, including a record 28 pairs that actively incubated eggs, fledged 34 young. That fledgling total matched last year's all-time post DDT record.

"The restoration of the Bald Eagle in New Jersey is a remarkable achievement," says Governor McGreevey. "The hard work and dedication of biologists from the DEP's Nongame and Endangered Species Program means people will once again be able to spot our nation's symbol in the skies above the Garden State."

Factors that have contributed to the continued recovery include the decades-old ban on DDT and other contaminants such as PCBs; protection afforded by both the federal and state endangered species acts; the release of 60 first-year Canadian birds in South Jersey during the 1980s; and the extensive monitoring and management of the growing nesting population by the ENSP and its dedicated Citizen Scientist volunteer nest-watchers.

"Overall the bald eagle population is secure and can look forward to a long future in New Jersey," says Larry Niles, ENSP chief. "But the year did yield some mixed results."

Although the number of pairs increased, more nests failed in 2002 than last year -- for a number of reasons. These include first-time pairs that often engage in just "housekeeping" before they begin to breed in earnest.

Human disturbance also likely led to the failure of at least two nests: a nest at Mantua Creek close to a busy road that attracted a lot of human attention; and another nest on Alloways Creek near a camp.

"It's obviously difficult to protect enough land around nests to maintain and accommodate new pairs," says Kathy Clark, principal ENSP zoologist. "It seems like there are neighbors (friendly or not) wherever new nests appear."

Finally, contaminants continue to be a concern for some nesting pairs. One of the three nests that have had a long history of failures due to contaminants, the Rancocas Creek nest, did fledge its first young since 1996 -- possibly due to a new female. However, a pair nesting on Mannington Meadows that for the first time in years fledged a chick in 2001 failed again this year. So did the pair on Raccoon Creek along the Delaware River; the female disappeared and presumably died in late March.

Besides banding 21 chicks at 12 nests, the ENSP also successfully introduced an eight-week-old chick from Pennsylvania into a Cohansey River nest that had another chick. The chick had survived a fall when its nest blew down in a storm, and was deemed healthy after a stay at Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research in Newark, Del., under the care of veterinarian Erica Miller.

"But when we put the bird into the nest it just laid down," says Larissa Smith, assistant ENSP biologist. After it apparently didn't feed for a week, ENSP biologists considered retrieving it. But, upon further observation, they let it remain after it revived and was obviously doing well.

While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed removing the bald eagle from the federally threatened list, it will continue to be considered endangered in New Jersey.



Gov. James E. McGreevey holds a just-banded bald eagle at the Belleplain State Forest nest. To his left are Robert McDowell, director of N.J. Division of Fish and Wildlife, holding up a Conserve Wildlife license plate that benefits the ENSP, and Larry Niles, ENSP chief. Second row: ENSP staffers Mike Valent, Kathy Clark, Cristina Frank and Larissa Smith; and Jane Morton-Galetto, chairperson of the ENSP Advisory Committee. Top row: ENSP staffers Craig James and Amanda Dey.

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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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Red Knots Continue Spring Decline

Message from Larry Niles, Chief, ENSP

This past spring's shorebird season began with great hope. Acting on a recommendation from our Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee to ban the collection of horseshoe crabs, the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council voted to limit the harvest of horseshoe crabs to just males, not females.

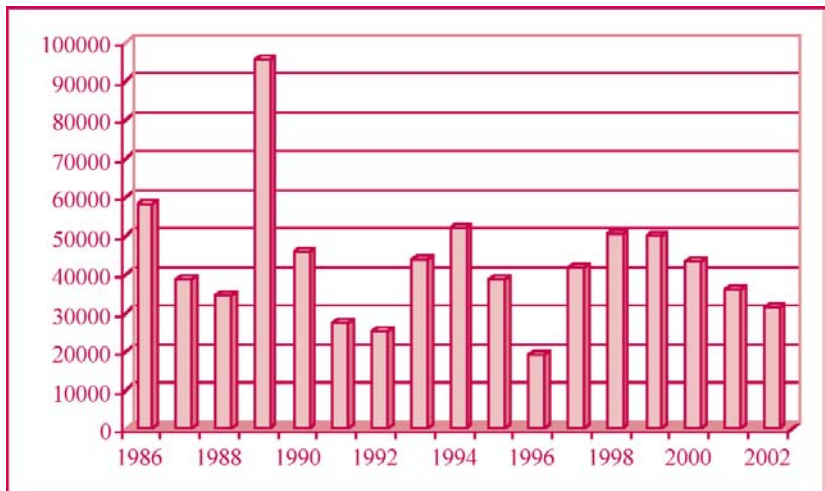
However, since the action would have only been effective if implemented on both sides of the Delaware Bay, the council's restrictions were not put into effect because the state of Delaware was unable to act quickly enough.

Meanwhile on the bay itself, a four-year cycle we had detected in the numbers of red knots indicated that this year should have been a peak year. However, last May red knots peaked on the bay at 37,000 – with another 8,000 concurrently on the Atlantic Coast. This May the peak count yielded just 32,000 on the bay, with another 800 on the coast.

This decline mirrors a dramatic decline we detected this past February at the red knots' principal wintering grounds on Tierra del Fuego, where in just two years their numbers fell 54% to just 20,775 birds.

Besides fewer birds on the Delaware Bay, the density of horseshoe crab eggs laid on the bay's shores also declined further.

Overall, the picture is alarming. The ENSP is now focusing on getting all of our data into a reviewable form so that, along with such bodies as the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council, we can work together to achieve a long-term solution -- one that preserves both the horseshoe crabs and the shorebirds that depend upon them.



Peak counts of red knots on Delaware Bay beaches. We expected the May, 2002 count to be a cyclic high point. Counts in the main wintering site in Tierra del Fuego in February showed a steep decline from 2001.

Frogs and Toads CD - No. 1 on Wildlife Charts?

The response for ENSP's *Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of NJ* and companion CD, *Calls of NJ Frogs and Toads* has reached international proportions! After the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* June 9 issue ran an amusing article on the CD, it was picked up on the Associated Press wire. Calls from CNN, NBC Today Show, National Public Radio's Weekend Edition, Radio Europe, the BBC, Discovery, WB 17, and other leading media outlets requesting interviews have been overwhelming. See www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/local/3431476.htm for the original article that generated all this interest.

The field guide and CD are \$10 each, or \$18 for both purchased together. To order, send a check to: Conserve Wildlife Foundation, PO 400, Trenton, NJ 08625-0400; Attn: Reptiles and Amphibians Field Guide/CD.

ENSP UPDATE

Late spring rains help some amphibians

The late spring rains came too late to help some early breeding amphibians, such as the state-endangered Eastern tiger salamander, in southern New Jersey. But, thanks to those rains, other species that breed in transient vernal pools later fared better, particularly in northern N.J.

"It was a bad year for vernal pools on the coastal plain," says Jason Tesauro, assistant ENSP biologist. "A lot of the ponds never recovered even with the late spring rains because they are so dependent on ground water, which takes a while to recharge." Hardest hit in the coastal plain ponds, he said, were Eastern tiger salamanders and wood frogs, another early breeder.

In northern N.J., where vernal pool amphibians begin breeding a little later, the situation was better. "It wasn't a banner year, but not a complete loss either, for wood frogs, spotted salamanders, Jefferson salamanders and state-endangered blue-spotted salamanders," says Tesauro.

American toads, spring peepers and northern gray treefrogs, which breed in late April through May, fared much better.

"They started breeding in their vernal pools when there was just enough water to support them," reports Tesauro. "Then, just when it looked like the pools would prematurely dry up and impact the young, torrential May rains filled the ponds up till they were brimming like they usually look in March."

New female peregrine at A.C. casino nest

The female peregrine falcon that died last year after taking up residency in 1985 on a ledge outside the penthouse suite of an Atlantic City casino has been replaced.

According to her leg band, the new female was hatched four years ago at a coastal nest in Virginia. Unfortunately, the four eggs she laid were infertile. "That's not unusual for a falcon's first nesting attempt," says Kathy Clark, the principal zoologist who heads the ENSP's peregrine falcon project.

With a normal incubation period of 4.5 weeks, the falcon's eggs should have hatched about April 24th on the ledge outside the 23rd floor of the Hilton hotel-casino. But several weeks later, she was still incubating. Clark removed two of the eggs for analysis, which confirmed the eggs were infertile. But Clark left the other two because she didn't want to unduly disturb the peregrine falcon's nesting attempt.

Incredibly, the female's maternal instincts are so strong she was still sitting on the remaining infertile eggs into the summer. "Her marathon incubation shows an amazing tenacity, which will serve her well in her urban home," says Clark. "Her predecessor, which raised 25 chicks over 14 years, had the same kind of perseverance."

This year's 17 nesting pairs of peregrine falcons (same as 2001) produced a good average of 1.5 chicks per nest.

Sharp Teen-agers

Second-place World Series of Birding youth team donates pledges to ENSP

A rookie team of teen-aged birdwatchers did quite well in the New Jersey Audubon 19th annual World Series of Birding (WSB) this past May – both for themselves and the Division of Fish and Wildlife's ENSP. The foursome organized by Scott Haber, 17, of Tenafly, N.J. finished second in the Level III School & Youth division by recording 169 species in a 24-hour period.



BNV Jaegers at the finish line in Cape May. From Left to Right: Scott Haber, Chris Brown, James Keener, Christian Nunes. The BNV Jaegers scanning the beach at the South Cape May Meadows. From L to R: James Keener, Chris Brown, Scott Haber

In addition, they raised pledges totaling more than \$2,000 – all of which they will donate to the ENSP.

"We're really impressed with, and grateful for, their enthusiasm, dedication and thoughtfulness," says Kathy Clark, principal ENSP zoologist. "They're the first group ever to donate their World Series pledges to the program."

"Based on the research they are doing on such species as peregrines, eagles and shorebirds and their need for funding, we felt that the ENSP would be an excellent organization for our donations," says Haber.

Sponsored by the Birdwatcher's NatureView store in Wakefield, R.I., the BNV Jaegers also included: Chris Brown, 15, of Trenton, N.J.; Christian Nunes, 17, of Peace Dale, R.I.; and James Keener, 18, of Martinez, R.I.

Meeting via an Internet listserv for teen-aged birders, they were coached by Linn Pierson, a long-time Citizen Scientist volunteer for the ENSP in northern N.J. and a WSB veteran.

Their first stop at midnight at the Kearny Marsh was disappointing. But their next stop at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge yielded quite a few night birds, including four owl species and some rails. By the time they had driven more than 500 miles to Cape May, some of their best sightings included a golden-winged warbler in the Pequannock Watershed, black rails in the Dennis Creek Wildlife Management area and a gull-billed tern at the Forsyth National Wildlife Refuge.

Though they fell just short of their goal – 175 species, which won their division – Haber says his group had an incredible experience that they plan on repeating.

"It was incredible to spend 24 hours in a car with three other birders going all over the state," he says. "The cumulative total for the World Series was 266 species. To be able to see that many species in 24 hours in a state some people have come to think of as an urban wasteland, to think that all the varied habitats we have can attract that many species, is amazing."

GOING BATTY?

Once again the ENSP will conduct guided tours to the Hibernia Mine in the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area, the state's largest known bat hibernaculum. The tours are offered on several dates from August through early October. If you are interested in making reservations, contact the ENSP's Mike Valent or Kris Schantz at 908-735-8975.

Watchable Wildlife

Citizen Scientist volunteers are needed for the following:

Palisades Interstate Park - Alpine Boat Basin

Both the Palisades north of the George Washington Bridge and the boat basin beneath the diabase cliffs offer good views of migrating fall raptors. In the winter, Barrows goldeneyes, buffleheads and canvasbacks can be seen on the Hudson River. A hiking trail that begins at the boat basin offers an easy walk, while a trail that leads down the cliffs from the State Line Lookout off the Palisades Interstate Parkway is more challenging. ENSP volunteer Linn Pierson conducts a fall hawk watch near the visitor's center located at the lookout.

Directions: Take the Palisades Interstate Parkway north from I-95. Go to the lookout, or travel 7.5 miles to Exit 2. Go east and downhill 1 mile to Henry Hudson Drive and the entrance to the boat basin on the left.

Information: Palisades Interstate Park Commission: 201-768-1360.

Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area

Straddling both sides of the Tuckahoe River, this WMA on the edge of the pinelands features six brackish impoundments brimming with wildlife. During spring and fall migrations sandpipers, plovers and yellowlegs feed on exposed mud flats. Muskrats, willets, egrets and herons are seen year-round. Bald eagles also frequent the area, and migrating waterfowl include hooded mergansers, blue and green-winged teal, northern pintails, gadwalls and American wigeons.

The Corbin City side features an 8-mile drive along the impoundments, and a handicap accessible viewing platform. On the Tuckahoe side of the river, sand foot trails lead to the impoundments and marsh.

Directions: For the Tuckahoe side, from U.S. 9 in Seaville, take N.J. 50 north 4.8 miles to County Route 631. Turn right and go 0.3 miles to the WMA entrance on left. For Corbin City, continue north on N.J. 50 for 3 miles. Turn right onto Griscom Mill Road, which turns to sand and gravel and continues for 8 miles past the impoundments.

Ownership: NJ DEP, Division of Fish and Wildlife: 609-628-2436.

Wildlife Conservation Corps Citizen Scientists Needed

Citizen Scientist volunteers are needed for the following:

Urban Wildlife Survey Project

Late summer and/or fall surveys are being conducted for the following: migratory songbirds (through Oct.); migratory shorebirds and colonial waterbirds (through Oct.) and migratory raptors (Sept.-Nov.). Herptile Atlas surveys are also being conducted through October.

These surveys are being conducted in the following counties: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, Union, Mercer and Camden.

Interested volunteers should contact the ENSP's Marie Mockers-Numata at 609-777-4136 or at Marie.Mockers-Numata@dep.state.nj.us



Wildcat Ridge Hawk Watch

From Aug. 15 through Nov. 15, a hawk watch will be conducted at the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Morris County. Coordinator Bill Gallagher needs volunteers to help staff the seven-day-a-week count. A basic knowledge of birds is required; Gallagher will train interested volunteers, who will record sightings and weather data.

Interested volunteers should contact the ENSP's Larissa Smith at 609-628-2103 or at llsmith@gtc3.com

AUGUST

First week:

- Ospreys are fledging.
- (Continuing through August) Red knots migrate through N.J. coastal areas, headed from the Canadian Arctic to South America.

Second week:

- Last of piping plover chicks fledge.

Third week:

- Passerine migration begins through Cape May peninsula.

Fourth week:

- Eagle fledglings begin moving away from nests.
- Last of least terns fledge.
- Plovers preparing to migrate south to Florida and the Gulf Coast.
- Bats begin returning to their wintering caves/mines.

SEPTEMBER

First week:

- Ospreys begin migrating to northern South America. Track the migration of 3 N.J. ospreys at <http://www.raptor.cvm.umn.edu/>, "Highway to the Tropics."
- Raptor migration begins through Cape May peninsula.

Second week:

- Monarch butterflies begin migration.
- Diamondback terrapin eggs begin hatching.

Third week:

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

Fourth week/First week Oct.

- Raptor migration peaks on Cape May peninsula.

October

First week:

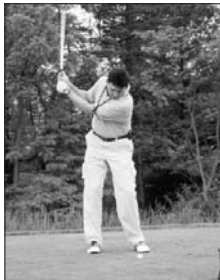
- Wood turtles return to streams for breeding and hibernation.

Fourth week:

- Snow geese begin arriving.

2002 Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ Golf Classic

On May 29, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ held its third annual golf tournament at Stanton Ridge Golf and Country Club in Hunterdon County. This annual charitable event helped raise \$62,000 in support of New Jersey's endangered and threatened wildlife protection. Our heartfelt thanks to all our sponsors, players and volunteers who helped make this event such a great success!



Clockwise: Robert Bonazzi, CWF Chair, and Linda Tesauo, CWF Executive Director, present a duck stamp print to Rich Guindon from Anheuser-Busch (center); registration for the big event; hole-in-one prize provided by Lexus; Assistant Div. of F&W Director Marty McHugh, teeing off for wildlife; Principal Zoologist Mike Valent at the putting contest with guests Rainer Mimberg and Art Muti; South Jersey Gas Co. golfers on in two – ready to par.

A special thanks to all of our sponsors, raffle and silent auction donors:

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"Brewing Solutions for a Better Environment"

For more than a century, Anheuser-Busch has been committed to protecting the environment. Through its many environmental programs, awareness campaigns, research and conservation projects, Anheuser-Busch Companies is making a difference in communities where they do business. 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 second year in a row," says Mary Alice Ramirez, Director of Environment Outreach. "Our company is committed to supporting the environment and natural resource conservation, and New Jersey is a leader in bringing back such important species as the bald eagle, osprey and other endangered wildlife to stable populations."

To learn more about Anheuser-Busch's environmental efforts, visit www.abenvironment.com.

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Conserve Wildlife Foundation News

MESSAGE FROM LINDA TESAURO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Benjamin Moore & Company Joins Corporations for Conservation of Wildlife

The Conserve Wildlife Foundation welcomes Benjamin Moore & Company as a new Bobcat member of *Corporations for Conservation of Wildlife*, a partnership with N.J. companies who want to help protect natural wildlife resources. Headquartered in Montvale, N.J., Benjamin Moore produces high quality paint products throughout the United States and Canada. Their \$3,500 grant will help our biologists continue to protect N.J.'s endangered wildlife population through conservation, education and research. PSE&G and Conectiv have also renewed their membership at the Bobcat level. We thank these companies for their generous support.

Kudos Reckitt Benckiser

Reckitt Benckiser's Earth Day Celebration, held at their headquarters in Wayne, raised \$1,000 for the Conserve Wildlife Foundation this year. Our thanks to the employees of Reckitt Benckiser and Rick Weiman, who chaired the event, for their support of N.J.'s endangered and threatened wildlife.

Welcome Pat Shapella

I am pleased to announce that Pat Shapella has joined CFW as Contributions Manager. Pat has extensive experience in fundraising, working as the Development Director for the Delaware & Raritan Greenway, a land trust in central New Jersey. Pat brings with her a wealth of ideas and understanding of environmental stewardship and hopes to grow the new CFW membership program. Call Pat at 609-292-3707 for membership details.



Pat Shapella at her first eagle banding.

Check out matching gifts

Also as a reminder, if you make a contribution to the Conserve Wildlife Foundation and work for a company, please check about a possible matching gift to your contribution. Many N.J. corporations will match employee gifts to nonprofit organizations--additional dollars to help protect N.J.'s rare wildlife.

Thank you for being our Partner in Protection.

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