Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 November – 15 December, 2020

Staff:
John Heilferty, Chief
Kathy Clark, Supervising Zoologist
Jeanette Bowers-Altman, Principal Zoologist
Christina "Kashi" Davis, Environmental Specialist II
Amanda Dey, Principal Zoologist
Gretchen Fowles, GIS Specialist
MacKenzie Hall, Environmental Specialist II
Emily Heiser, Assistant Biologist
Sharon Petzinger, Senior Zoologist
Bill Pitts, Senior Zoologist
Kris Schantz, Principal Zoologist
Robert Somes, Senior Zoologist
Brian Zarate, Senior Zoologist

Administration – J. Heilferty
As of 16 March, all ENSP staff are working from home and instituting social distancing in the course of our work to avoid contributing to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Landscape Project – J. Heilferty
No new report.

Habitat Change Analysis Project (HCAP) –S. Petzinger
No new report.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff
Staff consulted on DEP land-use project reviews as requested.

Staff virtually attended workshops to learn more about prescribed burns, wildfires, and wildlife habitat. Staff also attended a webinar regarding the use of plastics in soil erosion and sediment control products.

Staff continued to coordinate on the Departments review of various offshore wind energy projects.

Chief Heilferty participated in the NEAFWA Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee meeting.

Staff participated in the Department's Coastal Ecological Restoration and Adaptation Plan (CERAP) efforts regarding the Barnegat Bay.

S. Petzinger virtually attended the NRCS State Technical Committee meeting on Dec 2, 2020.

Staff participated in a regional NJ/DE Tidal Marsh Working Group led by the USFWS.

Staff advanced planning efforts regarding the ENSP webpage re-design.

Chief Heilferty and Gretchen Fowles coordinated with the Bureau of Lands Management regarding their use of Biotics data.

M. Hall, E. Heiser and J. Bowers-Altman attended the New York State Environmental Technical Working Group's State of the State 2020 workshop. The workshop, held virtually on November 16-20, brought together over 450 stakeholders engaged with environmental and wildlife research relevant to offshore wind energy development. Workshop sessions focused on assessing the state of the knowledge regarding offshore wind development's cumulative effects on populations and ecosystems

Biotics Database – G. Fowles
Biotics staff continue to work on developing the NJ Wildlife Tracking (online submittal application) in collaboration with the Bureau of GIS, that will work as seamlessly as possible with new customized batch upload tools for the Biotics database that staff completed earlier this year in collaboration with NatureServe. A version of NJ Wildlife Tracker continues to be used by ENSP biologists and another version is now ready for Biotics staff to enter Sighting Report Forms (SRFs) that have been submitted to ENSP, but not yet fully processed. Biotics staff have done another round of scanning the paper SRFs stored in Trenton that have come in via mail over the past few months so that they can be processed electronically through the new system. The remainder of the backend of the application continues to be developed, including additional mobile friendly forms for the public to use and for biologist review.

ENSP continues to struggle with lack of staff and computers to adequately handle the incoming data flow.

Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) – G. Fowles, B. Zarate, M. Hall
G. Fowles led a virtual Roads & Wildlife Working Group meeting on Dec 10, attended by the CHANJ team/ENSP and members of NJDOT, DLRP, and USFWS. The main topic of this meeting was the recent "Plastics in the Environment" conference with wildlife and transportation professionals from NJ and other states, which highlighted the issues and potential alternatives to using plastic and other harmful materials in soil erosion control. Our NJ group is following up with the appropriate agencies (i.e. NRCS, NJ Dept of Agriculture) to discuss possible changes to soil erosion control standards.

CHANJ team participated in a small multi-state group web meeting about a regional connectivity grant opportunity and discussed possible multi-state project ideas that can be accomplished in a one-year timeframe. The group is excited about the idea to broaden the Vermont Agency of Transportation's "Highways and Habitats Training" and deliver it across several states' transportation agencies as a way of institutionalizing habitat connectivity goals and techniques.

The CHANJ team sent an update to the volunteers helping with the Mammal Gene Flow project, asking for help collecting additional samples, reached out to wildlife rehabilitators individually to seek their continued help and make sure they had supplies, as well as recruited 4 additional trappers in central and southern NJ to help with collection during the trapping season.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff
Staff met with Lands Mgt staff at the Millville Holly Farm to discuss removal of old orchard vegetation and a restoration to native grasses and shrubland.

The boundaries at the Stand 12 site in Sparta Mountain WMA have been remarked.

Species Status Review – K. Clark
No new report.

State Wildlife Action Plan – All staff
No new report.

HERPTILES
Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz
No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz
Collection and compilation of the venomous snake response team information (time/mileage sheets, response activity and sighting report forms) began in preparation for the ENSP's federal aid report. K. Schantz began drafting the snake portion of the SWG report.

K. Schantz continued a literature review and drafting a guidance document regarding the dangers of snake entanglement and subsequent mortality from soil erosion control materials that include netting made of plastics and other synthetic materials. The ENSP has reached out to NJ DOT to discuss replacing such materials with biodegradable products and will pursue future discussions that include the NJ Soil Conservation Districts.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts
B. Zarate and B. Pitts continued to participate in monthly regional bog turtle coordination calls and B. Zarate on SSA development calls. B. Zarate participated on monthly coordination calls for spotted turtle, eastern box turtle, and wood turtle, as well, in relation to CSWG and RCN grants and New Jersey's role in each of them.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts
Surveys of breeding ponds will begin in late December.

Diamondback Terrapins - J. Bowers-Altman and B. Zarate
B. Zarate and J. Bowers-Altman reviewed several coastal projects for impacts to terrapins.

MAMMALS
Bobcat Project – G. Fowles
G. Fowles coordinated with Wildlife Control in preparation for the start of the furbearer trapping season to make sure staff responding to release trapped bobcats had the needed supplies. DFW responded to three trapped bobcats during this period.

G. Fowles collaborated with Jan Lovy and Erica Miller to submit a backlog of bobcat liver samples (N = 38) for rodenticide testing.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall
As discussed in regional conference calls this month, NJ (and most states) will not be doing bat hibernaculum surveys this winter due to COVID-19 complications and lingering concerns about possible human transmission to bats. M. Hall shared information and instructions with other

Northeast region bat biologists on watching for and collecting any "bat tick" (*Carios kelleyi*) specimens found during regular bat handling activities, once those activities resume. The species was collected and confirmed for the first time in NJ in 2019.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles
A. Menasion and G. Fowles monitored a historic woodrat site at Yards Creek with remotely triggered cameras, and sent all raccoon scats collected in 2020 (N = 41) to a collaborator at Wheaton College for raccoon roundworm egg analysis.

BIRDS
American Kestrel – B. Pitts
B. Pitts scheduled a field day to install new nest boxes with partners from Raritan Headwaters later in the month. This will bring the number of boxes in the region up to 20, and prior to COVID, there were plans in the works for another 15-20 on Somerset and Morris County Parks and NJCF parcels. If conditions allow, some of these installations could take place early in the winter of 2021.

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis
C. Davis began making plans for the 2021 aerial survey for wading birds. C. Davis remotely attended the Waterbirds Meeting.

Beach-Nesting Birds - C. Davis & E. Heiser
C. Davis and E. Heiser hosted the annual New Jersey Beach-Nesting Bird Meeting for cooperators. Productive discussions were held on the state of Piping Plovers in New Jersey and plans were made for the upcoming 2021 field season.

E. Heiser coordinated the annual American Oystercatcher wintering survey. The survey took place December 6-15. C. Davis and E. Heiser surveyed Absecon Inlet – the largest roost of wintering AMOY in the state. 350+ individuals were observed utilizing habitat in the area. An additional 12 sites were surveyed in 2020 by partners and volunteers.

Seasonal positions for the 2021 field season will be posted in late December.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark
K. Clark and L. Smith (CWF-NJ) completed the annual report of nesting and related eagle data. The count of active nests was 220 active nests and 307 fledglings documented. The report will be released when the DEP press release is issued. K. Clark and J. Heilferty provided the DEP Press Office with background, videos, and photos.

Two poisoning events occurred in the last month, with eagles recovered sick at both Cumberland and Salem county landfills. The eagles died and were sent to Dr. Nicole Lewis for necropsy and toxicology. Results showed both had euthanasia drugs in their system. The Salem County landfill has had other, recent poisonings of vultures and crows that were also attributed to euthanasia drugs. USFWS law enforcement is investigating both landfills about their practices for dealing with animal disposal.

Eagle Project volunteers are monitoring the local movements of "Duke," the Duke Farms 2019 fledgling who carries a satellite tag. Duke spent most of 2019-2020 in upper Chesapeake Bay, but in November 2020 returned to central Jersey. He has been spotted a few times and continues to reside

along the Millstone River and adjacent farms and woodlands. His data can be viewed here: http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/protecting/eagle-trax/

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark
The annual report was completed for the federal aid report and a summary was distributed to project volunteers and cooperators. The summary will also be posted on the DFW website.
K. Clark is compiling data on nests, nest success, and band encounters for a USFWS-led status assessment of peregrine falcons nationwide. We are responding as one of six pilot states in this early assessment period.

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark
K. Clark and B. Wurst (CWF-NJ) will complete a year-end report in the next few weeks. B. Wurst and volunteers recorded 647 occupied nests, with 83% on the Atlantic coast, and the remainder along Delaware Bay and inland in the Delaware River basin. Nest success was documented at 511 active nests that produced 821 young. Licensed banders checked nests and banded 203 nestlings; B. Wurst submitted the band records to USGS Bird Banding Lab. Productivity was reduced in many colonies, including Delaware Bay. Statewide, productivity averaged 1.61 young per active (known-outcome) nest, which is above the minimum necessary to sustain a population.

Other Raptors – K. Clark
K. Clark is working with local partners to provide nest structures for barn owls along the Atlantic coast. The presence of nesting barn owls in 2020 suggests that they will occupy suitable sites.

Migratory Shorebirds – A. Dey

Scrub-shrub/Open Field birds (GWWA) – S. Petzinger
S. Petzinger participated in a NRCS field tour of WLFW properties on November 19, 2020.

Secretive Marsh Birds– C. Davis & E. Heiser
C. Davis began making plans for 2021 Black Rail field season. E. Heiser reached out to University and NWR contacts to coordinate future potential Saltmarsh Sparrow work.

Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship (MAPS) – S. Petzinger
Nothing to report.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger
S. Petzinger virtually attended a NJ-specific AMJV meeting on November 23, 2020.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS
Freshwater Mussels/Shortnose Sturgeon/Aquatics – J. Bowers-Altman
J. Bowers-Altman reviewed and commented on a proposed instream project relative to freshwater mussel impacts.

J. Bowers-Altman participated in the monthly Brook Floater Working Group meeting.

Pollinator Conservation – R. Somes
R. Somes attended the New Jersey Corporate Stewardship Council annual meeting which focused on pollinator conservation on corporate and private lands.

Lepidoptera- R. Somes
R. Somes attended several meetings related to Appalachian Grizzled Skipper Conservation. New Jersey will be part of a multi-state effort to assess the current status of this species range wide.

Odonata- R. Somes
No new report

Coleoptera – R. Somes
No new report