

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 January – 15 February, 2021

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 2020, all ENSP staff are working from home and instituting social distancing in the course of our work to minimize 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

Chief Heilferty participated in the annual Wildlife Diversity Program Managers meeting January 26 through 28, held virtually this year due to the pandemic.

Staff consulted on DEP land-use project reviews as requested.

ENSP staff partnered with the NJDOT to address the need to reduce the use of soil erosion control products that incorporate netting made with plastics and other synthetic materials in an effort to reduce plastic fragments and microplastics in the environment and to reduce wildlife entanglement, particularly that of snakes who are most susceptible. ENSP and NJDOT held a virtual meeting to discuss steps forward and discovered the NJDOT *may* participate in the Soil Erosion Control Standards subcommittee 2021 meeting to review NJ’s standards. In preparation for that meeting, K. Schantz and Nori Shepperd (NJDOT) drafted an email requesting information from other states’ DOTs and DNRs working to shift to 100% biodegradable material.

M. Hall, E. Heiser, and J. Bowers-Altman reviewed and commented (bats, birds, marine mammals/sea turtles) on offshore wind pre-federal consistency documents.

C. Davis helped lead a webinar on the next steps for the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative camera guidance for predation management project. She began work on the next meeting, which will take place in early March at the Shorebird Committee of the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section meeting, which she chairs.

ENSP staff coordinated on the reviewed of a Div. of Land Resource Protection application proposing to release hatchery-reared freshwater mussels in State waters.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

Biotics staff continue to work on developing the NJ Wildlife Tracker 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. 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 of submitted records.

G. Fowles worked with K. Clark to finalize the list of proposed species listing changes, updating common and scientific names as needed to match the NatureServe standard. G. Fowles and A. Mitchell worked with ENSP biologists to guide getting priority data ready for Biotics entry and set a deadline of end of February for all data to be ready and submitted. Per biologists, priority data is available for <20% of species. The plan is to generate SOAs only for those species with new records added to Biotics by early March as resources allow, otherwise the last version of the SOA is being used for generating an updated version of the Landscape Project mapping that will represent the proposed species listing changes.

ENSP continues to struggle with lack of staff and computers to adequately handle the incoming data flow, particularly as they convert to an all-electronic system.

Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) – G. Fowles, B. Zarate, M. Hall

G. Fowles led and the CHANJ team participated in a bi-monthly Roads and Wildlife Working Group meeting on Feb. 11, with approx. 20 colleagues from the Div. of Land Resource Protection and NJDOT. The group continued discussions about reducing plastics and wildlife-hazardous materials in erosion control, reviewed potential road mitigation projects, and looked at the Roads and Wildlife Mitigation Database being developed internally.

Along with DEP Construction Management and Treasury personnel, M. Hall participated in a virtual kickoff meeting with the engineering consultant hired to produce final designs for a planned amphibian road-crossing system in Sussex Co. Construction of this project is being funded by Federal Highway Administration/ NJDOT Transportation Alternatives Program.

G. Fowles and B. Zarate participated in the inaugural call of the AFWA Transportation & Wildlife Community of Practice in early February. G. Fowles gave a presentation on the CHANJ project to the group.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

A contract was signed to conduct habitat work this winter in Stand 12 on Sparta Mountain WMA and was set to begin on Feb 12, 2021. However, due to the amount of snow on site the start date has been delayed.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

Staff consolidated the status review results into a format for making recommendations for listing changes. Staff met to plan out next steps.

State Wildlife Action Plan – All staff

No new report.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

K. Schantz continued to work with research partners to develop and submit necessary LMRs and permits for the 2021 field season rare pinelands' snake studies.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

No new report.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

Staff coordinated with researchers and volunteers to survey breeding ponds.

Diamondback Terrapins - J. Bowers-Altman and B. Zarate

B. Zarate and J. Bowers-Altman gave an overview of ENSP efforts relating to terrapin conservation during the annual NJ terrapin meeting.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

DFW responded to 3 trapped bobcats during this period. There were also 2 roadkilled bobcats reported, from which samples were taken and necropsies performed. Rodenticide testing of bobcats livers collected between 2018 and 2020 was completed by the PA Diagnostic Laboratory System during the reporting period. G. Fowles had a web meeting with researchers at Black Rock Forest, NY regarding bobcats and habitat connectivity and their interest in evaluating the effects of roads on bobcat movement in their study area.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

Staff corresponded with collaborators at USFWS, Rutgers University, NJDOH, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, Mercer Co. Wildlife Center, and nuisance wildlife control companies about various bat monitoring and research projects for the coming season. M. Hall provided guidance to four homeowners about bats in buildings issues. Field tech E. Gilardi continued vetting our large volume of acoustic data from summer 2020 projects for the North American Bat Monitoring Program.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

Staff are seeking permission to continue to survey historic Allegheny woodrat sites in northern New Jersey using a standardized baited trail camera survey that has been used across the region. The efforts have been slowed by COVID restrictions and deep snow. The distribution of anthelmintic baits in the vicinity of active woodrat sites in the Palisades continues every 6-8 weeks to treat local raccoons for roundworm, in an effort to prevent *B. procyonis* infection in the Allegheny woodrat population because it has been shown to be a serious mortality factor. A new order for the

anthelmintic baits is being coordinated with PA and IN for the first time, as a result of our newly formed regional woodrat working group.

BIRDS

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

No new report.

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis worked on survey plans for 2021, including an aerial survey of the marsh islands of the Atlantic Coast. She participated in meetings regarding the habitat enhancement projects in the marshes west of Stone Harbor. She began working with other DEP staff on a wetland grant to study the potential benefit of dredged materials on long-legged wading bird habitat.

Beach-Nesting Birds - C. Davis & E. Heiser

C. Davis & E. Heiser worked on hiring for the 2021 field season. Migration surveys will begin in March and site fencing is scheduled to begin when field staff returns in April.

C. Davis & E. Heiser attended the virtual American Oystercatcher Working Group meeting. The Barnegat Light Habitat Restoration Project was highlighted and efforts/plans to restore habitat at Seaview Harbor Marina were shared.

C. Davis attended several site walk-throughs of the Cape May Meadows project where sand was removed from the site and put on the City's front beach. The Meadows project has taken the habitat back to original modifications from the early-2000's. The project is anticipated to finish before March 1 and will hopefully attract beach-nesting birds once again.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark

The 2021 nesting season is underway and volunteer nest monitors are checking nests weekly. Peak onset of incubation usually occurs in mid-February.

K. Clark completed the update of the eagle nest database that will update Biotics records.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

No new report.

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark

B. Wurst of Conserve Wildlife Foundation, with K. Clark, prepared the 2020 Osprey Project report and sent to project cooperators.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

Staff and partners installed one of the first coastal nest boxes for Barn Owls in Wildwood. Partners are planning additional nest box sites in the coastal zone.

Migratory Shorebirds – A. Dey

A. Dey attended a virtual 3-day workshop held by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission: Horseshoe Crab Adaptive Resource Management Modeling Workshop II. The workshop addressed proposed revision of an Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Model used to set horseshoe crab bait harvest quotas constrained by red knot.

Scrub-shrub/Open Field birds (GWWA) – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger met virtually with NJA staff to discuss monitoring plans for this spring.

Secretive Marsh Birds– C. Davis & E. Heiser

C. Davis finalized seasonal staffing plans for the 2021 field season for Black Rail. She began making plans for surveys and met with USFWS NWR staff to ensure coordination of survey points. She participated in regional meetings regarding potential projects across the range.

Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship (MAPS) – S. Petzinger

No new report.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

The first Bird of the Month Facebook post on the DFW Facebook page was drafted and set to be posted Feb 16. Feature bird: Dark-eyed Junco.

S. Petzinger attended two AMJV virtual meetings to discuss forestry in NJ and monitoring across the region.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Freshwater Mussels/Shortnose Sturgeon/Aquatics – J. Bowers-Altman

J. Bowers-Altman provided comments to Division of Land Resource Protection on several proposed instream projects regarding impacts to listed freshwater mussels; attended three associated virtual meetings. Also provided comments to K. Davis (Envl. Review) on potential impacts of a NOAA project on marine mammals.

As requested, J. Bowers-Altman provided additional information to the Brook Floater Working Group regarding NJ project needs for possible inclusion in an upcoming Comp SWG proposal.

J. Bowers-Altman attended a virtual meeting of the Columbia Lake dam removal monitoring group and provided updates on 2020 ENSP-contracted mussel/habitat surveys above and below former dam site.

J. Bowers-Altman met with C. Reeves, Water Quality Program Coordinator of the Musconetcong River Watershed Association to discuss preparations for the second meeting of the Northern NJ Freshwater Mussel Working Group. The group will be meeting online in April 2021.

Pollinator Conservation – R. Somes

No new report.

Lepidoptera- R. Somes

No new report.

Odonata- R. Somes

No new report.

Coleoptera – R. Somes

No new report.