

BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

MONTHLY REPORT

February 2021

Carole Stanko, Chief

NEW JERSEY WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT GRANT NO. W-68-R

STUDY PLAN I. WHITE-TAILED DEER

Jodi Powers, Senior Wildlife Biologist (Northern Region)

Joe Leskie, Senior Wildlife Biologist (Southern Region)

Annual Deer Harvest (Job I-A)

J. Leskie and J. Powers returned inquiries from hunters who experienced errors or needed assistance with their deer harvest reporting during the last remaining deer seasons. The 2020-21 deer season concludes on February 20, 2021. The majority of the reporting issues were from hunters using the wrong harvest tags as well as not having purchased the appropriate tags.

Hunting and Trapping Digest

J. Leskie and J. Powers spent a considerable amount of time re-designing, editing, and updating deer information layout and content for the 2021-22 NJ Hunting & Trapping Digest deer sections.

Special Areas

Project biologists contacted special areas about 2021-22 Hunting & Trapping Digest submissions.

Extension Activities

J. Leskie prepared and delivered monthly highlights for the February Division of Fish and Wildlife Report to members of the Atlantic County Federation of Sportsman's Clubs.

J. Powers has received several calls from concerned visitors to Sandy Hook National Recreation Area. There is an overabundance of deer on that property. A follow up call has been made to the staff at Sandy Hook.

Other Activities

J. Leskie collected an additional 104 deer samples and recorded ages and location data to be entered into the final 2020-21 deer harvest database.

J. Powers and seasonal technician, J. Gyurcsak collected additional deer heads for aging and recorded ages and location data to be entered into the final 2020-21 deer harvest database.

J. Leskie extracted retropharyngeal lymph nodes from 5 deer in Cape May County. The samples were forwarded to the lab for testing as part of the Division's CWD surveillance program.

Project biologists continued updating the farmer depredation database from 2020 and forwarded mortality reports to the appropriate Regional Law Enforcement office.

J. Leskie and J. Powers attended a meeting to discuss specifics regarding details of a new Regulation Set Permit.

STUDY PLAN III. UPLAND WILDLIFE AND FURBEARERS

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist
Andrew W Burnett, Principal Biologist
James Sloan, Senior Biologist
Joseph R. Garris, Wildlife Technician I
Keith Santini, Seasonal Technician

Objective 1 – Conduct annual or periodic monitoring programs of the upland game and furbearer resource, their users, and the habitats on which they depend.

Hunter and Trapper Harvests

During the current segment, deer hunters reported harvesting 14 coyotes; trappers reported harvesting 63 coyotes and 4 gray fox; and, Special Permit holders reported harvesting 19 coyotes and 2 gray fox. Reported harvest total to date is 224 coyotes and 20 gray fox.

Garris generated a trapper database for the annual Trapper Harvest Survey containing 1,184 licensed trappers (1,109 adults and 74 total youths, including those previously licensed). There were 1,210 license trappers in CY2019. Mailing labels, survey instrument, and cover letter were prepared. Postage stamps for survey returns were ordered.

Beaver and River Otter

Staff continued conducting statewide beaver/otter field inventories.

A few dozen beaver and several river otters were registered during the segment. Garris sent an email on February 1 to all permit holders reminding them of the February 20 pelt registration requirement.

Wild Turkey

Sloan reviewed the AHRS for turkey with B. Stoff on January 29.

Sighting Reports

Reports received during the segment included: 2 bobcat (Essex and Morris counties); ruffed grouse in Ocean County; and nutria in Passaic County. The latter was determined to be muskrat based on photographic evidence provided. Bobcat reports were forwarded to G. Fowles (ENSP). Project files were updated.

Objective 2 – To participate in business meetings and monitoring programs of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC), Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC), Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC), and Short-leaf Pine Initiative (SPI).

Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC)

Sloan participated in the Eastern Grouse Working Group Strike Force meetings during January 19-26. The Strike Force presented desired future conditions and fundamental objectives for the Regional Ruffed Grouse

Recovery Plan to the larger Working Group on January 22, which was then required to complete an online survey. These survey results were then summarized and discussed by Strike Force team members on January 26.

Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC)

Burnett received 3 science brief papers developed by AFWA's Furbearer Working Group. These briefs focused on topics that often arise when trapping is discussed, specifically: Animal Selectivity, Animal Welfare, and Sustainable Use of Wildlife (available online at <https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/furbearer-management>).

Objective 5 – To disseminate accurate and appropriate information on upland game and furbearer programs to sportsmen, public, state and local agencies, and other organizations.

The majority of the reporting segment was dedicated to revising hunting and trapping information for the 2021 Digest. Project staff participated in virtual meetings on January 15 and February 16. Proposed changes were provided to Chief Stanko.

Burnett provided 2020 license sales figures to Jared Wiklund (Public Relations Manager, Pheasants Forever) as requested last December. As with most other states that previously responded, hunting license sales increased in 2020 compared to 2019 due to increased recreational time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Garris provided input and identified various species of wildlife and scat from pictures/videos/audio and conversations with constituents.

Other Activities

The project's coyote database contains 12,777 records of mortalities, sightings, and other incidents from a minimum 470 municipalities in all 21 counties.

WATERFOWL - STUDY PLAN IV

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist

Lisa Clark, Assistant Biologist

Objective 2 – Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint Ventures

Program biologists prepared for the 2021 Winter Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section (AFCTS) meeting which will be held virtually. As past AFCTS Chair, Ted Nichols worked with the incoming Chair and virtual host coordinator (SCDNR) to develop the meeting agenda and participated in 2 Executive Committee meetings. Staff participated in several committee meetings held ahead of the main meeting.

Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies

American Black Duck Research

Program staff collaborated with 7 other Atlantic Flyway states, the USFWS, and Mitch Weegman (University of Missouri; lead investigator) on a study funded by the Black Duck Joint Venture entitled: *Quantifying the influence of environmental conditions and American black duck behavior and movements throughout the full annual cycle on subsequent productivity using state-of-the-art tracking devices.* This

study will use backpack transmitters on black ducks captured on the wintering grounds for 3-4 years beginning in February 2021. 2021 was a pilot year with 50 black ducks marked across the flyway from Maine to Virginia. Objectives of the study are to:

1. Quantify black duck movements and wetland use during the breeding season.
2. Develop a baseline data set to classify accelerometer (ACC) data from wild birds and develop detailed time activity budgets of black duck behavior throughout the annual cycle.
3. Quantify recruitment metrics such as reproductive attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing in black ducks by using daily displacement from GPS data and proportion of stationary behavior from ACC data.
4. Assess the extent to which migration characteristics (e.g., number and duration of stops), proportion of time feeding, energy expenditure and habitat used during wintering, staging and the reproductive period explain variation in reproductive output in black ducks.
5. Examine the extent to which precipitation and temperature explain variation in behavior and energy expenditure during wintering, staging and breeding periods.

From 10-17 February, staff trapped and instrumented 9 female (6-ASY; 3-SY) black ducks at 3 locations in Atlantic, Ocean and Monmouth Counties with GSM-GPS transmitters.

T. Nichols worked with Matt Hencheck (I&E) and developed a short video for the Division's Facebook page explaining the study.

Atlantic Brant Ecology Study and Atlantic Brant Migration and Breeding Ecology Study (2BRANTXX)

Program staff completed the 2021 trapping and marking phase in collaboration with New York DEC, Canadian Wildlife Service, and University of Missouri on 2 interrelated studies. Objectives are:

- 1) Determine if the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey is representative of the wintering population
- 2) Determine fidelity of brant to wintering and breeding areas
- 3) Determine breeding propensity and variables related to age and body condition to breeding success
- 4) Determine key spring and fall migration staging areas
- 5) Compare breeding propensity estimates from geolocators with recruitment estimates from color-banded birds associating with young to develop a more complete measure of annual productivity.

From 28 January – 2 Feb, 284 Atlantic brant were captured and fitted with various markers at 6 locations from Stone Harbor to Navesink River. The distribution of marked birds along the coast was similar to that observed during the Mid-Winter Survey. Twenty-five adult (ASY) males and 5 ASY females were outfitted with Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) backpack transmitter units which communicate through cellular networks. Five of the transmitters were one-year old units reused from birds harvested or found dead during the previous year. Eight brant (1 female; 7 males) were outfitted with GSM units and geolocators mounted on uniquely-numbered tarsal bands while all remaining (n=22) GSM-marked birds also wore a uniquely-coded, red tarsal band combination on each leg. 254 (98 ASY-F; 65 ASY-M; 58 juvenile [SY] females; 33 SY-M) birds were outfitted with a uniquely-coded, red tarsal band combination on each leg. Juveniles comprised 32% of birds captured. Birds were captured with rocket nets or a CODA net-launcher using decoys and an electronic calling device to lure birds to capture nets.

Twenty-two previously marked brant were recaptured. Three of the recaptured brant were marked with GSM units (NRWW, 8YWW, and H99). NRWW carried a nonfunctioning unit and had been seen several times since returning in the fall of 2020; upon capture, it was evident that the GSM unit was struck with a

shotgun pellet, rendering the device inoperable. NRW was refitted with another GSM unit and released. 8YWW experienced a partial harness failure in January 2021 compromising the recharge of the solar GSM unit. Upon capture we fit 8YWW with a new harness. Two recaptured birds carried geolocators and were marked on Southampton Island.

All banding and recapture data were entered into computer files and sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory for processing.

Staff continued to collect geolocators and transmitters from brant shot by hunters. Data from geolocators was downloaded and devices with suitable remaining life were redeployed. To date, collaborators received 28 geolocators shot during the 2020 hunting season. Approximately 60 geolocators obtained from the 2018 and 2019 hunting seasons, live-recaptures, and birds found dead, are being analyzed by the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Atlantic Brant Integrated Population Model

T. Nichols coordinated with Tony Roberts (USFWS), Josh Dooley (USFWS), Beth Ross (Clemson University), Jim Leafloor (CWS), and Kevin DuFour (CWS), on a manuscript entitled “*An Integrated Population Model to Inform Harvest Management of Atlantic Brant*”. Tony Roberts is lead author; Roberts first job out of college in 2006 was to work as a seasonal technician for the Migratory Gamebird Program. He since obtained MS and PhD degrees in wildlife management and works as a biologist for the USFWS. The manuscript was accepted for publication in the Journal of Wildlife Management.

Other

A new table outlining migratory bird regulations and permit requirements was developed for the Hunting Issue of the Digest.

WILDLIFE SERVICES SECTION

Anthony McBride, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

Mike Madonia, Principal Wildlife Biologist

Joe Burke, Wildlife Technician I

Amy DeCheser, Wildlife Technician I

Emilia Topp, Wildlife Technician II

Michael Patrick, Wildlife Technician II

Peter Stark, Wildlife Worker

Bear Control: Lethal and Non-Lethal

The black bear unit received a total of 1 bear call from January 20, 2021 to February 21, 2021; this compares with 10 calls from the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 0 Category II calls, and 1 Category III call for the time period January 20, 2021 to February 21, 2021; this compares to 0 Category I calls, 4 Category II calls and 6 Category III calls for the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received a total of 12 bear calls from January 1, 2021 to February 21, 2021; this compares with 14 calls from the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 1 Category II calls, and 11 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2021 to February 21, 2021; this compares to 0 Category I calls, 5 Category II calls and 9 Category III calls for the same time period in 2020.

As of February 21, 2021, the total number of calls received by the Division decreased 14.2 percent from the same time period in 2020. Category I incidents had a 0 percent difference in change while Category II calls decreased 80.0 percent and Category III calls had increased 22.2 percent from 2020. This data does not include calls made to local police departments.

Research

Project personnel continue to edit and input research data into the bear database.

Damage/Nuisance Control

Project personnel continue to provide technical advice for damage complaint incidents and will set traps for Category 1 behavior.

Cooperative Research

Project personnel continue to work on cooperative research projects with East Stroudsburg and Stockton University.

White-tailed Deer Calls and Complaints

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services staff immobilized a deer with wire wrapped around its chest in Wayne, Passaic County. The wire was removed and the deer was released at the capture site.

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services staff immobilized a deer with a plastic jar stuck on its head in Washington Twp., Bergen County. The jar was removed and the deer was released at the capture site.

Other Activities

Unit employees continued matching beaver complaint sites with 2020-21 beaver trapping season permit holders. In addition, 4 special site-specific permits were issued during the current reporting period.

Wildlife Nuisance Complaints/ Technical Guidance (Federal Aid Project)

BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SPECIES

Bat	2	Goose	3
Bear	1	Gull	1
Beaver	8	Muskrat	1
Bird	1	Opossum	1
Bobcat	2	Raccoon	6
Coyote	11	Skunk	2
Deer	42	Squirrel	2
Eagle	1	Swan	1
Fox	20	Turkey	4

108 calls for the Federal Aid Project.

Total calls: 109 (*black bear calls are not included in this project)

Wild Turkey Research Project (Federal Aid Project W-68-R-16)

J. Sloan and A. McBride worked on edits and new tables for the 2021 Hunting Digest.

A. McBride and J. Sloan reviewed turkey permit lottery information for B. Stoff.