

BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

MONTHLY REPORT

March 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 spent a considerable amount of time finalizing the 2020-21 deer harvest database. All database errors were corrected. The finalized database was forwarded to C Stanko.

J. Leskie and J. Powers completed the final updates to the 2020-21 deer harvest tables, charts, and graphs for the 2020-21 deer season and forwarded them to C. Stanko.

Hunting and Trapping Digest

J. Leskie and J. Powers continued edits and reviews to deer information layout and content for the 2021-22 NJ Hunting & Trapping Digest.

Special Areas

J. Leskie met with the Edwin B. Forsythe Refuge Manager to discuss changes to their deer hunting program. Deer hunting quotas for the property were also discussed as well as information for the 2021-22 NJ Hunting and Trapping Digest.

Extension Activities

J. Leskie participated in a virtual meeting to discuss planning and logistics for the upcoming Outdoor Women of New Jersey's Turkey Hunt Workshop, which will be held in May.

Other Activities

J. Leskie assisted the turkey project with a trap and transfer effort in Camden County. A total of 15 turkeys were captured, biological data was collected, and the turkeys were released into suitable habitat.

J. Powers started conducting deer spotlight counts to determine population density estimates for Hopewell Twp., Mercer County.

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 1 coyote, trappers reported harvesting 49 coyotes and 6 gray fox, and Special Permit holders reported harvesting 15 coyotes and 5 gray fox. Reported harvest total to date is 289 coyotes and 31 gray fox.

Trapper Harvest Survey instruments and cover letters were prepared and mailed out to all licensed trappers on March 12.

Beaver and River Otter

Division staff operated the 6 mandatory beaver and otter check stations on February 20 and several trappers that missed the check-in had their catch processed. Preliminary harvest figures for beaver and river otter total 604 and 44, respectively. All information from harvest forms were entered into the project database.

All river otter carcasses collected were grossly examined (sexed, weighed, and measured). Reproductive analysis of females is ongoing. Tooth samples were sent to Matson's Laboratory for cementum annuli aging.

Northern Bobwhite

Sloan met with BLM staff to discuss spring 2021 habitat work on Dix WMA. Comparisons were made between BLM core habitat areas and BWM bobwhite management acreages. A high percentage of work will focus on full field reclamation to increase early successional old field habitat.

Ruffed Grouse

An original grouse drumming survey in the Highlands portion of Sussex County with an excessive volume of traffic will be dropped from this year's upcoming survey effort. Garris investigated a new grouse drumming survey route in Passaic County that runs parallel to the original route.

Wild Turkey

Sloan and other BWM staff conducted a turkey trap and relocation project in Sicklerville and relocated 15 birds.

Sighting Reports

Reports received during the segment included: 1 river otter that washed up on the Delaware Bay shore in Lower Twp., Cape May County. 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).

National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC)

Sloan participated in the NBCI Business Plan Training remote meeting on February 18. The new business plan creates a staggered level approach dependent on financial commitment (membership only, membership + Coordinated Implementation Program (CIP) and membership + CIP + additional services). The NBCI Management Board will vote on the new business plan at their March 17 meeting.

Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC)

Sloan participated in the Eastern Grouse Working Group Strike Force meeting on February 17. The meeting was the final group discussion on additional edits to the regional aspirations of the core planning team. Final edits were submitted to the full EGWG on February 18.

Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC)

The USFWS Division of Scientific Authority made a positive CITES non-detriment finding (NDF) for the exportation of bobcat taken in the contiguous 48 US states on February 2. The NDF will be in effect through the 2025-2026 seasons. Currently, 41 states and 32 tribes have approved multi-year CITES export programs for bobcat. The available information suggests that the species is thriving and well-managed.

Objective 4 – To provide technical guidance to landowners interested in providing wildlife habitat on their lands.

Sloan visited Landis Sewerage Authority on March 11 to discuss upcoming habitat management work, including their NRCS contract. Discussions included chemical treatment to fulfill the brush management portion of the NRCS contract and the possibility of outreach events later in the year.

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

Burnett attended the NJSFSC Trapping Committee meeting in Stockton on February 21. Discussions included problems with coyote/gray fox harvest reporting, problems with an Animal Control Officer improperly removing legally captured furbearers, beaver damage permit issuance (both in-season and out of season), and helping game bird hunters on WMA after January 1.

Burnett participated in the NJSFSC Upland Game Committee remote meeting on March 3. Discussions included modifying game bird stocking, perceived lack of early successional habitat on WMAs, allowing night predator hunting on stocked WMAs, and getting better access for trappers on WMAs. Burnett also gave a Power Point presentation on *Trapping in New Jersey*.

Burnett and Sloan participated in the Digest Stakeholder remote meetings on February 25 and March 4. Project submissions for the 2021 Hunting & Trapping Digest were revised based on feedback from the two meeting and returned to Chief Stanko and AD Barno on March 8.

Burnett participated in the Gloucester County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs remote meeting on March 9 and gave the *Trapping in New Jersey* Power Point presentation as requested by the Gloucester County president.

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

Other Activities

Sloan met with Toms River property owners on March 3 and 15 to discuss turkey problems on their properties.

Burnett and Sloan attended the Appalachian Landscapes Project Fund (ALPF) remote meeting on March 8. The ALPF is administered by Open Space Initiative.org, a group primarily concerned with landscape ecological resilience and carbon storage/sequestration in relation to climate change through permanent land preservation but is not particularly interested in wildlife species sustainability. Preservation of mature forest stands would preclude forest management activities that benefit the suite of wildlife species dependent on young forest, which makes OSI an unsuitable partner from the Project's viewpoint.

The project's coyote database contains over 12,800 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 1 – Migratory game bird monitoring programs

Postseason Mallard Banding

During the winter of 2021, New Jersey participated in a postseason (1 January – 20 March) banding program with other Atlantic Flyway states for mallards. Annual preseason banding (1 July – September 30) for all age and sex cohorts (adult-female, adult-male, juvenile-female, juvenile-male) provides harvest and survival estimates that are used in management and regulatory decisions. However, the preseason sample of adult female mallards has declined over time subsequently reducing precision in annual survival estimates. Preliminary results from the postseason black duck banding analysis indicate that implementation of a two-season (i.e. preseason and postseason) banding program reduces variance in survival estimates. Atlantic Flyway states agreed to explore postseason banding for the next several years and set state-specific quotas to band 3,000 mallards during winter.

In 2021, 119 mallards were banded between 11 February and 17 March. Of those banded, 38 were female (14 juvenile, 23 adult, 1 undetermined) and 81 were male (26 juvenile, 53 adult, 2 undetermined). In addition, 60 black ducks and 3 mallard-black duck hybrids were also captured and banded during the postseason period. Black ducks were mostly captured incidental to the Black Duck Joint Venture telemetry study. A total of 25 (16 mallards, 8 black ducks, and 1 hybrid) previously banded ducks were also recaptured.

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

Objective 2 – Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint Ventures

Program biologists participated in the winter meeting of the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section (AFCTS). The meeting was held virtually and hosted by South Carolina DNR.

On behalf of the AFCTS, T. Nichols sent a request to *Ducks Unlimited* to do a feature article or blog on biological concerning extending duck seasons later into the winter than allowed by the current Federal frameworks. Nichols provided a suggested outline and framed the issue.

On behalf of the AFCTS, T. Nichols prepared a conceptual research proposal for *Delta Waterfowl* about biological concerns of late and early season framework duck hunting.

T. Nichols participated in a virtual meeting of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Black Duck Working Group. The Working Group is drafting the Black Duck Habitat Management Plan.

T. Nichols was nominated by the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture NAWCA Committee and agreed to serve on the committee to review and rank NAWCA proposals.

Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies

Breeding waterfowl 2-platform survey

Traditionally, salt marsh plots are done by boat/ground and are logistically difficult to complete since they can only be accessed and surveyed during the high tide cycle. In addition, an individual salt marsh plot done by ground takes 55 minutes to complete not counting travel time by boat and/or vehicle between plots. Helicopter surveys are time efficient in that a survey plot can be done in about 5 minutes; however, aircraft rental costs are expensive. Program biologists designed and conducted a paired helicopter/ground experimental survey design accounting for observer, time of day, tide, and other variables during 2018 and 2019. A manuscript entitled, “*Comparison of Ground and Helicopter Surveys for Breeding Waterfowl in New Jersey*” was submitted to The Wildlife Society Bulletin in May 2020, and after 2 revisions, was accepted for publication in March 2021. An abstract of the findings were:

ABSTRACT New Jersey has participated in the Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Survey by conducting ground surveys in the salt marsh strata, which are important for breeding waterfowl, particularly American black ducks (*Anas rubripes*). Ground surveys in salt marshes are time-intensive, tide dependent, costly, and take several days to complete. We investigated the use of helicopters to survey and compare the results of mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), black duck, and Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) estimates to ground surveys. Expected mean point estimates for all species were consistently higher during ground than helicopter surveys. Expected mean point estimates were higher during both ground and helicopter surveys at twilight than at midday for Canada geese and black ducks, while mallard observations were higher during midday than twilight for both survey methods. We found no differences in results from helicopter surveys conducted at high versus low tide. Although helicopter contracts are expensive, ground surveys took 8.5 times more staff time to complete, resulting in similar cost to complete the survey between survey platforms. Helicopter surveys provide an alternative for ground surveys in salt marshes of the Atlantic Flyway and we provide recommendations to develop visibility correction factors for different species groupings to account for visibility bias associated with helicopter surveys.

Population dynamics of Atlantic brant

Program seasonal technicians continued to run barrier island routes once per 10-day interval to observe and record auxiliary marked brant for this study. Observations were forwarded to University of Missouri graduate student Fran DiDonato for analysis.

T. Nichols participated in a planning virtual meeting with 9 cooperators from the US and Canada on an Arctic Goose Joint Venture funded study entitled: *Ascribing the importance of Atlantic brant breeding, staging and wintering areas for holistic conservation planning*. Mitch Weegman (University of Missouri) is

principal investigator. A PhD student will be brought on board during fall 2021 to collect and analyze study data.

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

Program staff made 2 attempts to capture a brant that had been observed with a broken radio transmitter harness. The specimen was observed using a ballfield in Harvey Cedars and although he was observed on the field during one of the attempts, he was too far from nets to attempt capture. However, several other brant were captured and a transmitter leftover from New York DEC was deployed at Harvey Cedars.

Objective 5 – Outreach

T. Nichols delivered a presentation on migratory bird status and issues at the March meeting of the Fish and Game Council.

T. Nichols provided a brief interview with Joe Albanese of *Ducks Unlimited* for a blog concerning late winter and spring movements of light geese through New Jersey during the Conservation Order.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee

T. Nichols coordinated with the Committee chair and cancelled the in-person meeting that was scheduled for mid-March. A replacement date has not yet been set.

2021-22 Migratory Bird Season Regulations

Program biologists met via GoToMeeting with the Migratory Bird Season Selection Committee to select 2021-22 migratory bird hunting seasons to develop a recommendation for the Fish and Game Council. The Committee is comprised of sportsmen's representatives from NJ Ducks Unlimited, NJ Waterfowlers Association, and the NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.

Program biologists updated migratory bird regulations and season dates for the 2021 Hunting 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 4 bear calls from February 20, 2021 to March 21, 2021; this compares with 26 calls from the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 2 Category II calls and 2 Category III calls for the time period February 20, 2021 to March 21, 2021; this compares to 2 Category I calls, 16 Category II calls and 8 Category III calls for the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received a total of 18 bear calls from January 1, 2021 to March 21, 2021; this compares with 39 calls from the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 3 Category II calls, and 15 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2021 to March 21, 2021; this compares to 2 Category I calls, 20 Category II calls and 17 Category III calls for the same time period in 2020.

As of March 21, 2021, the total number of calls received by the Division decreased 53.8 percent from the same time period in 2020. Category I incidents decreased by 100 percent, Category II calls decreased 85.0 percent and Category III calls decreased 11.7 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 a metal cap on a front leg in New Milford, Bergen County. The cap was removed and the deer was released at the capture site.

Other Activities

Unit employees trapped 15 turkeys at a nuisance complaint site in Sicklerville, Camden County. The turkeys were released into suitable habitat nearby.

Wildlife Nuisance Complaints/ Technical Guidance (Federal Aid Project)

BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SPECIES

Bat	2	Osprey	1
Bear	4	Otter	1
Beaver	24	Owl	1
Bird	1	Raccoon	8
Bobcat	1	Skunk	5
Coyote	12	Squirrel	2
Deer	56	Swan	2
Fox	17	Turkey	13

Goose	6	Unknown	3
Hawk	3	Woodchuck	1

159 calls for the Federal Aid Project.

Total calls: 163 (*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 continued work on edits and new tables for the 2021 Hunting Digest.