

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 March – 15 April, 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. This guidance continues but field work is restarting and work from office and field has begun.

ENSP staff are reviewing the 2022-2024 grant proposals in the new federal Tracking and Reporting on Actions for Conservation of Species (TRACS) format in preparation for review and ultimately, input into TRACS online.

M. Hall continued working with the DEP’s Office of Budget and Finance and technical consultants to transition the Conserve Wildlife Matching Grant Program application and management into the online SAGE system.

K. Clark and M. Hall gave short presentations on April 1 as part of DEP’s “What’s Happening in NJ’s Wetlands?” webinar series featuring various Divisions and Bureaus within the Natural and Historic Resources group (open to all DEP employees). K. Clark presented a brief overview of the DFW bureaus, before talking about the salt marsh management being led by The Wetlands Institute behind Avalon-Stone Harbor. M. Hall presented on the CHANJ project linking wetlands and core habitats across the landscape.

Landscape Project – J. Heilferty

No new report.

Habitat Change Analysis Project (HCAP) –S. Petzinger

No new report.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff

K. Clark coordinated with USFWS Regional permits office on several bald eagle permit issues.

ENSP staff is reviewing and providing input on Scientific Collecting Permit applications.

S. Petzinger is working with OFWIS and BFF to provide data and feedback in DEP's Solar Siting Criteria.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

G. Fowles continues 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.

Staff submitted high priority new data for inclusion in the next SOA file, but the program is without staff to work on the data transcription to Biotics pending the on-boarding of temp services staff, as well as receipt of a delayed computer order.

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

G. Fowles organized, and the CHANJ team & partners participated in, a bi-monthly Roads and Wildlife Working Group meeting (virtual). Among other topics, the group discussed a prospective bridge widening project for wildlife dry passage beneath, and continued talks about reducing the use of plastics and mesh in erosion control practices in NJ.

Our Waterloo Road amphibian tunnel project is progressing through the design development stage. Consultants have completed the land survey, wetland delineation, and first iteration of the project design plan for stakeholder review. A public info session and comment period is being planned for May.

CHANJ team had a web meeting with two nonprofit groups within the NJ Sourlands region to help them integrate CHANJ into their organizations' landowner outreach and habitat restoration work.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

Habitat restoration on 9.2 acres in Sparta Mountain WMA was completed. Overall, the implementation of this project was successful. The contractor followed the specifications of the project and the goal of the project was met. The contractor even went above and beyond their requirements in the contract to help alleviate concerns and placed rocks along existing trails to prevent ORVs from entering the site.

On April 13, 2021 S. Petzinger gave a presentation to the Fish and Game Council on the habitat work done on Sparta Mountain and bird response to that habitat work.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

ENSP will provide all post-2012 status review results to the Endangered & Nongame Species Advisory Committee (ENSAC) for their May meeting.

State Wildlife Action Plan – All staff

No new report.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

No new report.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

Staff have started field surveys for wood, spotted, box, and bog turtles, including coordination with volunteers. Participation in monthly project coordination calls remains ongoing.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

K. Clark and B. Pitts conferenced with a Virginia biologist who sought guidance on translocation techniques to restore a population location.

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

B. Zarate and J. Bowers-Altman continued reviewing scientific collecting permit applications relating to diamondback terrapin research. Conditions for several permits were prepared and sent to L. DiPiano for processing.

J. Bowers-Altman met with J. Smith (FWS) to discuss potential methods for reducing terrapin road mortality along Rt. 9 near Chestnut Neck, adjacent to Forsythe NWR property. B. Zarate investigated ownership of a small park in the area where management could benefit terrapins. J. Bowers-Altman also met with a Fort Mott representative to discuss how to protect terrapin nests on park property. .

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

Carcasses from 4 road-killed bobcats were collected between February 15 and April 15. Tissue and teeth samples were collected for genetic and aging analysis and all were necropsied by E. Miller. G. Fowles has continued to survey with the scat detection dog, Fly, for bobcat scat, particularly in areas with little bobcat data. G. Fowles has also been working with the University of Delaware to refine a bobcat expansion scenario model.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall sent a seasonal reminder about NJ bat exclusion guidelines and a COVID-19 update to our network of professional Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators. She provided technical assistance to 5 homeowners on their bats-in-buildings issues during the past month, and the bat team (Hall & E. Gilardi) provided/installed 4 bat houses for residents having bat colonies excluded from their homes.

ENSP, USFWS, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, and Rutgers University had a virtual “bat team” meeting to talk about plans, research needs and collaborations for the upcoming summer season, and the current/evolving precautions we will need to continue taking related to COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 given the lingering concerns over the potential for human-to-bat virus transmission (so far, Big Brown bats appear to be resistant to the virus, but other native species/genera haven’t yet been ruled out).

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

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

G. Fowles also led the bi-monthly regional woodrat working group call, which focused on trying to diagnose active sites that “blink out” suddenly. There are now representatives from over 13 states in the working group.

BIRDS

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

No new report.

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis made preparations for the aerial wading bird and tern/gull surveys that will take place in May and June, including finalizing the helicopter vendor and contractors. C. Davis responded to multiple issues of disturbance/harassment for nesting Yellow-crowned Night-herons in residential settings.

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

Seasonal staff reported for work on April 1. All historic nesting sites along the coast were symbolically fenced by staff. Volunteers are typically used for larger sites but due to continued concerns with COVID, it was decided to rely solely on staff again this year. Volunteers have started aiding staff with monitoring some nesting areas. The first American Oystercatcher nests were found in mid-April and several returned breeding Piping Plovers have been noted at nesting sites.

C. Davis and E. Heiser have worked with USFWS and the borough of Monmouth Beach to expand the borough’s Beach Management Plan to include a pilot year of police patrols by ATV within the nesting zones. Staff will train police to escort the vehicle below the nesting areas to ensure no nests/chicks are potentially harmed by this activity and are in accordance with the federal guidelines for vehicles in proximity to Piping Plover chicks. Both the borough and the beach-nesting bird program hope that this will help address some of the heavy disturbance by people and dogs in the nesting areas.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark

L. Smith (Conserve Wildlife Foundation) sends out weekly updates on nesting. Most nests are being reported on by experienced volunteer nest monitors. Hatching has been recorded at the majority of nests, but many monitors cannot confirm number of chicks until the 3-4 week mark. New nests continued to be documented. ENSP banding of nestlings will be very limited due to Covid restrictions.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

K. Clark and volunteers began regular nest monitoring.

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark

K. Clark and B. Wurst (of Conserve Wildlife Foundation) responded to numerous reports of osprey nests on various structures that may require intervention by DFW or USDA-Wildlife Services. This work usually continues through May-June.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

No new report.

Migratory Shorebirds – A. Dey

No new report.

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

On April 14, 2021 S. Petzinger gave a presentation to The Wildlife Society – NJ Chapter about forest management in a changing climate in NJ.

On April 15, 2021 S. Petzinger gave a presentation to private landowners about the need to manage forests for golden-winged warblers as part of a Working Lands for Wildlife outreach virtual meeting.

Secretive Marsh Birds– C. Davis & E. Heiser

E. Heiser met with The Wetlands Institute and University of Delaware's SHARP program to discuss Saltmarsh Sparrow survey protocol in response to beneficial reuse marsh projects in the area of Stone Harbor. The Wetlands Institute intends to increase survey and monitoring efforts of Saltmarsh Sparrows in the area in 2021.

C. Davis and a seasonal technician worked to lay the groundwork for the 2021 Black Rail field season. C. Davis trained the tech on previous year's work and outlined the plans for 2021, which include call playback surveys, ARU surveys, and volunteer efforts.

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

Nothing to report

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

Nothing to report

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

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

J. Bowers-Altman provided comments to LRP on several proposed instream projects regarding impacts to listed freshwater mussels.

J. Bowers-Altman attended the monthly Brook Floater Working Group (BFWG) meeting. The BFWG will be submitting a joint proposal focusing on brook floater conservation for CompSWG funding in May.

J. Bowers-Altman continued reviewing scientific collecting permit applications relating to freshwater mussels for the upcoming season

Pollinator Conservation – R. Somes

R. Somes met with State Forestry Service staff at the State Tree Nursery to plan pollinator and butterfly foodplant growing efforts for the upcoming year.

R. Somes is coordinating with the State Park Service and several County and Municipal open space landowners to create pollinator habitat at various locations throughout the State.

Lepidoptera, Odonata, Coleoptera- R. Somes

R. Somes worked together with other Division staff to enhance habitat for the Northern Metalmark Butterfly on White Lake Wildlife Management area by removing invasive vegetation throughout several acres of habitat for this species.

R. Somes and Seasonal staff have been conducting surveys for SGCN Tiger Beetle Species on several Pinelands Region WMAs. This effort is currently targeting the New Jersey Pine Barrens Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela patreula consentanea*).

R. Somes conducted habitat surveys for Tiger and Arrowhead Spiketail in Allamuchy State Park.