

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 April – 15 May, 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

In May, the state began easing restrictions related to Covid-19. Field work that accommodates the remaining restrictions is being conducted, but most staff continued to work from home when possible.

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.

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. These include, but are not limited to, applications related to snake research, DEP- and Pinelands Commission-required snake surveys as part of land use permit applications, and diamondback terrapin research. Conditions were prepared and sent to L. DiPiano for processing.

K. Schantz provided rare snake-related guidance on two trail maintenance projects for the National Park Service, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. She continues to work with the Bureau of Watershed Management, E/T Unit (formerly of the Division of Land Use Regulation) on pinelands’ snake mitigation projects.

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.

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. One temporary employee was hired at the end of March to work on Biotics data and A. Mitchell with the Division of Land Resource Protection is also helping with Biotics on a part-time basis as of early May.

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 Apr. 15, with 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 a potential road mitigation project for which S. Predl from the Bureau of Lands Management joined the conversation, and had invited guests from NV5 to discuss the Waterloo Road wildlife passage system draft plans along with M. Hall.

Camera monitoring of a newly discovered structure under Rte. 287 that supports wildlife began by a new WCC volunteer after a site visit by G. Fowles and Fly.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

No new report.

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

Cape May Peninsula Conservation Focal Areas were revised to include all natural habitats.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

K. Schantz re-enlisted 59 Venomous Snake Response Team members and provided them with related authorization documents. Fifteen responders decline to volunteer in 2021 for various reasons but on-going COVID-19 (and variant) infections was the main reason.

K. Schantz drafted a Request for Proposal (RFP) for northern copperhead research to assess survey methods to identify dens and rookeries. The draft RFP is being reviewed within the ENSP.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

No new report available.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

No new report.

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

No new report.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

G. Fowles and E. Miller had a call with a researcher at UNH about collaborating on a regional analysis of rodenticide exposure in bobcats.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

No new report available.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles led the bi-monthly regional woodrat working group call, which focused on camera trapping protocols used across the region and also an invited guest, Mikey Tabak from WEST, Inc. who described AI work he has been doing with camera trap data that might be of interest to the group.

BIRDS

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

No new report available.

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis made final preparations for the helicopter aerial survey that will take place in late May and early June. C. Davis responded to numerous inquiries and issues regarding yellow-crowned night-herons nesting in residential areas. C. Davis coordinated site visits with USDA-APHIS to treat cormorant nests that are negatively impacting wading bird colonies.

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

No new report available.

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. To date, 210 nests have been identified as active, 4 as territorial, and 31 as unknown status. Twenty-five new nests were documented so far. ENSP banding of nestlings is very limited due to Covid-19 restrictions, but one nest was visited in Somerset County, on a transmission tower with assistance from PSE&G. A nest camera was repaired and is now streaming the view of the nest, at <http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/education/threebridges/>.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

K. Clark and volunteers began regular nest monitoring. The Little Egg Foundation supplied cameras to record action at three nests as a pilot project for identifying all prey that are delivered. The Foundation also created a brochure to assist staff and cooperators to identify peregrines in the coastal areas as part of beach-nesting bird colony 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. Citizens can monitor nests in their area and report their observations and key dates on the website www.osprey-watch.org.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

K. Clark continued to coordinate with non-profit partners on a coastal barn owl nest box program to support nesting in coastal areas.

Migratory Shorebirds – A. Dey

No new report.

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

No new report available.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis & E. Heiser

C. Davis supervised call-playback surveys at 40 points thought the southern Atlantic and Delaware Bayshore costs and the deployment of nine acoustic recording units (ARU). Surveys were carried out by an hourly technician and contractors. They will continue until each point is surveyed three time or July 15th, whichever comes sooner. The ARUs will remain in the marsh until July 15th, although each unit will be moved to at least two locations throughout that period (switching spots every 2 weeks). Initial reports are encouraging – although still extremely low rate of detections, multiple birds have been confirmed by ARU, on call-playback surveys and via volunteers/birders.

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

No new report available.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

No new report available.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

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

J. Bowers-Altman continued to assist NEAFWA by serving as a NE taxa team member for freshwater mussels. Top regional Threats /Actions for Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (RSGCN) were identified via a new team assignment. The Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee of NEAFWA is updating information on NE RSGCN over the next two years as part of a Regional Conservation Needs (RCN) project sponsored by the NEAFWA states.

J. Bowers-Altman participated in a meeting with the Northern NJ Freshwater Mussel Working Group. Agenda items included aquatic invasive species and their impacts on rare mussel populations.

J. Bowers-Altman provided comments to Division of Land Resource Protection on several proposed instream projects relative to impacts on listed freshwater mussels.

R. Somes and J. Bowers-Altman participated in a meeting with the DEP's Invasive Species Plan steering committee.

J. Bowers-Altman continued work on the NJ section of a Comp-SWG proposal focusing on Brook Floater conservation. The multi-state effort is being led by the State of MA and the Brook Floater Working Group.

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

Pollinator Conservation – R. Some

R. Some coordinated with the State Tree Nursery to distribute left over wildflower seedlings that were held over from last year. These will be planted in various pollinator gardens and management sites throughout the site. R. Some also met with nursery staff to plan for this season's propagation efforts.

Lepidoptera, Odonata, Coleoptera- R. Some

R. Some and staff conducted surveys for the Hoary Elfin Butterfly and monitored populations at several existing sites and documented one new occurrence. Surveys were also conducted for Hessel's Hairstreak and documented two new occurrences.

R. Some and staff have been managing invasive plant species at several of our Northern Metalmark colonies in Sussex and Warren County. Several days of vegetation management have been conducted and approximately 3 acres of habitat have had extensive areas of shrubby invasives removed. One of the biggest threats to his species is invasive plants and succession of its cedar glade habitats. We are also planning to plant nectar source plants in restored areas and are going to experiment with the propagation of this species' host plant the Round-leaved Ragwort.

R. Some is coordinating with the USFWS to conduct surveys for Frosted Elfin in Southern NJ. USFWS staff are systematically surveying known occurrences for this species but due to poor weather conditions populations numbers have been very low and a maximum of four individuals observed.

R. Some is part of a regional project with the USDA to survey for and better understand the habitat requirements of the Appalachian Grizzled Skipper. This species appears to have been extirpated in NJ but no extensive survey efforts have been conducted in some time. Staff will be conducting surveys for this species at historic locations as well as at potential sites to see if the species still occurs in NJ.

View from the new webcam of the Three Bridges bald eagle nest. The camera was installed when the old transmission tower was replaced with a new monopole structure. The power company, PSE&G, included a nest box in the installation of the new pole.

