

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 April – 15 May 2023

Staff:

Kathy Clark, Supervising Zoologist (Acting Chief)
Christina “Kashi” Davis, Principal Zoologist
Gretchen Fowles, GIS Specialist
MacKenzie Hall, Environmental Specialist II
Emily Heiser, Assistant Biologist
Kim Korth, Biologist Trainee/Planner
Sharon Petzinger, Senior Zoologist
Bill Pitts, Senior Zoologist
Kris Schantz, Principal Zoologist
Robert Somes, Senior Zoologist
Brian Zarate, Principal Zoologist
Rhea Rajpal, Biotics (temp services)

Administration – K. Clark

K. Clark worked on agency planning and policy issues, and regional actions as part of the Northeast Wildlife Diversity Managers committee. B. Zarate attended the NE Wildlife Diversity Managers meeting held at the NE AFWA meeting in PA.

Staff met with Bureau of Information and Education staff to plan outreach ideas for 2023 that highlight the important influence of the NJ Endangered & Nongame Species Conservation Act as it turns 50 years old. NJFW will feature stories and highlight species in social media posts and videos this year. The first media release will coincide with May 19th Endangered Species Day and will present NJ Wildlife Tracker.

Landscape Project –

No new report.

Habitat Change Analysis Project (HCAP) –S. Petzinger

No new report.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff

Staff continued to review applications for Scientific Collecting permits, and issue permits and amendments for 2023.

Staff reviewed and commented on DEP land use permit applications, energy project reviews, and internal NHR land projects.

Several staff attended the meeting of the NE Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) held in Hershey, PA.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

G. Fowles has initiated a search for 2 new temporary employees to serve as data managers to work full-time on Biotics data management and the new NJ Wildlife Tracker application. They will replace

other temporary employees who have recently resigned for full-time jobs with benefits elsewhere. That is now 6 temporary employees who have resigned in less than 4 years for more permanent jobs with benefits. This rate of turn-over is hobbling efforts to maintain a quality, standardized, up-to-date rare species database.

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

G. Fowles and M. Hall of ENSP, along with C. Albizati (NJDEP Watershed Protection and Restoration) and S. Olivera (NJDEP Flood Hazard and Stormwater Engineering), presented a 1-hour CHANJ workshop at the NJ TransAction Conference in Atlantic City on April 18. Fifteen people representing local governments, consulting firms and transportation agencies attended the session. TransAction is NJ's major annual transportation-focused conference, and this was our first time attending.

G. Fowles and M. Hall traveled to Tucson, AZ, for a Wildlife Corridors, Connectivity and Crossings Conference May 9-11, where both were invited to present about NJ's progress, projects, and strategies for addressing roads-and-wildlife and landscape connectivity challenges. We also joined a field trip to the Oracle Road Wildlife Crossings, where a wildlife overpass and underpass system were constructed in 2016 along a major state highway (77). Monitoring cameras have documented more than 28,000 animals using the crossings, ranging from pronghorn antelope to desert tortoise.

M. Hall worked with our consulting engineers at NV5 and fellow DEP & NJ Division of Property Management and Construction partners to plan our second (final) public info session about the Waterloo Road Amphibian Crossing project in Sussex County. The info session will be held virtually on May 18 to update stakeholders and give opportunity for public comment on the project, which is now in the final design stage. Details: <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/conservation/waterloo-road-amphibian-crossing-project/>

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

S. Petzinger led public field tours at Sparta Mountain WMA on May 6 and May 11, 2023.

S. Petzinger conducted the first of two grassland bird surveys to monitor the bird response to grassland restoration efforts on South Branch WMA.

Bird surveys to monitor the response to habitat management on Sparta Mountain WMA and Weldon Brook WMA will be conducted between May 15 and June 15, 2023.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

Hourly D. Jenkins continued working on a rule amendment to revise the lists of endangered and nongame wildlife.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

ENSP staff are meeting regularly with our contractor, The Strategic Stewardship Initiative, on revision of the NJ SGCN list, the first step in the Plan revision. A first draft using updated selection criteria is under internal review.

ENSP staff is also working on revisions to the "Threats" lexicon (threat categories) and relevant NJ-specific threats.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

ENSP staff continued to: a) Coordinate members of the venomous snake response team, b) Field nuisance snake calls from concerned residents, and c) Develop the copperhead NOFO and recruited two biologists (Mike Jones, MA and Mike Ravesi, CT) to assist in reviewing and finalizing the document and score sheet and later, participate as part of the project technical review committee.

ENSP staff continued its partnership with Tyler Christensen (FoHVOS) in its seventh year of an eastern copperhead study in Mercer County. The ENSP provides supplies and two seasonal technicians.

ENSP staff worked with Woodlands Wildlife Refuge and Tyler Christensen (Piedmont Ecological Services) to surgically implant transmitters in three timber rattlesnakes and two black ratsnakes as part of an effort to assess mitigation measures implemented during a winter construction project.

ENSP staff continued working with DEP's Division of Watershed Protection and Restoration, E/T Unit in the review of and revisions to the northern pinesnake Habitat Evaluation Model (HEM).

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

No new report available.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

No new report available.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

A brief update on the review of potential management actions to reduce mortality factors was presented at the May meeting of the Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

There were 3 roadkilled and one hit by vehicle/injured bobcats reported during this period. Locations and samples were collected from all individuals.

G. Fowles is working with University of Delaware again to bring on a graduate student this coming Fall to study habitat connectivity as it relates to bobcats, supported by UDel.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

NJFW executed an agreement with Rutgers University for a project investigating the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling to detect bat roosts in bridges. The field component of the project finished this month.

ENSP had meetings with staff of NJ Forest Service and Pinelands Commission to discuss land use guidance regarding Northern long-eared bat, which was uplisted to federally (and state) endangered on 3/31/23.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles attended the Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies conference in early May and helped organize and served as moderator for an Allegheny woodrat symposium, which included talks from members of the regional woodrat working group and ended with a discussion on the captive breeding protocol that the group is working on in preparation for at least one captive breeding program getting off the ground this year.

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis prepared for the wading bird aerial survey. There is usually just one flight per season but this year multiple flights will be flown to try and increase robustness of data. The flights had to be reserved in the winter, but the warm spring has the birds on a slightly early schedule so adjustments may need to be made on flight dates. The first flight is scheduled for May 21, generally peak incubation, but some species are already with chicks (particularly newcomer White Ibis).

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

Beach-nesting Bird season is in full swing. Seasonal staff has been locating nests for Piping Plover and American Oystercatcher. Least Terns and Black Skimmers are just beginning to arrive on their breeding grounds. Staff has also been engaged with recreational beachgoers in public outreach.

Staff met with Law Enforcement to discuss monitoring and patrols of Horseshoe Island. Captain Scott relayed that regular patrols of Horseshoe will take place throughout the majority of the nesting season. A monitoring and management protocol was developed to aide stewards on the island this season.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark

Bald eagle nest monitoring has documented 243 nests active and 12 territorial. Eagles from the first few nests have fledged as of mid-May, but most will fledge in the next four weeks. L. Smith of CWF-NJ is providing weekly email updates to all volunteers and cooperators.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

Nest monitoring is underway, and to date seven cameras are fielded on coastal nests. Additional cameras are planned. To date, 30 nests have been tracked but not all are active.

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

As of May 15th, there are 101 known active American Kestrel nest boxes. This is the second year in a row with >100 nesting attempts. Natural Lands leads the way with 41 active boxes, ENSP has 37, Duke farms has 7, and Raritan Headwaters and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space both have 8. So far, there have been 5 failures, 1 banded box, 2 hatched, and 93 still on eggs. 28 adults have been captured, with 14 recaptures (13 female, 1 male) and 14 newly banded birds (11 female, 3 male).

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark

K. Clark responded to cell companies and communication tower owners (and the public) regarding Osprey nests on towers and the timing restrictions that apply to those nests.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

Cooperators are monitoring barn owl nest boxes placed in the coastal zone to improve opportunities for barn owl nesting.

Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts

B. Pitts has planned for several contracted services, including horseshoe crab egg surveys and shorebird stewards. B. Pitts will conduct aerial surveys on three dates in May. ENSP hired two banded-bird resighters who have been trained and are working alongside partners and on a shared schedule. Important beaches were posted to protect migrating shorebirds for the May 7-June 7 period. Shorebird stewards, overseen by CWF-NJ, will be working at important beaches on weekends in May.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

Although there was no Black Rail technician hired this year (no applicants), C. Davis is still attempting to collect some data through acoustic recording units (ARU). Five units were placed in high marsh habitat. They will be moved every two weeks so that 10 points will be surveyed. One Black Rail was reported at a site without an ARU so that data will be added to the state database later this year.

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

Bird surveys to monitor the golden-winged warbler population and the bird response to habitat restoration efforts will be conducted from May 15 – June 15, 2023. Survey locations were reduced this year due to a lack of assistance in conducting the surveys.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

Nothing to report.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

R. Somes and Seasonal staff gave a butterfly conservation presentation at the Pequest Nature Center.

R. Somes attended a NJ Invasive Species Striketeam Technical Advisory Meeting and provided expertise and data on invasive invertebrate species in NJ.

R. Somes and seasonal staff worked on habitat management and invasive plant species control in a Northern Metalmark site in Sussex County.

R. Somes and seasonal staff are currently working together with Fish and Wildlife Conservation Police Officers to address a recent butterfly collecting incident that occurred at a Hessell's Hairstreak site in Ocean County.

R. Somes and seasonal staff partnered with the Cape May County Park Zoo to create several areas of pollinator and Frosted Elfin/Monarch/Skipper habitat on the property through the planting of wild indigo and a variety of native wildflower and butterfly host plant species.

R. Somes and seasonal staff have been conducting Frosted Elfin surveys throughout Atlantic and Cape May counties monitoring known populations and document two new populations.

Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes and State Tree Nursery staff assembled and distributed 50 kit pollinator gardens and trays of native wildflowers and butterfly host plant species to be planted in over 50 gardens and conservation projects throughout the State.

R. Somes and NJ State Museum staff met to discuss additional pollinator planting projects at the State Museum as well worked on planning a Rare and Endangered Species Exhibit for the Museum.

Freshwater Mussels – R. Somes

R. Somes attended a Brook Floater Conservation Working Group meeting where 2023 survey and research projects were discussed and planned.

R. Somes attended several meetings related to the Chinese Pondmussel with focus on pesticide permitting and upcoming survey needs for this spring, including creating a map of areas to target for eDNA surveys.

R. Somes and seasonal staff conducted a mussel survey targeting Chinese Pondmussel in the Wickecheoke Creek in Hunterdon County.

R. Somes ran a Freshwater Mussel Conservation and Management Workshop for the NJ Watershed Ambassadors Program at the Pequest Nature Center. The program involved education about NJ's freshwater mussel species and their conservation, identification, and field surveying techniques.