November/December 2019

CONNECTICUT Wildlife

From The Director

This issue of Connecticut Wildlife *is perfect for the season. It is filled with many things to be thankful for. I am sure both the young falcon learning to fly and the adult bald eagle in need of some help would agree that the many residents of our state who care enough about our wildlife to help when needed would be high on the list. A highly skilled staff of wildlife and fisheries biologists and licensed wildlife rehabilitators are not far behind. The teamwork displayed by these individuals allowed a young falcon to survive and, hopefully, learn to soar through Connecticut skies and helped a veteran bald eagle – one of our first "home-grown" chicks – continue to thrive some 24 years later.*

You will also read about how families were able to enjoy the magic of the outdoors together, whether through teaching kids to ice fish, learning lots of new things at Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day, or by mentoring the conservationists, biologists, and community leaders of the future through the University of Connecticut's Natural Resources Conservation Academy. The stories you will read and the images captured reflect the wonder and curiosity that our natural world brings to all of us, regardless of our age.

There are things to celebrate – a piping plover population that continues to slowly grow after nearly disappearing from our state; a young angler who was able to catch the biggest fish of his young life; the adaptability of a small woodpecker that enables it to thrive in backyards as well as in forests; and yes, that adult eagle. Gone from our state as breeding birds by the mid-1950s and facing extinction largely due to the use of the pesticide DDT that caused their egg shells to weaken, the return of bald eagles to Connecticut as nesting birds in the early 1990s is one of our most poignant success stories. To learn that one of the chicks from that first nesting pair, one that I was fortunate enough to help band all those years ago, is still gracing our state touches me deeply.

While there are still many challenges ahead, as the story on hibernating bats underscores, there are things we can try and ways we can work together to achieve more conservation success stories. As we approach the New Year, I hope this issue inspires you to enjoy all the wonders our natural world has to offer, to celebrate the successes, and to let your curiosity lead you to the adventures waiting outside.

Jenny Dickson, DEEP Wildlife Division Director

Connecticut Wildlife

Published bimonthly by

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Bureau of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division
www.ct.gov/deep

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Connecticut Wildlife magazine (ISSN 1087-7525) is published bimonthly by the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection Wildlife Division. Send all subscription orders and address changes to *Connecticut Wildlife*, Sessions Woods WMA, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013. Subscription rates are $8 for one year, $15 for two years, and $20 for three years. No refunds. Periodical postage paid at Bristol, CT. Postmaster: Please send all address changes to *Connecticut Wildlife*, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013.

www.ct.gov/deep/wildlife www.facebook.com/CTFishandWildlife
E-mail: deep.ctwildlife@ct.gov Phone: 860-424-3011

Connecticut Wildlife Magazine *is the official publication of the Connecticut Bureau of Natural Resources, and is dedicated to creating awareness and appreciation of the state's fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. Much of the work of the Wildlife and Fisheries Divisions of the Bureau is supported by the Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs, which are exclusively funded by your purchase of fishing tackle, firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and motor boat fuels.* ***Partnering to fund conservation and connect people with nature.***

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A northern long-eared bat in a Connecticut hibernaculum where moisture condensation helps prevent dehydration during hibernation. PHOTO BY P. J. FUSCO

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Cover:

An adult female peregrine falcon perches on a Connecticut rock outcrop. Read about peregrine nesting success in the state during 2019 on page 4. Photo courtesy Paul Fusco

Lesson on the River

Peregrine Falcon Takes a Training Flight

Written by Brian Hess, DEEP Wildlife Division

Peregrine falcons are the high performance sports cars of the bird world. Their long pointed wings are adapted to a blend of fast and maneuverable flight and can be tucked in for extremely high speed dives exceeding 240 miles per hour. Peregrines have specialized tubercles inside their nostrils that deflect high speed air that would damage their nasal passages (supersonic jet engines have similar structures that slow air before it reaches the turbines). To protect their eyes from high speeds, they repeatedly flush away debris with special membranes.

From the time young falcons take flight, they have these adaptations to fly fast. But, the process of learning to fly fast is difficult. First flights are awkward adventures for most young birds, but for falcons, their physiology and nesting locations mean that the learning curve can be steep, and the cost of errors can be high.

One fledgling falcon took a risky plunge from the Charter Oak Bridge this past summer. It was an exceptionally windy day on June 11 with afternoon gusts well over 30 mph. That afternoon, a fully-feathered peregrine fledgling that had not yet taken his first flight fell from the substructure under the bridge. The bird landed in the water, and swam to the Hartford shore. There, an angler scooped up the falcon and transported it to the Wildlife Division office at DEEP Headquarters in Hartford.

The Wildlife Division Director's office is not a suitable

C. VANN / DEEP WILDLIFE

A damp falcon waits to be transported from DEEP Headquarters to Horizon Wings Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

C. SAMORAJCZYK / CT DOT

The young bird was fitted with two leg bands – a bare aluminum band with a unique nine-digit number and a black and green colored band with a large alphanumeric code that can be seen with a spotting scope or zoom camera lens.

place to evaluate or rehabilitate a bird, so from there, DEEP staff took the bird to Horizon Wings Raptor Rehabilitation and Education Center in Ashford. Mary-Beth Kaeser, a state-licensed wildlife rehabilitator, fed the falcon and took him to be evaluated by a veterinarian the next morning. Under the dedicated eye of the staff at the center, the bird (with a clean bill of health) spent a few days in the flight pen to determine if he was ready to fly. While he had the necessary feathers, he was unable to jump up from the ground to a perch. Though the bird was not yet capable of strong flight, the staff at DEEP and Horizon Wings agreed that the best scenario was to return the falcon to the bridge as soon as possible. The falcon would be placed back on the bridge pier, where the adult falcons (who had not left the area) would hopefully keep feeding and protecting the young bird.

After marking the bird with aluminum leg bands, staff from CT DOT and DEEP crawled up into the cat-walk under the bridge and walked out over the river, carrying the bird in a cloth bag. Peregrines do not build nest structures. Rather, they lay eggs directly on the concrete or metal of a bridge. When the crew found the spot with plenty of food remnants and guano, they opened the bag and the bird walked away. It was seen on the pier for the rest of the day, but by morning it was gone. A chick was seen in the area later the second day, but it unclear if it was the same bird. The Division has not received any subsequent reports of the young bird, but we hope it is doing well.

Peregrine Falcon Nesting Summary, 2019

Even with their affinity to human and urban structures, falcons can be very difficult to monitor compared to other birds. The presence of a nest is assumed by the number of adults seen and if they are acting territorially. Despite these monitoring challenges, 2019 was a productive year for peregrine falcons in Connecticut. In particular, New Haven was a hot spot for falcons, with two new nests. At first glance, this may seem odd, but the area is full of pigeons, is along a migratory corridor, and has plenty of tall buildings and natural rock faces.

Productivity

Active Nesting Territories	18
Successful Nests	6
Number of Chicks	11
Unknown Outcome	8
Failed Nests	4

Nesting Locations

Buildings	5
Bridges	8
Rock Face	5

Peregrine nesting activity in Connecticut declined through the 1920s and 1930s, with the last documented nesting occurring on the Travelers Tower in Hartford in the late 1940s. Peregrines remained absent from Connecticut until 1997 when a pair successfully nested once again on the Travelers Tower. The peregrine falcon was listed in 1992 as an endangered species on Connecticut's Endangered Species List. It was reclassified as a threatened species in the state in 2010.

Peregrine falcon populations declined rapidly between 1950 and 1965 throughout the United States and Europe. By 1975, the entire population of peregrines in the eastern United States was considered to be extirpated. This decline is directly attributed to the effect of organochlorine pesticides, such as DDT, on breeding populations.

P. FUSCO (2)

Where Do Bats Go During Winter?

Written by Kyle Testerman, Contractor for the Wildlife Management Institute; photos by Paul J. Fusco

The silhouettes of bats catching insects in the summer evening sky was enjoyed by many around Connecticut in decades past. In recent years, that sight has become more infrequent as the overall bat population in the state has dramatically declined.

While bats can still be seen by a few fortunate onlookers at dusk during the warmer months, winter brings a stillness in the air and an absence of furry flying mammals. So, where do bats go during winter?

For all bats in Connecticut, winter brings about a change to colder temperatures and a lack of insects for food. As a result, bats must leave their summer habitat and move to where they spend the winter. While there is not one simple answer to where bats go, there are some general trends on where different groups of bats end up each winter. The nine species of bats in Connecticut are often categorized into one of two general groups; cave bats or tree-roosting bats.

The red bat is North America's most abundant tree bat. This bat's reddish fur helps it blend in among pine cones and browning leaves in the tree tops. When hibernating, red bats use their furry tail membrane like an insulating blanket to conserve heat.

The silver-haired bat is one of three tree-roosting species found in Connecticut. These bats generally migrate long distances to more southern latitudes during the winter. They face threats from wind turbines along their migration paths.

Cave Bats

Much more is known about cave bats because they tend to live more social and communal lives throughout the year. Cave bats include the big brown bat, which is the species most likely to roost around your home or in your barn in the warmer months. Come winter, big browns and the other cave bats, like tri-colored, northern long-eared, eastern small-footed, little brown, and Indiana bats, migrate regionally to cavernous spaces, usually below ground, where they hibernate through the coldest months of the year. Bats select slightly different types of cave-like structures for hibernation, as long as the environmental conditions suit their needs. Most often, they are found hibernating in abandoned mines, caves, and other underground structures, where temperatures hold steady between 32°F and 49°F. During hibernation, the body temperature of a bat can decline from a normal summer range of 99°-106°F down to as low as 32°F. This drop in body temperature helps slow down a bat's metabolism, reducing its need to eat for several months.

Another important characteristic of suitable hibernating spaces is humidity. Hibernating bats are susceptible to dehydration, so choosing a hibernaculum with higher humidity will reduce evaporative water loss. In some cases, high humidity can cause water droplets to form on the fur of hibernating bats, which bats can drink when they

periodically wake up (photo below, northern long-eared bats). Waking and warming up from hibernation is energetically expensive. In fact, a bat can use 80-90% of its entire stored fat reserves just from waking up for a few minutes each winter. The high energy cost of warming up after waking is part of what makes cave bats so vulnerable to white-nose syndrome (WNS). The disease is caused by an introduced fungus (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, or *Pd*) which thrives in the same cold, wet places where cave bats hibernate.

Connecticut Bat Species and their Status

Common Name	Scientific Name	CT Status	Federal Status
Big brown bat	*Eptesicus fuscus*	SGCN	
Little brown bat	*Myotis lucifugus*	E, SGCN	
Northern long-eared bat	*Myotis septentrionalis*	E, SGCN	T
Eastern small-footed bat	*Myotis leibii*	E, SGCN	
Indiana bat	*Myotis sodalis*	E, SGCN	E
Tri-colored bat	*Perimyotis subflavus*	E, SGCN	
Silver-haired bat	*Lasionycteris noctivagans*	SC, SGCN	
Eastern red bat	*Lasiurus borealis*	SC, SGCN	
Hoary bat	*Lasiurus cinereus*	SC, SGCN	

SGCN = Species of Greatest Conservation Need
E= Endangered
T = Threatened
SC = Special Concern

Since the discovery of WNS in North America in 2006, nearly seven million cave bats have perished. The fungus infects a hibernating bat's muzzle and wings, irritating the bat and causing it to wake up frequently and burn through stored fat reserves too soon. Starving bats are forced to leave their hibernacula in search of food, which leads to death in the cold winter months. Deaths from WNS for some species, like the little brown and northern long-eared bats, have resulted in over 90% population declines in the region.

Tree-roosting Bats

Connecticut's three tree-roosting bat species include the eastern red, silver-haired, and hoary bats. These species are mostly solitary throughout the year, and do not hibernate in cave-like environments, making them much more difficult to study. Tree-roosting bats generally migrate long distances to more southern latitudes during winter. Upon arrival to their winter range, many tree bats will still hibernate during periods of cold weather, emerging to feed during periods of warm winter weather.

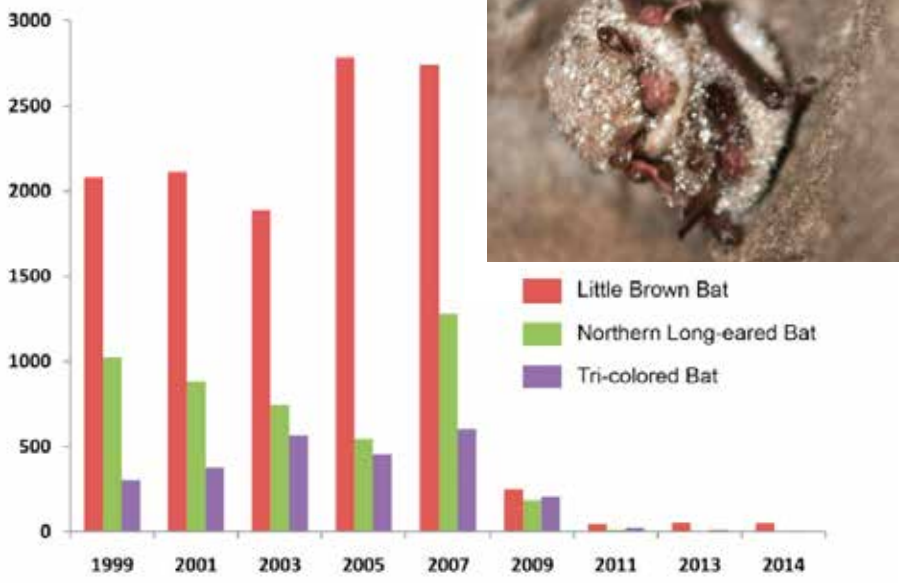
While considered safe from the effects of WNS, migratory tree bats are still facing threats. Habitat loss and mortality associated with wind turbines present other conservation challenges.

While bat populations face a long, uphill battle to recover, there are some things you can do to help:

- Report sightings of live and dead bats seen in late December through mid-March to *deep.batprogram@ct.gov*.
- Let the Wildlife Division know about summer bat colonies. There might be a maternity colony nearby. Report summer colonies to *deep.batprogram@ct.gov*.
- Put up a bat house. You could support a whole colony in your own backyard!
- Educate friends and family about the benefits of bats and the perils they face.

Next summer, if you are fortunate to see a bat flying overhead after sunset, appreciate the journey this amazing animal took to get back to your yard. The sad fact is that when bats leave for winter, many never make it back.

Number of bats counted at three hibernation sites in Connecticut.



Families that Fish Together, Eat Fish Together!

Written by Justin Wiggins, DEEP Fisheries Division

Connecticut is home to many avid and passionate anglers who take advantage of the fantastic and diverse fresh and saltwater fisheries. What fuels and motivates people to fish will vary greatly depending on who you ask. Relaxation, spending time outdoors, catching lots of fish, catching BIG fish, spending time with family and friends, connecting with nature, and observing wildlife are all valid and genuine responses you could expect.

As far back as I can remember, I have been hooked on fishing. As a kid, fishing was an adventure into the unknown (a feeling that has not yet faded) and every fish and experience was new and exciting. One of the biggest joys in my life now is witnessing this excitement through the eyes of a "newbie" to fishing. Being with someone who is seeing things in the natural world for the first time is truly a remarkable and rewarding experience.

M. CLAVETTE FOR DEEP

Cousins Logan and Quinn had a great morning catching a dinner of fried yellow perch! The boys went back and forth, running from flag to flag. Yellow perch are the saving grace for many ice fishing outings. These beautiful native fish are very active during winter and can be caught on tip-ups or jigging rods. Yellow perch are excellent eating, even more so when pulled from the cold winter water.

These days, there is nothing better than taking my young son and nephews fishing and I am already looking forward to my baby daughter joining in a few years! Like any parent, I love spending time with my kids, especially time spent outdoors. Quinn, my oldest at four years of age, loves digging for worms and using them to catch sunfish at our local town park. His reaction to seeing the first fish pulled up from a frozen pond during an ice fishing trip last winter was priceless – pure, sincere shock and awe (and screaming and running). He is still talking about the catfish he caught last summer and the blue crabs we scooped up and ate with

his cousins. These memories and experiences are imprinted in his young mind as they are mine, which is what I have come to love most about fishing – **sharing the experience**. Kids grow up way too fast, but these memories will last and be cherished forever.

Taking a kid fishing is much more than just fishing. Beyond the good old-fashioned family fun, time spent outdoors with youth has numerous consequential benefits, such as fostering a connection with our natural world and building a foundation of respect, knowledge, and love for the outdoors. Fishing provides the perfect excuse to put the cell phone away, turn the TV off, and connect with nature and each other. Take advantage of the opportunity and integrate positive life lessons into your fishing experience. For instance, I always make it a point to pick up any balloons and discarded fishing line I see. I now have a young boy with a keen eye for garbage, which he insists on picking up and disposing of properly – whether on the water, hiking trail, or in a parking lot.

Fishing with kids undoubtedly takes preparation, patience, and love! Following are some simple tips for making your next trip with kids a success:

- **Keep it simple:** Use live bait. A worm or live minnow under a bobber will catch fish. Kids like to catch fish. Enough said.
- **Be prepared:** Bug spray, sunscreen, first-aid kit, and a change of clothes are all essentials. You will need the change of clothes!
- **Snacks:** Got to have them! Lots of snacks. An absolute must.
- **Life jacket:** When fishing from a boat or on a floating dock, it is critical that a PFD be worn at all times. Even if the kids are good swimmers, this is responsible behavior and offers piece of mind.
- **Expectations:** If you get a few solid hours of fishing in, you did well!
- **Pictures:** Make sure to take lots! You will look back and cherish these memories.

Ice Fishing

Ice fishing is a wonderful way to introduce kids to fishing. It is a family-friendly outdoor activity that provides fresh air and exercise during the doldrums of winter. The fishing can be fast and furious, and the slow times are perfect for dragging the kids around in a sled, throwing a football or Frisbee, cooking hot dogs, and drinking hot chocolate. The Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) Program offers free "Introduction to Ice Fishing" classes during winter that will teach you everything you need to know to get started ice fishing!

The winter 2019 ice fishing season yielded some unforgettable times with family, friends, and new ice anglers. The target species while ice fishing is usually anything that will

J. WIGGINS / DEEP FISHERIES

Quietly paddling a canoe through a calm saltwater marsh, it did not take long before we noticed dimpling on the water's surface. The boys eagerly casted their snapper poppers toward the commotion as giant schools of peanut bunker were fleeing from snapper bluefish. The juvenile bluefish were a few months old and tiny, too small to catch, but Quinn and Ryan loved seeing the giant schools of baitfish. As the tide fell, we noticed blue crabs shuffling along the muddy bottom. Over the next hour, a dozen keeper blue crabs were netted for a feast that afternoon. The beauty and life exploding from a saltwater marsh is a must see for any kid!

M. CLAVETTE FOR DEEP

On the afternoon of Super Bowl Sunday, Quinn and I found ourselves in the midst of a perch feeding frenzy! As the sun was sinking, I began to pull tip-ups, thinking this trip could not get any better. One of the last tip-ups left got triggered. "Flag up," I yelled to Quinn. He took it by himself. "Help, it's a monster," he replied. I laughed, assuming a yellow perch was on the line. Instead, I saw a walleye head sticking out of the ice hole and we had caught a 20-inch walleye. My three-year old boy (at the time) had just landed a bigger walleye than I ever have. We hugged, screamed, and smiled ear to ear for a photo.

Cousins Quinn, Logan, and Ryan were eager to spend a day on the boat after a long winter. The first warm day in early April found my brother-in-law and me taking the boys fishing. We watched great blue herons, ospreys, egrets, and bald eagles hunting for fish, just as we were. Casting live shiners under a bobber, we found a school of hungry fish. Over the next few hours, a flurry of sinking bobbers produced a stringer full of beautiful black crappie that made for a fantastic dinner!

bite! Tip-ups baited with live shiners dropped down to one to two feet off the lake bottom is all it takes to produce fish.

Freshwater fishing in lakes, ponds, and rivers offers a variety of options for the kids. From Trout Parks in spring to panfish, bass, and catfish during summer, the opportunities are endless! The "Connecticut Is Fishy" interactive web application, found at *www.ct.gov/deep/fishing*, can help identify family-friendly fishing locations near you. Not many fish can resist the simple, yet effective, presentation of a worm or minnow fished under a bobber.

The go-to quarry are panfish, a group of fish that includes sunfish, yellow perch, and black crappies. Panfish are abundant in our lakes, ponds, and large rivers and usually willing biters. An added bonus is panfish make fantastic table fair and the kids love eating the fish they catch.

Long Island Sound and her bountiful tidal rivers, streams, and salt water marshes are bursting with great kid-friendly opportunities throughout summer.

Scup (porgy), referred to as the "sunfish of the seas", migrate into Long Island Sound in late spring, taking residence on almost every rock pile, mussel bed, pier, or jetty. A simple bottom rig baited with squid strips or sandworms, whether casted from the shore or drifting from a boat or kayak, is irresistible to scup and many other saltwater species. Drifting on a boat or kayak will allow you to cover ground, which will certainly help you find the fish. If you are shore bound, the DEEP-designated "Enhanced Shore Fishing Sites" have excellent public access and reduced length limits on fluke and scup. Jumping aboard one of the many Charter or Party Boats that cater to families will cost a bit

of money but greatly increase your chances of success and having a day you will never forget! Come August, the numerous tidal rivers, creeks, marshes, and beaches along the coast offer fantastic multi-species fishing for snapper bluefish and blue crabs. The "Saltwater Fishing Resource Map" found at *www.ct.gov/deep/fishing* has detailed information on shore fishing sites, boat ramps, and Party/Charter vessels found along the Connecticut shoreline.

Become a Volunteer CARE Fishing Instructor

I am grateful and fortunate to have a career with the DEEP Fisheries Division Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) Program. The CARE Program offers "Learn to Fish" classes around the state, affording the opportunity to share my passion and love of fishing with others who are interested in learning. Almost as rewarding is working with the hundreds of volunteer fishing instructors who donate their time to teach fishing to others.

Quinn and I launched my canoe into a small pond on a hot July afternoon. Just the two of us for an afternoon of bluegill fishing. A Spiderman push button rod with a piece of nightcrawler hung 18 inches under a bobber did the trick this day. We paddled around and argued about where we should fish, went for a swim, and caught bluegill after bluegill. A few dozen of these tasty fish made their way into our cooler destined for "Poor Man's Shrimp", an easy and delicious use of bluegill fillets. An afternoon well spent!

J. WIGGINS / DEEP FISHERIES (2)

We set out of Niantic Bay on a beautiful July day with the goal of gathering enough scup for fish tacos that evening. Hi-lo rigs baited with squid were sent to the bottom of Bartlett Reef. Almost instantly, they were hooked up. The boys reeled in scup after scup until their arms hurt! Not the biggest fish in the sea by any means, but what they lack in size scup make up for with their tenacious fight. And, they make for excellent fish tacos!

The CARE Program relies heavily on these volunteer instructors to provide quality first fishing experiences to Connecticut residents. If you are passionate about the outdoors and interested in sharing your knowledge and love with others, call the CARE Center at 860-663-1656 to become a volunteer fishing instructor. You may just find that what you enjoy most about fishing is sharing the experience!

A Backyard Favorite

The Industrious Downy Woodpecker

Article and photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

Female downy woodpeckers often have a dainty appearance.

Note the black barring on the tail feathers, which is visible on the top and the underside of the feathers.

One of Connecticut's most familiar backyard birds is the downy woodpecker. This little hammerhead is our smallest member of the woodpecker family. It is a hardy bird with a wide distribution across the continent, and is found virtually statewide in Connecticut. They can be seen in practically any woodlot, regardless of size. Downy woodpeckers are resident birds, but those from the northern part of their range may shift a short distance south.

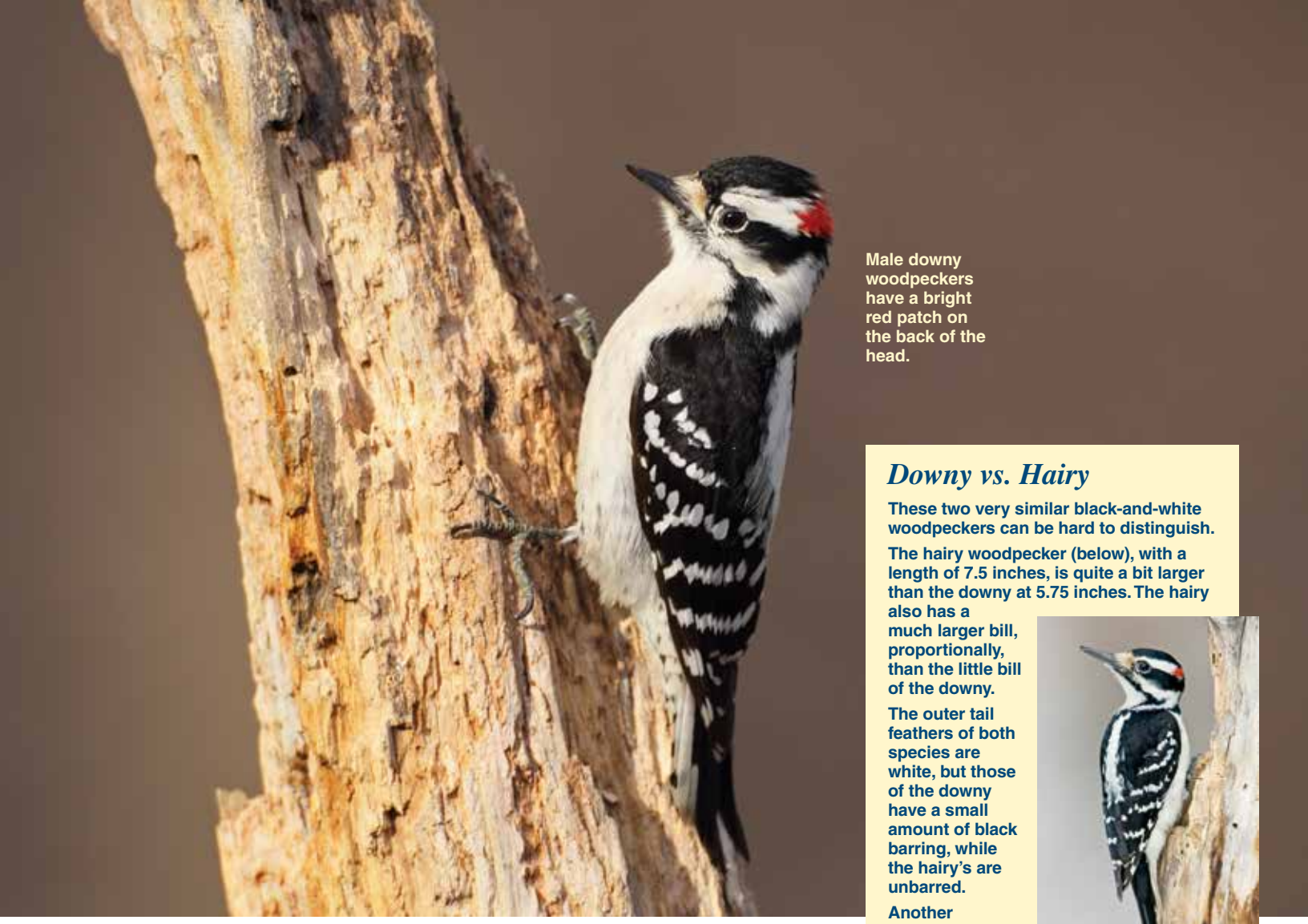
In winter, downy woodpeckers are common visitors to backyard bird feeders. They are often in the company of other small birds, including chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches, together forming a roving band of activity. By congregating in loose flocks, all of the individuals benefit as they locate food sources and watch for predators, such as hawks and cats.

Downy woodpeckers have a broad white patch on their back and a white underside. The black wings have white spots, giving them a bold checkerboard appearance. The head is striped black and white, and males have a red spot on the back of the head. The outer tail feathers are typically white with a few small black bars. The bill is small, straight, and finely-tipped. The birds also have a noticeable tuft of nasal bristles at the base of the bill.

While downy woodpeckers prefer open deciduous woodlands, they are also at home in orchards, parks, backyards, and young forest habitat with brushy or weedy edges. Because of their small size, these woodpeckers can forage on smaller twigs, branches, and herbaceous stems that would not support larger birds. The majority of the diet consists of insects, especially wood-boring beetles and their larvae. The downy woodpecker is a recognized predator of the invasive pest, the emerald ash borer.

At backyard bird feeders, this little woodpecker is fond of black oil sunflower seed, suet, peanuts, and peanut butter. It will sometimes visit hummingbird feeders for sugar water.

Woodpeckers often communicate by drumming on a resonating surface, such as a hollow



Male downy woodpeckers have a bright red patch on the back of the head.

Downy vs. Hairy

These two very similar black-and-white woodpeckers can be hard to distinguish.

The hairy woodpecker (below), with a length of 7.5 inches, is quite a bit larger than the downy at 5.75 inches. The hairy also has a much larger bill, proportionally, than the little bill of the downy.

The outer tail feathers of both species are white, but those of the downy have a small amount of black barring, while the hairy's are unbarred.

Another difference is the voice. The hairy woodpecker has a loud, sharp "peek" call note, while the downy has a mild but loud "pik" call note. Both have a similar rattling call, but the call of the hairy remains at about the same pitch while the rattle descends in pitch at the end with the downy.

How did they get their names?

The lower white patch on the back of the downy woodpecker has soft feathers, while those feathers on the hairy woodpecker are shaggy and more hair-like.

or dead branch. Drumming is done by both sexes and intensifies in late winter and early spring as males advertise for a mate and begin courtship. Drumming may also be a way for woodpeckers to claim a territory or as response to an intruder.

Drumming patterns can be separated by species. For instance, downy woodpeckers drum at a relatively slow pace, 15 or so taps per second, with a frequency of a few seconds between each set of drums. Compare that to the hairy woodpecker, which has a faster rate of about 25 taps per second, but a slower frequency, which may be over 20 seconds between sets.

Downy woodpeckers nest in dead trees, where they excavate a chamber with a small entrance hole. The cavity is usually up to 12 inches deep. Here, the female lays three to eight white eggs. Incubation takes 12 days and young fledge about 24 days after hatching.

Conservation

Because they are adaptable birds and use such a wide variety of habitats, downy woodpeckers have a relatively stable population. However, the same issues that are affecting many small birds are also a concern for downy woodpeckers. Chief among those concerns is habitat loss, which is the number one concern for all wildlife, downy woodpeckers included. While Connecticut has experienced forest regeneration over the past 100 years, there has been a downtick in the amount of forest habitat in the state in recent years due almost entirely to land clearing for development. Other serious concerns for these birds include predation by cats, collisions, and pesticide poisoning.

Homeowners who wish to help downy woodpeckers can provide safe places for roosting at night. The birds will readily use bird boxes, such as bluebird nest boxes, for roosting on cold winter nights.

Piping Plover Numbers Continue to Grow

Written by Rebecca Foster, DEEP Wildlife Division; photography by Paul Fusco, DEEP Wildlife Division

The piping plover is a small (robin-sized) buff-gray and white shorebird that winters in the southern hemisphere and returns to the Connecticut shoreline to breed each spring. The DEEP Wildlife Division manages this state and federally threatened species consistent with guidelines provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This is the Wildlife Division's 33rd year of monitoring and managing this species in Connecticut under the USFWS guidelines, although the Division has been responsible for the management and protection of this small shorebird before it was listed as a threatened species.

Multi-faceted Management

Piping plovers nest on beaches, directly in the sand. Efforts to protect nests begin with using wooden posts and string to construct "fencing" delineating plover nesting habitat. Male piping plovers dig a small depression in the sand, called a "scrape", in which the female plover lays three or four cryptically-colored eggs. Fencing off prime nesting habitat from beach foot traffic minimizes disturbance while the birds are forming nesting territories. Fencing also prevents the eggs, and later small chicks, from being accidentally stepped on. Numerous signs are used in conjunction with the fencing, including yellow "STAY AWAY" (from sensitive nesting areas) signs, "NO DOGS ALLOWED" (during breeding season) signs, and educational signs explaining the life cycle and needs of the breeding plovers.

Once piping plover nests are located, the Wildlife Division may use an exclosure to limit egg predation. An exclosure is essentially a protective metal structure with netting over the top that is buried into the sand (around a nest) and anchored down with large, metal posts. Piping plovers are small enough to easily move in and out of the exclosure, and the exclosure is very effective at preventing large predators, both birds and mammals, from reaching the eggs. Our research has shown that the success rate for exclosed nests is higher than for unexclosed nests.

The final step involves carefully monitoring the fate of piping plover pairs, their nests, and chicks throughout the season (typically April through August). Monitoring is done to collect accurate data, document and minimize disturbances, and educate beachgoers who are interested in learning about piping plovers. The Wildlife Division is very fortunate to have a robust support system of conservationists who assist with monitoring piping plovers, including the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds, The Nature Conservancy, DEEP State Parks Division, municipal governments, shoreline property owners, and over 100 dedicated volunteer piping plover monitors.

Piping Plover Nesting Results for 2019

This past season, 57 pairs of piping plovers and two non-breeding

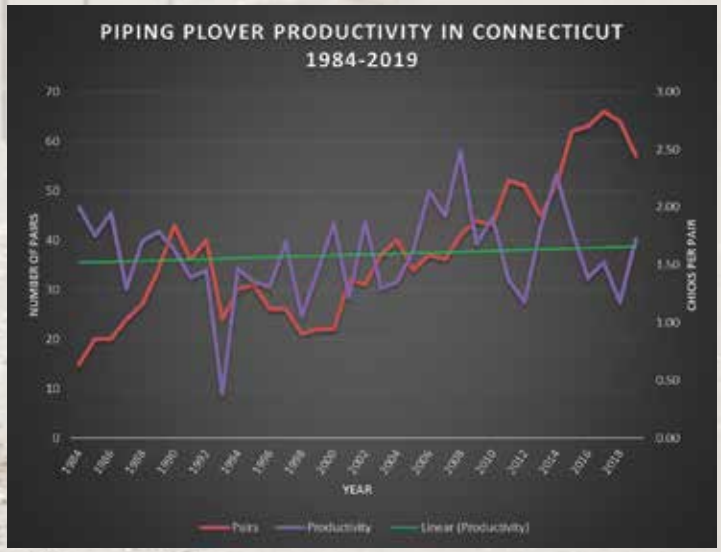
All totalled, 260 plover eggs were produced statewide. Of those, 149 chicks hatched for a hatching success rate of 57%. A total of 98 plover chicks were able to reach flight age.

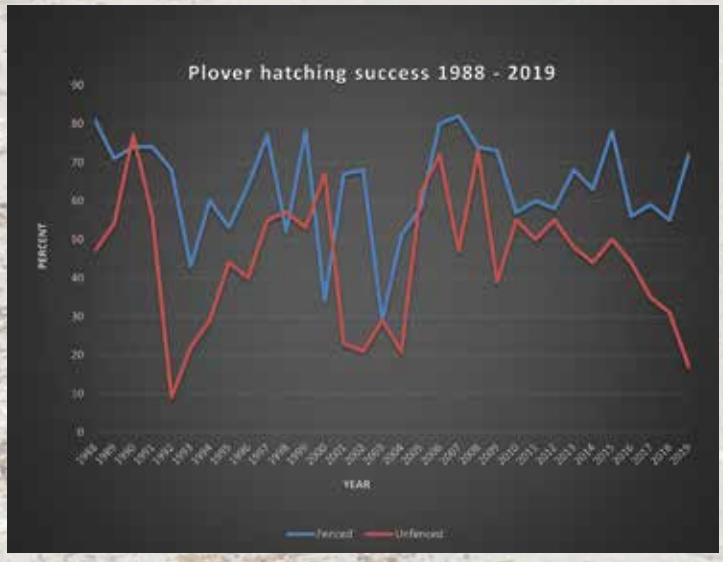
Piping plover eggs and chicks are well camouflaged in their beach habitat.

males were documented on Connecticut beaches. Of the 57 pairs, 53 were able to nest while four pairs did not. Several nests were destroyed and pairs renested. All totalled, 260 plover eggs were produced statewide. Of those, 149 chicks hatched for a hatching success rate of 57%. A total of 98 plover chicks were able to reach flight age, or "fledge," for a fledging success rate of 66%. Piping plover productivity for 2019 was 1.72 chicks produced per pair of plovers. The average productivity in Connecticut over the past 33 years indicates an increasing piping plover population for the state.

Private Property Challenge

Much of Connecticut's shoreline property is privately-owned. Therefore, successful shorebird breeding cannot occur without the cooperation and stewardship of these property owners. The Wildlife Division works diligently to develop and maintain positive relationships with shoreline property owners. The Division recognizes and appreciates that these landowners temporarily modify their activities and use of their beaches to accommodate the nesting birds, as well as allow staff access to their property. Most landowners who "host" nesting piping plovers on their property are enthusiastic about the birds. However, this past season, several landowners declined the protections that have proven to enormously increase plover nesting success. This lack of protection and best management practices created an unfortunate situation where residents and visitors constantly walked through nesting territories, causing the birds to abandon usually productive nesting areas.





Looking Ahead to 2020

The Wildlife Division will continue to work with landowners, municipalities, and beach visitors to implement protections and best management practices to ensure the greatest probability of breeding and nesting success for Connecticut's threatened piping plovers. Those interested in assisting the Division with piping plover monitoring for the 2020 season are encouraged to contact the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds at *ctwaterbirds@gmail.com*.

Community Connections Through Conservation

Written by Nicole Freidenfelds, Visiting Assistant Extension Educator, NRCA Program Coordinator, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Connecticut

The Natural Resources Conservation Academy (NRCA) at the University of Connecticut (UConn) is a unique program that engages Connecticut teens and adult volunteers throughout the state with conservation efforts at the community level. The NRCA includes two different programs students can choose to participate in – the Conservation Ambassador Program (CAP) and the Conservation Training Partnerships (CTP) Program. With the guidance of UConn faculty and students, Academy participants in both programs conduct projects that address local conservation issues, such as creating an inventory of invasive plant species for a specific property, collecting water quality data for stream/wetland protection, using geospatial technology to map resources or features of interest in a given area, along with many others. The products that result from these projects contribute to scientific research and vary from educational presentations and pamphlets to interactive online maps and short videos.

Evelyn, a student in the Conservation Ambassador Program, digs through leaf litter for earthworms and eastern red-backed salamanders with her community partner, Annette Evans, a doctoral student from the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology department at UConn.

PHOTO: A. CABANISS, UCONN NRCA

Popular among NRCA participants are conservation projects that focus on diverse topics related to wildlife. The species and habitats they choose to explore range from insects to bears and backyards to city trails. Here, we highlight a number of wildlife-related projects being conducted by members of the current NRCA class.

Listening for State-listed Bats

All of Connecticut's native bat species are considered of greatest conservation need according to the state's Wildlife Action Plan, and all but one are listed under the state's Endangered Species Act. In addition to habitat loss and disturbance to roosting sites, another major threat to bats is the deadly fungus that causes white-nose syndrome, which has resulted in the death of tens of thousands of bats since it was first discovered in Connecticut in 2008.

Working as Conservation Training Partnerships (CTP) teammates, Laurie and Aiden are using acoustic recording devices to survey for bats throughout northwest Connecticut. Aiden, a high school student, notes that they are not only contributing valuable data to the state's long-term bat monitoring efforts, but also helping "educate the public about bats and their importance in the environment." Bats are often misunderstood, even though they provide important ecosystem services, such as reducing the number of insect pests (e.g., mosquitoes) and pollinating plants in some environments.

As one of Kent Land Trust's Board

Dr. Erin Kuprewicz, Vertebrate Collections Manager in UConn's Biodiversity Research Collections, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, lends her expertise during a tour of the vertebrate collections for a closer look at the mammals that benefit from beaver-created wetlands.
PHOTO: N. FREIDENFIELDS, UCONN NRCA

of Directors, Laurie particularly wants to focus their survey efforts in the town of Kent, land trust properties, and specific micro-habitats within these areas so that the town and land trusts can better manage habitat for bat species. She also points out the need for well-trained wildlife rehabilitators who can care for abandoned or injured bats to help release them safely back into the wild.

Salamanders vs. Earthworms

Over the past few decades, an increase in human activity and movement has enabled the spread of non-native earthworms into new areas of North American forest ecosystems. These invasive earthworms are driving changes in soil structure, nutrient cycling, and competition with native species for food and/or space.

Evelyn, a member of the NRCA's Conservation Ambassador Program (CAP), notes that "something as small as an earthworm can affect the ecology of a forest." She is partnering with Annette Evans, a doctoral student at UConn, to examine the impacts of non-native earthworms on the abundance of eastern red-backed salamanders (*Plethodon cinereus*) in southwestern Connecticut. It is thought that earthworms reduce the amount of leaf litter and detritus on the forest floor, which in turn reduces the availability of invertebrates that make up the majority of salamander diets.

As Annette points out, "The introduction of non-native species, such as earthworms, can have devastating consequences for native ecosystems, including those in your town! Everyone can help preserve native Connecticut

Aiden is using SonoBat software to analyze bat acoustic recordings as part of his Conservation Training Partnerships project.
PHOTO: L. DOSS, MARVELWOOD SCHOOL

wildlife, such as salamanders, by not dumping unwanted plants or animals outside and never removing rocks or fallen logs from forests (even those next to your backyard!), as they provide important homes to native wildlife."

Birds of a Feather

Michael and Michaela are a father-daughter CTP team whose goal is to combine Michaela's passion for birding and Michael's passion for the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve in East Lyme. According to Michaela, "The Oswegatchie Hills is an astounding place, with countless stories to tell." She and her dad plan to create a series of entertaining and educational videos about the preserve "in hopes that it will bring more interest to the Hills." Michael adds that when people become fascinated by the different things they can see and experience in the woods, they become more passionate about nature and thereby more inclined to preserve it.

Eastern red-backed salamanders (*Plethodon cinereus*) occur throughout Connecticut and are commonly found under leaf litter and woody debris on the forest floor.

PHOTO: N. FREIDENFIELDS, UCONN NRCA

Ovenbirds and Stock Market Models

Ovenbirds are olive-green warblers commonly heard singing throughout Connecticut forests during spring and summer, and the subject of CAP member Allie's project. She is working with Eliza Grames, a UConn doctoral student, to better understand factors that affect ovenbird singing. Using models similar to those in financial market trading and earthquake aftershock analysis, Eliza and Allie are exploring the role of time during the breeding season and forest fragmentation on ovenbird singing behavior.

When asked about the project, Allie said it is "a perfect fit for me because I am passionate about computer science and technology, as well as environmental conservation. I was surprised when I began my project at how easily accessible it was to me. I am not an expert on bird calls or Connecticut bird species, but I was immediately able to start learning more. It's important to understand that environmental conservation can be connected to many other fields (in this case, computer science) and that all forms of research are valuable." Eliza hopes "to help Allie develop programming skills that she can use in her future research and give her an opportunity to combine her interests in computer science and wildlife."

Eager Beavers

Inspired in part by the book *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter* by Ben Goldfarb, CTP teammates, Christin and Melinda, are creating an online story map featuring a beaver-created wetland at Mendell's Folly preserve, a property of the Bethany Land Trust. Their story map will include information they gained during a recent visit to the UConn Storrs campus. Melinda and Christin were given a tour of the UConn vertebrate collections by Dr. Erin Kuprewicz and met with Anna Puchkoff, a graduate student in the department of Natural Resources and the Environment, to learn more about wetlands, the valuable services they provide, and the organisms that use them.

Melinda's goal with this project is to educate the general public and to encourage more people to participate in citizen science programs like the NRCA or smaller events, such as The Great Backyard Bird Count.

Interested in learning more about the Natural Resources Conservation Academy and conducting a local wildlife-related conservation project? Visit *https://nrca.uconn.edu* or email *nrca@uconn.edu* for more information. Programs are available for teens and adults. The CTP program is funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation; CAP support is provided in part by the Goldring Family Foundation, Inc.

A Rewarding Story of Rescue and Release

Written by Sandra Ruiz, DEEP Wildlife Division

Successful stories about the recovery of injured wildlife are often the result of cooperative work among non-profit organizations, citizens, and DEEP. This year, the cooperative action of Audubon Connecticut's Sharon Audubon Center, volunteers, and DEEP's Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions resulted in the successful rescue and release of an adult male bald eagle. Early this past May, staff from DEEP's Burlington Trout Hatchery found a bald eagle stranded at one of the ponds and immediately contacted the Wildlife Division. The bird was taken to Sharon Audubon's Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic.

P. J. FUSCO

This 24-year-old bald eagle – the offspring of the first bald eagle pair to nest in Connecticut after almost 40 years of absence – was recently rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

Under the care of wildlife rehabilitation and outreach specialist, Sunny Kellner, along with the assistance of staff and volunteers, the eagle recovered his strength. Adult birds of prey taken in for rehabilitation without obvious injuries often show levels of lead poisoning and accumulation of environmental contaminants that are picked up from the prey and carrion they eat. In this case, medical examination showed no bodily injuries or chemical toxicity. The eagle's condition seemed to have been the result of weakness, possibly related to its remarkable age of 24 years old! Life expectancy in the wild ranges between 15 and 30 years, but for this bird to be free of toxins at that age is remarkable. Fortunately, the eagle only needed a safe place to recover weight and gain strength.

The surprise did not end with the medical results, band reports identified this eagle as a Connecticut native, banded as a chick by DEEP staff on June 8, 1995, in Barkhamsted. It is the offspring of the first pair of bald eagles to nest in Connecticut since the 1950s. This breeding pair was the only one in Connecticut from 1992 to 1995.

On October 1, 2019, after five months of hearty meals (including fish provided by the hatchery) and vigilant care, the eagle was released at the Burlington Trout Hatchery in the presence of those who were involved in his rescue and care.

Discover Outdoor CT 2019

Fun for the Whole Family

Written by Andrew LaBonte, DEEP Wildlife Division; photos by DEEP Wildlife Division staff

This year's Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day was held in September at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. The Bureau of Natural Resources Wildlife and Fisheries Divisions, along with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's Divisions of State Parks, Law Enforcement, and Boating, cooperatively hosted the event with more than 30 other groups, such as private hunting and fishing clubs, environmental education centers, and other conservation organizations.

The federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program, which is funded by special fees on hunting and fishing equipment and helps finance wildlife and fish management, habitat restoration, and other conservation programs in the states, helped make this event possible. Additional support was provided by Bill Embacher Decoys-Avian Taxidermy, East Hartford Cabela's, The Country Butcher, Friends of Sessions Woods, Home Depot, High Rock Shooting Preserve, Quinebaug Kennels, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Events like Discover Outdoor Connecticut would not be possible without tremendous support from various conservation and outdoor groups and local volunteers. The ultimate goal of the event is to provide attendees an opportunity to participate in various outdoor-related activities while also raising awareness and appreciation for resource conservation. Management efforts that benefit Connecticut's natural resources not only include fish and wildlife, but the air, water, and habitats in which those animals live. By introducing residents to our state's diverse natural areas and the species that live within, it is hoped they develop an appreciation, a sense of stewardship, and an interest in becoming involved.

Participants at this year's Discover Outdoor Connecticut learned from natural resource professionals about ongoing habitat management programs (top) and tried their hand at casting with spinning reels.

Emma Kowalchuk won third place in the youth category of the photo contest for her photo of a flower.

The second Discover Outdoor Connecticut Photo Contest was held in conjunction

with the event. Whether a hunter, angler, or general outdoor enthusiast, seeing and capturing a great photo of a raccoon, frog, butterfly, dragonfly, or a beautiful landscape, can be a memorable experience.

The locavore movement is becoming more popular, spurring interest in harvesting and providing local food for one's own table. Thanks to generous venison donations from Josh Weiner and processing efforts from Steven Boyer of The Country Butcher in Tolland, over 300 pounds of local venison (deer) were made into kielbasa, meat sticks, pastrami, salami, and summer sausage for attendees to enjoy. Many left with a full appreciation of how good locally harvested food tastes and, hopefully, left them craving more.

Thanks to all of the DEEP staff, volunteers, and organizations who participated, the event featured a long list of outdoor activities for the whole family. Truly connecting with the outdoors cannot be accomplished through a smart phone or tablet. Nothing can replace a firsthand outdoor experience – such as spending the day on the water in a canoe or kayak, hiking through the woods with a camera, or harvesting one's own food for the table. Events like Discover Outdoor Connecticut not only increase awareness of DEEP's role in managing fish, wildlife, and their habitats, they also help build an understanding of the value and importance of natural resources as a whole.

It is hoped that attendees will continue to enjoy the outdoors and all it has to offer. Next year's event is planned again for Hammonasset Beach State Park, sometime in September. Stay tuned for details by checking the DEEP website at *www.ct.gov/deep/DiscoverOutdoorCT*.

Discover Outdoor Connecticut offers participants a unique opportunity to learn about Connecticut's natural resources and a variety of outdoor activities, including target archery, wildlife demonstrations, exhibits, a photo contest, venison tasting (left), and more!

Discover Outdoor Connecticut will be held in September 2020 at Hammonasset Beach State Park. Stay tuned for details at www.ct.gov/deep/DiscoverOutdoorCT or on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/CTFishAndWildlife.

Notable Statistics from the 2018 Deer Hunting Season

Harvest Total	**11,345**
Archery Harvest	5,332
Shotgun/Rifle Harvest	4,298
Archery Permits	16,956
Shotgun/Rifle Permits	16,526
Success Rates	
Archery	31.3%
Shotgun/Rifle	24.6%
Muzzleloader	8.4%
Sex Ratio	
Males per Female	1.4:1
Top Harvest Towns	
Lebanon	227
East Haddam	228
Coventry	202
Woodstock	196
Top Archery Harvest Zone	
Zone 11	1,249
Reported Roadkill	608
Crop Damage	569

More specific details are in the 2018 Deer Program Summary at:

https://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/wildlife/pdf_files/game/deersum2018.pdf

A Fun Day of Fishing!

PHOTO COURTESY M. ADAMS

Thirteen-year-old Zack Adams attended DEEP's Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day this past September not knowing it would turn into the largest bass of his life! Zack was the winner of the Kid's Quiz contest at the event, which earned him a fishing prize package and an afternoon of fishing for his family at the Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) Center.

Zack has experience trout fishing, but bass fishing was new to him. He and his brother, Jake, were in for a treat that evening and CARE Fishing Instructor Jake Parise was on hand to assist with this new style of fishing. The conditions were calm and perfect for casting topwater frogs. The plastic frogs dragged across lily pads triggered several eruptions, and the boys were rewarded with a few nice largemouth bass. In the meantime, CARE Instructor Jake caught some live bait – small bluegill sunfish that he rigged on a large circle hook under a bobber. Bluegill sunfish are bass candy, and this turned out to be the ticket for Zack's biggest largemouth bass ever. Zack casted one of the live bluegill along a weed line and soon watched the bobber disappear. After a short battle, Zack pulled to shore a largemouth bass that was pushing four pounds. Congratulations to Zack!

Justin Wiggins, DEEP Fisheries Division

Bird Species on the Brink

Using the latest climate change models and known home ranges of 604 North American birds, National Audubon Society scientists were able to predict how each species' range will shift as climate change and other human impacts continue to influence the continent. The results indicate that two-thirds (389 out of 604) of North American bird species will be forced to relocate as the climate warms, and many of those species may not survive. While one might think that certain species would simply shift their home ranges further north, the models emphasize the fundamental climate needs each species requires for survival; not the specifics of habitat. In other words, some species will likely be forced to move their home ranges further north, but there may not be any suitable habitat for them when they get there. So what does this mean for Connecticut birds? A two degrees Celsius warming could mean that over 50 species that call our state home may lose more than half of their current range. This includes the eastern towhee, American woodcock, bobolink, and ovenbird. Reducing our carbon emissions and better absorbing emissions that are produced would greatly help limit our planet's warming trend. To learn more about how climate change will impact birds, visit *www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees*.

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Conservation Calendar

Dec. - March ..... Observe eagles at the Shepaug Dam Observation Area in Southbury. The viewing area is open Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM from early December through early March. Visitation to the observation area is by reservation only. To schedule a free visit, go to *https://www.firstlightpower.com/recreation/?location_id=397* or call 1-800-368-8954 (Tuesday through Friday between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM).

Jan. - April..... Donate to the Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-off Fund on your 2019 Connecticut Income Tax form. Learn more at *www.ct.gov/deep/EndangeredSpecies*.

Early 2020 Hunting Season Dates

Jan. 1-31 ..... Bowhunting season for deer and turkey on private land only in Deer Management Zones 11 and 12.

Jan. 1-Feb. 29 ..... Hunting continues for pheasant, chukar and Hungarian partridges, gray squirrels, cottontail rabbits, European hares, and red and gray foxes. (See the 2020 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide for additional season dates.)

Jan. 15-Feb. 15 ..... Canada goose late season in the south zone.

*Consult the 2020 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guides and 2019-2020 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide for specific season dates and details. Guides are available at DEEP facilities, town halls, and outdoor equipment stores, and also on the DEEP website (**www.ct.gov/deep/hunting; www.ct.gov/deep/fishing**). Go to **www.ct.gov/deep/sportsmenlicensing** to purchase Connecticut hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as required permits and stamps. The system accepts payment by VISA or MasterCard.*

Find us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/CTFishandWildlife

Recovering America's Wildlife Act Advances in the U.S. House of Representatives

The U.S. Congress House Committee on Natural Resources recently advanced bills that protect our rivers and restore our wildlife populations, including Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3742) which has 157 bipartisan cosponsors toward final passage in the House.

ALLIANCE FOR AMERICA'S FISH & WILDLIFE

State fish and wildlife agencies have identified over 12,000 species in need of proactive conservation to prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered. The bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA), reintroduced by Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) in July of this year, is a solution to this critical problem.

The bill will dedicate $1.3 billion annually to state fish and wildlife agencies to implement their science-based wildlife action plans and an additional $97.5 million for tribal fish and wildlife managers to conserve fish and wildlife on tribal lands and waters. This will provide dedicated funding, so state and tribal wildlife managers can proactively conserve fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need in a voluntary, non-regulatory manner before federal listing under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. All of this can be done without additional taxes. Learn more at *www.ct.gov/deep/AllianceforFishandWildlife* or *http://ournatureusa.com/*. Follow progress on RAWA on Facebook at *https://www.facebook.com/OurNatureUSA*.

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P. J. FUSCO

A cedar waxwing makes use of ornamental crabapple berries on a cold and icy winter morning.