

ISSUE 9 | FALL 2020

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

IN THIS ISSUE...

- Learn about forests
- Meet our deer biologist
- Learn how hunters can help wildlife
- Match animal tracks

MEET THE WHITE-TAILED DEER!



DEM
RHODE ISLAND



DID YOU KNOW?



We do a lot of work to protect, conserve, and learn about Rhode Island's wild creatures and the places they call home. None of this work would be possible without the help of people who hunt and fish in our state.

Hunters and anglers buy a license each year. This license means that they promise to follow all the rules of hunting and fishing in Rhode Island. These rules exist to protect our important natural resources and make sure that people can enjoy hunting and fishing in our state forever. Also, the money from these licenses goes towards important conservation work in Rhode Island.

There's another really cool way that hunters, anglers, and also target shooters (people who may not hunt, but practice their aim with firearms or archery at a range) help with conservation all across the United States. The businesses that make firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and fishing equipment pay a tax on these items. This raises millions of dollars, which is split up and given to each state by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

What do we do with all this money? We use it to help our state's fish and wildlife! This money helps to buy more land for our management areas, which means more habitats will be protected in our state forever. We also use the money to do important research to learn more about our fish and wildlife, and what we can do better to help them.

Much of our work wouldn't be possible without the help of our hunters, anglers, and target shooters. By participating in these types of outdoor activities in a responsible and safe way, you can help support fish and wildlife conservation in Rhode Island too!

CONTACT US

RI DFW FIELD HEADQUARTERS
 277 GREAT NECK ROAD, WEST KINGSTON, RI 02892
 401-789-0281 | DEM.DFW@DEM.RI.GOV
RI DFW EDUCATION CENTER
 1B CAMP E-HUN-TEE, EXETER, RI 02822
 401-539-0019
DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
 24HR VIOLATION LINE: (401) 222-3070

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Want to learn even more
 about RI's fish and wildlife?

Follow us on
 YouTube and Instagram!



Rhode Island Department of
 Environmental Management



The Wild Rhode Island Explorer | Fall 2020

Writer/Editor: Mary Gannon, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator

Cover photo: Dean Birch

Inside cover photo: Mike Stultz

Contributors: Madison Proulx, Dylan Ferreira, Gabrielle DeMeillon, Dana Kopec

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HABITAT CHAT

Fantastic Forests



Baby fishers (called kits)
 playing together in a tree

Rhode Island is nicknamed "The Ocean State" for our beautiful coasts and the Narragansett Bay, but we also have some amazing forests! More than half of the land in Rhode Island is covered by forest habitat. That's a lot of trees! But, there weren't always a lot of forests in Rhode Island. Many of them were cut down for farms or **timber**, causing some wild animals that need forests to disappear from our state.

Eventually, people moved West for better farmland, or moved to the city for work. Over time, our forests grew back, and our wildlife started coming back too. Animals like the fisher and pileated woodpecker are now common sights in Rhode Island. These critters like **mature forest** habitat. This is a forest that is about 70 to 100 years old. Most of our forest habitat across the state is around this age.

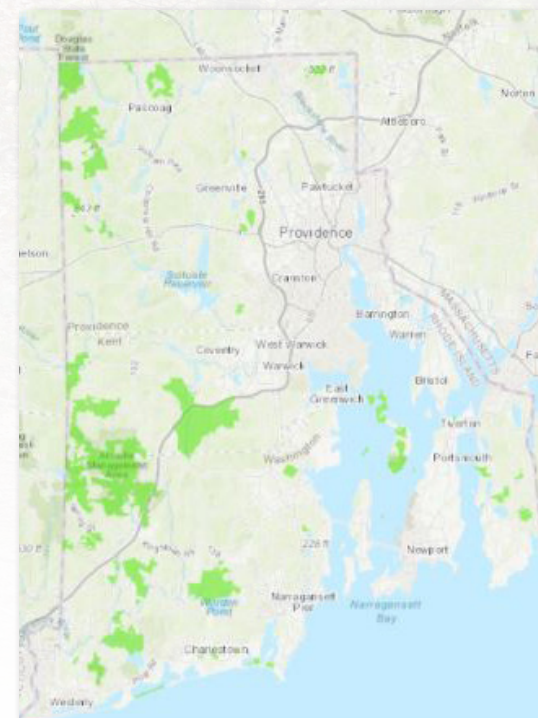
In Rhode Island, there is a lot of habitat **fragmentation**. This means that the habitat is broken up into smaller chunks that are not connected. Think about putting together a puzzle and finding out at the end that you are missing a few pieces. The picture



A mother pileated woodpecker
 feeding her chicks

wouldn't be complete! That's what our forest looks like from a bird's eye view. It has gaps and spaces in between the patches of forest. This is not good for wildlife, because animals have to cross roads and areas with people to find food, water, shelter, and space.

At the Division of Fish and Wildlife, we work with the Division of Forest Environment to protect and **connect** patches of forest habitat in our State Management Areas. These are big pieces of land that will be protected forever. In this map, you can see them in green. Most of our Management Areas are in the western half of Rhode Island, which is where most of our state's forest habitat is found. Get outside and enjoy Rhode Island's fantastic forests!



Fisher photo by Dean Birch; Pileated woodpecker photo by Gerald Krausse

MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES



How can hunters help wildlife?

In nature, it's all about balance. Hunting can help biologists keep animal populations in balance with their habitat. Let's go back in time to look at an example of this. In the early 1900's wildlife biologists in Arizona wanted to save a mule deer herd that was shrinking. They banned hunting and predators were removed. Without any hunting or natural predators, the deer herd eventually grew so much, it got out of control! The deer destroyed habitat by eating all the plants. This caused a lot of deer to starve. After seeing this happen, Arizona opened hunting back up in 1929 to help balance the deer with the habitat. Today, a large, healthy herd of mule deer live in that area of Arizona!

Today, we work with hunters to keep that balance here in Rhode Island. Hunters help by harvesting some animals so there is enough food to go around. Hunters have to follow rules so that we don't harvest too many animals. People who do not follow those rules are called poachers. Poaching is not fair to our wildlife or to other hunters!



Want to be a junior hunter/wildlife conservationist in Rhode Island?

Take a hunter education course! Ask an adult help you find out how on our website: dem.ri.gov/huntereducation. All ages welcome!

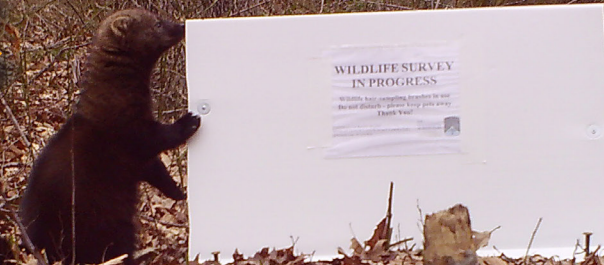
If you want to get out and hunt you must be 12 years old to get a junior hunting license and be with a qualified adult. We know lots of super nice mentor hunters to help you out!

About the Author

Hi everyone! My name is Maddie; I am the secretary at the Outdoor Education office. I have the best job ever because I encourage people to go explore the great outdoors! I love to practice archery, learn about wild game animals (turkeys are my favorite), go fishing, and cook up seafood with my family! I did not grow up in a hunting family, so I relied on RIDEM Hunter Education programs to learn and to connect me with awesome mentors who helped me get to where I am today. I am still learning and growing, and now I am here to help you do the same!



CRITTER CAM CAPTION THIS PIC!



This fisher seems very interested in our trail camera study! Little tents like this were set up in front of our trail cameras and baited with all sorts of stuff. Different smells, stinky meat, and even cat toys were used to lure critters over to have their picture taken!



"Look Mom, no hands!"
-Logan

"Gov. Raimondo says masks to be worn by everyone and social distancing - 6 ft apart!"
-Skyler

"I'm a bat!"
-Luca

About our trail camera study:

A trail camera is a small, waterproof camera that can be strapped to a tree. It takes photos when it senses something moving in front of the lens. **We teamed up with wildlife biologists from the University of Rhode Island to learn more about our state's mammals with trail cameras. A whopping 248,743 photos were taken during this study!** We'll be featuring some of the best photos here. A huge thanks to the patient URI students who sorted through all those photos!

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS

Plan a Fall Fishing Trip

Fall is a great time to go fishing with family and friends. Here in Rhode Island, there are many different types of fish you can catch. There are many fun options when planning a fishing trip; you can fish from a boat, the shoreline, or in the water with waders, which will help keep you dry.

Before going fishing, pack up these items to have a safe and fun fishing trip!

Rod and Reel: Try a rod with a spincasting reel if you are new to fishing; this type of reel is simple to use and can handle fish up to 20 pounds! Spinner rods are also a good option for beginners. Practice casting a few times in an open area before heading to the water.

Fishing Line: An inexpensive type to start with is monofilament (4 to 6-pound test for smaller fish like Pumpkinseed and 8 to 12- pound test for larger species like Bass or Trout).

Bait: You can either use artificial lures or live bait.

Hooks: Choose the size and type based on the kind of fish you are interested in catching.

Scissors or clippers: For cutting fishing line.

Bobbers: These little floating objects attach to your fishing line and will "bob" up and down when a fish bites.

Sinkers: Are small weights that attach to your fishing line that help your bait or lure sink.

Fishing License: Only anglers who are 15 or older need a fishing license in Rhode Island.

Needle-nose pliers: These tools will help you remove the hook from the fish. Ask an adult for help when removing sharp hooks.

Tackle Box: This is where you can store all your small items. Any hard plastic or metal container that will protect you from sharp hooks stored inside will work.



Other things to bring:

- ✓ Sunscreen and a hat
- ✓ Flashlight or headlamp
- ✓ Bug Spray
- ✓ First-aid kit
- ✓ Lifejacket
- ✓ Water and snacks
- ✓ A phone or camera (To take pictures of the catch!)
- ✓ Bag for trash (What you bring in, you must take out.)

Thanks!



About the Author

My name is Dana, and I am the Technical Assistant at the Division of Fish and Wildlife Outdoor Education Office. I love fishing, mainly fly fishing, and fly tying. A big part of my job is helping people learn to fish. My favorite part is when someone catches a fish, especially if it's their first!



OUR WILD NEIGHBORS

WHITE-TAILED DEER



Scientific name:
Odocoileus virginianus

Did you know?

Baby deer are called fawns. Those spots help the fawn to **camouflage** when lying very still in the grass. This keeps them safe from predators when mom is out **foraging** for food.

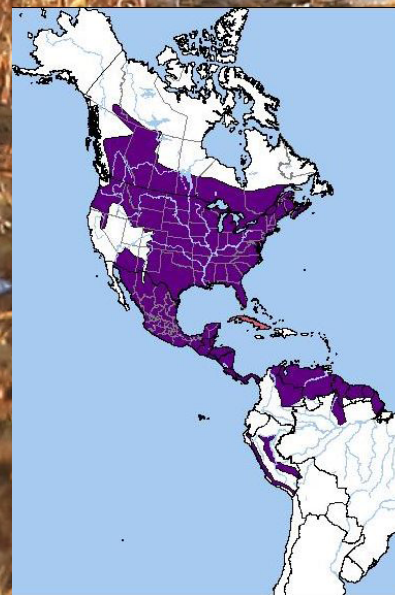
Habitat: In Rhode Island, deer will use pretty much any habitat, even the shoreline and the islands in Narragansett Bay, if they are close enough for the deer to reach by swimming. White-tailed deer use swamps, thickets, mature forest and fields. Deer also love yards and golf courses, which have a nice mix of trees, shrubs, lawns, and gardens. Many neighborhoods are overrun with deer because there are fewer predators and hunting is not allowed.

Food: Deer eat grass, fruit, and acorns. They also eat leaves, buds and twigs of woody plants. Deer can eat 5-9 pounds of food a day! They are **ruminants**. This means that their stomach digests food only halfway, then sends it back up to the deer's mouth for a second round of chewing. The half-digested food is called "**cud**." Plants are hard to digest, so deer have **microbes** (tiny living organisms) in their stomachs to help them break down their food.

Breeding: Male deer (**bucks**) search for female deer (**does**) in the fall. The deer breeding season is called the "**rut**." During the rut, bucks will mark their territory by rubbing their antlers against small trees and scraping the dirt with their hooves. This leaves a scent behind, which tells other bucks who's in charge of that territory! Fawns are born in May or June. Does usually have only one fawn, but can have twins in some cases.

Where in the world?

You can find the white-tailed deer from southern Canada to South America.



Pumpkinseed and pickerel illustration: USFWS



Learn more about deer conservation work in Rhode Island on the next page!

OUT IN THE FIELD

Keeping the Balance



Hi everyone, I'm Mary! I'm the Wildlife Outreach Coordinator for the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife. My job is to talk to Rhode Islanders about our state's wild animals and the conservation work we're doing to help them. Want to learn more about what it's like to keep the balance in nature? Let's go out in the field with our deer biologist, Dylan Ferreira, to find out!

Mary: Dylan, what are your responsibilities as a deer biologist?

Dylan: Overall, to make sure deer (and their habitat) are healthy. This makes sure that hunters are able to harvest deer **sustainably**. We allow hunters to harvest deer by setting hunting seasons and limits on the number of deer hunters can take each season. These rules can help increase or decrease the population to make sure we have deer for future generation to enjoy, but not have too many deer. When there are too many deer, it's harder for them to find food. We never want deer to struggle to survive, or die of starvation. I also work on reducing deer-human conflicts that arise. I keep an eye on the deer harvest data, deer vehicle collisions, and habitat measurements.

Mary: Why is it so important for biologists to learn more about animal populations?

Dylan: Every piece of information we learn allows us to **manage** the species better and better. The more we understand about a species, the better we can be at making sure the population stays healthy today and in the future.

Mary: What is the most challenging part of keeping Rhode Island's deer population in balance?

Dylan: Some people, like hunters, want more deer to hunt. Some people, like gardeners and farmers, would like less deer eating their flowers and crops. It can be hard to balance and keep everyone happy!

Mary: There's a big threat to deer in the United States called Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Can you explain what it is and why we're worried about it here in Rhode Island?

Dylan: CWD is a disease that attacks a deer's brain. Eventually, it causes the deer's muscles to waste away. The deer becomes very weak, and eventually dies. It's currently not in Rhode Island, but we are worried

about it getting here. This would seriously harm our deer population. Also, it's not known to infect humans, but if the disease were to ever jump species to humans, it could be dangerous. We want to keep both deer and people safe!

Mary: What are you doing as part of your job to help keep an eye on CWD and our state's deer?

Dylan: We test deer that have been harvested by hunters or unfortunately hit by cars. To test a deer, you have to remove the lymph nodes, which are located in the deer's neck.

Mary: Wait a minute, that sounds like it could be pretty gross and stinky!

Dylan: It definitely can be! But, it's all part of being a wildlife biologist, and to make sure our deer population is doing well. If you're not too squeamish, we actually have volunteers come and help at our deer check stations every November!

Mary: Cool, I will be there! What is your favorite thing about your job?

Dylan: Knowing I have a part in managing and conserving wildlife for the future, interacting with hunters, (with beginners, to share what I've learned and with experts, so I can learn from them), sharing what I know to educate and inspire others, and working outside and being close with nature and all it offers.

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite Rhode Island wild animal? Other than deer, of course!



Dylan: The wood duck! Early in my career I had the pleasure of banding them and checking their nest boxes with the Division of Fish and Wildlife. They are so stunning in the fall!



About Dylan

Dylan grew up outdoors. Hunting and fishing have always been a big part of his life. His passion for the outdoors and wildlife led him to his career as a wildlife biologist! Outside of the office, Dylan likes to watch sunrises and sunsets while out hunting or fishing. He also loves to cook and eat the fish, deer, and ducks that he harvests. Dylan says, "It's rewarding to harvest, prep, cook and eat something from the wild, knowing where it came from and what's in it!" Dylan also loves to play soccer!



WILD QUEST

Can you match each Rhode Island mammal with its tracks?

Bobcat



Coyote



White-tailed Deer



Gray squirrel



River otter



Raccoon



How did you do?
Check the answers
on the back cover.



CREATIVE CORNER: RHODE ISLAND MAMMALS



"HARBOR SEAL OF NEW ENGLAND"

The scientific name for the Harbor Seal means "sea dogs." They have gray or brown fur with spots and weigh between 150-300 lbs. Male Harbor Seals weigh more than females. They do not have ears, only ear holes.

Harbor Seals travel the North Atlantic seacoast from Canada to New York. They flop on their bellies and glide through the water. They do not make much noise, but sometimes slap the water with their flippers."

By Skyler



"RED FOX NEAR DEN" By John

Did you know that we have two species of foxes in Rhode Island? They are the red fox and the gray fox. Both are important predators of mice and other rodents. Foxes can sometimes cause problems for people, especially if you have chickens!

Make sure you clean up any pet food or trash outside, and keep an eye on small pets. Foxes might see these as invitations to come on over for a snack. Foxes are super cute, but it's important to remember they are wild animals. They need space, and should be viewed at a safe distance.

HUNTING SEASON HAS STARTED, IT'S TIME TO WEAR ORANGE IN THE WOODS!



"Hello humans! Zinnia the Labrador here! I just wanted to say that it's very important to wear a **fluorescent orange safety vest** when you visit our State Management Areas and undeveloped State Parks during the fall, winter, and early spring. Wearing an orange vest helps hunters see hikers, bikers, and horseback riders, and keeps everybody safe.

You can even get one for your dog too! Isn't mine so cool? I just wish it had pockets so I could carry some cookies in it...Or my favorite squeaky toy!

It's also important to make sure to walk your dog on a leash in the Management Areas so that people, pets, and wildlife stay safe. I hope you all have lots of fun out in nature!"

Wild Quest Answers

- 1 - Coyote
- 2 - River otter
- 3 - White-tailed deer
- 4 - Gray squirrel
- 5 - Bobcat
- 6 - Raccoon

Hey everyone! If you'd like to learn more about Rhode Island's wildlife, tell your teachers to check out our Rhody Critter Kits!

For more info, visit dem.ri.gov/wildlifeoutreach



RI Department of Environmental Management
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
Great Swamp Field Headquarters
277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892

TO: