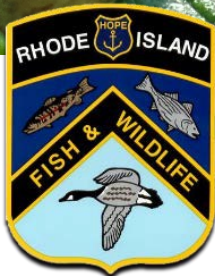


Division of Fish and Wildlife
Wild Rhode Island

Summer 2020 ∞ Volume 13 ∞ Issue 3



Spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*) Photo: G. DeMeillon



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

NICHOLAS FARM MANAGEMENT AREA.....	3
YOUTH HUNTER & MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS.....	6
WILD TURKEYS IN RHODE ISLAND.....	8
AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE PROTECTIONS.....	10
CONNECT WITH DFW ON SOCIAL MEDIA.....	12

Saltmarsh sparrow. Photo: Patrick F.



The Saltmarsh and the Sparrow

By: Shilo Felton, Principal Wildlife Biologist, Nongame program

One of my favorite sounds of spring and summer in Rhode Island is the territorial song of the red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). If you're enjoying a social distancing stroll on a sunny day along an inland or coastal wetland, you may have heard the trill "conk-la-reeeeee, conk-la-reeeeee" of these robin-sized, marsh-loving songbirds. While I enjoy a leisurely hike at this time of year on any of the open spaces we are fortunate to have in our state, what brings me to Galilee Bird Sanctuary at 5am these days is more focused. The more common red-winged blackbird is part of the draw, but I am really on the "hunt" for the saltmarsh sparrow (*Ammospiza caudacuta*).

Sparrows are often under-appreciated among many casual and not-so-casual bird enthusiasts. They are small, mostly gray or brown, blending well into their environment, and they can be difficult to tell apart, even as an experienced

Continued on page 5

THE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ensure that the freshwater, wildlife, and marine resources of the state of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.



Watchaug Pond, Charlestown, R.I.



Wild Rhode Island is a quarterly publication created by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish and Wildlife. Printing is supported by the Aquatic Resource Education Program (Federal Aid Grant F-42-E) and the Hunter Safety Education Program.

Janet Coit, Director
RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Catherine Sparks
Assistant Director of Natural Resources

RIDEM, DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE

Sarah M. Riley, WRI Editor/Designer
Implementation Aide

Veronica Masson, WRI Editor
Federal Aid Coordinator

Kimberly Sullivan, WRI Publisher
Aquatic Resource Education Coordinator

Amy Penta, Assistant Editor
Seasonal Technical Support Intern

For a free subscription to Wild Rhode Island and/or Wild Rhode Island Explorer, please email Sarah.Riley@dem.ri.gov

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This Issue Features:

THE SALTMARSH AND THE SPARROW.....1



LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS ELUSIVE RHODE ISLAND BIRD AND THE HABITAT IT CALLS HOME.

NICHOLAS FARM MANAGEMENT AREA.....3



LEARN ABOUT THIS SECLUDED AND BEAUTIFUL OPEN SPACE IN COVENTRY, R.I., AND WHAT THIS AREA OFFERS VISITORS.

YOUTH HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.....8



LEARN ABOUT RIDFW YOUTH HUNTER EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS, AND WHAT THEY MEAN TO PARTICIPANTS.

WELCOME NEW HUNTER SAFETY COORDINATOR.....9



SCOTT TRAVERS WILL BE JOINING THE DFW FULL TIME AS OUR HUNTER SAFETY COORDINATOR.

A SIGN OF THE TIMES: HERPTILE PROTECTION IN RI.....10



RI'S AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES ARE FACING MANY CHALLENGES TODAY, LEARN WHAT DFW IS DOING TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE

CONNECT WITH DFW ON SOCIAL MEDIA.....12



LEARN HOW TO CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA SO THAT YOU CAN STAY UP TO DATE ON PROGRAMS, PROJECTS, AND RI'S FISH AND WILDLIFE

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NICHOLAS FARM, COVENTRY, RHODE ISLAND

FEATURED STATE LAND, R.I. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Rhode Island DEM's Management Areas provide hunting and fishing opportunities to the public, and protect wildlife habitat and important natural communities. In 1969 a 146-acre parcel in Coventry, Rhode Island containing Carbuncle Pond was purchased to establish Nicholas Farm Wildlife Management Area. With subsequent acquisitions in the 1980s and 1990s, including the historic Cy Place Farm, the area now totals 1,550 acres. These purchases were accomplished in part with funding from the Federal Aid to Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program. Nicholas Farm is adjacent to Pachaug State Forest in Sterling, CT and contributes to a large network of conservation land throughout the borderlands held by RIDEM and other conservation organizations.

Nicholas Farm is dominated by coniferous forest and oak forest, along with a variety of other habitats including pitch pine woodland, and grasslands. The 31-acre Carbuncle Pond is located to the north and provides ample fishing opportunity during all seasons, featuring a boat ramp and fixed dock. Along the western border, patches of young forest have been created through forest management to provide habitat for wildlife that rely on these dense thickets. Several coldwater streams flow through the area, including the Mossup River, Roaring Brook, and Bucks Horn Brook. A recent project initiated in 2017 was undertaken to restore a large tract of pitch pine-scrub oak barrens through tree thinning and prescribed fire at the Nicholas Unit. The Trestle Trail bike path, operated by RIDEM Parks and Recreation, bisects Nicholas Farm connecting Lewis Farm Road to Route 14A in Sterling.

Nicholas Farm is accessible from Plainfield Pike (Route 14) and from Nicholas Road where gated access roads and unimproved trails wind throughout the property. Nicholas Farm is open to all forms of regulated hunting and trapping, and is located within Deer Management Zone 2. White-tailed deer, turkey, and fisher are considered relatively abundant here. Two areas of open fields, the Place Farm Unit and the Nicholas Unit, are stocked with ring-necked pheasant throughout the small game season. Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funds made available through the Pittman-Robertson Act and Dingell-Johnson Act and the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service, along with matching funds from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and permits, are used to maintain and enhance this Management Area. With the recent boundary expansion here and other recent acquisitions at Tillinghast Pond and Durfee Hill Management Area, RIDEM continues to increase its portfolio of open space to help support wildlife conservation and provide hunting opportunities to the public. Get outside and enjoy Nicholas Farm Management Area!



Photo: M. Stultz



White-tailed-deer Photo: Dean Birch



Photo: M. Stultz



Pheasant Photo: M. Stultz

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE RHODE ISLAND DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE?

Available now is the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife *Overview of Programs & Responsibilities* for the DFW Wildlife Section.

Inside you will find information about where our funding comes from, our programs, collaborations & more.

Find it at:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/dfw-division-overview.pdf>

It can be mailed or sent as a PDF by emailing DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Division of Fish and Wildlife

Overview of Programs & Responsibilities
Wildlife Section

INTRODUCTION

OUR MISSION

To ensure that the Freshwater, Marine, and Wildlife Resources of the land will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.

The Wildlife (DFW) Wildlife Section protects, restores, and manages the wildlife resources shares management responsibility of more than 60,000 acres of land, including 25 is, and is responsible for thousands of species of wildlife. We serve a wide and diverse from outdoor recreationists (e.g., hunters, hikers, mountain bikers, wildlife watchers) to backyard birders, public concerned with nuisance wildlife, municipalities, legislators).

With duties named above, we are responsible for the State's public hunter education on all hunting and trapping in the state. This includes setting seasons, size limits, and limits for the harvest of all wildlife species, including, but not limited to, white-necked storks, waterfowl, and small game species (coyote, squirrel, cottontail, etc.).

funded through the Federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Program, through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The largest pot of money run uses taxes placed on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment to help fund programs. There are over 9,000 licensed hunters in Rhode Island, whose license funds the federal funds. Annual appropriations for WSFR's State Wildlife Grants are an additional, smaller, yet less restricted pot of money that can be put toward species of Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) as identified in the RI Wildlife Action Plan to monitor populations of the state's deer, turkey, waterfowl, and other game maintain hunting areas and provide a shooting range for the public at Great Swamp is funding also assists in land acquisition for the DFW, helping to secure valuable fish game and non-game species, in perpetuity. This report is a compilation of the DFW has 9 state full time employees, and approximately 10 seasonal technicians enable for species research, monitoring, and management, habitat conservation and access, technical assistance and outreach, and policy and permitting. We also partner organizations for species research, land acquisition, habitat restoration, and more.

SPECIES RESEARCH & MANAGEMENT

SEARCH & MANAGEMENT

BIRDS

Atlas

Bird Atlas (RIBA 1.0) was 1982-1987, with 164 species listed as nesting in Rhode Island. In addition, novel datasets on abundance and distribution. This is a unique project, which collaborative effort with the and consists of five efforts: breeding abundance atlas, and the nocturnal atlas. Informative project, which dedication of our volunteers!

Endangered Species

against Bay for more than 20 years, which of long-term data unique to the northeastern plumage during the North American gannet try birds with the passing of the Migratory Bird many species were severely reduced or had been begun to recover and recolonize their historical range only recently. Although persecution was variety of threats related to disturbance at colony objective of this project is to collect nesting data for the families Ardeidae (black-crowned night heron), Icthyophaga (black-crowned night heron), and the black-backed gull, common tern, least tern).

Go to WWW.DEM.RI.GOV for more information about RIDEM Divisions and Programs

- Purchase Fishing, Hunting, & Trapping Licenses
- Find Maps for State Lands and Management Areas
- Get updates on special events, programs, and more!

Saltmarsh Sparrow continued from Page 1

birder. For sparrow lovers, of course, this is a welcome challenge! Many of the sparrows nesting in coastal marshes like Galilee have distinct songs, but they mostly consist of a couple buzz notes followed by a trill (the *reeeee* portion of the red-winged blackbird is what we in the bird world would consider a trill). Unlike the other sparrows, the saltmarsh sparrow has a song that sounds more like a conversation, a medley of different phrases, similar to what you might hear from a mockingbird. It makes me think the male is trying to have a conversation with his potential mate, instead of simply showing off or yelling out the car window as he drives by her on the highway (though observations suggest they are not necessarily very gentlemanly in other areas of courtship). Their song is less flashy, but it does distinguish them from other sparrows. Visually, the saltmarsh sparrow is identified by its relatively flat head, large but streamlined bill, vivid orange-buff eyebrow and mustache, and the distinguishable brown streaks toward the top of the breast and along its flanks. It is also in serious trouble.

Saltmarsh sparrows rely exclusively on tidal marshes for both nesting and feeding. In some ways this means that they are well-adapted for an environment that is highly variable. Females lay their eggs in nests they build in higher parts of the marsh - areas which are only flooded during the highest tides. They are capable of nesting multiple times in a season. After females lay their eggs (generally 3 to 6 eggs at a time), it takes 20 - 22 days before her chicks have hatched and grown up enough to leave the nest. High spring tides occur in time with full moons—every 30 days or so. If a female loses her nest to the spring tide, she can lay a new nest and raise her new brood in time for them to fledge before the nest is flooded by the next spring tide. Unfortunately, as sea levels rise, and storm surges become more pronounced in response to climate change, flooding is a more common occurrence. Human structures upland of the marsh hinder the marsh's capacity to migrate inland; hard coastal structures, meant to reduce erosion in some areas, can trap sand that would have naturally built up saltmarshes. Marshes were also commonly ditched beginning in the 1930s for the purposes of agriculture and mosquito control. Ditching is the process by which long dredges are carved out of the marsh to direct the flow of water. This practice generally drains water from the areas of the marsh where wading birds forage and directs it further upland, flooding areas that would not otherwise be inundated with water.



Saltmarsh sparrow. Photo: Patrick F.

Unfortunately, ditching has negatively altered saltmarsh habitat, making them more susceptible to flooding in some areas. Many marsh birds, like the saltmarsh sparrow, also rely on the mosquito larvae for food, and ditching dried up many of the marsh ponds in which the mosquitos produced their larvae. Even if saltmarsh sparrow parents manage to keep nests from flooding, young often fall victim to mammalian predators, such as coyotes, cats, and raccoons that tend to be more plentiful in and around human-developed areas. Due to these pressures, scientists estimate that, without intervention, saltmarsh sparrows will be extinct within 50 years.

Along with its many partners, like Save the Bay, The Nature Conservancy, and US Fish and Wildlife Service, Rhode Island's Division of Fish and Wildlife is working diligently to restore the coastal wetlands on which saltmarsh sparrow rely. In the fall and winter, when nesting has finished up and the birds have left Rhode Island for milder climates, you may see heavy machinery placing sediment in the marshes and biologists planting native marsh grasses. During this time of year, I am out in the marsh looking for saltmarsh sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, clapper rails, and other marsh birds around Rhode Island's coastal wetlands, to measure the effectiveness of our habitat restoration efforts.

While you're practicing safe outdoor social distancing measures this summer, keep an eye out for these special little sparrows. Please, be mindful where you step, stick to the trails, and stay out of sensitive marsh areas, as the birds are doing their best to keep their population afloat. Like many of the rest of us during this time, they appreciate the safety of a little distance.

RIDFW Youth Hunter Education & Mentorship Programs: Forging the Future's Conservationists

THE ROLE OF HUNTING IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT & CONSERVATION

The R.I. Division of Fish and Wildlife (RIDFW) is responsible for the State's public hunter education programs and overseeing all hunting and trapping in the state. This includes setting season dates, size limits, methods of take, and daily limits for the harvest of all wildlife species, including, but not limited to, white-tailed deer, upland game birds, waterfowl, and small game species (coyote, squirrel, cottontail rabbit, and others).

The primary constituents for the Division of Fish and Wildlife are the people who hunt and fish in Rhode Island. For the Wildlife section, it is the hunters of the state who not only contribute to our federal funding program with their purchase of hunting equipment and firearms, but also by buying Rhode Island state hunting licenses and permits. The revenue from licenses and permits is matched with federal funding to support almost all the conservation work the Division conducts in the state, for both game and non-game wildlife alike.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE YOUTH HUNTER EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS?

Taking and passing a Hunter Education Course and Exam is not only required by law in order to get a hunting license, it is one of the best ways for young and inexperienced hunters to learn about hunting laws, regulations, wildlife conservation and management, wildlife ID and, of course, hunting safety. They learn how to safely and legally use firearms, about the life history of the game animals they will be hunting, ethical hunting and sportsmanship, and much more. It is the belief of RIDFW that the by providing education and guidance to young people interested in hunting, they will carry these concepts throughout their hunting career, and pass this knowledge on to future hunters.

These programs are designed with safety as the foremost importance, in every aspect of the lesson. Whether it is in a classroom setting, or afield with a mentor – it is always

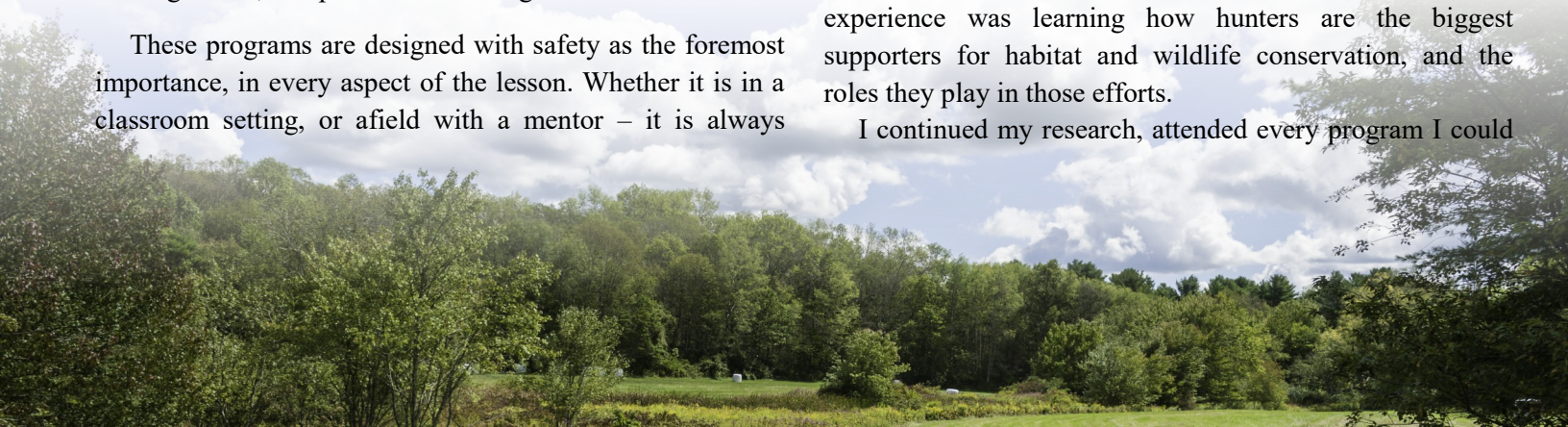
safety first. Having an educator or mentor allows the participants to learn from experienced hunters, while being under direct supervision at all times. With this guidance, youth hunters can gain essential skills, experience, and confidence while they learn the ropes.

Hunting isn't always just a hobby either; it has led some of us down a fruitful career path. Maddie Proulx, who now works at the DFW Hunter Education Office as the Clerical Support Aide, explains what her experience was like learning to hunt through the RI Youth Hunter Education and Mentorship programs.

“My passion for the outdoors and hunting started at a young age. I was determined to learn how to hunt and process my own meat, but my family was not interested in hunting. I never had a close family member to take me out and show me how to hunt, so it was not easy to pursue my goal alone as a young kid. I held off on my dream until my junior year of high school, when we were asked to create a mentorship-focused project demonstrating a topic of interest, and a potential career path. I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to investigate my interest in hunting.

I decided I wanted the final product for this project to be a meal produced from a game animal I would harvest; the theme was “From Field to Table.” I was not sure what animal I wanted to harvest at this point, so I began by taking my Hunter Education courses, both firearms and archery, with RIDFW. Learning how to safely load and unload a firearm was first, and I quickly gained a great respect for both firearms and archery equipment. I knew to always have a qualified adult present when participating in these activities, and that these instruments were not toys and to never treat them as such. Respecting equipment is just as important as respecting the land being hunted on, and the wildlife being hunted. A big part of my hunter education experience was learning how hunters are the biggest supporters for habitat and wildlife conservation, and the roles they play in those efforts.

I continued my research, attended every program I could



to gather as much information as possible for my project. One of my favorites was the RIDFW Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day. The Division provided awesome, knowledgeable mentors who were there to help all the kids safely participate. They showed us how to shoot clay pigeons (“skeet”, or “trap” shoot) at the Great Swamp Shooting Range, to practice accurate shot placement. They also taught us how to properly field dress the waterfowl we harvested. Most importantly, we learned that when the hunt is finished, every effort should be made to fully utilize all parts of the game harvested. Not only did I learn how to effectively hunt waterfowl, but I also learned about different types of ducks and upland birds, both game and non-game species. Understanding the ways of game is crucial to hunting success. It is important to teach the youth and upcoming generations to get familiar with the different species of wildlife out there. Familiarity breeds respect. Respecting the wildlife you hunt is imperative, as is being respectful of non-hunters and their opinions. Not everyone will always agree on this pastime, but it is always important to respect differing opinions.

After learning how to ethically and efficiently hunt game it was time to get out into the field and put my skills to the test. I was not comfortable yet to go out alone, so I needed a mentor. The person who came to mind was the instructor who taught the Hunter Education and Bowhunter Education courses, Scott Travers. I contacted Scott and told him about my project, and how I needed a mentor to take me out in the field. He got back to me right away and said “Absolutely!” I decided I wanted to harvest a deer and make a venison dish for the judges that would be grading my project. We spent all deer season out there scouting and waiting for a deer. Unfortunately, I had no luck, and time was ticking on my project deadline. After all, it is called “hunting” for a reason.

I did not want to give up on my project. Luckily, Addieville East Pheasant Farm, in Mapleville R.I., heard about my project and provided me with free pheasant to use for my meal. Despite having a great mentor, I was not able to harvest a deer my first year, and although this was not my original “from field to table” plan, the judges loved it, and I learned hunting is not as easy as I had thought. Harvesting wildlife takes a lot of time, knowledge, respect, and, most importantly, patience.

High school ended and I was still trying avidly to harvest my own animal. I continued taking the courses with RIDFW and kept in touch with my mentor, Scott. I volunteered as much as I could with the Hunter Education Office, and eventually, with all the knowledge I gained, I was able to



Maddie with her first turkey harvest.
Photo: Maddie Proulx

harvest my first turkey! It was the best experience ever, and I felt so accomplished. Being able to sustain myself and provide my own meat from the wild was an awesome feeling. I thanked everyone who mentored me and taught me everything I know. The role that mentorships and youth programs serve for hunters as they get older is such a positive one. I am just one, out of many examples. Today I work at the Hunter Education office and promoting hunting in a positive light is my favorite part of the job! I am lucky to have had such great mentorships as a young hunter, and to be able to find work in this field. To this day I have yet to harvest a deer, but I’m still determined.”

We encourage everyone to consider taking a Hunter Education Course, offered to the public for free through RIDFW. If you would like to start hunting, are interested in learning more about hunting, or are already a hunter but would like to hone more outdoor skills, the classes offered by the Hunter Education Office are a good way to gain knowledge and a better understanding for how hunting protects and provides for Rhode Island’s wildlife. For more information, contact the RIDFW Hunter Education Office by calling 401-539-0019 or by emailing DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov.

Visit the RIDEM website for a list of Hunter Education courses being offered: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/fish-wildlife/wildlifehuntered/index.php>

Rhode Island's Wild Turkeys

By: Jenny Kilburn, Principal Wildlife Biologist, Gamebird Program

As we begin to think about the first sunny days, ice cream, hiking, gardening and bonfires, the first gobbles of the wild turkey mark the return of spring in Rhode Island. It may seem hard to imagine a time when turkeys did not wage wars on chrome bumpers and newly seeded lawns or roost on urban community roof tops, but this was not always the case. Just 50 years ago the wild turkey did not exist in Rhode Island.

When European settlers arrived on the East Coast, turkeys were thought to be found in what would now be 39 states and the Canadian province of Ontario. As human populations began to expand, lands were cleared for timber and agriculture. This loss of habitat in conjunction with unregulated hunting resulted in the decline of wild turkey populations. By 1920, turkeys no longer existed in Rhode Island, and it wouldn't be until the 1980s that Rhody residents would begin to see turkeys again. So, what happened during those nearly 60 years that sparked their return?

Well, conservation became important to the American people. In 1905, the Lacey Act prohibited the sale of wildlife, which helped protect the small populations of turkeys that remained in the southern portion of the United States. However, this was not enough. Hunters noticed that species like the white-tailed deer, wild turkey and wood duck were disappearing from the landscape and that if something was not done, we would lose these iconic game species forever. Hunters, conservationists, and congress pushed for a tax on firearms and ammunition that would establish money for conservation. This led to the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. The Pittman-Robertson Act, a self-imposed excise tax on sporting goods and ammunition, when matched with state hunting license dollars, provided the funding to initiate wildlife recovery programs. With funds available, and old farms and cleared forests reverting back into shrublands and early successional habitat, wildlife biologists began planning for the return of the iconic wild turkey.

Early restoration attempts failed as biologists tried to release pen raised birds into the wild. Unfortunately, while you may be able to take the turkey out of the farm, you cannot take the farm out of the turkey. Pen raised birds did not have the natural instincts necessary to survive in the wild. Biologists then began considering trapping wild turkeys and re-introducing them into areas they once occupied. However,



Turkey hen incubating, Gerry Krausse

this was not as easy as one would think, particularly when it came to the question of how to trap wild turkeys? This question stumped early wildlife professionals until the invention of the cannon-net. The cannon-net, originally designed to capture waterfowl, would be concealed on the ground and remotely propelled over turkeys by a biologist in a blind. The cannon-net was later improved upon with the use of rocket projectiles powered by howitzer powder from the U.S. Military. It is hard to imagine what it would have been like to capture some of the first wild turkeys, but one would have to think it was an exciting time!

Once turkeys could be trapped, biologists started what is known as a "trap and transfer" program. Wild birds were trapped in areas where populations remained stable, and were then transferred to states that no longer had wild turkeys. The Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), along with the help of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), began a wild turkey restoration project on February 8th, 1980. Twenty-nine wild turkeys trapped and transferred from Vermont were released into the town of Exeter. Population growth was assisted by the migration of birds released in 1983 and 1984 by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) along the border of Rhode Island. Trap and transfer efforts occurred in 1994, and in 1995 DFW was able to begin its first ever in-state trap and transfer program. These efforts continued into 1996, after which turkeys began to establish themselves throughout Rhode

Island without the assistance of biologists. The restoration of turkey populations is generally considered one of wildlife's great success stories.

Fast forward to the year 2020 and wild turkeys can once again be found throughout Rhode Island. However, the turkeys of today are faced with many new challenges, as are the biologists who manage them. Human populations have continued to increase, and housing developments and urban areas now occupy once-forested landscapes. This means that people and turkeys more often interact, sometimes more than folks would like. Wild turkey management has shifted from restoration to mitigation as human-wildlife encounters continue to increase. Most of these negative encounters begin with food. Turkeys that are accustomed to being fed eventually become unafraid of humans, which leads to bold and aggressive behavior. Once again, this iconic game species is in trouble, but its not the same danger it faced many years ago. The turkey, one of wildlife's greatest success stories, is now considered a "nuisance" in many neighborhoods. It is important that Rhode Island residents do their part to ensure that we can keep the wild turkey "wild". Removing bird feeders in the spring prevents turkeys from finding and relying on artificial food sources, keeping them out of backyards and helping to reduce negative human-wildlife interactions.



DFW WELCOMES A NEW HUNTER SAFETY COORDINATOR TO THE TEAM!

Scott Travers will be the Division of Fish & Wildlife's Hunter Safety Coordinator, working out of the Education Office located at Camp E-Hun-Tee in Arcadia. Scott has worked as the program's Technical Assistant for the past six years teaching both Aquatic and Hunter Education courses. Since 2014, he has been teaching Hunter Education courses; giving fly-tying lessons across the state; writing articles for *Wild Rhode Island* and the hunting and fishing regulations guides; hosting bait casting events, land navigation courses, trapping workshops, tree stand safety workshops, wilderness first aid, and much more.

His early experience having to learn many of these skills on his own, has motivated him to want to teach these skills to others. He takes great pride in seeing his students succeed and enjoy learning, "Some of my fondest memories while working with the ARE and HE programs would include hosting the various scout groups at the Carolina Trout Hatchery and watching so many of the scouts catching their first fish with a great deal of fanfare and picture taking by parents and scout leaders. I have also greatly enjoyed creating and traveling throughout the state with the "flybrary" program teaching fly tying and fly fishing to so many people. "



"In my new position I hope to improve and expand programming with the help of all the fantastic volunteer instructors and assistant instructors we have, along with the dedicated staff in the Division of Fish and Wildlife who take time out of their busy schedules to help with various programs, and incredible partnering organizations who we could not accomplish our mission without. I am blessed to be surrounded by so many great people who are all so dedicated to wildlife conservation."

WELCOME SCOTT!!

A Sign of the Times:

Important Protections for Our Native Amphibians and Reptiles

By: Scott Buchanan, Herpetologist, RI Division of Fish & Wildlife

DON'T TAKE ME HOME!



Possession or removal from the wild of any native reptile or amphibian is illegal* (RIDEM Regulations 250-RICR-60-00-9)

Rhode Island's amphibians and reptiles face pressure from many threats. For many species, even the loss of a *single adult individual* can lead to local extinction.

HELP PROTECT WILDLIFE BY KEEPING IT WILD!

*Hunting/fishing permits are offered, with restrictions, for snapping turtles, green frogs, and bullfrogs. Scientific Collectors permits are also available for valid research purposes. No native amphibian or reptile can be kept as a pet under any circumstances.



**Report violations to the RIDEM Environmental Police
by calling 401-222-3070 (24 hr. hotline)**



You may see these signs up at parks and Wildlife Management Areas, but they apply to native reptiles and amphibians across the state. These laws serve as critically-important protections for vulnerable wildlife.

If I told you a story about thousands of animals poached from the wild, organized criminal networks, and hundreds of thousands of dollars trading hands on the international black-market, what part of the world would you think I was talking about? Would the Northeast United States be the first place that came to mind? The subject of wildlife trafficking usually conjures distant landscapes and large mammals like elephants and rhinoceros, sought after for their tusks and horns. The unfortunate reality though, is that the illegal collection and trade of wildlife is far more widespread and common than most people realize.

A variety of wildlife in the Northeast are susceptible, but because of the relative ease of their capture and transport, amphibians and reptiles often fall victim to illegal collection. Several species of native turtles for example, including some of our Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), are particularly vulnerable. Turtles face an already daunting list of threats - habitat loss, disease, road mortality - and the additive effect of losing individuals from the wild due to collection can be the difference between the conservation or elimination of local populations.

Poaching and wildlife trafficking are not new problems, but like in any market system, demand changes through time, and species that were once ignored are suddenly sought after. A spate of recently prosecuted cases in the eastern United States suggest that the threat to our native turtle species has increased significantly in the last three to four years. Turtles are coveted in the United States as pets, but much of the current demand also comes from Asian countries where turtles are not only kept as pets, but also consumed for food and traditional medicine. As mounting evidence has left little doubt, there is consensus among conservation professionals in the eastern United States that action is needed to confront the illegal turtle trade.

The issue is complex and demands a comprehensive response, but consistent, coordinated, and strong regulations and enforcement are paramount in the effort to protect our wildlife from poaching. Fortunately, Rhode Island has strong regulations that protect our non-game native species by limiting possession and collection to those in pursuit of permitted scientific research. Under no circumstances can native species be kept as pets, nor as “education animals” without a permit from the RIDEM Division of Fish &

Wildlife. These rules provide law enforcement with the ability to prevent the unnecessary and improper collection of turtles and other native wildlife. However, the best possible regulations are only meaningful if the public understands them and abides by them. It is critical that the Division of Fish and Wildlife works to deliver consistent messaging that makes clear the threat to our native species, and that the public reports suspicious activity to the RIDEM Environmental Police immediately.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife has made it a priority to disseminate these messages in 2020 on social media, in our annual hunting and fishing abstracts, and with new signage (see photo). Keep an eye out for the “Don’t Take Me Home” sign to be deployed in conspicuous locations on state lands. If you manage conservation lands in Rhode Island and would be interested in hanging one up on your property, please contact us for a free sign. We can all do our part in protecting Rhode Island’s vulnerable wildlife by understanding the conservation challenges these species face, as well as observing and advocating for the laws designed to protect them.



STAY SAFE AND HELP KEEP FISHING AREAS OPEN

FISH SMART, STAY 6 FEET APART

#SOCIALDISTANCING

TYPICAL LENGTH OF A
FISHING ROD



WWW.DEM.RI.GOV/FISHING

Connect with us on social media!



@RI.fishandwildlife



@RIfishwildlife



@RhodeIslandDEM



dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife

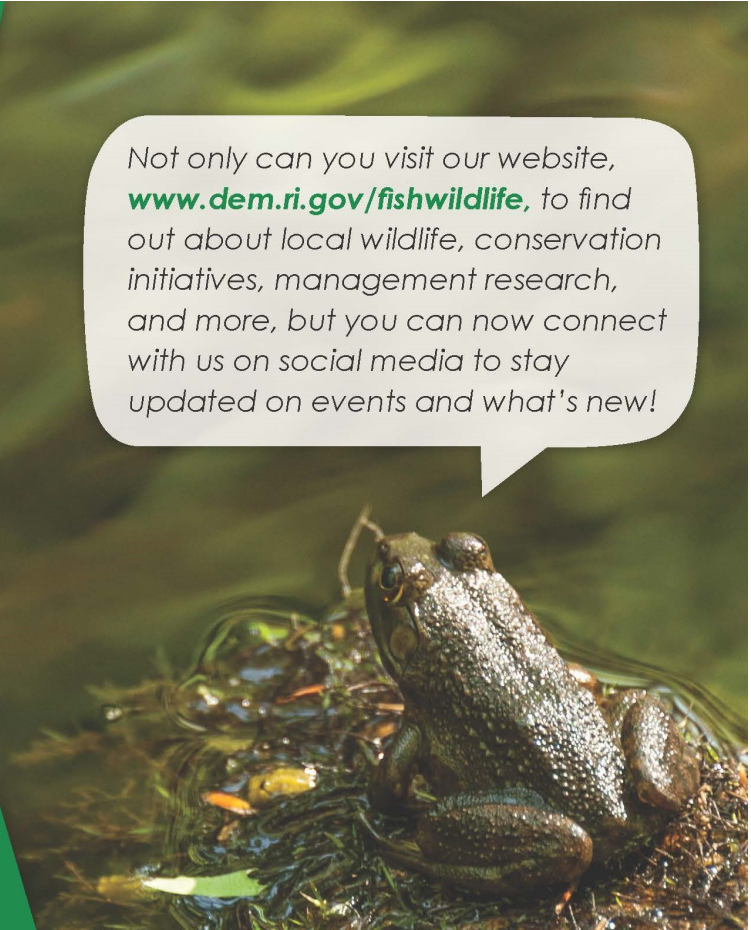


DEM
RHODE ISLAND



Photo by M. Stultz at Durfee Hill Wildlife Management Area, Gloucester, RI

Not only can you visit our website, www.dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife, to find out about local wildlife, conservation initiatives, management research, and more, but you can now connect with us on social media to stay updated on events and what's new!



WILD RHODE ISLAND
A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE
RI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
GREAT SWAMP FIELD HEADQUARTERS
277 GREAT NECK ROAD
WEST KINGSTON, RI 02892



TO: