

ISSUE 4 | SUMMER 2019

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

IN THIS EDITION...

**LEARN ABOUT RHODE
ISLAND'S WETLAND
HABITATS**

**GO ON A TURTLE
TRACKING
ADVENTURE**

**MEET THE
WOOD TURTLE!**





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The Wild Rhode Island Explorer | Summer 2019

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Pickerelweed growing along the edges of Breakheart Pond in Arcadia Management Area

HABITAT CHAT



Wonderful Wetlands

Swamp...Marsh...Bog...Fen...Pond...River. These different words all describe habitats where water and land meet, what we call **wetlands**! What makes certain types of wetlands different from others? It has to do with how much water is present and whether it is fresh water or salt water. The amount and type of water in the wetland controls what kinds of plants grow there. In Rhode Island, there are over 55,000 acres of **freshwater** wetland habitat, like swamps and bogs. We also have over 5,000 acres of **coastal** wetland habitat, like tidal mud flats and salt marshes. That's a whole lot of wetlands!



Richard Leach

A belted kingfisher perches over coastal wetlands in Mill Cove, North Kingstown

Wetlands are bursting with life! Insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals all live in Rhode Island's wetlands. All of these animals depend on the habitat and each other to survive. You can find wetlands all over Rhode Island. Next time you spot one, take a moment to stop, look, and listen. You might be surprised by what you see and hear!

Wetlands are very important for humans, too. When we get a big rainstorm, wetlands soak up all that extra water like a sponge. The plants in the wetlands help to **filter** water, making it clean. Salt marshes help protect our coast from hurricane flooding and **erosion**. A long time ago, people didn't realize how important these habitats were, and thought that the wetlands were just a waste of space. They drained and filled up swamps, marshes, and bogs. Because of this, Rhode Island has lost a lot of its original wetland habitat. Today, these important habitats are protected by special laws to make sure many unique critters have a place to call home!



Paul Toppan

A bullfrog hides between lily pads in a freshwater pond

TALES FROM THE TRAILS



CATCHING PEEPERS

By Eve Sosnowski

One day, my family and I went to catch peepers. "Let's grab some nets!" I said, and we hurried down to the pond. The peepers' song was high-pitched and strange, like tiny whistles being blown. The frogs laid on top of the water until I came, and then they swam away. I caught a little peeper, slimy and wet. I didn't want to let him go, but I did.

Eve carefully holds a frog friend caught during her adventure.

How do you connect with nature? Whether you fish, hunt, bird watch, or just love being outdoors, we want to hear your story! Email your nature stories to mary.grande@dem.ri.gov.

SUMMER ARCHERY DAYS

July 1, 2019 | August 5, 2019 | August 19, 2019 | August 26, 2019
9:30 am Mandatory Safety Session
10:00 am - 1:00 pm Range Time

Have you ever wanted to try out archery? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and RI Division of Fish and Wildlife will be offering FREE archery days this summer! We will have all of the equipment you need!

For more information, call 401-364-9124.



OUR WILD NEIGHBORS



WOOD TURTLE

Scientific name: *Glyptemys insculpta*

Range: You can find wood turtles in parts of southern Canada all the way to Virginia, and as far west as Wisconsin and Michigan.

Size: Turtles are measured by the length of their top shell, which is called the **carapace**. Wood turtles are usually 5.5 to 8 inches long.

Habitat: Wood turtles spend part of the year in streams and slow rivers. During the summer, they roam far and wide on land. You might be able to spot one in woods, thickets, swamps, and grassy areas.

Food: Wood turtles are **omnivores**, which means they eat both plants and animals. Grass moss, berries, mushrooms, strawberry leaves, flowers, insects, worms, snails, slugs, tadpoles, frogs, and fish are all on the wood turtle's menu! They will even scavenge on **carrion** (dead animals).

Breeding: Wood turtles do not breed until they are 10 years old! Female wood turtles lay 4 to 12 eggs in "nests" of sandy soil. The **hatchlings** (baby turtles) hatch in late August or September.

Predators: Raccoons, skunks, and foxes will dig up wood turtle eggs and eat them.

DID YOU KNOW?

The scientific name of the wood turtle comes from Greek and Latin. *Glyptemys* comes from two Greek words meaning "carved" and "turtle." *Insculpta* comes from the Latin word for "engraved." Scientists picked this name for the wood turtle to describe its beautiful shell!

OUT IN THE FIELD

Turtle Tracks

By Mary Grande, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator

If you've visited a pond before, you've probably seen a brightly colored painted turtle or maybe even a snapping turtle. But, did you know that Rhode Island is home to eleven different turtle species? If you didn't, it's probably because most turtles are pretty shy, and like to stay hidden from sight! To learn more about turtles and how we can help them, let's take a walk with our state **herpetologist**, Scott Buchanan.



Scott carefully holding an ENORMOUS snapping turtle

Mary: First of all, Scott, can you please explain to our readers what a herpetologist is?

Scott: A herpetologist is a person who studies amphibians and reptiles!

Mary: What are your duties as the state herpetologist?

Scott: My duties focus on the conservation and management of all the native amphibian and reptiles that occur in Rhode Island – there are almost 40 species!

Mary: That's a lot of different creatures to keep an eye on! Could you list the turtle species that live in Rhode Island?

Scott: Turtles? My favorite! We have five species that live in freshwater ponds, streams, and wetlands. They are the eastern painted turtle, the musk turtle, the snapping turtle, the spotted turtle, and the wood turtle. One species lives in coastal marshes – the diamondback terrapin. One species lives in forests and fields – the eastern box turtle. And we also have four species of sea turtles that migrate to the waters off our coasts in the summer months – the green sea turtle, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, and loggerhead sea turtle. That's a total of eleven species for a very small state!

Mary: What are the most common turtles and the rarest turtles in Rhode Island? Are any **endangered**?



A colorful painted turtle peeks out of its shell



A box turtle, all tucked away in its shell and living up to its name!



A musk turtle quietly basks along a river



Scott: All of the sea turtles are **threatened** or endangered and need lots of help. Painted turtles and snapping turtles are common. You can find them in many different habitat types in the state. Box turtles, spotted turtles, and wood turtles are what we call **habitat specialists** – they can only live in certain kinds of habitat and that makes them more **vulnerable**. We are very concerned about their long-term well-being. Diamondback terrapins are one of the state's rarest turtles. There are only a few places where you can find them. And finally, there is very little known about musk turtles. We need more herpetologists to study them!

Mary: What are some dangers that turtles face?

Scott: Habitat loss is probably the biggest threat. When we build things like houses and roads, sometimes we destroy or mess up their habitat. When turtles no longer have a place to live, they will disappear from an area. Other threats are cars, pollution, and poachers. And it's very important that you don't collect them from the wild to have as pets. This can have a very serious and negative impact on populations.

Mary: How are you learning more about turtles through your work? What's the best way to track or study them, seeing as they are so shy?

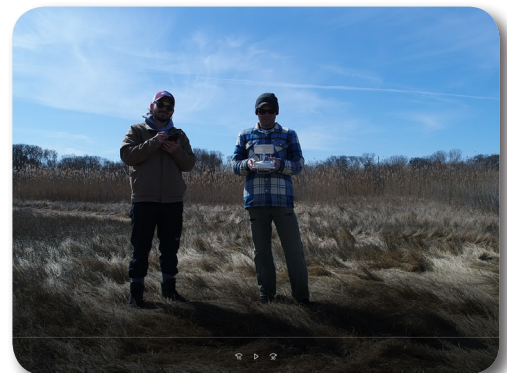
Scott: Because they can be so hard to find, it can take a very long time to understand a **population** of turtles. I am starting a bunch of projects to study our rarest turtles. Another great way to study turtles is to use **telemetry**. This works by attaching a tiny radio to the animal that allows you to track them everywhere they go. We also just started searching for diamondback terrapins using a drone. It's a pretty fun way to search for turtles!

Mary: What is your favorite part of being a herpetologist?

Scott: Definitely the opportunity to work outdoors! I also think that the conservation of our ecosystems is very important. I'm very proud to be one of the many who help protect our wildlife.

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite Rhode Island wild animal?

Scott: Oh boy, that's a tough one...I'm going to say the spotted turtle. They are ⁷ secretive and beautiful and I've worked with them a lot. I really love them!



Scott (right) and his intern Liam (left) smile for the drone camera!



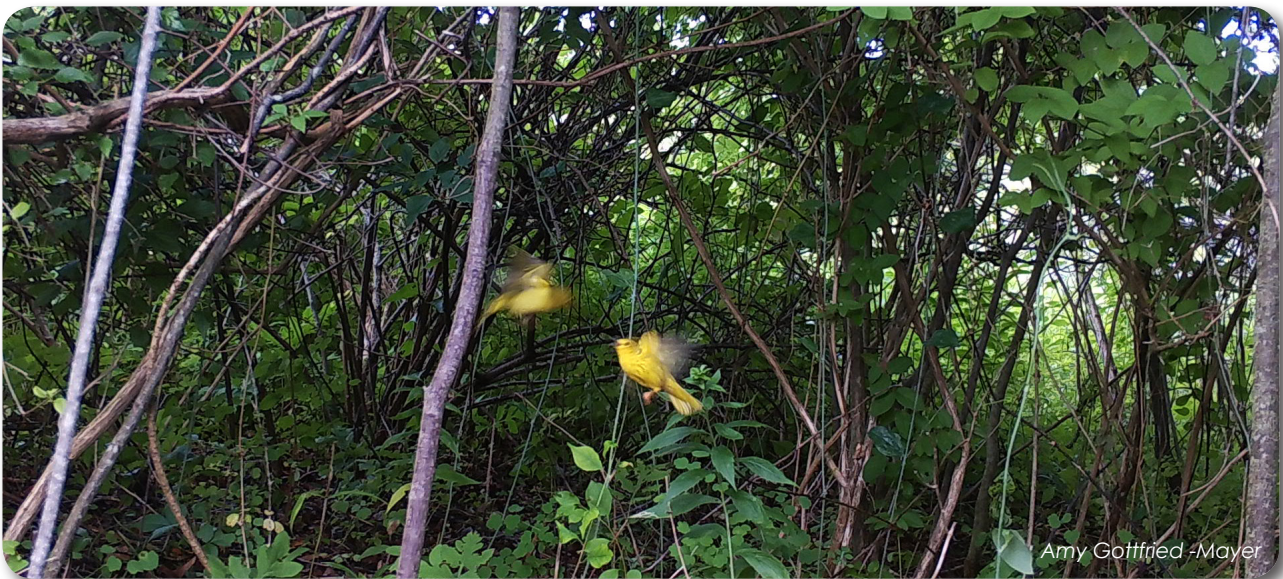
A view of Succotash Salt Marsh from our turtle drone

CRITTER CAM

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. Lots of people use trail cameras for many reasons. Wildlife biologists use camera "traps" to collect information about animal populations. Hunters use them to scout for the best place to hunt deer or turkey. Some people set them up just to see what kind of critters are living in their backyards. Even though trail cameras are used for many purposes, one thing is certain — they capture some cool photos!




A doe and her twin fawns seem very interested in the camera...



Two yellow warblers flutter by the camera!

CAPTION CONTEST

LAST ISSUE'S WINNING CAPTION



"It wasn't me, I didn't do anything wrong!"
- Audrey B.

Honorable Mentions

"Fisher cat! Doo-doo-doo-doo-doo-doo!" (To the tune of "Baby Shark") - Jason L.

"My fisher cat battery is fully charged." - Richard L.

"You think they spotted me? I wonder if I'll make it on Facebook?!" - Kayla M.

Amy Gottfried-Mayer

CAPTION THIS PIC!

Send in a caption for this photo by September 1, 2019.

We'll reveal the winning caption in our next issue! Submit your caption by sending an email to:

mary.grande@dem.ri.gov



Amy Gottfried-Mayer

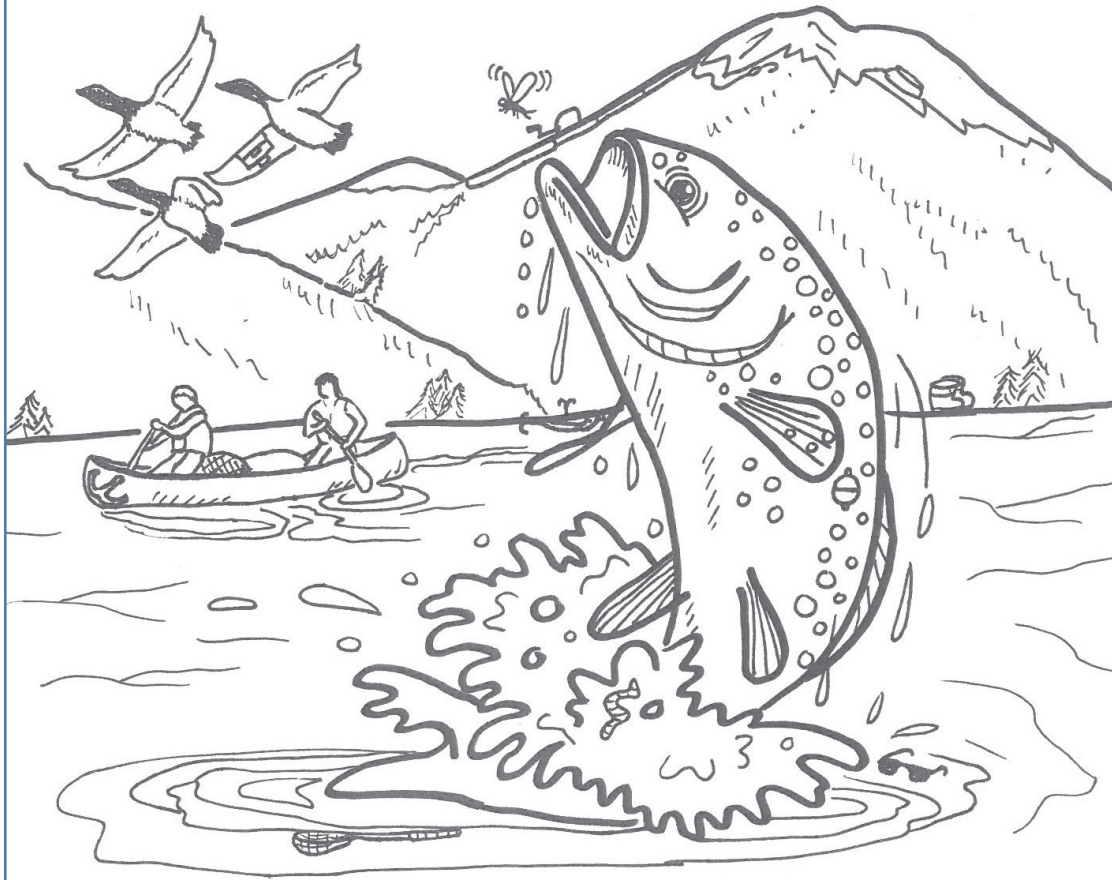
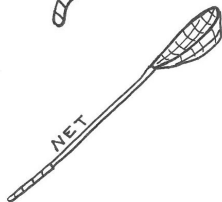
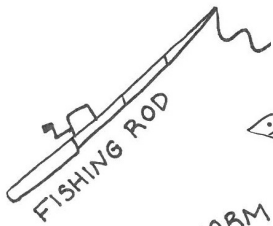
Caught on camera -- a gray fox!

WILD QUEST



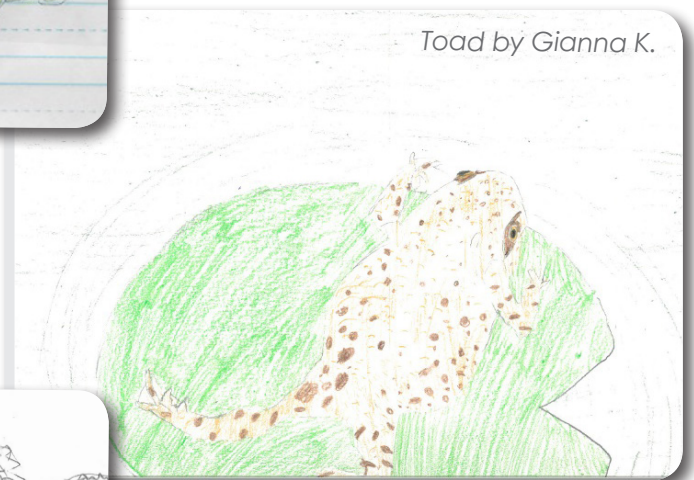
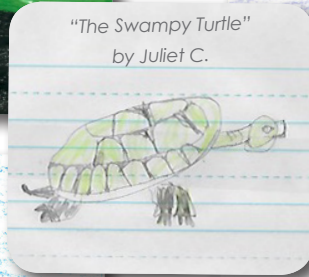
FISHING TRIP HIDDEN PICTURES

TRY TO FIND
ALL 10 ITEMS



CREATIVE CORNER

Our theme for this issue was "Swamp Critters."
Thanks for sharing your creative work!

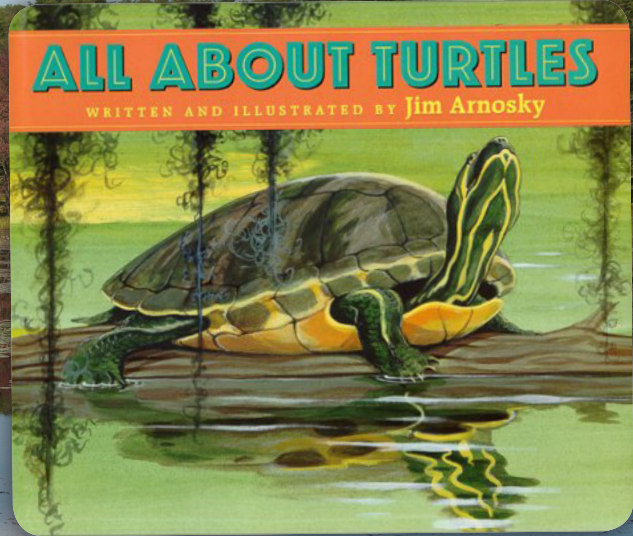


Send us your artwork and writing by September 1, 2019
to be featured in our next issue!

The theme for our fall issue is: Wildlife in the city

If you would like to share your creative work, you can send an email to mary.grande@dem.ri.gov or you can mail it to the address below.

BOOK NOOK



**WILD ABOUT WETLANDS?
CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS!**

Want to read more? Subscribe to receive *Wild Rhode Island Explorer* online or directly to your mailbox. It's FREE to all!

Contact Mary Grande
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Learn more at
dem.ri.gov/wildlifeoutreach

