

# WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

In this edition...

- Visit the rocky coast
- Go on patrol with an Environmental Police Officer

MEET THE  
HARLEQUIN  
DUCK!



**DEM**  
RHODE ISLAND



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*The Wild Rhode Island Explorer | Winter 2020*

*Writer/Editor: Mary Gannon, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator*

*Cover photo: Richard Leach*

*Contributors: Environmental Police Officer Christopher Duiguid, K-9 Bear*



*This issue of Wild Rhode Island Explorer is dedicated in honor of K-9 Sergeant Sean M. Gannon (End Of Watch April 12, 2018) and K-9 Nero.*

# HABITAT CHAT

Beavertail State Park

## Rhody's Rocky Coast



Richard Leach

Long-tailed duck

"The Ocean State" is a perfect nickname for Rhode Island. Our tiny state has nearly 420 miles of **coastline** along the beautiful Narragansett Bay! Have you ever visited the ocean? When you remember your visit, what do you think about? Maybe you think about swimming, making a sandcastle, sitting under an umbrella, packing a picnic, or eating clam-cakes and chowda! For most of us Rhode Islanders, when we think of the ocean, we think about summer. But have you ever visited the ocean in the winter? Believe it or not, there's a lot happening along our coast during the cold winter months!

Rhode Island's rocky coast is the perfect winter habitat for **sea ducks**!

So what makes a sea duck different from a regular duck? Sea ducks spend their summers raising their babies far up north in Canada. In the summer, they live on lakes in the **boreal forest**. These lakes are deep in the wilderness, which makes it hard for scientists to study these birds. In the fall, the sea ducks **migrate** south like many other birds. But, they don't fly to tropical places for their winter vacation. They fly here to southern New England, and spend their winter on the rough waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

Sea ducks are amazing at diving in the cold ocean water in search of food! They have thick, fluffy **down feathers** to keep them warm and dry. They are a little bit heavier than **dabbling ducks** (ducks that poke their heads in shallow water to search for food, with their tails up in the air). This extra weight helps sea ducks sink better during their dives. Sea ducks can spend 10-30 seconds underwater. They have been seen diving and feeding in water 10 - 65 feet deep!

The rocky coast creates habitat for lots of aquatic plants, mussels, crabs, small fish, and tiny swimming **invertebrates**-- which are all great snacks for sea ducks! Keeping our coastal habitats healthy is very important in making sure these super cool birds have a safe place to spend the winter and get ready for their migration back north, year after year.



White-winged scoters  
Peter Paton

# TALES FROM THE TRAILS

## Tufted Titmouse Written by Zoe Cumbee

You see a small bird hop from one branch to the next, knocking the snow from each twig it touches. Its head darts back and forth, its large, beady eyes scanning the ground. It chatters "Peter, peter, peter!" Its beak pecks at the sunflower seed bird feeder you had hung on a pole in your garden that very morning. The gray crest on top of its head bobbed with each movement. The rust colored side of the bird stood out vibrantly against the white background around the small creature. It sang as it hopped from the feeder to the ground, pecking at the seeds that had fallen before below the feeder.

Soon you notice more of the same peculiar bird fly around the one you could still pick out, as it seemed to be brighter than the rest to you. A few of the birds were still small and followed their parents around from branch to branch. Soon they dispersed, but you notice that the same bird that had come originally stayed there, hopping from ground to twig to branch. When it finally leaves from the feeder, you cannot hold back your curiosity, you follow the small thing. It flies a short time before landing back down onto the ground, it continues this until you reach the side of your home.



M. Gannon

You keep your distance, holding a pair of foggy binoculars to your eyes, clouded by the fog you were creating with your breath against the cold air. The crested bird flew through a small opening in a cardboard box, petering when it entered. You smiled when you heard a community of replies from inside the box, even from a distance the small chorus was seemingly loud in the otherwise quiet environment. Soon another bird came, and another into the brown box laying on the ground. You wonder how they stay warm in there, knowing there is no heater for them to warm up to.

Later that night as you can hear the small birds petering, you wonder what kind of bird you have seen in earlier hours of the evening. You take up your bird guide and find the perfect match, a tufted titmouse.

*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 stories to [mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov](mailto:mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov) or mail to RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife, ATTN: Mary Gannon, 277 Great Neck Road, West Kingston, RI 02892*

# OUR WILD NEIGHBORS



Peter Paton

## HARLEQUIN DUCK

**Scientific name:** *Histrionicus histrionicus*

**Range:** Harlequin ducks breed in inland parts of northern Canada and Alaska. In the winter, they move to rocky coastlines in Alaska, Canada, New England, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware. Although they can be found in a bunch of northeastern states, most of the eastern harlequin duck population spends the winter in Maine.

**Size:** The harlequin is a medium-sized duck. Males are a little larger than females and have a wingspan between 22 and 26 inches. Females have a wingspan between 16 and 23 inches. Harlequin ducks only weigh up to 1 ½ pounds!

**Habitat:** Harlequin ducks spend the breeding season in mountain or forest regions near rapids, streams, and rivers. In the winter, they migrate to the rocky coast to spend their time bobbing on the wild waves!

**Food:** Harlequin ducks dive underwater to search for insects, crustaceans, small fish, and small **mollusks** like mussels and periwinkles.

**Breeding:** Female harlequin ducks build their nests on the ground near water. The nest is hidden under a bush or near rocks, and is built out of grass, leaves, and twigs. The mother duck pulls out her own fluffy down feathers from her chest and stomach to make a cozy, soft lining for her nest. The ducklings leave the nest pretty soon after hatching, but are still watched closely by their mom. They learn how to find food for themselves and are able to dive underwater when they are still pretty small.

**Predators:** Adult harlequin ducks are eaten by bald eagles, mink, hawks, great horned owls, seals, and river otters. Ravens, mink, arctic fox, and red squirrels all eat harlequin eggs.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The harlequin duck isn't named after the comic book character Harley Quinn! Harlequin is an old-fashioned word for a clown dressed in bright, patterned clothes. The harlequin duck sort of looks like a little clown, with its fun pattern and colors!



Richard Leach

# OUT IN THE FIELD

## On Patrol with an Environmental Police Officer

By Mary Gannon, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator



Officer Chris Duguid and K-9 Bear

Protecting the environment is hard work! In Rhode Island, we have many laws that keep both wildlife and people safe. There are hunting, trapping, and fishing laws. There are laws that protect migratory birds from harm, and laws banning pollution. There are even laws that protect our turtles from being kidnapped from the wild to be sold as pets! Sometimes, people break these laws, which harms our environment. That's where our Environmental Police Officers step in to uphold the law and protect our fish, wildlife, and habitat! To learn more about environmental law enforcement, I chatted with Environmental Police Officer Chris Duguid and his K-9 partner, Bear.

**Mary:** Officer Chris, how long have you been an environmental police officer?

**Officer Chris:** I have been an environmental police officer for 20 years.

**Mary:** Did you have to go through any special training to become an environmental police officer?

**Officer Chris:** I trained at the RI Municipal Police Academy. After that, I went to other trainings for boating, land navigation, crime scene investigation, boat accident investigation, as well as many more.

**Mary:** What's it like having a K-9 as your co-worker? Are there special dog breeds that are used for police work?

**Officer Chris:** Having a K-9 partner is great because I almost always have a partner and buddy responding with me to calls for service and investigations. The breeds of dogs most used for police work are German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois. K-9 Bear is a Belgian Malinois.

**Mary:** Do you and Bear focus on one area of environmental law enforcement in Rhode Island?

**Officer Chris:** K-9 Bear and I focus on enforcing and investigating the poaching of wildlife, evidence recovery, looking for lost people and suspects who flee from the police, and illegal drug searches.



K-9 Bear shows off his searching skills. Good job, Bear!

**Mary:** What does a typical day look like for you and Bear?

**Officer Chris:** At the start of my shift, I never really know what I will be doing because each day is different, and you don't know what could happen that day. Bear and I like to patrol our assigned area to make sure people are following hunting and fishing regulations. We also patrol to keep the public safe in our Parks, Beaches and Management Areas. We often get sent to help with injured wildlife and to deal with possible rabies contacts with animals.

**Mary:** What is your favorite on-the-job memory with K-9 Bear?

**Officer Chris:** Every time K-9 Bear and I are successful at finding something we are looking for is a great day. One of the best memories was the day I got Bear, and it was official that we would become partners! Another favorite memory was when we had to track a bank robber. It's always great letting the public meet him too.

**Mary:** What do you like most about your job?

**Officer Chris:** I like many things about being an Environmental Police Officer. I like to have a hand in protecting our natural resources on land and water. I am fortunate to be able to work with and train with other police departments and K-9 teams. Being able to help people is also a great aspect of the job.

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

**Officer Chris:** My favorite wild animal in RI is the river otter!

**Mary:** K-9 Bear, do you have anything you'd like to say to our readers?

**K-9 Bear:** Do your best in school, be kind to people and animals, and have fun!



# CRITTER CAM



M. Gannon

*Oops! The camera snapped too late!  
Who could this be?*

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!



Tomas Fermento

*Just sniffing around...*



# CAPTION CONTEST

## LAST ISSUE'S WINNING CAPTION

### Honorable Mentions

"Hey guys, it's party time!"

- Sheila

"Where are Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen?"

- Angela

"It's the elusive New England kangaroo..."

- Al

"Oh deer! I didn't know you were going to be here!"

- Natalie

"Practicing for the Reindeer Games"

-Sean



Paul Richards

### CAPTION THIS PIC!

Send in a caption for this photo by  
February 28, 2020.

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

mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov



What's this squirrel up to?

# WILD QUEST

## WINTER BIRD CALLS

Many of our songbirds migrate south and spend their winter in the rainforest. Because all of our songsters have left, the woods can be very quiet in the winter! But, there are a few birds that tough it out and sing all winter long.

Can you match the winter bird with its song? Check the back cover for the answers!

**Northern  
Cardinal**



**Tufted  
Titmouse**



**Downy  
Woodpecker**



**White-  
breasted  
Nuthatch**



**White-  
throated  
Sparrow**



**Black-  
capped  
Chickadee**



**Peter-peter-  
peter!**

**Chicka-dee-  
dee-dee!**

**Wha-wha-  
wha-wha!**

**Birdie, birdie,  
birdie!**

**Pik! Pik!**

**My sweet Canada,  
Canada Canada!**

# CREATIVE CORNER: WINTER BIRDS

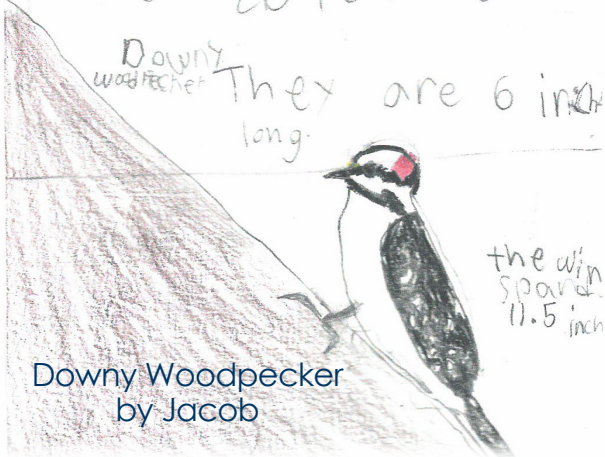
They mainly eat insects, also seeds and berries.

Jacob Jenness  
8 They weight 20 to 30 g.



Chickadee by Juliet

Northern Cardinal  
by Nikhole



Downy Woodpecker  
by Jacob



Snowy Owl  
by Charlie

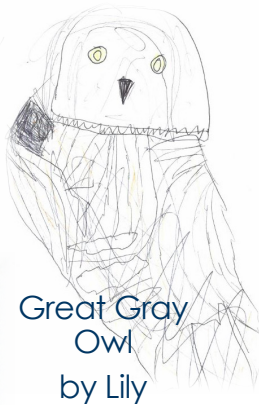
the win spore 11.5 inch



Blue Jay by Bryanna



Winter Bird by Erickson



Great Gray Owl  
by Lily



Winter Friends  
by Michael



Cedar Waxwing by Caedmon



Northern Cardinal by Sadie

**THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR AMAZING ARTISTS!**

Send us your artwork and writing by **February 28, 2020** to be featured in our next issue!

The theme for our spring issue is: Fishing

If you would like to share your creative work, you can send an email to [mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov](mailto:mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov) or you can mail it to:  
RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife, ATTN: Mary Gannon, 277 Great Neck Road,  
West Kingston, RI 02892

# BOOK NOOK



## LEARN MORE ABOUT SEA DUCKS THIS WINTER AT BEAVERTAIL STATE PARK!

“Come Birding with Me!”  
10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Saturday, January 25, 2020  
Wednesday, February 19, 2020

Join us for a FREE guided walk at Beavertail  
to watch sea ducks diving in the waves!

**Email [mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov](mailto:mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov) for more info.**

*Space for this program is limited,  
and registration is required.*

## WILD QUEST ANSWERS



**Northern  
Cardinal**

*Birdie, birdie,  
birdie!*



**Tufted  
Titmouse**

*Peter, peter,  
peter!*



**Downy  
Woodpecker**

*Pik! Pik!*



**White-  
breasted  
Nuthatch**

*Wha-wha-wha-  
wha!*



**White-  
throated  
Sparrow**

*My sweet Canada,  
Canada, Canada!*



**Black-  
capped  
Chickadee**

*Chicka-dee-  
dee-dee!*

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