

ISSUE 14 | WINTER 2022

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

MEET THE
FISHER!



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!

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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 | Winter 2022

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HABITAT CHAT

Make Way for Mesopredators!

Once upon a time, Rhode Island was home to large carnivores like gray wolves and mountain lions. These were our top predators in New England which kept our deer populations healthy and in check. Having a top predator on the landscape also meant that smaller predators, like foxes, raccoons, bobcats and fisher, were also kept in balance.

When the European settlers arrived in America, they began killing as many large predators as they could. They were afraid that the wolves and mountain lions would hunt their sheep and cows. The settlers were so determined to get rid of the large predators, that they put bounties on them. This meant that if you hunted a wolf, you could turn it in for money. This crazy hunting spree and a big loss of habitat led to the disappearance of Rhode Island's wolves and mountain lions. These animals, once part of our ecosystem, have never returned.



So, what happens when you take out the top predators? Populations of smaller predators, called **mesopredators**, begin to grow and thrive. Today, you can spot animals like foxes in the city and suburbs. They don't need as much open space as a wolf or mountain lion, and are very comfortable living around people. They don't need to hunt deer to survive. Instead, they can get by on a diet of mice, rabbits, and squirrels, as well as fruits, pet food left outside, or food scraps in your garbage can.

Human actions can seriously change the balance of our ecosystem. It's important to remember as we think about conserving our wildlife for the future!



MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

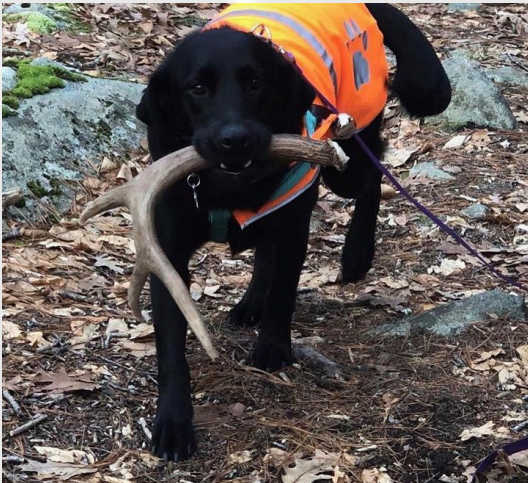
Shed Hunting

Every year during spring and summer, male deer grow a set of antlers. **Antlers** grow fast, almost an inch a day! Deer shed (lose) antlers every winter. Late winter (typically starting in February) is the perfect time to head out and search for shed antlers! There are many reasons why people hunt for "sheds." Deer antlers can be used for learning purposes, especially for hunters who want to learn and understand where the deer rest, feed, and hang out. Biologists like to find sheds to help them count the number and verify the ages of deer in the area. Deer antlers also make beautiful home decorations! Shed hunting is a fun and exciting way to spend some time outdoors with friends and family looking for these natural pieces of art!



URI WGEL

Hoping to find a shed this winter? Look where deer spend most of their time. You are more likely to find a shed in places where deer bed down, travel and feed. Grassy fields, conifer thickets and sunny slopes, where deer rest, are great places to start. Carefully comb over the area, looking for the points, rather than the entire antler. Also keep an eye out on deer trails and around crop fields or other sources of food, such as trees bearing acorns and nuts. On your search, be mindful that deer are often in their poorest body condition during the winter, and need space and rest to regain their strength for the next year.



One of the Fish and Wildlife pups, Zinnia, with a shed she found at Snake Den State Park. Remember to wear your fluorescent orange hats and vests while out hiking in areas that allow hunting. Pets should wear orange too!

Take your time, enjoy the walk in the woods, and don't look too hard! Scan slowly back and forth just hard enough that your eyes don't go blurry! Antlers will look like leaves and sticks until you realize it is an antler. Try bringing some binoculars and have fun scanning for antlers at a distance. Keep walking and cover as much ground as you can legally and safely.

Find any sheds recently!?! I would love to see!

Please send cool antler photos to madison.proulx@dem.ri.gov



About the Author

Hi everyone! My name is Maddie; I am the administrative assistant 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



Can you spot the bird in this photo? Look for a bright splash of red on the tree trunk. It's a Northern flicker! Flickers are a common woodpecker species in Rhode Island. When they fly, you can see a bright flash of yellow on their wings. Dead trees and stumps are perfect places for woodpeckers to find a breakfast of bugs!



Action shot! Cottontail rabbits will hop and run around each other for a couple of reasons. Males battle each other to show who's boss. Males and females also do this type of hopping behavior during the breeding season to pick a mate.

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've 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 our bobcat project! We are currently working on new projects studying beavers, muskrats, otters, and fisher.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Did you know that we have lots of events and classes where you can learn outdoor skills like archery, fishing, and first aid?

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram to check out more upcoming events!

Visit dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife for more info and to sign up!

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS

ICE FISHING FUN



In Rhode Island we are lucky enough to live in a climate that allows for ice fishing during the colder parts of the winter season. Ice fishing is a bit different than other types of fishing as it has a different set of equipment and techniques that are used.

The first thing you need for a fun day of ice fishing is safe ice. Safe ice means that it is thick enough to hold you and all your equipment. The ice should be at least 4" thick to safely stand on it. Have an adult check the ice before attempting to walk on it.

Bring along some safety gear in case of an emergency, like rope and a throwable ring buoy, a personal flotation device, and safety ice picks. Don't forget sunscreen. Even though it's cold the sun will still be reflecting off of the ice and could cause a sunburn.

Make sure everyone has their fishing licenses!

ICE FISHING EQUIPMENT:

TIP-UP: A device with a spool of fishing line and a flag attached to it that sits on top of the ice hole. When a fish bites the flag will pop up letting the angler know to check the line.

ICE AUGER: A manual, gas, or battery powered drill to make holes in the ice

ICE SCOOP: A slotted spoon that the angler uses to scoop ice out of the water hole.

ICE FISHING ROD AND REEL: These are designed for fishing straight down through a hole in the ice. The rods are much shorter than normal fishing rods.



ICE FISHING SLED: It slides over the ice easily and holds a lot of gear!

ICE FISHING LINE: To use with your rod or tip up. It is thicker than normal fishing line.

HOOKS: You will need these to hold your bait and hook a fish!

BAIT: The best is live bait in the form of mealworms, minnows, nightcrawlers or wax worms.



The first thing you will need to do, after making sure the ice is safe, is drill a hole in the ice with an auger. Make sure to clear out the ice that fell into the hole with an ice scoop. Then, setup your tip-up with line and a hook and set it on the hole with the line in the water, or you can use an ice fishing rod and reel and manually fish. Now, wait patiently for a bite and there you have it, you have successfully ice fished!



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

FISHER

HABITAT: The fisher lives in forest habitats. They like to rest in trees during the day, and will also use hollowed out logs as dens. They are excellent climbers and have retractable claws, like your pet cat. Fisher are mostly nocturnal but can sometimes be spotted during the day. The fisher was once common throughout North American forests. In the 1800s and early 1900s, fisher populations shrunk because a lot of forest was cut down. There were also no trapping laws at that time, which lead to overharvest of fisher for their soft fur. In recent years, fisher populations have begun to recover thanks to forest restoration, reintroduction of fisher in other New England states, and trapping laws.

BREEDING: Fisher babies (called **kits**) are born in March or April. Females usually have 2 or 3 kits in a litter. Kits are hidden in large holes in tree trunks for a couple of months, and then their mother may move them to another den in a rock wall, brush pile, or hollow log. Kits are able to catch their own prey at about 5 months old.

FOOD: Fisher eat squirrels, chipmunks, voles, mice, birds, snakes, insects, and frogs. They are one of the only **predators** of porcupines in North America! They will also eat fruits, nuts, and even pet food left outside. They are also notorious chicken coop thieves! Be sure to keep pet food inside and keep your chicken coops secure to prevent any issues with fisher.

DID YOU KNOW?

The fisher is commonly called the “fisher cat.” They are not in the cat family, but are actually related to weasels and otters! There’s also a rumor going around that fisher “scream” in the middle of the night. If you hear a strange screaming sound coming from the woods, it’s not a fisher. It’s a fox! Foxes make some strange noises to communicate with each other.



OUT IN THE FIELD

FOLLOWING FISHER



Hi everyone! Gabby here! Follow me out into the field with Laken Ganoe, PhD student at the University of Rhode Island, as we track fisher across the state! This project is a great way for the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife to learn about these elusive mammals with the help of our friends from URI!

Gabby: Hi Laken! Studying fisher sounds so awesome, but it must be hard to do since they are very secretive! Can you tell me a little about your research?

Laken: Sure! My research is a collaborative project between the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife and the University of Rhode Island, so I get to work with both fantastic biologists and professors. During the summer and winter we collect photos from our trail cameras to see where fisher are found across Rhode Island. We also catch fisher and give them a little GPS collar that allows us to see where they go and what they do every day.



Gabby: So, those cameras can see the fisher, even when you can't! That makes a lot of sense. I can't wait to see what you learn! How big are the collars that you put on the fisher, and how long do they stay on?

Laken: If you think about the kind of collar you might have on your house cat or small dog (such as a Yorkie), that is about how big around our fisher collars are. The collars are light enough that that they won't harm them and will stay on for about a year before they fall off.

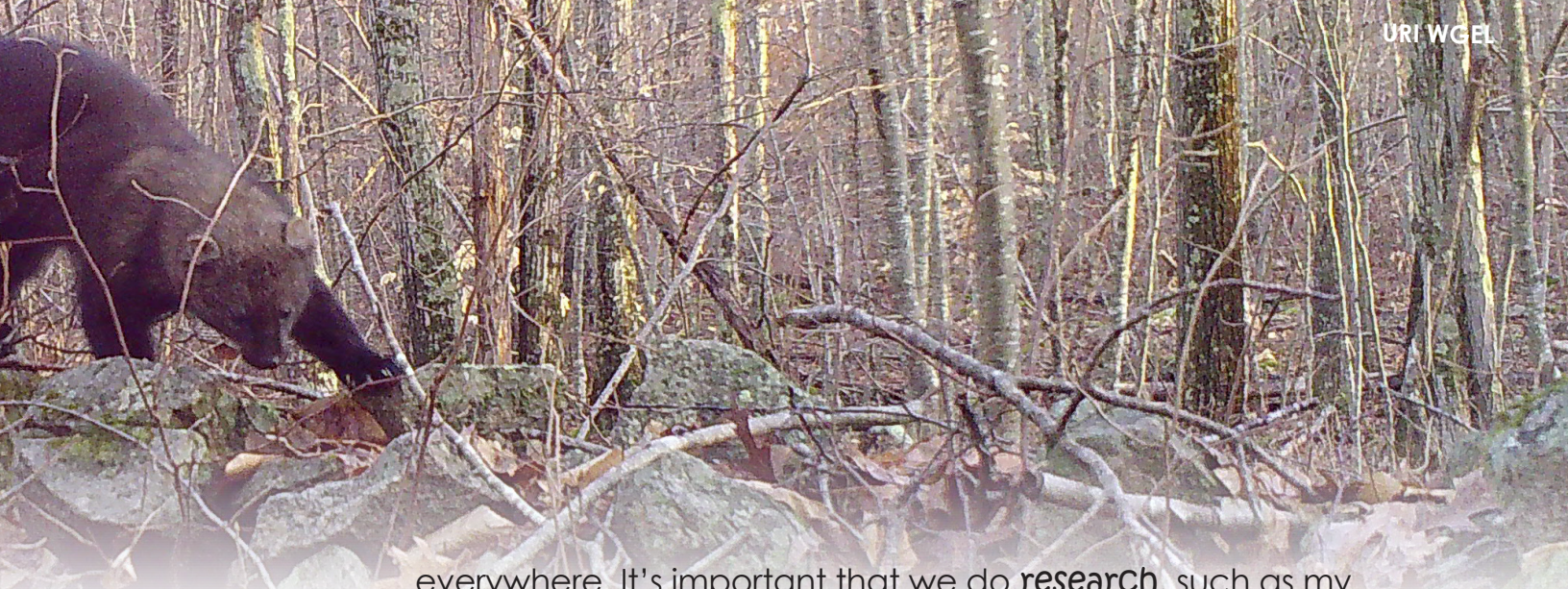


Gabby: Very cool! But to put on the collars, first you have to catch them! Is that difficult and do they look scary up close?

Laken: We know just what they like, so we had really good luck last winter catching fisher! When we see them in the cage, they are not scary at all. Most of the time they are more scared of us and try to hide!

Gabby: Aw! We are much bigger than they are, so it makes sense that they might be scared. They kind of look like little teddy bears! Aside from being very cute, why are you studying fisher?

Laken: Fisher were **trapped** and chased out of Rhode Island a long time ago by humans, and now they have come back on their own and seem to be



everywhere. It's important that we do **research**, such as my project, to learn how they are able to live here so that we can make sure we don't lose them from RI again. Fisher are a critical species in our **ecosystem** and help maintain healthy squirrel, rabbit, and other small mammal populations which keeps our coyotes, foxes, and bobcats in balance.



Gabby: Wow, so they are really important. I'm glad they made a come-back in Rhode Island! It sounds like it might be hard to choose, but what is your favorite part about your project?

Laken: There are lots of parts of my research that I love, but I feel the most obvious is being able to safely handle a live fisher and watch them grow up. You create a connection with these little fuzzballs, monitor their health and wellness, and then see them thriving in a place where it's amazing they are able to live at all.

Gabby: Your project is so amazing, thanks for letting us join in to learn more! I can't wait to spread the word about these furry critters and their important role in our state! One last question before you go... What is your favorite Rhode Island critter?

Laken: There are so many cool species that live here in RI, but fisher will always hold a special place in my heart!



Gabby: Ha! I should have known! Thanks again Laken, I can't wait to hear about what you learn from your research. Laken has a website dedicated to her project where you can learn more and can even help her out by reporting any sightings of fisher wearing collars: www.lakenganoe.com/fisher-chronicles

About Laken

Laken Ganoë is a PhD student at the University of Rhode Island. Since she was little, she always knew she wanted to be a wildlife biologist. She spent the majority of her time growing up exploring the woods in her backyard, hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, and kayaking. Working on the Rhode Island Fisher Study has given Laken the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the beautiful Rhode Island woods and share her excitement about fisher with fellow hikers, volunteers, and landowners.



WILD QUEST

WORD SEARCH

As you read through the magazine, look for words typed in this font.

Then see if you can find them in the word search below!

I	M	K	J	K	I	G	Y	S	Q	S	A	S	G	P
H	T	E	S	I	G	X	E	J	N	M	R	W	R	W
C	P	H	T	T	X	M	W	O	Q	O	K	E	B	N
R	O	R	X	S	E	N	I	B	T	X	D	V	U	Y
A	D	F	J	U	Y	T	T	A	R	A	L	L	O	C
E	U	K	L	Z	A	S	D	X	T	A	Q	O	J	M
S	X	G	T	L	U	E	O	O	R	S	T	N	T	D
E	N	X	U	D	R	G	R	C	D	Y	H	U	F	M
R	N	P	P	P	H	S	D	A	E	T	D	E	F	I
R	O	L	O	X	V	W	N	M	C	P	B	I	D	M
P	A	S	V	E	C	G	R	N	K	F	K	C	M	S
X	E	A	N	E	X	L	B	A	N	T	L	E	R	S
M	K	G	Q	B	R	M	N	D	J	K	P	I	D	P
C	O	N	S	E	R	V	A	T	I	O	N	V	Z	H
T	K	G	G	Z	L	T	B	C	H	B	T	D	U	O

CRITTER CARDS

Rhode Island is home to many different wild animals. Some are very common and easy to spot. Others are rare and hard to find. Some are doing great and have healthy **populations**, while other species are threatened or endangered. At the Division of Fish and Wildlife, we've created a list of Species of Greatest **Conservation** Need (Marked as SGCN on the cards). We focus a lot of our work on helping these species. We do this by studying their populations, protecting special habitats, and spreading the word about these cool critters.

Cut out and collect these Critter Cards to learn about Rhode Island's wildlife species!



Fold in half



FISHER

4

I am a member of the weasel family, and an important predator in RI's ecosystem. I help control populations of small critters like mice. I love forests and hiding in hollow logs. People think that I am scary, but I'm actually really shy and secretive.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Please protect my forest home and don't invite me to your backyard by leaving out pet food or small pets like chickens and rabbits. I don't know any better and think they are free meals! Help spread the word that predators have an important job in the ecosystem.



WINTER FLOUNDER (SGCN)

2

I love the Narragansett Bay and RI's coastal salt ponds. I am called the winter flounder because I only like to spawn (lay eggs) in the winter when the water temperature is below 42 degrees. My populations in RI have been shrinking over the past couple of decades.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Climate change will cause the temperature of the ocean to rise, which is not good for me! Scientific work to slow down climate change will be really helpful to me and many other species. Protecting our salt ponds and marshes, and keeping the bay clean are also very important.



AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (SGCN)

4

I can be found in RI year round, but most of us hang out here during fall and winter. In the winter, salt marsh habitat is very important for me. Since the 1960s, my populations have been decreasing across North America.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Biologists need to keep track of my populations. I am a game species, so it's important to be strict about hunting rules so that I am not overharvested. Habitat protection is super important too!



NORTHERN SPRING SALAMANDER (SGCN)

2

I am rare in RI, and can only be found in 4 locations (as far as biologists know). I live in cold stream habitats. I am one of RI's biggest salamander species.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Keeping our streams clean and free from chemicals will be a big help! Try not to use chemical fertilizers, weed killers, and pesticides in your yard. These chemicals get washed away in rainstorms, and the rainwater ends up in streams. I am very sensitive to habitat loss and pollution!

Chris Raithel



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