



A Quarterly Publication from the RI Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish & Wildlife

Hunter Education to Introduce Field Training

By Scott Travers



Participants get a hands-on experience in a field training provided by the DFW Hunter Education Office. Photo courtesy of S. Travers

When I began teaching hunter education courses in 2004, the only option Rhode Island residents had for hunter education courses was to attend an in-person, classroom-style course and pass a written exam at the end. This was true for both hunter education and bow hunter education courses. Now, more than a decade later, we offer an online version of both curricula. Students can take either the hunter education course or the bow hunter education course online, complete a knowledge assessment online, and then take the in-person exam to obtain their course completion cards.

Hunter Education courses are meant to provide a basic foundation for the various skills one needs to be a successful hunter. While the online courses offer greater flexibility, they lack the “hands-on” experience found in classroom settings. Frequently, it has been my experience that students completing my courses approach me at the end and ask “now what?” They are often looking for a mentor or guide to help continue their education in related hunting activities, like purchasing hunting equipment and acquiring initial field experience. To address this issue, the Division has created a field training program based on similar programs offered in other states. While the field training program in Rhode Island is not mandatory, people

[Continued on page 2](#)

Inside This Issue:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Hunter Education Courses | 2 |
| R.I. Wildlife Clinic | 3 |
| Black Bears in R.I. | 4 |
| New Wildlife Outreach Coordinator | 6 |
| Kids' Corner | 7 |

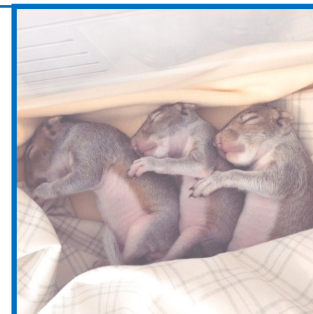
Spring is the Busy Season at the R.I. Wildlife Clinic

By Marissa Sprouls

Spring is a wonderful time of year; the weather gets warmer and animals become livelier. With an increase in animal activity and our use of the outdoors, we notice more animals becoming injured or orphaned; sometimes even because of human interactions or interference. Knowing what to do when you come across an injured or orphaned animal can potentially save its life.

The Wildlife Rehabilitators Association of Rhode Island (WRARI) is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to the veterinary and rehabilitative care of injured and orphaned native wildlife. WRARI operates The Wildlife Clinic of Rhode

[Continued on page 3](#)



Baby squirrels brought to R.I. Wildlife Clinic after a storm blew down their nest. Photo: M. Sprouls

THE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ensure that the Freshwater, Marine and Wildlife resources of the State of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.



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Field Training continued from page 1

who have taken it have walked away with a greater appreciation for considerations that hunters face in the field. Some of these concerns could be left out of the required courses or perceived differently by the participants in the classroom or online setting.

For example, it is one thing to read a short piece on basic land navigation and watch a quick video on the topic. However, it is a very different learning experience during the field training course when you put an orienteering compass in a student's hand and ask for the bearing to and from a certain object in the distance. Something this simple can mean the difference between walking into the woods and safely returning to the parking area, and walking into the woods and getting lost, sometimes with tragic consequences.



Hunter Educator Scott Travers explains safe tree stand protocol to students. Photo: S. Travers



Participants learn about safe gun handling in the field. Photo: S. Travers

The field training course is designed to take just under 4 hours to complete. The training is completed in a group setting with up to five participants in each group. Participants are led on a guided walk on the campus surrounding the Hunter Education Office, where they will encounter scenarios that will help them to self-assess their knowledge in areas such as firearms familiarization, land navigation, safe hunting methods, range estimation, responsibility, ethics, etc. During this course no written tests are given, no scores are recorded, and there is no pressure to achieve "a passing grade". Participants are free to concentrate on the information that is being provided in this hands-on learning experience.

If you are a new hunter who has recently completed a hunter education course, a hunter who does not have a mentor, a hunter who has not taken to the field in a while, a hunter who is simply interested in how to be more successful in the field, or even someone who is interested in hunting but has no idea where to start, please feel free to contact me via email at scott.travers@dem.ri.gov to register for this course or to ask any questions.



R.I. Wildlife Clinic continued from page 1

Island, which is the only facility in Rhode Island licensed to care for all species of native wildlife. The number of animals brought into the clinic each year is between 4000 and 5,000, and that number is increasing. WRARI is primarily run by volunteers, including two Veterinarians, an Executive Director and a Board of Directors. It employs only one full time staff person, and a handful of seasonal staff. WRARI receives no State or Federal funding, because such funding is not available, but instead relies on private donations, fundraisers, and limited grant support from the R.I. Foundation. WRARI provides all of its services, including x-rays and surgery, free of charge.

If you come across a wild animal that you suspect is in need of care or intervention, be cautious – wild animals perceive humans to be predators so you must account for both their safety and your own. If you can safely do so, the best thing to do is to try to contain the animal in or under a box or other container and call the Wildlife Clinic immediately at (401) 294-6363 for assistance. If you find a bat, fox, raccoon, skunk, or woodchuck DO NOT TOUCH IT with your bare hands - call the Wildlife Clinic or the Division of Fish & Wildlife at (401) 789-0281. These species are Rabies Vector Species (RVS) in R.I. and must be handled properly with gloves, or by law will have to be euthanized for rabies testing. The trained staff at the clinic and the Division will tell you how to properly handle the situation and, if necessary, the animals.

Baby animals are commonly found in spring and summer, but just because you see a baby sitting in your yard by itself does not necessarily mean it is abandoned. Many parents will leave their young in a safe place while they go out to find food. Animals that commonly do this are deer and rabbits. If you do not notice an injury, just let them stay where they are and leave them alone. Any baby with an injury should be brought to the clinic right away. Baby animals cannot regulate their own body temperature and should be put on a heating pad set on LOW or given a hot water bottle (any bottle or jar will do) to snuggle against during transport. Just make sure to secure the bottle so it does not roll onto the animal (s).

Once you bring the animal into the clinic, the staff will jump into action. Experienced rehabilitators and veterinarians will examine the animal and devise appropriate treatment plans. Proper housing and enrichment are provided, and the animal is put into a quiet place to rest and heal. Staff and volunteers check on the animals in their care daily, even on holidays and weekends, and reassess the status of the animal to determine when the animal will be ready for release.

When an animals injuries heal and they become more active, they are moved to an outdoor enclosure, which helps them acclimate to the outside. This is called a “soft release”, which allows the patients to slowly get used to the outdoors before they are fully released. All animals, with the exception of orphaned babies, are released back to the area where they were found.

What can you do to help? The Wildlife Clinic is a non-profit organization that is funded by donations and fundraisers. Two major fundraisers are the Baby Shower, occurring each spring, and Wildstock, which happens in October. Sign up for the Wildlife Clinic newsletter to learn more about these events. You can also consider volunteering at the clinic and helping these animals more directly. Every little bit helps! You can learn more by going to their website at www.RIwildliferehab.org.



A baby hummingbird that was displaced from its nest beside a penny to show size. Photo courtesy of M. Sprouls

Black Bears In Rhode Island, Research Update

Written By Charles Brown (2011), Updated By Sarah Riley

Last year, there were many sightings of black bears (*Ursus americanus*) throughout Rhode Island, from Glocester, to West Warwick, to Charlestown. State biologist Charles Brown, and others studying these animals, suspect that increased forest habitat and wildlife conservation efforts throughout New England over the past century are allowing bears to return to their historic range. Below is an updated version of the article that Charles Brown wrote in 2011 for Wild Rhode Island about the background and life history of black bears; updates and edits are provided by Sarah Riley.

After an absence of more than 200 years, the report of a black bear sighting in Rhode Island today is enough to bring out reporters from all the local television and newspaper outlets, all hoping to get the scoop on the whereabouts of this large and impressive yet shy and elusive animal. Whether it will still be “breaking news” a few years from now remains to be seen as bear sightings become more commonplace in our state.

The American black bear originally ranged throughout all of the forested portions of North America, including all of what is now known as New England. It is the only species of bear that occurs in the eastern United States. Historical records are scarce, but it is likely that bears were extirpated (became locally extinct) from Rhode Island sometime before 1800. The clearing of land for agriculture and other uses, along with unregulated persecution and harvest, pushed the remaining populations into the most remote and undisturbed parts of North America. Colonists considered bears a danger to crops and livestock, and were routinely shot on site in the era before game laws were in place.

After several centuries of population declines and range constriction, black bear populations today are increasing in many areas and beginning to reoccupy some of their former range. As former agricultural lands in the northeast revert back to forest, it has the potential to become bear habitat. Today, bears are managed and protected as game animals, with harvest strictly regulated or prohibited. Bear populations in Massachusetts and Connecticut are increasing at rates estimated to be seven to eight percent per year. The roughly estimated population in Rhode Island is thought to be between one and ten individuals, with little evidence that a true resident population has yet been established.

Bears belong to the mammal order Carnivora, but they are omnivorous in the true sense of the word. They are not built for stalking and pursuing prey, lacking the necessary speed and agility for pursuing adult prey animals. Insects and insect larvae make up a significant portion of their diet, and they will scavenge dead animals (carrion) as well. Fruits, vegetation, and nuts are a major component of a bear’s diet. In spring, bears will eat grasses and the leaves, buds, and tubers of a variety of plants. Blueberries, blackberries, and other fruits are highly sought after during the summer. In the fall, acorns and other mast crops, such as beech nuts, are eaten in large quantities. In poor mast years, bears will often move great distances in search of available foods. They are excellent climbers and will readily climb trees to collect nuts or to escape danger. Black bears lead mostly solitary lives, with the exception of females with cubs or coming together to mate. Adult bears are territorial and may defend their territories from other unwelcome bears. Adult females may



Black bear seen exploring a back yard in West Greenwich
Photo: D. Oliver

Black bears in R.I. continued from page 4

have territories of two to six square miles, while adult males' are much larger, often encompassing the territories of several adult females. Bears use scent and visual markings such as biting and clawing trees to convey messages such as territorial boundaries, identity, and reproductive status. They vocalize in a number of ways using various grunts, blowing burst of air through their nostrils or clacking of their teeth to convey moods such as pleasure, pain, nervousness, or fear. In this way, bears avoid altercations with other bears. They will sometimes bluff charge or stamp the ground with their front feet if they feel threatened but rarely follow through with an attack.

As an adaptation to living through periods of food scarcity, bears go into a hibernation-like state in some parts of their range. Bears are not true hibernators, but actually go into a state known as torpor. Torpor is different from hibernation in that their body temperature does not drop to match that of their surroundings, and they can easily awake from this state. While in torpor, bears reduce their metabolism by half, lowering their heart. They are able to maintain their body temperature because of their thick fur and fat accumulated during the fall. Bears do not eat, drink, or defecate while they are hibernating, but they will wake in response to disturbance, tend to their cubs or nurse.

Breeding season for bears occurs in June or early July, with adult male bears competing for breeding rights with as many females as possible. Female bears will generally not breed before they are at least three or four years old. Males will usually not achieve enough "status" to breed until they are much older. Adult females breed every other year. The cubs are born in the den in January and stay with their mother until they are one and a half years old. The average litter



This black bear has made a habit of going after bird feeders in Charlestown, R.I. Photo: courtesy of B. Berker

is two but may be more or less depending on the age and health of the female. Bears are highly intelligent with long memories and will remember the location of predictable food sources.

The return of bears to Rhode Island and other parts of their historic range should be viewed as a wildlife success story. However, there are a number of management issues that state wildlife agencies must contend with as bears move back into areas from which they were long absent. In some parts of their range, loss of habitat remains a significant concern for the long-term viability of bear populations. Bears come into conflict with humans when they are attracted to human-related food sources such as bird feeders, garbage, pet food, bee hives, livestock, and agricultural crops. Residents in areas where bears occur can take steps to minimize the potential for conflicts with

black bears.

Properly securing livestock feed, garbage, and other potential food sources will prevent many problems from occurring. The use of electric fencing can be effective in preventing damage to apiaries or attacks on livestock. Bird feeders should be taken down in April and not put up until November or made completely inaccessible to avoid attracting bears into backyards. Bird seed is high in fat and protein content, which is often lacking in a bear's normal diet, making feeders an attractive target. Never intentionally feed bears, it is illegal in R.I. and those that are fed by humans almost always become nuisances to other property owners.

Continued on page 6

Black bears in R.I. continued from page 5

In 2002, the Department adopted a Policy Regarding Problem Black Bears. The intent of the policy is to establish guidelines for Department personnel responding to various situations involving black bears that develop nuisance or destructive behaviors. Public education is major component of the plan, the goal being to prevent problems from occurring. Revisions to this policy continue to be made as more information is gained about bear travel patterns, habitat use and behavior. The future of black bears in Rhode Island will depend on public attitude and actions as much as suitable habitat. We can, as have residents of the other five New England states, learn to coexist with bears and enjoy this wild-life success story.

The Division has been working with the University of Rhode Island (URI) and with a group of volunteers for the past three years to conduct a black bear presence/absence study across western Rhode Island. The bear enters the corral of barbed wire to investigate the lure attractant. The hair sample taken from the bear's thick coat can then be sent to the Genetics Lab at URI for analysis. Genetic analysis can differentiate individual bears. So far, no samples have yet to be collected, indicating a low bear population abundance, but those numbers are expected to rise. We are also continuing to track sightings and suspected bear activity; if you see a bear or suspect one has been in the area, call our office at 401-789-0281, or email DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

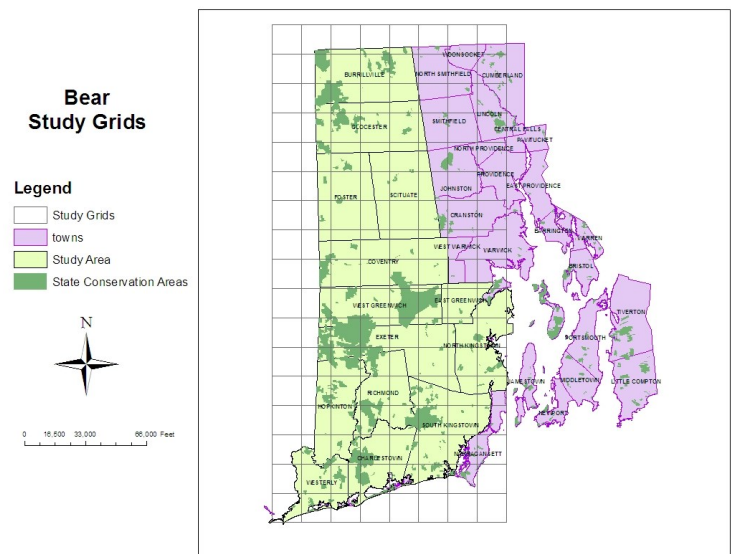


Fig. 1– Site locations of bear hair collection study area in western Rhode Island

Meet Mary Grande, Our New Wildlife Outreach Coordinator !

The Division welcomes Mary Grande as our Wildlife Outreach Coordinator to help with public education and wildlife conservation outreach. She has a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology and is currently finishing up her master's degree in Education at Brown University. "I have loved wildlife since before I could walk- just ask my family!", says Grande, "So working with the Division of Fish and Wildlife is an exciting opportunity for me. I'm so lucky that it is now my job to share my joy for nature through public outreach regarding wildlife species and conservation!

This spring, Grande has organized a program called "Come Birding With Me" where she takes classes, families, and anyone interested, out into state management areas to learn about Rhode Island's native birds. She also plans to implement programs for classrooms all across the state to teach students about RIDEM's various efforts and programs. In the future, Grande would also like to team up with organizations like the Scouts and 4-H clubs, and with the Division's Volunteer coordinator, to engage and involve more people in various conservation efforts. For more information about the Wildlife Outreach program, or to talk to Mary Grande, you can call her at 401.782.3700 or by email Mary.Grande@dem.ri.gov.



Mary poses with a grey tree frog she found in Carolina Management Area. Photo: M. Grande

Kid's Corner! Presented by the Aquatic Resource Education Program

Fishing season is here and it is time to take your family out to your favorite pond! Before you go, you just need to make sure you have everything that you need. Find the following items in the word search below that will make your fishing trip fantastic:

- Tacklebox
- Catch
- Fishing Rod
- Northern Pike
- Line
- Bluegill
- Hook
- Perch
- Sinker
- Friend
- Bait
- Lure
- Pliers
- Sunscreen
- Bug Spray
- Trout
- Bass
- Pickereel
- Stringer
- Scissors

- Nymph
- Plug
- Waders
- Sunglasses
- Hatch

- Net
- Lunker
- Hat
- Fun
- Caddisfly



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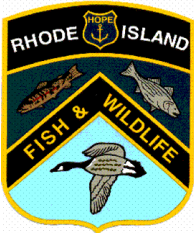
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