



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

Colonial Nesting Bird Survey *by Christopher Raithel*

Wading birds, including herons and egrets, have always been very popular species. In fact, they were once too popular for their own good. In the 1800s, their showy breeding plumes were highly sought by the millinery trade and used for the adornment of ladies hats and other fashion needs. Because of intense persecution, egret populations were annihilated in many parts of their range and were driven into remote refugia in the deep southern swamps. Other types of water birds, including gulls, were intensely sought but for different reasons – they were good to eat. A gull egg is a significant amount of protein and, in the era before refrigeration, fresh eggs were fair game, so to speak. Teams of “eggers” regularly plied the gull breeding colonies. To insure that the



Photo: R. L. Ferren

A Great Egret on Hope Island shows off its breeding finery.

eggs were fresh the eggers first smashed them all and then came back a few days later after new eggs had been laid. Needless to say, this sort of harvest drove the gulls out of New England but in the opposite direction – the remaining colonies were located on remote islands off the eastern coast of Canada. By the early part of the 20th century, most wildlife had been severely diminished and sea birds were particularly rare. However, this vast consumption of bird products ignited the conservation movement and led to the formation

of the first environmental groups, including the Audubon Society. Eventually, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 protected all native birds from unregulated harvest.

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Atlantic Menhaden in Rhode Island *by Jason McNamee*

Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) are small filter-feeding fish that migrate into Narragansett Bay during the spring. They come in from their wintertime spawning aggregations off the mid-Atlantic coast of the United States. Atlantic menhaden (also called pogeys, bunker, or simply, menhaden) form large, tightly-packed schools which can be seen from a vessel and are even noticeable from the air. Despite their small size, menhaden have an important role in Narragansett Bay's ecosystem by serving as one of the primary prey items for many species of fish such as striped bass and bluefish. They also serve a role in altering the chemical composition of the water column in areas where they concentrate, though the exact consequences of their role as a filter feeder, and specifically how they affect water quality, is a topic of scientific debate (ASMFC 2010).



Photo: B. Gratwicke

The current coast-wide stock status of Atlantic menhaden indicates that the stock is not over-fished, but that over-fishing was recently detected (ASMFC 2010). That the current status is “not overfished” means that the population is sustainable because the current number of fish and eggs produced is sufficient to ensure that a population of equal or greater size

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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.



Activities on RI's Lakes and Ponds *by Alan Libby*

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Lakes and ponds are very popular for organized recreational activities. Last year over 40 organizations applied to the Division for permits to conduct more than 300 events on RI's freshwaters. The organized events included both fishing tournaments and the launching of boats (including canoes and kayaks) from state-owned or controlled access areas. All organized fishing activities must be permitted by the Division, regardless of the point of access or waterbody. In addition, any organized activity requiring the launching of boats from state-owned or controlled access areas must also be permitted. Twenty-six lakes and ponds were utilized: Echo Lake and Johnson Pond (a.k.a., Flat River Reservoir) received the greatest number of requests: 47 and 42 respectively. Stafford Pond, Smith & Sayles Reservoir, Wilson Reservoir, Worden Pond, Indian Lake, and Watchaug Pond were the next favored areas, with 18-21 tournaments.

Fishing is a traditional activity in RI. According to the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 158,000 anglers, both residents and nonresidents, fished in RI's freshwaters, spending more than an estimated \$150 million on trips, equipment, and other related items. Black bass (largemouth and smallmouth bass) were the most targeted species.

The vast majority of permits were issued to bass clubs. Bass fishing tournaments are a popular pastime with many anglers. Bass clubs have assisted the Division in evaluating the status of bass populations in selected ponds and lakes over the years. For selected tournaments, club members are issued special permits to collect all sizes of bass that they catch. Biologists from the Division meet the clubs at the "weigh-in" to measure (length and weight) each bass and collect scale samples in order to age individual fish and to evaluate such parameters as growth rates. At the conclusion of the tournament and when all the necessary data is obtained the bass are returned alive to the water.



Contestants hoping to catch the last fish before the close of a tournament one rainy day on Johnson Pond.

Photo: A. Libby

Location of Event	Number
Echo Lake	47
Johnson Pond	42
Stafford Pond	21
Smith & Sayles Reservoir	20
Wilson Reservoir	20
Worden Pond	20
Indian Lake	19
Watchaug Pond	18
Upper Slatersville Reservoir	16
Bowdish Reservoir	14
Keech Pond	12
Wallum Lake	9
Tiogue Lake	8
Wakefield Pond	6
Woonasquatucket Reservoir	6
Beach Pond	5
Brickyard Pond	4
Roger Williams Park Pond	4
Chapman Pond	3
Silver Spring Lake	3
Gorton Pond	2
Tucker Pond	2
Waterman Reservoir	2
Olney Pond	1
Round Top Pond	1
Zeke's Bridge	1
Total	306

A Turkey Hunting Milestone is Reached in RI *by Brian Tefft*

On May 6 of this year, Rhode Island was the location of a quest completed by very few hunters. Daniel Rorrer of Pulaski County, Virginia is a turkey hunter whose goal was to harvest a wild turkey in each of the 49 states where turkeys are found (only Alaska does not have wild turkeys). Together with hunting partner and friend Scott Culpepper from Georgia, Daniel hunted turkey in Rhode Island for the third year with hopes of bagging his 49th and final turkey in all states.

Daniel grew up hunting squirrels and rabbits in Virginia and tried fall turkey hunting for the first time in 1975. Another friend, Steve Price, encouraged Daniel to try spring gobbler hunting and in 1996, Daniel and Steve went to Texas to hunt, but were not successful. Finding the time to spring gobbler hunt was always a challenge for Daniel, the owner and operator of a successful well-drilling business for 47, because spring was his busiest time of the year. In 1997, Price helped Daniel harvest his first spring gobbler in his home state of Virginia, and the quest had begun. Over the next 10 years Rorrer was fortunate enough to hunt each spring, many times in more than one state, together with friends Culpepper and Tom Stich of Pennsylvania. Turkeys in states around the country fell to Rorrer's sharp eye and hunting abilities: Florida, North Dakota, Minnesota, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Colorado and so on.

Rorrer made friends while traveling and met many interesting people on his quest, but he told me one of his most difficult and most memorable hunts was in Massachusetts with Culpepper. After locating two birds and calling them in, on public land, the men scored a double with both bagging turkeys at the same time. For hunters, the enjoyment comes from the tradition and rewards bestowed from a successful hunt. To meet the challenge of the hunt while upholding the spirit of fair chase, enjoying the beautiful outdoors and the gifts of nature, friendships and of course the



Scott Culpepper (l) and Daniel Rorrer with Rorrer's 49th turkey in as many states. Photo: B. Tefft

taste of delicious wild turkey are what it's all about!

Rorrer retired from his drilling business in 2005, passing it on to his son who encouraged him to enjoy life after working hard, up to 100 hours per week, all his life. In 2007, Rorrer returned part-time to the business to help out and provide his vast experience to his son in keeping things going strong. In 2011, only two states remained on Rorrer's quest, Maryland and Rhode Island. In early May, a Maryland gobbler fell to his gun and then only Little Rhody was left. Rorrer said he always feared that RI would be the toughest state, especially after last year when he hunted here and did not hear one single gobbler. I received a call from mutual friend and Rhode Island turkey hunter Jeff Dinger, who had moved to Virginia and befriended Rorrer about 10 years ago. Jeff called me and asked if I

might be able to assist Daniel in locating and harvesting a Rhode Island bird. Of course I agreed; what an honor! We planned to hunt public land and met for the first time on Wednesday, May 4. We worked birds over the next two days but were unsuccessful. On Friday, turkeys we had located the previous night were gobbling their heads off at sunrise. This was our chance. As luck would have it, once the birds hit the ground they went silent; never a good thing. We set up anyway and after a couple of hours of patience, the birds gobbled no more than 100 yards from our location. Culpepper scratched his slate call to give a few soft yelps and bingo, the turkeys were hooked. Three big Jakes soon came in gobbling, strutting and stretching their necks to find the "hen" they heard calling. When one presented Rorrer an opportunity, he took the bird with a good clean shot. Finally, with that shot, Daniel Rorrer had fulfilled his goal of harvesting a wild turkey in every state in the United States. After congratulations and pictures, the bird was checked to record the official harvest. I am very lucky to have been a part of this hunt. I enjoyed every minute and made new friendships with two avid hunters, for which I am very grateful.

Atlantic Menhaden in Rhode Island *by Jason McNamee* *cont. from page 1*

Menhaden purse seine skiffs of the FV TIDEWATER in the Chesapeake Bay.



Photo: www.oceansart.us

will be produced in the following years. The fact that “overfishing was recently detected” means that even though the population size is adequate now, fishery removals (from fishermen and/or from naturally occurring mortality) are higher than a level that will allow the population size to remain at sustainable levels. Due to this finding, the states are working collaboratively through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to address these concerns. RI contributes data to the assessment by providing fishery harvest data, and more importantly, RI contributes fishery independent information through the Narragansett Bay Juvenile Finfish Seine Survey (Wild RI, Autumn 2009) This is one of five fishery independent juvenile indices that contribute to the overall stock status.

There are both recreational and commercial fisheries for menhaden in Narragansett Bay throughout the spring, summer, and fall. The main commercial fishery is conducted by vessels called purse seiners that are commonly called “Pogey Boats.” The operation consists of a large primary collection vessel, one or more smaller net-setting vessels, and also employs spotter aircraft to locate the schools of menhaden and direct the vessels to the areas where the fish are congregated. The net-setting vessel encircles the school of fish, and then the bottom of the net “purses” closed, capturing and holding the fish until they can be pumped on to the larger collection boat. These commercially caught fish are then sold for lobster bait as well as to bait shops, where they are used by recreational fishermen to catch various sport fish such as striped bass and bluefish. Larger scale purse seine operations occur in the south, predominately in Chesapeake Bay. The fish harvested in these operations are used in what is called the reduction fishery. This fishery produces omega-3 fatty acids for use in products such as dietary supplements, as well as using the other parts of the fish for protein in livestock feed. Reduction fishing is illegal in Narragansett Bay; therefore all of the commercial operations seen locally are participating in the menhaden bait fishery.

On the recreational side, sport fishermen capture menhaden for use as fresh bait when pursuing larger sport fish. They are commonly caught by “snagging,” where a weighted hook is reeled through a school of menhaden at high speed

in an effort to snag and harvest a menhaden, or by the use of cast nets, small circular nets that are thrown into a school of menhaden and then quickly hauled back, encircling and capturing a number of fish at a time. Recreational fishermen prize menhaden for both their use as bait, and also for luring sport fish into the Bay by providing a food source that both brings in and sustains fish like striped bass and bluefish in Narragansett Bay from spring through fall. In the spring and early summer, groups of sport fishing boats can be seen surrounding schools of menhaden in the Providence River getting their bait for a day of fishing.

As the reader can probably imagine, any time both commercial and recreational interests compete for a similar and limited resource, user group conflicts arise. This is certainly the case with regard to menhaden. For as long as most can remember, each spring brings about what many refer to as the “Pogey Wars,” a period of time when both commercial and recreational fishermen compete for the schools of menhaden that enter Narragansett Bay. And for just about as long, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, recreational fishing groups, and commercial interests have been working diligently to develop a system where all of the user groups have access to the resource in a fair and equitable manner.

The latest iteration of these compromises occurred over the winter during 2010 – 2011. It is a progressive and complex management system that is anticipated to stem some of the conflict that occurs each year in Narragansett Bay. Variations of this system have been in place for the past 3 - ½ years with varying levels of success. It is hoped that the modifications made for 2011 will keep us on the path for a solution in Narragansett Bay and provide protection for an important fishery resource and opportunities for fishermen of all persuasions.

References: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. 2010. Stock Assessment Report No. 10-02 of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment and Review Panel Reports. 326 pp.

Menhaden in pursed seine, ready to be pumped aboard the primary vessel in Chesapeake Bay.



Photo: www.oceansart.us

Colonial Nesting Bird Survey *by Christopher Raithe*

cont. from page 1

Following federal protection, populations of many water birds began to increase and recolonize their ancestral ranges. As gulls moved south and egrets moved north from their relict populations, they eventually reached southern New England. Herring Gulls began nesting in Rhode Island about 1937 and Great Black-backed Gulls a few years later, in 1944. The first "southern" egrets, led by the Great Egret, began to nest locally in the early 1960s (R.L. Ferren, unpub. ms.). The return of nesting gulls and egrets must have seemed remarkable to contemporary observers, and before long scientists began to conduct surveys of their nesting populations. The first comprehensive statewide survey of colonial nesting water birds occurred in 1961, when Robert Woodruff and Roland Clement conducted a thorough inventory of all nesting sites. Their results were published by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island's journal *Narragansett Naturalist* [1962: Vol. 5(3-4)]. After this yeoman effort, survey work was sporadic for several years, although interest was renewed when the egrets began to reappear. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Division of Fish and Wildlife began to conduct surveys of all the sea birds (gulls, terns, egrets, and certain shorebirds) that nested in colonies. These surveys were initially done by James E. Myers (a state wildlife biologist) and Richard Ferren, who at that time was teaching at the Berkshire Community College and was the acknowledged expert on Rhode Island birds. In the formative years, this survey work was a grueling and sometimes harrowing affair. Without benefit of a strong seaworthy boat, Myers and Ferren used small open craft, trailered to the launching point closest to the target island. Eventually, the Division acquired a Seahawk, whose canopy, maneuverability, and shallow draft made reaching and debarking on the islands a much easier process.

Eventually Jim Myers retired and this work was reassigned to other Division personnel and has continued uninterrupted, with Dick Ferren still on board and serving as the main census taker and institutional knowledge. The colonial survey, as it is now known, occurs annually between late May and early June. It consists of visits to about 80 sites in Narragansett Bay, along the South Shore, and on Block Island. Some nesting sites are no more than exposed rocks, channel markers, or rooftops near the sea. Other sites are large islands that take several hours to inventory. The size of nesting populations of all target species are either estimated or precisely tallied by nest counts. Other states do similar surveys, but at multi-year intervals. Rhode Island's small size allows easier logistics and therefore a greater intimacy with our local avifauna than possible elsewhere.

The results of these investigations are too numerous to describe here, but in aggregate this work represents a 30+ year time series of the nesting status of at least a dozen nesting bird species, a body of work that is unique in the Northeast. Current information about the status and location of the colony nesting birds is in constant demand. It has been used to coordinate certain demolition and remediation projects on former Navy lands in Narragansett Bay, and also to acquire certain key parcels as conservation areas (e.g. Rose and Dyer Islands). Conservation plans have also been implemented for certain priority species that seem to be in trouble.



Herring Gull guarding nest on West Island.



Common Tern, Spar Island.



Ruddy Turnstones pause in RI on their migration to Arctic breeding grounds. All photos above by R. L. Ferren.

The Magic of Surf Fishing *by Kimberly Sullivan*

As the sun slowly descends towards the horizon, a group of 20 people gather around a cherry red Dodge Durango in the parking lot of Camp Cronin. With an open hatchback, the truck is nearly overflowing with various types of fishing rods, tackle, line, lures, tackle boxes, boots and first aid supplies. Standing before the small group is Al Williams, a hatchery employee with more than just a keen interest in fishing: he has been the instructor for 'Surf Fishing: The Basics' for over 10 years. During this particular evening in late August, Al shares with the participants of the Aquatic Resource Education program, his love of fishing.

For the past eight years as Aquatic Resource Education Coordinator, I have listened to Al Williams begin his 45-minute talk about saltwater fishing at the 'Surf Fishing: The Basics' class and it still amazes me how much information one man can possess. After I thank all of the participants for attending and introduce Al, he takes on a conversational tone and begins describing the equipment needed for a day of fishing with just enough anecdotes to keep you interested. At first he talks about how to choose a rod. Participants learn that two of his favorite rods are a \$40.00 Benny's special and the one that he built himself. Both rods are highly flexible, which keeps his line from breaking when he catches that big striper, and the first eye on the rod is large enough for the line to easily come off the reel when casting. As for line, braided line is better to avoid "bird-nesting," but monofilament works fine and is cheaper. Next, Al opens up his tackle boxes and a hush falls over the crowd. Even those that have never fished before look in awe upon the numerous lures which include poppers, spinners, rubber worms, spoons and, my personal favorite, "the storms," realistic-looking rubber fish with a weight in the middle for further casting. Once he describes the basic types of lures and how to use them, Al takes out his handmade lures which have been crafted from old broom stick handles, spray paint, glitter and plastic eyes. He entertains the numerous questions about which lure is best for which type of fish.

In keeping with ARE program's goal of teaching safe and responsible fishing, Al turns to safety issues. He warns the future anglers to stay off of slippery rocks, watch the tides so as not to become stranded on those cold days of surf fishing, and to keep dry, especially hands and feet. Safety equipment and protective gear leads to a brief discussion about

Instructor Al Williams.



Surf casting demo.



Point Judith lighthouse.



Surf fishing as the sun sets.



Photos: K. Sullivan

boots and waders. Other topics covered during the talk included the new saltwater license, the proper way to catch and release, how to cast properly, the moon's influence on fishing and finally, angler ethics, which is near and dear to Al's heart. In other words, respect others around you.

After condensing decades worth of knowledge into a 45-minute period, it is time to learn to cast and rig up the rods. The participants are handed a surf rod and the staff help tie leaders onto the monofilament. The participants pick their lures and follow the winding path. As the sun dips past the horizon and the tide comes in, the participants try their hand at casting the lines. They surf fish for a few hours, switching up lures with the hope of catching something. Some have waded in past their shorts to get that cast further out there. Every now and then someone thinks they have a bite and comes up empty handed. Other times there is a fish on the hook and excitement stirs the crowd. With the moon upon the water, the waves lapping at the sand, and a fishing rod in hand, it is clear to see why Al Williams takes every opportunity to teach others to fish the shores of Rhode Island.

'Surf Fishing: The Basics' will be held on August 11th and 25th, 2011 at the DEM Marine Fisheries Jerusalem Coastal Lab in South Kingstown. For more information and to register, please contact Kimberly Sullivan at 401-539-7333 or kimberly.sullivan@dem.ri.gov.

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

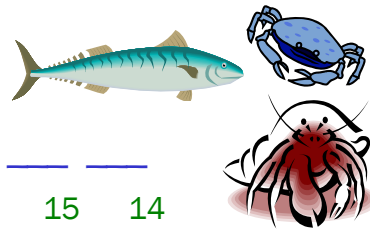
Use the code below to find the answer to the following fishy jokes:



A B C D E F G H I J K L M
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

Which fish can perform an operation?



1 19 20 21 18 7 5 15 14

What lives in the ocean, is grouchy, and hates neighbors?

1 8 5 18 13 9 20 3 18 1 2

Mirror Riddle

Take a solving break. Hold this page up to a mirror to find two riddles and their answers.

What happens when you throw a green rock into the Red Sea?

It gets wet.

What is in the middle of a jellyfish?

A jelly button.








What did the Pacific Ocean say to the Atlantic Ocean?

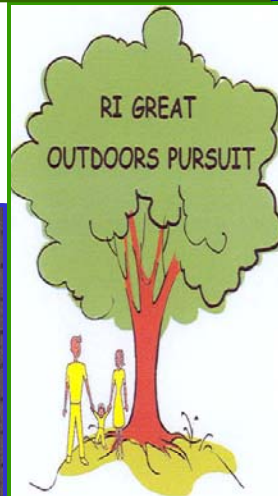
Nothing, it just waved.



Saltwater Sudoku

Each row, column and four-square box must contain only one of each of the critters. See if you can solve the puzzle! The answer is on page 8.



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Calendar July –September 2011

July 10 - Great Outdoors Pursuit, 11 am–3 pm Pulaski State Park, Chepachet, RI. 401-222-2632
www.riparks.com

July 31 - Governor's Bay Day at Colt State Park, Roger Wheeler State Beach, Brenton Point State Park, and more.

August 11 & August 25 - Surf Fishing: The Basics, 6PM-9PM, Jerusalem Coastal Lab Facility. Please contact Kimberly Sullivan at kimberly.sullivan@dem.ri.gov or 401-539-7333. Registration Required!

September 1 - 30 - Canada Goose Early Hunting Season.

September - Youth Pheasant Training, date TBA.

September 10 - Introduction to Freshwater Fly Fishing. Addieville East Farm, 9am-3pm. Space is limited, registration required. Please contact Kimberly Sullivan at kimberly.sullivan@dem.ri.gov or 401-539-7333.

September 15 - Opening Day for Archery Deer Season.

















Deer season summary report now available

Rhode Island deer hunters harvested a total of 2569, deer during the recently completed 2010-11 deer hunting season, 6% more than in the previous year. The 2010-2011 annual White-tailed Deer status report is available online by going to www.dem.ri.gov or by following the link: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/deerharv.pdf>.

This report contains a summary of the deer hunting season and a review of the biological information gathered from deer by RIDEM biologists. Copies of the report may also be obtained by calling the Great Swamp field headquarters at 401-789-0281.



Sudoku solution

Kids Corner answers: Which fish can perform an operation? A Sturgeon! What lives in the ocean, is grouchy and hates neighbors? A Hermit crab! **Mirror Mirror**—What happens when you throw a green rock into the Red Sea? It gets wet. What is in the middle of a jellyfish? A jelly button! What did the Pacific Ocean say to the Atlantic Ocean? Nothing, it just waved.

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