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ENDANGERED AND NONGAME SPECIES PROGRAM MISSION
To actively conserve New Jersey's biological diversity by maintaining and enhancing endangered and nongame wildlife populations within healthy functioning ecosystems.



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A World Class Resource

Message From Larry Niles, ENSP Chief

Jon Mitchell once wrote that you don't know what you've got till it's gone. Indeed, it is often easy to take local phenomenon for granted. There are many residents of Philadelphia, for example, who have never visited Independence Hall.

But if anyone doubted the worldwide significance of the annual spring migration of shorebirds through the Delaware Bay -- and the growing concerns about its continuing viability -- all one had to do this spring was spend a day on the bayshores or stop by our banding team's house on Reed's Beach.

The team assembled there was, at least for May, the finest group of bird banders operating anywhere on earth. Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, England, Scotland, the Netherlands -- combined with our dedicated U.S. volunteers, it was a U.N. of bird banders. But their contribution went beyond their unparalleled skill that led to a record number of banded shorebirds.

Building upon the experience they have developed working with migrating birds in flyways throughout the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, their expertise -- and their very presence -- put into clear perspective just how priceless the shorebird migration is. And how essential it is for us to preserve it.

For their valuable contributions and insight, we say, "Thank you."

Pinelands Rattlers

Attempting to avert future timber rattlesnake controversies -- such as the one currently surrounding the construction of a 300-home development around a snake den along Kettle Run in Evesham Township -- the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program recently initiated a timber rattlesnake monitoring project throughout the Pinelands Landscape Region.

Funded by the Pinelands Commission, the three-year, minimum \$130,000 project will track the movements of individual rattlesnakes during their active season and identify their wintering den locations. "We want to find out where other dens and travel corridors are so that we can help with intelligent planning and develop protective buffers that, hopefully, will keep the Pinelands population viable while preventing future controversies like the one that has occurred in Evesham," says Larry Niles, ENSP chief.

The ENSP will form a snake response task force comprised of pre-qualified individuals such as state park personnel and licensed animal rehabilitators to respond to calls of rattlesnake sightings. According to Dave Golden, assistant ENSP biologist, these individuals will collect each snake and turn it over to the ENSP to have a radio transmitter implanted. Within 24 hours, the snake will be released where it was originally sighted and then tracked with radio telemetry as it feeds, breeds and makes it way back to its den -- where a number of other rattlesnakes no doubt winter.

In addition, the state's Green Acres Program -- as part of a settlement agreement between the Pinelands Commission and the developer -- is poised to purchase a tract of land between the Evesham development and Wharton State Forest. The rattlesnakes are already using the area to forage.

Meanwhile, three rattlesnakes implanted with radio transmitters that were released this spring at the Kettle Run den site are being tracked by Pinelands Commission and ENSP biologists.

SPEAKERS AVAILABLE

The Speakers Bureau offers interested groups an informative slide presentation and discussion on ENSP's efforts to research, manage and protect endangered and threatened species in New Jersey. More than 50 trained Division of Fish and Wildlife - Wildlife Conservation Corps volunteers are available to conduct the half-hour presentation geared toward adult audiences. To schedule a speaker for your group, contact Terry at 609-628-2103.

Putting Plovers First: Beach Raking Reduced

If you've noticed more seaweed along the state's more isolated beaches this summer, credit both beachnesting birds and shorebirds.

Thanks to the influence of the Division of Fish and Wildlife's ENSP, new DEP state regulations this year ban raking beaches in front of piping plover, least tern and black skimmer nesting areas and on non-recreational beaches -- beaches 100 yards beyond a life-guard stand. The "wrack line" -- where the high tide leaves seaweed, marsh vegetation, egg casings and shell and crab bits -- is a prime feeding zone for both plovers and shorebirds, which feed there on both insects and marine invertebrates.

"Excessive raking lowers the quality of the beach habitat for both nesting and feeding," says Dave Jenkins, principal ENSP zoologist. "Besides reducing feeding opportunities, particularly for state-endangered piping plovers, beach raking can kill beachnesting chicks or, earlier in the season, rake up nests before we've found them and fenced them off."

The fencing prevents beachgoers from stepping on eggs and disturbing the adults or young; if either are disturbed, the young or eggs are more likely to fall victim to predators such as gulls, crows, foxes, cats, dogs and rats.

The ENSP is also encouraging local beach towns to take a more active role in managing and protecting the piping plovers, including educating beachgoers and enforcing local dog prohibitions on the beaches. Avalon is the first of what is expected to be many beach communities that will sign management agreements.

In addition, the ENSP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with the DEP's Office of Engineering and Construction and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to include funds for monitoring any piping plovers or other beachnesters attracted to wider beaches that result from beach renourishment projects. The towns where such projects occur will also be required to enhance protection of these birds.

Red Knots:

Achieve weight, but leave late

Results from the Division of Fish and Wildlife's ENSP shorebird banding operation on Delaware Bay this past May were mixed.

Aerial surveys of both sides of the Delaware Bay shore conducted by Kathy Clark, principal ENSP zoologist, found an above-average peak count of 316,000 migratory shorebirds on May 30th. The peak counts of ruddy turnstones, semipalmated sandpipers and sanderlings were all significantly above their long-term averages, while dunlins (45,000) and dowitchers (13,375) were at record-high numbers since Clark began surveying in 1986.

But red knots, the species of most concern, peaked on May 23 at 36,125, 18 percent below their long-term average. That follows a significant decline on their Argentinian wintering grounds this past winter. The knots must nearly double their weight before completing their 10,000-mile journey from Tierra del Fuego to their Arctic breeding grounds. To do so, they rely primarily on horseshoe crab eggs, whose density has declined dramatically due to what the ENSP believes is the overharvesting of crabs for eel and whelk bait.

While most of the red knots appear to have gained sufficient weight, they did so about five days later than usual. That was partly due to a complete mid-month absence of spawning horseshoe crabs on the N.J. side that wasn't rectified till a late-month new moon tide. An unprecedented 7,500 red knots were still on the bay shores June 5th. "That means a sufficient portion of the birds got off late," says Larry Niles, ENSP chief. "It's unclear what that means for their breeding, but for the third year in a row the birds have had problems related to insufficient horseshoe crab egg availability."

Australia's Clive Minton, who again headed the trapping/banding efforts, agrees: "Everything points to the system now being balanced on a knife edge. If there isn't good horseshoe crab egg laying for a considerable part of May, especially the last 10 days of the month, then a significant part of the population may not get to a sufficient weight to enable them to get to the Arctic and/or breed successfully."

Coordinated by Mandy Dey, assistant ENSP biologist, more than 300 New Jersey, U.S. and international volunteers, including skilled banders from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Canada, Brazil and Argentina, weighed and banded a record 5,424 birds.

Of that total, 459 were retraps, including 20 originally banded in either Argentina or Brazil. Ninety of the red knots also were fitted with radio transmitters that were expected to help an ENSP-led expedition to track them this summer on their Arctic breeding grounds.

For more information, visit Larry Niles' recap of the ENSP's Delaware Bay and this summer's Arctic research at the Division of Fish and Wildlife's website, www.njfishandwildlife.com



A red knot (left) with a good takeoff weight of 210 grams contrasts sharply with a very svelte 117-gram red knot. Both were trapped on June 2 at Fortunate Beach. Photo by Larry Niles

Watchable Wildlife

Bat Tours

This fall the ENSP will conduct several bat tours to the Hibernia Mine in the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area in northern New Jersey. The tours are conducted in September or October, usually on Friday evenings. They include a brief talk by Mike Valent, a principal ENSP zoologist, followed by a trip to the mouth of the mine, the state's largest known bat hibernaculum. Bat species you will have the opportunity to see -- perhaps even swarming together -- include little brown, big brown, northern long-eared, eastern pipistrelle and federally and state-endangered Indiana bats.

Contact Mike Valent at 908-735-8975. When enough people express interest, a date will be set and you will be notified.



Little brown bat. Photo by Pete Lolas

Fall Migration Hot Spots

Raptors:

Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area (near Hibernia)

Directions: Take I-80 to Exit 37. Take County Route 513 N 6.5 miles. Turn right on Upper Hibernia Road, proceed 2.8 miles to the Overlook Trailhead on the right.

Information: NJ Div. of F&W, 908-637-4125.

Cape May Point State Park

Directions: From Cape May, take CR 606 (Sunset Blvd.) west, left on Lighthouse Blvd. to state park entrance.

Information: NJ Div. of Parks and Forestry, 609-884-2159

Raptors and Songbirds:

Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area (near Cape May Point)

Directions: From end of Garden State Parkway, take NJ 109 west to NJ Route 9. Left on Route 9 to 1st traffic light. Left onto CR 626 (Seashore Road) to first right-hand turn, New England Road. Continue for two miles to end of road and beach access parking.

Information, including parking details: NJ Division of F&W, 609-628-2436.

Shorebirds:

Most beaches, back bays and mud flats along the N.J. shore.

What's your favorite watchable wildlife spot?

Stow Creek: Bald eagle sits above nest, then flies away. Another smaller bald eagle flies in, goes into nest. He comes out, sits on the nest's edge, waits for the female to return so he can get more food. Wow!

Ralph J. Kmiec, Elm, N.J.

In 40 words or less, tell us your favorite N.J. wildlife viewing spot or experience. Email your responses to owells@dep.state.nj.us. Title the message "Favorite" and include your name, address and phone number for verification purposes. We'll publish the best responses.

August

First week

- Ospreys are fledging.
- (Continuing through August) Red knots migrate through N.J. coastal areas, headed from the Canadian Arctic to South America.

Second week

- Last of piping plover chicks fledge.

Third week

- Passerine migration begins through Cape May peninsula.

Fourth week

- Eagle fledglings begin moving away from nests.
- Last of least terns fledge.
- Plovers preparing to migrate south to Florida and the Gulf Coast.
- Bats begin returning to their wintering caves/mines.

September

First week:

- Ospreys begin migrating to northern South America. Track the migration of 3 N.J. ospreys at <http://www.raptor.cvm.umn.edu/>. "Highway to the Tropics."
- Raptor migration begins through Cape May peninsula.

Second week

- Monarch butterflies begin migration.

- Diamondback terrapin eggs begin hatching.

Third week:

- Peak of bats returning to their wintering caves/mines.

Fourth week

- Raptor migration peaks on Cape May peninsula.

October

First week

- Wood turtles return to streams for breeding and hibernation.

Fourth week

- Snow geese begin arriving.