

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 December – 15 January 2024

Staff:

Kathy Clark, Supervising Zoologist (Chief)
Christina “Kashi” Davis, Principal Zoologist
Gretchen Fowles, GIS Specialist
MacKenzie Hall, Environmental Specialist II
Emily Heiser, Assistant Biologist
Alex Kisurin, Biologist Trainee/Aquatics
Kim Korth, Biologist Trainee/Planner
Sharon Petzinger, Senior Zoologist
Bill Pitts, Senior Zoologist
Kris Schantz, Principal Zoologist
Robert Somes, Senior Zoologist
Brian Zarate, Principal Zoologist
Robert Criollo, Biotics temp services
Daniel Turcios, Biotics temp services

Administration – K. Clark

K. Clark worked on agency planning and policy issues, and regional actions as part of the Northeast Wildlife Diversity Managers technical committee.

Landscape Project –

Staff are meeting monthly with Office of Information Services on the tasks of revising the Landscape Project mapping.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff

Staff edited and released a new 2024 Scientific Collecting permit application.

Staff reviewed and commented on DEP land use permit applications, energy project reviews, and internal NHR land projects.

Staff contributed to reviews of DEP draft rules and rule amendments.

Staff continued to work with the Office of Environmental Review on outreach to other DEP Divisions conducting permit and plan reviews (e.g., Site Remediation, Solid Hazardous Waste) to discuss the apparent exclusion of E/T species concerns.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

Biotics staff continued to work on catching up on entering backlogged data from the past several years into the Biotics database.

The Species Occurrence Dataset Version 14 is being disseminated to agencies with whom ENSP has a data licensing agreement.

Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) – G. Fowles, B. Zarate, M. Hall

The CHANJ Team met with the Office and Research as well as the Bureau of GIS regarding design of a standardized roadkill survey application that will feed into the NJ Wildlife Tracker application.

The CHANJ team met with staff from The Nature Conservancy to touch base on various connectivity related work that we are both working on, together or independently.

G. Fowles participated in a bi-monthly AFWA Transportation Community of Practice call.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

A request for bids to implement a habitat restoration project on Sparta Mountain WMA was sent to potential bidders. Bids are due January 21, 2024.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

D. Jenkins and M. Monteschio continued working on a rule amendment to revise the lists of endangered and nongame wildlife.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

K. Korth worked on the NE Regional database, the NE Action Lexicon, and met with the regional SWAP coordinators. The SWAP Technical Advisory Group (TAG) reviewed the results of the first round of Statewide Level 2 threats – 124 people took the survey and the natural break of the top two threats was deemed too few and recommended a second iteration. The second iteration was completed with 114 people taking the survey (93% of the first round). A TAG meeting is scheduled for 1/16.

K. Korth met with a TAG subcommittee to discuss creating a scoring process for Level 3 regional threats.

Staff continue to review Level 4 threats. K. Korth and contractor SSI worked on the final review of the SGCN list. K. Korth is working with the Natural Heritage Program staff to fully incorporate plants in the 2025 SWAP revision.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

During this period, K. Schantz completed a NOFO for copperhead work and submitted it to NJDEP legal office for review.

K. Schantz assisted pinelands' snake researchers through the LMR and Div. of Parks, Forests and Historic Sites permitting processes.

K. Schantz began cursory data reviews of 2023 Scientific Collecting Permit holders' data and 2024 permit issuance.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

During this period we had one regional coordination call related to bog turtle.

FWS coordinated another call with a handful of state leads to talk about what a priority turtle area map would look like, a tool to be used to help identify important areas for RSGCN turtle conservation, similar to Important Bird Areas. With the sensitivity of the locational component for turtles, there was

much discussion about the scale of any public map and exploring other alternatives to elevating NE turtle conservation work absent a traditional map.

B. Zarate held a call with NJ Pinelands Commission staff to discuss plans for the winter and upcoming season related to the cooperative box turtle project that is ongoing. One element of the project is exploring the relationship between box turtle and dormant season prescribed burns, and we are engaging Forest Fire Service in these conversations as partners in the project.

B. Zarate coordinated with Conserve Wildlife Foundation staff on upcoming field work related to a CWF-awarded NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant that will pilot new bog turtle detection techniques, including the use of eDNA.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

Breeding had been confirmed at seven sites so far this year, and two additional sites have been surveyed without finding any egg masses or adults. 25 egg masses have been translocated to a new pool complex in Cumberland County, and B. Pitts has identified a new site to be visited in the next month.

A. Kisurin initiated a call with B. Pitts and a researcher from Cornell University to discuss a potential eDNA project to survey known, historic, and potential sites for presence of tiger salamanders.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

B. Zarate had a call with representatives from South Jersey Transportation Planning Authority to scope out a potential road improvement project for terrapin, that would include roadkill monitoring. These discussions will be ongoing.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

One bobcat was struck by a vehicle, and eight bobcats were reported trapped during the reporting period. Samples were taken from all individuals/carcasses.

G. Fowles is working on a collaborative research project with the University of Delaware that kicked off in January. The project involves analyzing bobcat habitat connectivity in NJ via cameras under 4 major highways as part of a Master Thesis project. In early January, we learned that NJ DOT agreed to fund the scoping out of the camera locations.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall and contractor worked on processing acoustic bat recordings from summer monitoring projects.

M. Hall attended the annual Northeast Bat Working Group meeting, where agency reps and researchers from across the region collaborate, share recent findings and strategize about new and ongoing issues and approaches in bat conservation.

M. Hall met with NJ Dept of Health rabies lab staff to review their intakes of bat species of interest, including migratory tree bats, which contribute to ENSP's Biotics database.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles led a regional woodrat working group meeting in early January with representatives from several states and zoos across the region. The focus of the call was brief updates from each state/zoo on research from 2023 and plans for 2024. Ten updates were given (NJ, PA, VA, WV, OH, IN, MD, NC, Toledo Zoo, Maryland Zoo in Baltimore). This is the third year that the group has organized these updates, which are valuable for increasing collaboration, creativity, and standardization. We also talked through the captive breeding protocol that the group hopes to finalize in early 2024.

G. Fowles and technicians compiled and sent raccoon scat collected over the course of 2023 from the Palisades (N = 26) and from Picatinny (N = 17) to Wheaton College for analysis of raccoon roundworm presence, a major mortality factor for Allegheny woodrats, for which we are mitigating at the last known active site in the Palisades.

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis presented results of the wading bird aerial surveys from 1983-2023 at the Harbor Herons & Other Waterbirds of the Greater NY/NJ Harbor Working Group Meeting on January 10. She initiated bids for the 2024 aerial surveys (helicopter rental). She reviewed the draft first-year report from The Wetlands Institute Gull Island Black-crowned Night-heron research and provided feedback ahead of it being finalized. She worked with partners in DEP to determine if there was funding to pursue cormorant control work on Gull Island in 2024.

Beach-Nesting Birds - C. Davis & E. Heiser

Seasonal hiring for the 2024 nesting season was completed.

C. Davis and E. Heiser worked with Conserve Wildlife Foundation to compile and complete the 2023 Horseshoe Island Report which can be found on the NJFW website.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark

Staff documented and took possession of several deceased eagles found across the state or died while in rehab care. Dr. E. Miller has been conducting the necropsies to document causes of death.

The [2023 report](#) was sent to all cooperators and posted on the Fish & Wildlife website.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

The 2023 report was sent to project cooperators and will be posted on the website.

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

B. Pitts has been coordinating with the staff naturalist from Hunterdon County Parks about monitoring additional nest boxes within their park system. An eagle scout project has been approved to replace some older boxes and to install new ones. Plans are being made to do maintenance and scout new locations in the next several weeks. Volunteer outreach for the 2024 monitoring season will begin in the next couple of weeks.

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark

The annual report will be completed in January.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

No new report.

Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts

ENSP staff held a meeting to discuss planning and logistics for the 2024 Delaware Bay Shorebird season. B. Pitts has reached out to several organizations for bids on the Horseshoe Crab Egg Density Survey and the Shorebird Stewards Project and will begin the procurement process once the quotes have been received. ENSP will provide two resighters for the shorebird project through six week contracts.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

C. Davis initiated efforts to recruit a seasonal technician for the 2024 Black Rail project.

Scrub-shrub/Open Field birds (GWWA) – S. Petzinger

Nothing to report. The GWWA Working Group will meet at the Road to Recovery Workshop Jan 17-19, 2024.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger virtually participated in the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture full annual cycle meeting to discuss the new scores soon to be released in the Avian Conservation Assessment Database and next steps.

S. Petzinger virtually participated in the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture monitoring meeting to discuss eBird tools that would be useful for broad-scale bird monitoring. For example, eBird shows the migratory stopover sites with the highest use during spring migration in NJ are primarily location in the central portion of the Piedmont Region.

S. Petzinger prepared a presentation to give at the Road to Recovery Workshop, to be held Jan 17-19, 2024.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

No new report.

Pollinators – R. Somes

No new report.

Freshwater Mussels – R. Somes, A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin and R. Somes attended a meeting with Federal Fish and Wildlife representatives to discuss Dam removals and freshwater mussel monitoring across NJ waterways.

eDNA TECHNOLOGY – A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin met with a USGS representative to discuss Freshwater Mussel metabarcoding design to begin preliminary for an approach in NJ waterways.

A. Kisurin attended the monthly government eDNA working group (GEDWG) that is dedicated to developing and standardizing eDNA methods across North America.

A. Kisurin and B. Pitts hosted a meeting with a Cornell Wildlife Labs representative to begin planning a collaboration for an eDNA application for monitoring Tiger Salamander populations in NJ.