

**Endangered and Nongame Species Program**  
**Monthly Report for 16 January – 15 February 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  
Melissa Roach, Biologist Trainee  
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. Tasks include the review and testing of new species models and model parameters.

**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.

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

CHANJ team had a field meeting with a representative from Animex (wildlife fencing company) about potentially using their products at two reptile/amphibian road crossing projects.

CHANJ team met with partners from The Nature Conservancy to continue planning out a Habitats & Highways training program, which is being designed for transportation and natural resources personnel in the northeastern US.

G Fowles led the bimonthly Roads and Wildlife Working Group meeting, with colleagues from NJDEP, NJDOT, and USFWS.

CHANJ team began planning a State of CHANJ meeting (to be held in April), where we will meet with fellow implementer groups to review progress since the 2019 launch of CHANJ and identify needs, gaps, and strategies to advance NJ's habitat connectivity goals.

#### **Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands** – All staff

Two bids were received to implement forestry activities in Stand 7/8 on Sparta Mountain WMA and the contract was awarded to the lowest bidder. The area was closed to the public for safety reasons.

#### **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

Final Statewide Level 2 Threats were approved by the SWAP's Technical Advisory Group (TAG). K. Korth presented TAG with the process for the first round of Regional Level 2 Threat prioritization surveys. K. Schantz, K. Clark, and S. Petzinger attended the meeting.

Round 1 and 2 surveys for Regional Level 2 Threats were completed. TAG reviewed the results of Round 1 for every region and approved moving the threats that received at least 20% of the votes to Round 2. Results from the Regional Round 2 surveys will be reviewed with TAG; a meeting is scheduled. Staff from the bureaus of Lands Management, ENSP, Wildlife Management, Fresh Water Fisheries, and Marine Fish participated in both rounds of the surveys. Staff from Parks and Forestry and Office of Natural Lands Management also participated. K. Korth led two meetings of the Level 3 Threat Scoring TAG subcommittee to finalize scoring method for regional Level 3 Threats (K. Clark and K. Schantz attended).

K. Korth and D. Rizio (I&E) met to discuss process and requirements to create a web-enabled SWAP.

Kim Korth and K. Walz (NHP) met to discuss deadlines and opportunities to incorporate plants into the 2025 revision.

Kim Korth attended NE Regional SWAP Coordinator's meetings, AFWA Paperless SWAP Guidance meetings, and AFWA's SWAP Learning Series.

K. Clark met with OIT to finalize contract with Stategic Stewardship initiative (SSi) for the SWAP Database Design.

#### **HERPTILES**

##### **Snake Fungal Disease** – K. Schantz

No new report.

## **Snakes** – K. Schantz

### **SGCN Turtles** – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

We met with the FWS bog turtle lead and reps from PA Fish and Boat to plan borrowing of game cameras for use in a CWF-NJ project this field season. Seasonal staff worked on entering 2023 data into the tracking templates. We continue to work through the procurement process to get purchase orders secured for a number of bog turtle trapping projects this spring, funding coming from the active bog turtle CSWG.

No new report for wood turtle.

B. Zarate held two meetings with NJ Pinelands Commission to discuss plans for the upcoming field season, including potentially applying for a single state CSWG in February 2025, which would allow the project to continue for perhaps another 2-3 field seasons if awarded. B. Zarate also met with academic and data analyst partners to discuss decision making around the potential release of confiscated box turtles later this summer, after a thorough evaluation of the turtle's health and a number of additional factors related to an appropriate release location.

### **Eastern Tiger Salamander** – B. Pitts

An additional 15 egg masses have been translocated to a new pool complex in Cumberland County. B. Pitts met with a landowner that is adjacent to a 1990s observation of a tiger salamander. Three egg masses were found within a few feet of entering the vernal pool on her property. B. Pitts is planning to conduct group surveys at this site next year.

### **Diamondback Terrapins** - B. Zarate

As part of the active terrapin RCN project, we held our first all-partners call on January 26. The purpose of the call was to hear from each of the contracted partners what their plans are for the upcoming field season and offered an opportunity for state leads to ask questions or seek clarifications. These coordination calls are planned to be held quarterly.

## **MAMMALS**

### **Bobcat Project** – G. Fowles

No new report available.

### **Bat Conservation** – M. Hall

Staff continued working on processing acoustic survey data from the spring and summer, for our North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat) project and additional efforts.

M. Hall met (virtually) with staff of the Meadowlands Research & Restoration Institute to review results of their first year of acoustic bat monitoring in the Meadowlands and discuss plans for 2024.

Staff surveyed three bat hibernacula (done every 3-5+ years). At one Hunterdon County location, we saw an increase in the number of big brown bats since the previous survey 4 years ago, and tallied 14 rarer Myotis bats (likely all little browns), which had not been seen at this location since 2013.

### **Allegheny Woodrat** – G. Fowles

No new report.

## **BIRDS**

### **Colonial Waterbirds** – C. Davis

C. Davis continued to work with regional organizers ahead of the 2024 colonial waterbird survey, taking place across the Atlantic coast. She finalized paperwork for rental of a helicopter and pilot and worked with partners to plan additional surveys using novel techniques. She reviewed the first year's report for the Gull Island/Sturgeon Island restoration monitoring work and helped make plans for 2024 with project partners.

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

Seasonal hiring for the 2024 nesting season was completed. Planning for the 2024 field season is well underway, including a pilot research project on American Oystercatcher chick provisioning.

### **Bald Eagle Monitoring** - K. Clark

Incubation was documented at more than 90 nest sites to date, with the normal peak of nest initiation in mid-February. Staff and CWF personnel held an online volunteer nest-monitor meeting in late January to reach project volunteers statewide.

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.

### **Peregrine Falcon Monitoring** – K. Clark

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

### **American Kestrel** – B. Pitts

B. Pitts is scheduling dates for late February- early March to meet with landowners and perform box maintenance.

### **Osprey Monitoring** – K. Clark

The annual report was completed and posted on the website.

### **Other Raptors** – K. Clark

No new report.

### **Migratory Shorebirds** – B. Pitts

ENSP is still waiting on one last quote for the 2024 Delaware Bay Shorebird contracted projects, then paperwork will be submitted to procurement. B. Pitts has been following up on leads for the two shorebird resighters. Plans are in the works for a Baywide meeting with NJ, DE, and USFWS.

### **Secretive Marsh Birds** – C. Davis and E. Heiser

C. Davis and E. Heiser hosted a joint Black Rail and Saltmarsh Sparrow New Jersey Working Group for partners and stakeholders participating in active conservation measures for these species. The meeting was well-attended and facilitated productive discussions on on-going work, future collaborations and plans for future meetings are in the works. C. Davis identified a seasonal technician to work on the Black Rail project and that person will be starting in early April.

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

S. Petzinger attended the GWWA Working Group meeting at the Road to Recovery Workshop on Jan 17, 2024, and virtual meetings held Jan. 22 and Feb. 12, 2024. The Group will be launching a new tool to track habitat projects for GWWAs.

#### **Regional & National Bird Coordination** – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger attended and presented at the Road to Recovery Workshop held in West Virginia from Jan 17-19, 2024. The workshop focused on proactive recovery of declining birds before they become federally listed using both single species and ecosystem approaches as well as integrating social science with biological science to help recover bird populations. The 4 species to pilot the recovery process are evening grosbeak, golden-winged warbler, lesser yellowlegs, and yellow-billed cuckoo (western population).

#### **INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS**

##### **Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species** – R. Somes

R. Somes participated in the Northeastern Regional Species of Greatest Conservation need working group meeting.

R. Somes met with NJ State Museum Staff to plan an upcoming exhibit on the Conservation of New Jersey's Rare Wildlife and Ecosystems.

R. Somes participated in a C1 Waters planning meeting to look at updating NJ's waterways designated as C1 with the most recent listed species occurrence data.

##### **Pollinators** – R. Somes

R. Somes gave a presentation on insect conservation to the Sussex County Chapter of the Native Plant Society.

R. Somes participated in a meeting with DEP BPU staff on project locations and habitat management on solar projects in NJ.

##### **Freshwater Mussels** – R. Somes, A. Kisurin

R. Somes participated in the NJ Dam Removal and Freshwater Mussel Conservation working group meeting.

R. Somes and A. Kisurin participated in the Yellow Lampmussel Conservation Working Group meeting.

R. Somes participated in the Silty Pondmussel Management Working Group meeting to plan surveying and management needs for the upcoming field season.

R. Somes and A. Kisurin participated in several meetings related to bridge project in Sussex County that will require a freshwater mussel relocation effort.

#### **eDNA TECHNOLOGY** – A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin continues to actively participate in the monthly eDNA working group dedicated to standardizing and advancing the use of eDNA for various applications. Our discussions revolve around the application of eDNA in locating rare and invasive creatures, conducting community assessments, and expanding its role in ecology, conservation, and management.

A. Kisurin continues to collaborative in eDNA research with Fisheries at the Pequest Hatchery; with a focus on implementing eDNA techniques to enhance monitoring and assessment practices in aquaculture. This partnership aims to refine existing methodologies and explore the potential of eDNA in optimizing hatchery management and conservation efforts.

A. Kisurin attended a meeting with representatives from USFW to provide technical support for an eDNA project on the Raritan River, specifically targeting freshwater mussel populations. Our work aims to utilize eDNA as a non-invasive tool for monitoring and assessing the distribution of these critical species.

A. Kisurin is providing technical advice and assistance to the Brook Floater Working Group, focusing on the integration of eDNA into their assessment protocols. This initiative seeks to incorporate eDNA techniques to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of ecological assessments related to Brook Floater sampling protocol, contributing to more informed conservation and management strategies