

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 March – 15 April 2024

Staff:

Kathy Clark, 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, CWF Biotics
Daniel Turcios, CWF Biotics

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 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, as well as working on several other efforts aimed at streamlining data flow and ingesting data from other or expanded sources.

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

The CHANJ Team participated, virtually, in the [Sustainability Speaker Series](#) hosted by the DEP Bureau of Sustainability on 3/21 on the topic of Nature Connectivity. G. Fowles presented the CHANJ

project and other presenters were CHANJ collaborators – The Nature Conservancy and the South Jersey Transportation Authority.

G. Fowles led the bimonthly Roads and Wildlife Working Group meeting, with colleagues from NJDEP, NJDOT, and USFWS. During the meeting, the CHANJ team previewed transportation-focus content for the upcoming State of CHANJ meeting for feedback.

The CHANJ Team held a meeting with DEP land managers and those involved in land acquisition to preview land preservation/management focused content for the upcoming State of CHANJ meeting for feedback.

G. Fowles continued to participate in Steering and Program Committees calls for the upcoming Northeast Transportation and Wildlife Conference to be held in September in CT.

The CHANJ Team met with The Nature Conservancy and DOT to continue planning content for NJ's portion of the Habitats & Highways project, which will educate on the importance of habitat connectivity and highlight wildlife passage projects across the Northeast.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

Habitat management work was completed on Stand 7/8 on Sparta Mountain WMA to restore young and open-canopy forest conditions on 10 acres.

The public comment period about the proposed location and/or prescription in Stand 2 on Sparta Mountain WMA ended on March 31. In total 49 comments from 41 individuals or organizations were received. Only one public comment appeared to have content specific about the proposed location and/or prescription. The content in the other comments pertained to whether the work should or should not be done in general.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

Staff completed edits to the draft rule amendment for species status updates.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

K. Clark finalized the SWAP Database Development contract with Strategic Stewardship Initiative (SSI).

Regional Level 3 Threats survey results were summarized and sent to the Technical Advisory Group and select staff for fatal flaw analysis. K. Korth created a process for the next step of creating or linking priority and important actions to those priority threats; ENSP staff tested the process.

K. Korth continues to work on the pages for the digital enabled SWAP, participated in the NE Regional SWAP Coordinator's monthly meeting, and attended the SWAP Learning Series meetings.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

No new report.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

ENSP seasonal staff have begun standardized wood turtle surveys at 3 new transects, which will conclude in Spring 2025.

The first organized bog turtle survey began during this reporting period, as well, led by ENSP seasonals.

B. Zarate coordinated a partners call to discuss spotted turtle trapping techniques and methods.

Significant planning continued for the box turtle repatriation project later this summer. A release site was identified and coordination with BLM staff continued, as the likely location will be a WMA. Dates are scheduled to conduct updated health evaluations of the currently held turtles.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

No new report.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

B. Zarate met with external partners and Division of Science and Research staff to review draft outputs from analysis of 2022 terrapin road encounter data. Next steps after the field season, or sooner, will be to request pre-2022 and 2023 road data and attempt to standardize data collection across the projects.

ENSP staff met with MFA staff to discuss next steps on crab pot BRDs and plans for the 2024 field season.

B. Zarate participated in two meetings related to the active RCN terrapin work, with a focus on coordination around headcount survey methods.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

G. Fowles was interviewed for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation column, [The State We're In](#), about bobcats and how habitat connectivity is tied to their recovery in NJ.

There were 2 reported roadkilled bobcats. One of the carcasses was able to be recovered and was sampled.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall and researchers from Rutgers University collected swabs and photographs of bats late in the hibernation season at one site, completing an investigation of using ultraviolet light sanitation (pre-hibernation) to improve winter bat survival by reducing the fungus which causes white-nose syndrome.

Vandalism was discovered at one of our bat-friendly mine gates at a Wildlife Management Area. NJFW Law Enforcement and management team were notified and a contractor quickly responded to repair a breach in the gate.

M. Hall and J. Martinez trained NJ Natural Lands Trust personnel at Petty's Island to set up and maintain an acoustic bat detector on the island, starting during bats' spring migration and through the

summer. The island (located roughly between Camden NJ and Philadelphia PA) is being naturalized/restored, and presents an opportunity to monitor bat migration activity along the Delaware River.

J. Martinez re-deployed an acoustic detector and downloaded climate logger data at a highway culvert in Sussex County, to complete a year of follow-up investigations after a tricolored bat was found roosting inside the large box culvert last May.

M. Hall, A. Kisurin and Rutgers PhD student D. Fisher collected environmental DNA samples inside two bat hibernacula. This is the first time using eDNA techniques in a hibernation setting to try identifying the bat species present. Lab results pending.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles
No new report

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis continued to work with the Atlantic Coast Flyway Technical Section to prepare for the regional survey of colonial waterbirds that will take place in May and June. She attended meetings and provided feedback on datasheets and protocols.

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

Seasonal technicians began beach-nesting bird work during the first week of April. All historical nesting sites were pre-fenced in anticipation of nesting. Several American Oystercatcher nests were located in mid-April. Piping Plovers have filtered back onto their territorial breeding sites. Technicians have begun monitoring and maintaining fenced areas.

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.

To date, ENSP and CWF-NJ have a reported 242 active eagle nests statewide. Most nests hatched in the last month or so, but data and observations from volunteer nest monitors will continue to come in through July 31.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

Staff and volunteers began monitoring nests in mid-February and installed trailcams on coastal nests for a prey study. Some known nests began incubation in mid- to late-March and would be expected to hatch in mid- to late-April or early May. Early nest checks show a high turnover in the adult nesting population along the coast, which could indicate effects of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

The Kestrel season is up and running with confirmed egg laying in a dozen nest boxes. There were six boxes where egg laying began in March; this was the first year with egg laying that soon in Hunterdon County. B. Pitts met with volunteers late in March and early April, and he will finish up training on April 18.

B. Pitts will present on NJ kestrel management and research efforts to The Wildlife Society on April 19.

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

Procurement for the upcoming season is progressing. The two resighters have been selected and are working on getting into NJSTART. B. Pitts presented on shorebirds to an in-person reTurn the favor volunteer training on April 13, and he is scheduled to present virtually on April 17 and April 27. Conserve Wildlife Foundation will be holding a virtual training on April 30 for Shorebird Stewards, and B. Pitts will present to that group as well. Large Bay restriction signs are planned for installation on May 1.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

C. Davis met with B. Pitts to scout non-traditional locations where ARU units will be deployed to “listen” for BLRAs. The seasonal technician (supervised by C. Davis) began his tenure in early April. Call-playback survey routes were created and ground-truthed and acoustic recording units were de-winterized and programmed for deployment. Call playback and ARU surveys are slated to start at the end of April. C. Davis also initiated contact with biologists who work on non-traditional sites to get permission to place ARUs to start investigating if birds are adapting to the floodprone coast by moving inland.

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

Data are being summarized from the 2023 bird surveys.

S. Petzinger attended a virtual Golden-winged Warbler Working Group meeting on March 18. In honor of the 20th anniversary of the working group, the group launched a breeding habitat management challenge (<https://gwwa.org/challenge/>) in an attempt to meet or exceed its annual habitat goal and will develop a story map about the diversity of habitats and management approaches using GWWA best management practices.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger attended a portion of the AMJV virtual meeting on March 28, 2024.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

R. Somes met with Bureau of Lands Management staff to plan habitat management projects for Frosted Elfin and pollinators in general on Fish and Wildlife property in Cape May County.

R. Somes met with USFWS and Cape May County Parks staff to plan a Frosted Elfin habitat restoration project on county park property.

Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes met with Woodbridge Township Parks staff to plan several pollinator conservation projects on public property within the township.

R. Somes met with State Forest Service staff to plan pollinator plantings during the upcoming season. This year plantings will be targeted for fall projects.

Freshwater Mussels – R. Somes, A. Kisurin

R. Somes met with the Contract Consultants to plan for the upcoming survey season for the Brook Floater Research Project. This year's surveys will also be focused on using the Brook Floater Monitoring Protocol to collect watershed level data for occupancy modeling in the Musconetcong River and the South Branch of the Raritan River.

R. Somes participated in the NJ Invasive Species Strike Team Technical Advisory committee meeting where updates on the eradication of Silty Pondmussel were discussed.

eDNA TECHNOLOGY – A. Kisurin

No new report.

Photo of the month: Kashi Davis took all precautions in the course of removing dead bird carcasses from the Barnegat Light beach-nesting bird habitat area. Prevalence of HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) in gulls, shorebirds, and waterfowl dictate caution in handling sick and dead birds.

