

**BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT**

**MONTHLY REPORT**

**December 2024**

**James Oxley, Chief**

**NEW JERSEY WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT  
GRANT NO. W-68-R**

**STUDY PLAN I. WHITE-TAILED DEER**

Jodi Powers, Principal Wildlife Biologist

Megan Mills, Assistant Biologist (Northern Region)

Megan McCafferty, Assistant Biologist (Southern Region)

Brian Schumm, Assistant Biologist (Deer Outreach)

**Objective 1 – To determine the composition, size, distribution, productivity, and other aspects of the annual deer harvest mortality by deer management zone, unit, county, municipality, and ownership, date, and season.**

The Deer Project Team continues receiving calls regarding harvest report errors as several seasons have started, leading to harvest report corrections and transfers.

M. McCafferty and M. Mills review the weekly harvest for harvest violations in cooperation with Conservation Police Officers.

J. Powers provided preliminary harvest data to the Fish and Game Council.

**Objective 2 – To coordinate a statewide Suburban Deer Management Program for management in areas of high human density where standard hunting practices are not feasible.**

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Mercer County Parks Commission Application was approved by the NJ Fish and Game Council. Princeton Township, Essex County Parks, and Joint Base were presented to the Council. Essex County Parks, and Joint Base were approved and issued.

The Deer Project published a survey for municipalities to report deer population observations and trends.

The Deer Project, in partnership with BI&E, designed and produced deer management signs to distribute to deer management programs in need of support.

**Objective 3 - To participate in business meetings and monitoring programs of the Northeast Deer Technical Committee, and other related meetings and conferences.**

J. Powers had several conversations with other states within the NEDTC.

J. Powers submitted a travel request for the Southeast Deer Study Group (SEDSG) conference. A joint meeting between the SEDSG and the NEDTC is planned.

**Objective 4 - To conduct one white-tailed deer research study.**

*Nothing to report*

**Objective 5 – To disseminate accurate and appropriate information on white-tailed deer and habitat management to sportsmen, public, local, and state agencies, and other organizations.**

M. McCafferty and M. Mills began editing and reviewing deer season charts for the 2025-26 Digest.

B. Schumm attended the League of Municipalities Conference with ENSP and BI&E staff.

J. Powers and B. Schumm attended the New Jersey Farm Bureau annual convention.

J. Powers and B. Schumm attended the Farmer Sportsmen Committee meeting.

B. Schumm presented to Franklin Lakes Environmental Commission on deer management.

The Deer Project, in partnership with OIS, designed and produced an Esri StoryMap on the need for Deer Management in NJ.

J. Powers spoke to NYDEC Deer Biologist about methods to increase antlerless harvests.

J. Powers gave an interview for Rack and Fin Radio.

**Objective 6 – Develop, maintain, and make adaptive changes to a white-tailed deer Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Response Plan.**

M. McCafferty, G. Canale, and J. Bauer began CWD sampling in the southern half of New Jersey with a total of 170 samples and approximately 300 aged.

M. Mills, D. Dolor, and G. Canale continued CWD sampling in the central portion of New Jersey with a total of 127 samples and approximately 176 aged.

M. Mills, G. Canale, and J. Bauer are working with Monmouth County Parks to sample deer from Hartshorne Woods and Thompson Park.

M. Mills pulled lymph nodes from 4 fallow deer that were dispatched by law enforcement for CWD testing.

The Deer Project met with pathologist Patrick Connely to discuss CWD sampling efforts and how to be more effective in our sampling methods in the future. A joint project with Cornell University was also discussed.

M. McCafferty has been working with pathology and the southern region conservation officers in collecting CWD samples from deer displaying neurological concerns.

### **Extension Activities**

The Deer Project Team has received reports for injured or sick deer from the public and continues to work with the pathology team and USDA Animal Control to decide the best course of action for these deer.

The Deer Project is working with USDA employees to help coordinate their sampling efforts for COVID in our collected deer.

The Deer Project is working with The Pennsylvania State University to retrieve ear tissue samples from collected deer to aid in a large DNA study.

M. McCafferty and M. Mills continue open communication with Special Areas.

### **Other Activities**

The Deer Project Team is continuing to review data collected from the density surveys via spotlight counts from Pequest WMA.

The Deer Project Team has been working on the recodification of the Game Code, regarding the sections such as the General Provisions and each specific deer season to be rewritten and updated.

The Deer Project attended a training on the safety and set up of operating rocket nets in the use of capturing waterfowl and turkey, led by Austin Dammingier and James Sloan.

### STUDY PLAN III. UPLAND WILDLIFE AND FURBEARERS

James Sloan, Senior Biologist  
Joseph R. Garris, Wildlife Technician I  
Peter Stark, Senior Biologist  
Alexandrea Nickel, Seasonal Technician  
Shelby Gravatt, Seasonal Technician  
Richard Strittmatter, Seasonal Technician  
Jodi Bauer, Seasonal Technician  
Michael Ferraro, Seasonal Technician  
Michelle McGill, Seasonal Technician

#### **Objective 1 – Conduct annual or periodic monitoring programs of the upland game and furbearer resource, their users, and the habitats on which they depend.**

##### *Beaver Trapping*

J. Garris prepared and summarized beaver trapping data and organized materials for the upcoming mandatory beaver and otter check station on February 22, 2025.

##### *Coyote Harvest*

To date, a total of 126 coyotes have been reported via the Automated Harvest Reporting System (AHRS) or to regional state offices for the 2024-25 hunting and trapping seasons.

A total of 86 coyotes were reported for the segment. The majority (56) were taken incidentally to deer hunting: 10 by archery, 10 by muzzleloading rifle, and 36 by shotgun. Thirty (30) coyotes were harvested by cable restraint.

Coyotes were harvested from the following counties: Atlantic (3), Bergen (1), Burlington (9), Cape May (6), Cumberland (7), Gloucester (2), Hunterdon (6), Mercer (2), Middlesex (3), Monmouth (1), Morris (4), Ocean (2), Salem (12), Somerset (7), Sussex (10) and Warren (11).

By sex, the harvested coyotes were male (43), female (36) and unknown (7).

Ten of the coyotes harvested were of black fur color, 21 were blonde, 46 were of typical pelage and 8 were red color phase and 1 was white. Ten of the 86 reported coyotes had mange.

##### *Gray Fox Harvest*

To date, a total of 20 gray foxes have been reported through the AHRS for the 2024-25 hunting and trapping seasons.

Fifteen gray foxes were reported during the segment; these were either harvested incidentally to hunting deer (7) or by trapping (8).

Gray foxes were harvested from the following counties: Burlington (1), Cape May (2), Cumberland (1), Gloucester (2), Hunterdon (1), Monmouth (1), Morris (1), Ocean (2), Salem (3), and Warren (1).

By sex, the harvested gray foxes were male (7), female (7) and unknown (1).

#### *Fisher*

Staff are continuing preparation work for the upcoming field season. Trail cameras and live trapping efforts will resume January – April, 2025. Telemetry monitoring efforts continue on two adult male fishers. Review and classification of trail camera footage is ongoing.

#### *Northern Bobwhite*

No report

#### *Ruffed Grouse*

No report.

#### *Wild Turkey*

#### **Wild Turkey Research Project Update-**

2025 Turkey Research trapping has started. The 2025 goal for hen transmitter deployment is 25 in each study area and 11 redeployments for a goal of 61 transmitter deployments in 2025.

#### North Study Area

Current number of hen turkeys on air: 7

Out of the original 2024 26 telemetry equipped hens, 7 are accounted for and alive while 10 are confirmed deceased, 6 are unconfirmed deceased, and 3 are currently missing. Trapping efforts will start the next reporting period.

#### South Study Area

Current number of hen turkeys on air: 43

Out of the original 2024 25 telemetry equipped hens, 16 are accounted for and alive while 8 are confirmed deceased, and 1 is currently missing.

On December 20, 2024, project personnel trapped 16 female and 11 male turkeys in Salem County, New Jersey. Fifteen new transmitters were deployed on females and biological samples were taken. Both males and females were leg banded, weighed, and male attributes (spur and beard length) measured.

On December 24, 2024, project personnel had a failed trapping attempt in Cape May County, New Jersey.

On December 26, 2024, project personnel trapped 12 female and 6 male turkeys in Cape May County, New Jersey. Twelve new transmitters were deployed on females and biological samples were taken. Both males and females were leg banded, weighed, and male attributes (spur and beard length) measured.

*American Woodcock*

No Report.

**Objective 2 – To participate in business meetings and monitoring programs of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC), Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC), Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC), and Short-leaf Pine Initiative (SPI).**

*National Bobwhite and Grassland Initiative (NBGI)*

No report.

*Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC)*

No report

*National Wild Turkey Federation Technical Committee*

No report

*Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC)*

No report

**Objective 4 – To provide technical guidance to landowners interested in providing wildlife habitat on their lands.**

No report.

**Objective 5 – To disseminate accurate and appropriate information on upland game and furbearer programs to sportsmen, public, state, and local agencies, and other organizations.**

Staff answered numerous questions and provided input to identify various species of wildlife and scat from pictures/videos/audio and conversations with constituents.

### **Extension Activities**

Garris answered questions and provided input and identified various species of wildlife and scat from pictures/videos/audio and conversations with constituents.

### **Other**

Garris monitored the location of the 2 radio collared fishers weekly and aided in programming of the trail cameras for the upcoming 2025 fisher field work.

## **MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS - INVESTIGATION I**

Austin Damminger, Assistant Biologist

Mary Kate Lisi, Biologist Trainee

### **Objective 1 – Migratory game bird monitoring programs**

#### *Recruitment Surveys for Atlantic Brant and Tundra Swans*

Program biologists conducted productivity surveys for Atlantic brant and tundra swans. Recruitment is measured on the wintering grounds because these species nest in remote arctic wilderness. Productivity surveys are done by examining flocks of birds with spotting scopes and discerning plumage differences between young and adult birds. Plumage differences in brant are subtle in that juveniles have light-edging on wing coverts whereas adults have uniform-colored wing coverts. Productivity surveys measure the proportion of young in the fall flight and can be used in population modeling. Ancillary data also include the mean number of young in family groups surviving from hatching through migration to the wintering grounds. Results will be reported in the next monthly segment.

In New Jersey, surveys were conducted 13-20 November and Atlantic brant flocks ( $n=10,526$  birds examined) contained 18.9% young. New York conducted a similar survey ( $n=26,914$  birds examined) and combined with New Jersey data, indicated 17.2% young in the 2024 fall flight.

Program staff conducted recruitment surveys for tundra swans on 10-17 December. Productivity surveys measure the proportion of young in the fall flight and can be used in population modeling.

Because tundra swans nest in remote arctic wilderness, recruitment is measured on the wintering grounds. Productivity was 8.3% young in the fall flight (n=60 birds examined) similar to the long-term average (mean=8.5% young).

#### *Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey*

Several logistical arrangements for the 2025 Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey (MWS) were made. Staff completed appropriate online US Department of Interior flight training modules. NJFW uses US Department of Interior aircraft and pilot at no cost to NJFW. The MWS will be conducted in early January.

### **Objective 2 – To participate in programs of the Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint Ventures**

No report

### **Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies**

#### *Atlantic Brant Ecology Study*

### **Objective 5 – To provide technical guidance for enhancement and acquisition of migratory game bird habitats.**

#### *Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee*

No Report

### **Objective 6 – Outreach**

Program staff met with several hunters who harvested Atlantic brant with either Geolocators or GSM Backpack Transmitters to exchange harvested units for replicas so data can be downloaded or units to be redeployed. Geolocators store data internally and do not offload their data remotely, thus requiring returning the device to extract the data.

#### *Atlantic Population Canada Goose research*

A. Damminger continued correspondence with hunters that harvested AP geese wearing GPS collars and coordinated shipping replica collars and creating maps of those bird's movements.

#### *Sea Duck Fecundity Study*

From 2018 – 2022, Atlantic Flyway states implemented a pilot photo survey to evaluate the ability of digital images to estimate annual productivity of sea ducks. The recent MS graduate work of Jacob Hewitt (State University of New York - Brockport) indicated reliable fecundity estimates can be obtained through the photo survey and a decision to continue the photo survey again during 2024. Biologists across the Atlantic Flyway collected photos of scoters (white-winged, black, and surf) and long-tailed ducks during the fall and used plumage patterns to develop age ratios for each species. Reliable estimates of productivity are expected to aid in the development of future population models and inform sea duck harvest management. Program



staff collected 30 photos at Avalon from 19 October – 13 November which will be pooled with photos from other states for a flyway-wide productivity estimate for sea ducks.

## **Other**

A. Damminger participated in a radio recording for Rack and Finn Radio on the upcoming Coastal Waterfowl Zone opening and how waterfowl migration has been so far this fall.

A. Damminger assisted J. Sloan in hosting an agency wide rocket net and pneumatic cannon net training for 36 staff members.

M.K. Lisi and two seasonal technicians attended the agency wide rocket net and pneumatic cannon net training.

A. Damminger attended a Field Logistics Meeting to discuss upcoming winter duck trapping and transmitter/geolocator deployments on black ducks and mallards.

A. Damminger attended the Reporting Options and Discussion with BWM.

A. Damminger and M.K. Lisi met with Forsythe NWR staff to mark out areas to be mowed for upcoming winter duck trapping.

A. Damminger and M.K. Lisi assisted the Turkey Project with trap site logistics and multiple trapping events.

## **Black Bear Research Project**

Mike Madonia, Principal Wildlife Biologist

Joe Burke, Wildlife Technician

Emilia Topp, Senior Biologist

Michael Patrick, Wildlife Technician

Peter Stark, Senior Biologist

Kaitlyn Barone, Senior Wildlife Worker

Ryan Ferraro, Assisting Biologist

Benjamin Laubach, Senior Wildlife Worker

Christian Nitko, Senior Wildlife Worker

Amy DeCheser, Wildlife Technician

Grace Johnson, Senior Wildlife Worker

## **Bear Control: Lethal and Non-Lethal**

The black bear unit received a total of 30 bear calls from November 20, 2024 to December 21, 2024; this compares with 55 calls from the same time period in 2023.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 16 Category II calls and 14 Category III calls for the time period November 20, 2024 to December 21, 2024; this compares to 8 Category I calls, 14 Category II calls and 33 Category III calls for the same time period in 2023.

The black bear unit received a total of 1,774 bear calls from January 1, 2024 to December 21, 2024; this compares with 1,363 calls from the same time period in 2023.

The black bear unit received 147 Category I calls, 683 Category II calls and 923 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2024 to December 21, 2024; this compares to 121 Category I calls, 592 Category II calls and 640 Category III calls for the same time period in 2023.

As of December 21, 2024, the total number of calls received by the Division increased 30.1 percent from the same time period in 2023. Category I incidents increased 21.4 percent, Category II calls increased 15.3 percent and Category III calls increased 44.2 percent for the same time period in 2023. This data does not include all calls made to local police departments.

## **Research**

Project personnel continue to edit and input research data into the bear database.

## **Damage/Nuisance Control**

Project personnel continue to provide technical advice for damage complaint incidents and set traps for Category 1 behavior.

## **Cooperative Research**

Project personnel continue to work on cooperative research projects with East Stroudsburg University.

## **Wildlife Nuisance Complaints/ Technical Guidance (Federal Aid Project)**

### **BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SPECIES**

Bat	1	Mountain Lion	2
Bear	30	Opossum	3
Beaver	28	Owl	2
Bird	7	Rabbit	1
Bobcat	4	Raccoon	5

Coyote	28	Skunk	2
Deer	69	Squirrel	3
Fox	42	Swan	2
Goose	2	Turkey	7
Gull	2	Unknown	3
Hawk	6	Vulture	6

**225 calls for the Federal Aid Project.**

**Total calls: 255 (\*black bear calls are not included in this project).**