

**Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 December - 15 January 2025**

Staff:

Kathy Clark, Chief
Christina “Kashi” Davis, Principal Zoologist
Gretchen Fowles, Research Scientist II
MacKenzie Hall, Environmental Specialist II
Emily Heiser, Senior Zoologist
Alex Kisurin, Assistant Biologist/Aquatics
Kim Korth, Assistant Biologist/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 planning and policy issues and regional actions as part of the Northeast Wildlife Diversity Managers technical committee.

Landscape Project –

Version 3.4 of the Project and supporting documentation were completed and released online on January 6, concomitant with the revised conservation statuses on the Endangered Species List and the Regulated Nongame Wildlife List.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff

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

Staff continued to work with the Office of Environmental Review to address issues with DEP units conducting permit and plan reviews. Staff assisted in making suggestions for site remediation rules that would improve compliance with ENSCA.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

Version 15 of the SOA was released to partners with whom ENSP has data sharing agreements, concomitant with the release of Version 3.4 of the Landscape Project and the revised conservation statuses on the Endangered Species List and the Regulated Nongame Wildlife List. Also, tables reflecting the revised conservation statuses and updated common and scientific names were created and posted on the DEP Fish and Wildlife website. The list of species reflected in the NJ Wildlife Tracker system were also updated to include the revised names as well as additional species to now include all of the SGCN species as well.

All 'On Road' records in the Biotics database prior to, so not captured by, the NJ Wildlife Tracker system, were extracted from Biotics and uploaded into the NJ Wildlife Tracker system so that the system will now serve as a comprehensive database of 'On Road' wildlife data.

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

G. Fowles participated in a recorded radio interview with NJ101.5 on wildlife tunnels in New Jersey that was published in early January: <https://nj1015.com/wildlife-tunnels-save-animals-new-jersey/>

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

S. Petzinger began summarizing pre- and post-monitoring data from forestry activities on Sparta Mountain WMA and planning for the upcoming forestry activities.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

The species status changes proposed in June were adopted on January 6, 2025, with publication in the NJ Register. On December 16, a related proposal was published to amend the status of NJ Chorus Frog from unknown to special concern; this change was overlooked in the June proposal that contained over 100 amendments. The comment period for that proposal is open until February 13.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

K. Korth participated in the NE Regional Database Steering Cttee meeting. The regional database is on track to be completed in late 2025. Korth attended the Northeast SWAP Coordinators meeting and AFWA's SWAP Learning Series.

Biologists with Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Fisheries, Wildlife Management, ENSP, and botanists from Natural Heritage Program completed their "fatal flaw" review of SGCN habitat associations.

Doug Rizio (I&E) and DJ Case (contractor) launched a regular meeting schedule to create the Wordpress framework for new SWAP database. K. Korth and Kathy Clark (ENSP), Rich Hyjack (OIT), Glenn Curtis (OIT) met to discuss vision, options, limitations, and timeline for the SWAP website. K. Korth, D. Rizio, and DJ Case had a working meeting to begin the testing phase of building pages with content and data from the SWAP database.

Prioritizing Actions addressing regional priority threats is underway. B. Zarate, K. Clark, and C. Davis tested prioritization process and K. Korth with those staff and G. Fowles to review and make final changes to the instructions and spreadsheet. DJ Case incorporated those changes, created a new "how-to" video. K. Korth sent the Action Prioritization assignment to Fish & Wildlife biologists, NHP botanists, SWAP Technical Advisory Group members, and a few DEP staff who were active in the threat and action process.

K. Korth had a preliminary meeting with the Bird City preliminary meeting C-SWG SWAP Enhancement meeting to discuss ideas.

Jersey Coast Anglers Association presentation was moved to Feb

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

K. Schantz is finalizing the Grant Agreement for Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) with the DEP's Grants and Loans Office and OPTLA (legal counsel) to fulfill the awarded Eastern Copperhead Survey Technique Development and Assessment grant. She continues to compile copperhead data to share with FoHVOS as part of this Grant Agreement.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

There were no monthly meetings for bog, wood, or spotted turtle this period.

NJ continued to explore the potential for a Competitive-SWG grant to continue and expand work on box turtles in the Pinelands region, in coordination with the Pinelands Commission. Since last reporting period we are now moving towards a multi-state CSWG application, with Maryland as the host state. Pennsylvania and Rhode Island are also funded partner states on the application. We are having weekly calls to develop the application, budget, and support letters – with a target for submission by end of February.

The box turtle “re-wilding”/release/repatriation project, like the turtles, is mostly dormant for the moment, although we did pull the 2024 tracking data into GIS and will do some initial summaries and analyses this winter. In coordination with the NJ Pinelands Commission, we aim to collect some overwintering data on the turtles in March to better characterize brumation locations, which may help inform conservation measures when land activities are conducted during winter months, using data from the Pine Barrens and Highlands regions.

Under direction from Dave Golden, B. Zarate is pulling together materials for a presentation on the “State of the Herps.” This information will be used by D. Golden to speak to various natural resource manager audiences this winter and spring about the need for increased attention to amphibian and reptile conservation, including funding and national coordination.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

B. Pitts and A. Kisurin have continued to coordinate with biologists from the NE region on a CSWG proposal for an eDNA project focused on tiger salamander detection. Staff have been on weekly calls to finalize an application for the project.

B. Pitts and CWF staff have continued to monitoring water levels at key sites, and even with the recent snows, there is only shallow standing water or ice at a few sites.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

Coordination calls continued related to the active Northeast RCN terrapin project, specifically Job 1, which is standardized headcount surveys from land or water. NJ will identify land and water routes for these surveys that will be surveyed primarily by volunteers to generate match for the overall grant.

B. Zarate met with a representative from the NJ Innovation Institute to request assistance with printing novel terrapin bycatch devices, so these new dimensions may be trialed in controlled and field settings in commercial-style crab pots. In coordination with Marine staff we are finalizing which dimensions we would like to request for print for the trials.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

There was one reported roadkilled bobcat. The carcass was collected, necropsy performed, and samples taken. There were also 8 bobcats reported trapped that NJFW responded to during the reporting period. Samples were taken from all individuals.

G. Fowles and K. Clark met with staff from BWM and Assistant Directors to discuss content for an upcoming Bobcat Project talk to ENSAC and the Fish & Game Council in January and February, respectively.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall and J. Martinez were accompanied on a mid-winter survey of a former military bunker in Monmouth County, where bats had recently been discovered hibernating. Fourteen Tricolored Bats (a newly state endangered species, proposed for federal listing) and one Big Brown Bat (species of special concern) were observed hibernating inside the structure on January 7. This site provided the first Tricolored Bat record in the county and is now the southernmost documented bat hibernaculum in NJ. The ENSP and USFWS are consulting with the land managers on a bat-friendly gate design to secure the entrance. Two additional bunkers were also surveyed but no bats were found using them. Rutgers PhD student D. Fisher joined the ENSP for a winter bat survey and deployed air filter devices to sample for environmental DNA (eDNA) outside the hibernaculum. Three additional sites will be sampled next month. This pilot effort is our first step to see whether eDNA air sampling can detect presence of bat species hibernating in different types of features with varying air flow.

M. Hall attended and gave NJ's state update at the annual Northeast Bat Working Group meeting, which was held this year in Harrisburg PA. White-nose syndrome advancements, survey techniques for cryptic bat species, wind energy mitigation, and a host of other bat-focused topics were covered from across the region.

Vetting and analysis of 2024 acoustic bat survey data continued.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles participated in a special Allegheny Woodrat working group call focused on a brainstorming ideas for a CSWG application related to the captive breeding efforts that are just getting started regionally.

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis worked on plans for the 2025 field season. This included posting and closing an RFP for work that will take place on Gull Island and Sturgeon Island to monitor waterbird response to restoration efforts (the bid was awarded to The Wetlands Institute). She also began to process of acquiring bids for a helicopter rental for aerial surveys. She completed and submitted the 2024 aerial and ground survey dataset for the Atlantic Flyway Council effort to compile the coasts waterbird population.

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

The statewide Beach-Nesting Bird meeting was held on December 17 with stakeholders and land managers participating. Results from the 2024 nesting season were shared and discussed. Topics covered included human disturbance, habitat and predator management.

The Horseshoe Island report has been completed and sent to the Tidelands Resource Council. It is currently available on the NJFW Beach-nesting Bird web page.

K. Davis and E. Heiser will be attending the 2025 Atlantic Coast Piping Plover and Least Tern workshop at the National Conservation Training Center in February. Seasonal hiring is underway for the 2025 field season.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - M. Roach

We held a virtual meeting with our volunteer nest monitors in preparation for this year's breeding season. Over 50 volunteers attended, and we sent out the recording to those who could not. We went over resources for volunteers, upcoming events (e.g., the Cumberland County Eagle Fest in February), important numbers, and HPAI awareness.

There was one eagle mortality the past month: an immature bird found dead at the Oradell Reservoir in Bergen County. It was held for necropsy.

One grounded eagle was taken to Tri-State Bird Rescue by ENSP staff and is currently being treated for Pb toxicity.

As of mid-January there are 11 eagle pairs incubating.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – M. Roach

An adult male Peregrine was found injured in Little Egg Harbor. It was taken to Tri-State Bird Rescue by ENSP staff, but its injuries were not treatable and the bird had to be euthanized. This was a bird banded as a nestling by ENSP staff in 2020, and it had successfully nested in 2024.

The Bird Banding Lab forwarded a report of a dead Peregrine Falcon found in Moorestown in Nov. 2024. It was banded as a nestling at the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge just a few months prior.

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

B. Pitts has continued coordinating new nest box installations in Readington and Raritan Townships. One new box was installed on a Raritan Twp. property, and an installation date of 3/7 was set for the three new Readington Twp. boxes.

B. Pitts is coordinating with NGO partners in Hopewell on their Hatch a Hundred initiative. Building upon last year's best of 81 young banded in 29 nesting attempts, FoHVOS is focused on continued community engagement, expanding landowner outreach, and the installation of 25 new nest boxes this winter to increase the kestrel population in their region.

Osprey Monitoring – M. Roach

Nesting season data were collected by volunteers and B. Wurst of Conserve Wildlife Foundation. In 2024 there were 716 occupied nests checked, 519 with known-outcome that produced 844 young resulting in a 1.63 productivity rate, which is on par with the five-year average and above the average for a stable population. 101 nestlings were banded. The full report will be finalized soon.

Other Raptors – M. Roach

One Barn Owl was recovered dead in Downe Twp and was held for HPAI testing.

Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts

ENSP staff have scheduled meetings for 2025 field season planning with NGO and F&W project partners. B. Pitts is beginning the procurement process for the Shorebird Steward and Horseshoe Crab Egg Density surveys. B. Pitts is also interviewing folks for two resightings positions, selecting aerial survey dates, and other logistical planning for the upcoming season.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

C. Davis and E. Heiser spoke with the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture regarding conducting Rapid Demographic Assessments at selected sites in Cape May County in the 2025 field season to measure the status of Saltmarsh Sparrows in recently restored marsh systems. Plans to conduct pre-monitoring of Saltmarsh Sparrows at NJFW BLM sites are underway.

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

S. Petzinger virtually attended the monthly GWWWG (Golden-winged Warbler Working Group) meeting.

S. Petzinger reviewed and commented on the draft USFWS Species Status Assessment for Golden-winged Warblers.

S. Petzinger conducted a site visit with NRCS for the WLFW-GWWA program.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger virtually attended the monthly Atlantic Flyway Nightjar meeting.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

R. Somes met with State Museum staff to deliver exhibit materials and review some of the displays and signage for the exhibit.

Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes met with NJ State Forest Service staff to plan work for the 2025 planting season and are looking to expand the project to more species as well as create some pollinator habitat on the nursery property.

R. Somes met with the Pinelands Nursery discuss seed and plant availability for the 2025 planting season.

Freshwater Mussels – R. Somes, A. Kisurin

R. Somes and A. Kisurin conducted a feasibility analysis regarding New Jersey's potential participation in a competitive wildlife grant for the Yellow Lampmussel. While New Jersey will not pursue participation at this time—given the species' limited presence in a relatively small stretch of the shared Delaware River—this effort has fostered collaboration. Discussions with Pennsylvania biologists have been initiated to explore joint conservation initiatives for mussel populations in shared waterways.

eDNA TECHNOLOGY – A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin attended the monthly Government eDNA Working Group meeting.

Photo: Tricolored Bats during winter hibernaculum survey. Credit: MacKenzie Hall/NJFW

