

BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

MONTHLY REPORT

March 2025

James Oxley, Chief

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

STUDY PLAN I. WHITE-TAILED DEER

Jodi Powers, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

Megan Mills, Senior Biologist (Northern Region)

Megan McCafferty, Senior Biologist (Southern Region)

Brian Schumm, Senior 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 is reviewing the complete deer harvest for errors as the last seasons have closed and have been organizing the data for future analysis.

The Deer Project Team has begun to prepare and analyze deer harvest data for distribution and presentation to the Fish and Game Council at the April meeting.

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

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.

The Deer Project Team met with Liberty State Park to discuss current deer issues in the park and within a revitalization area. A site visit was conducted and a spotlight survey was planned to determine a deer population density estimate.

J. Powers and B. Schumm corresponded with residents and elected officials from Maplewood regarding deer population.

J. Powers and B. Schumm continued development of 2025 Deer Management Grant. The grant is money allocated by DEP to assist communities in managing over-abundant deer populations.

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

No report

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 continued editing and reviewing deer season charts and special area dates for the 2025-26 Digest.

The Deer Project Team has begun to prepare harvest data for the 2024-25 season to present to the Fish and Game Council.

B. Schumm and M. McCafferty attended the annual Soybean Producers meeting in Burlington County to discuss deer management options for farmers.

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

M. Mills and M. McCafferty transported the CWD samples to the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory for testing.

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.

M. McCafferty and M. Mills continue open communication with Special Areas as the 2025-26 digest is being reviewed.

J. Powers, B. Schumm, Chief Oxley, J. Leskie and T. Wooley attended and spoke at a Ocean Twp., Ocean County council meeting to discuss their recent ordinance to prohibit hunting east of Rt. 9. J. Powers presented data and discussed Game Code. The council is considering rescinding that recent ordinance change.

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 begun spotlight counts at the Pequest WMA to compare to data collected via drone.

The Deer Project Team has begun spring spotlight counts in areas of interest, including DMZs 45 and 46 to evaluate the health of the herd recovering from the 2022 EHD outbreak.

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.

M. McCafferty, M. Mills, and B. Schumm attended a NJ Government Tableau conference.

B. Schumm attended two Hunters Helping the Hungry meetings regarding their record keeping protocols as it relates to special wildlife management permit deer.

B. Schumm began processing Tracking Dog Permit reports and applications.

The Deer Project Team attended a meeting with B. Stoff about churn and avidity.

STUDY PLAN III. UPLAND WILDLIFE AND FURBEARERS

James Sloan, Senior Biologist
Joseph R. Garris, Wildlife Technician I
Tim Ruth, Biologist Trainee
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.

Northern Bobwhite

No report

Ruffed Grouse

No report.

Wild Turkey

Wild Turkey Research Project Update-

North Study Area

Current number of hen turkeys on air: 34

A total of 9 females are still alive from the 2024 trapping season.

South Study Area

Current number of hen turkeys on air: 50

A total of 16 females are still alive from the 2024 trapping season.

One hen died during this reporting period.

American Woodcock

M. Lisi and J.Sloan met with US Fish and Wildlife service to discuss this years American Woodcock Singing-ground Survey. New Jersey will have 9 routes to conduct throughout the State between April 15- May 5, 2025.

Beaver and River Otter

Project staff successfully operated six beaver and river otter check locations throughout the state on February 22, 2025. A total of 597 beavers and 45 river otters were harvested during the 2024-25 beaver and river otter trapping season (Dec. 26, 2024 - Feb. 9, 2025). Thirty-three beavers were taken on in-season damage control permits. Two otters were caught incidentally and surrendered to NJDEP Fish and Wildlife.

46 River otter carcasses were collected from trappers at the Feb. 22 check station. These carcasses were sampled by project staff, who recorded morphometric measurements and collected a lower canine tooth from each carcass to determine age through the cementum annuli method. Teeth were organized, prepared, and mailed to Matson's Lab in Manhattan, Montana for analysis.

Coyote Harvest

To date, a total of 534 coyotes have been reported to the Automated Harvest Reporting System (AHRS) or to regional state offices for the 2024-25 hunting and trapping seasons.

A total of 95 coyote harvests were recorded for the monthly reporting period. These were taken by trapping (62) or during the Special Coyote/Fox Hunting Season (33). Of the coyotes harvested during the special season, 16 were taken with shotgun, 17 with modern rifle, and 10 were harvested at night.

Coyotes were harvested from the following counties: Atlantic (7), Burlington (5), Camden (1), Cape May (11), Cumberland (8), Gloucester (5), Hunterdon (8), Mercer (1), Middlesex (4),

Monmouth (3), Morris (2), Ocean (3), Salem (12), Somerset (11), Warren (14). By sex, the coyotes were male (57), female (32), and unknown (6). Sixteen coyotes were reported to have mange.

Three of the coyotes harvested were of black fur color, 17 were blonde, 69 were of typical pelage, 4 were red color phase, and 1 was white. One coyote had no pelt color reported.

The recreational hunting and trapping seasons for coyotes and foxes ended on March 15. Coyote and fox season will resume during the spring turkey season (running from April 19, 2025 - May 23, 2025).

Gray Fox Harvest

A total of 25 gray fox carcasses have been collected for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Multistate Conservation Grant to assess pathogen and toxin loads in gray fox. Results are pending on several previously submitted fisher samples.

Fisher

Telemetry monitoring continues for two adult males and one adult female.

Live trapping efforts will continue until the end of March, at which time traps will be removed to minimize the chances of catching and overly stressing heavily pregnant females.

Trail camera monitoring efforts will continue until the first week of April. Classification and analysis of footage is ongoing.

Trapper Harvest Survey

The 2024-25 Trapper Harvest Survey was mailed at the close of the 2024-25 Trapping Season on March 15, 2025. The current response rate for the survey is 18.5%, with the percentage expected to rise as more responses are received.

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

February 12-14 virtually. Discussions included NWTf Endowed Professorships, research updates (including our multi-state collaborative study), brood survey updates, and State/Federal policy updates.

Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC)

No report

The 2025 committee meeting will be held in New Jersey on September 8-12, 2025. Staff have identified the venue and are working through the final stages of planning.

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

J.Sloan and T. Ruth met with Sam Meleski, Site Coordinator Plainsboro Recreation and Community Services, on March 20th to discuss wildlife habitat on their township preserve. Suggestions were made to decrease deer populations, enforce mowing restrictions, and grant opportunities for forest stewardship plans.

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

Project personnel met to discuss the results from the survey titled- NJ Pheasant & Quail Stamp Buyer Survey. Results are currently being compiled and will be available during the next reporting period.

Project personnel have helped with migratory bird trapping during this reporting period.

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

Garris assisted with deploying trail cameras and traps for the Fisher study. Also, Garris routinely located or attempted to locate the 2 male and 1 female fishers presently radio collared.

Extension Activities

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS - INVESTIGATION I

Austin Damminger, Senior Biologist

Mary Kate Lisi, Biologist Trainee

Objective 1 – Migratory game bird monitoring programs

Postseason Mallard Banding

During the winter of 2025, New Jersey participated with other Atlantic Flyway states in a postseason (1 January – 21 March) banding effort for mallards. Annual preseason banding (1 July – September 30) for all age and sex cohorts (adult-female, adult-male, juvenile-female, juvenile-male) provides harvest and survival estimates that are used in management and regulatory decisions. However, the preseason sample of adult female mallards has declined over time and has subsequently reduced precision in annual survival estimates. Implementation of a two-season (i.e. preseason and postseason) banding program can reduce variance in annual survival estimates. Since 2021 Atlantic Flyway states agreed to use postseason banding and set state-specific quotas to achieve a Flyway goal of approximately 3,000 mallards banded.

In 2025, 187 mallards and 3 mallard hybrids were banded between 29 January and 11 March. Of those banded, 91 were female (60 juvenile (SY), 30 adult (ASY), 1 unknown) and 99 were male (28 SY, 71 ASY). A total of 43 (22 mallards, 21 black ducks) previously banded ducks were also recaptured. Ducks were captured at 9 banding stations in 5 counties.

All banding and recapture data were entered into computer files and sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory for processing.

Objective 2 – To participate in programs of the Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint *Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section*

Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies

American Black Duck Research

Program staff collaborated with 8 other Atlantic Flyway states, 4 Mississippi Flyway states, CWS, USFWS, and lead investigator Mitch Weegman and his PhD student Ilsa Griebel (University of Saskatchewan) on a study funded by the Black Duck Joint Venture entitled: *Quantifying the influence of environmental conditions and American black duck behavior and movements throughout the full annual cycle on subsequent productivity using state-of-the-art tracking devices*. This study uses backpack transmitters on black ducks captured on the wintering grounds for 3-4 years. The study began in 2021 as a pilot year. Objectives of the study are to:

1. Quantify black duck movements and wetland use during the breeding season.
2. Develop a baseline data set to classify accelerometer (ACC) data from wild birds and develop detailed time activity budgets of black duck behavior throughout the annual cycle.
3. Quantify recruitment metrics such as reproductive attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing in black ducks.
4. Assess the extent migration characteristics (e.g. number and duration of stops), proportion of time feeding, energy expenditure and habitat used during wintering, staging and the reproductive period to explain variation in reproductive output in black ducks.

5. Examine the extent to which precipitation and temperature explain variation in behavior and energy expenditure during wintering, staging and breeding periods.

From 29 January - 11 March, staff trapped and instrumented 9 female (5 adult [ASY]; 4 juvenile [SY]) black ducks at 3 locations in Atlantic and Burlington Counties with GSM-GPS transmitters. 94 black ducks; 36 females (16 ASY; 20 SY) and 58 males (69 ASY, 28 SY) were leg banded ancillary to telemetry trapping. An additional 21 (3 females, 18 males) previously banded ducks were recaptured.

Edwin B. Forsythe NWR provided logistical support to conduct fieldwork at their site. WCC volunteers and cooperators assisted with scouting, baiting, and banding process.

All banding and recapture data were entered into computer files and sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory for processing.

Identifying Limiting Factors of Eastern Mallards.

The breeding population of Eastern mallards declined 40% in Atlantic Flyway states in the past 25 years. Managers need reliable estimates of productivity and seasonal survival at the sub-population scale to guide management actions for this declining population. Understanding demographic rates of eastern mallards and potential important differences between populations in eastern Canada and eastern U.S. is important for managers to effectively model population dynamics and subsequent harvest strategies. Further, understanding biases within current datasets (e.g. banding data) is needed to develop useful population models used in harvest management. This project will answer questions that will improve the understanding of bird movement during the pre-season banding window.

To address this knowledge gap, Atlantic Flyway Council member states, federal (US and CWS) and University cooperators instrumented female mallards both in eastern Canada and the US with Global Positioning System (GPS)-Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) transmitters to better understand demographic rates, migration chronology, and habitat use differences between the two sub-populations throughout the annual cycle. A sample of hens were also marked with geolocators (light-level loggers) mounted on tarsal bands to assess nesting attempts and success. Study objectives are:

- 1) Quantify and compare recruitment metrics including nesting attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing between mallards in the northeast US and eastern Canada, and the extent to which behavior and weather explain variation in recruitment metrics.

- 2) Estimate seasonal survival rates of female mallards in Eastern Canada vs. Northeastern US.
- 3) Quantify and compare female mallard movements and habitat use and selection throughout the annual cycle in the northeastern US and Eastern Canada
- 4) Assess nesting attempts and nest success between mallard hens marked with GSM units versus geolocators.

During 2025, 24 mallard hens (12 ASY, 12 SY) were instrumented from 29 January to 11 March at 7 sites from Cape May to Hunterdon County. Additionally, 23 mallard hens (9 ASY, 14 SY) were instrumented with geolocators period at 3 sites.

Atlantic brant research

Program staff completed the 2025 trapping and marking phase in collaboration with New York DEC, Canadian Wildlife Service, University of Saskatchewan, and University of Delaware on 2 interrelated studies.

Study objectives are:

1. Determine if the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey is representative of the wintering population
2. Determine fidelity of brant to wintering and breeding areas
3. Determine breeding propensity and variables related to age and body condition to breeding success
4. Determine key spring and fall migration staging areas

From 10 January to 8 March, 10 adult females were outfitted with Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) backpack transmitter units which communicate through cellular networks. Five of those units were from NY due to being unable to deploy them. Study birds were marked at 2 locations from Cape May to Margate. 9 of the transmitters were three-year old units and 1 was a four-year old unit reused from birds harvested or found dead during the past year. 58 additional Atlantic brant captured ancillary to study birds were leg banded. Juveniles comprised 13% of birds captured. Of the totaled banded 39 were female (3 juvenile (SY), 36 adult (ASY) and 29 were male (6 SY, 23 ASY). 5 previously marked brant were recaptured. Birds were captured with rocket nets using decoys and an electronic calling device to lure birds to capture nets. All banding and recapture data were entered into computer files and sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory for processing.

Atlantic Population Canada Goose Research

A. Dammingier prepared a fact sheet about the current ongoing Atlantic Population Canada goose telemetry study for the Atlantic Flyway states to distribute to the public.

Since the summer of 2022 the Atlantic Flyway has participated in study on *Migration chronology, breeding distribution, and winter site fidelity of Atlantic Population of Canada geese*. The study uses neck collar transmitters on AP geese captured on the breeding and wintering grounds, and about 20 transmitters will be deployed in New Jersey this winter. Staff continued logistical arrangements for trap sites and started deploying collars for the third year (NJ's first) of the study.

Study objectives are:

1. Determine migration routes and chronology of Atlantic Population of Canada geese
 - a. Estimate the exposure days of AP Canada geese to hunting with RP zones
 - b. Determine the timing of migration relative to current framework dates
 - c. Explore the potential for additional Canada goose hunting opportunity in that does not cause additional exposure to AP Canada geese
 - d. Compare the timing of migration of southern vs. northern terminus Canada geese
2. Determine the extent of wintering and breeding site fidelity of Atlantic Population of Canada geese
3. Determine the breeding range of Atlantic Population of Canada geese
 - a. Do current banding operations adequately represent Atlantic Population of Canada geese?

From 13 February - 6 March, staff trapped and instrumented 19 adult female Atlantic population geese at 3 locations in Mercer and Hunterdon Counties with GSM-GPS transmitters. 108 Canada geese; 50 females (3 ASY; 47 SY) and 68 males (49 ASY, 19 SY) were leg banded ancillary to telemetry trapping. An additional 3 (2 females, 1 male) previously banded Canada geese were recaptured.

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

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee

No Report

Objective 6 – Outreach

No report

Trainings

Other

2024-25 Migratory Bird Season Regulations

A. Damminger prepared 2025-26 Migratory Bird Season options to be presented to the Migratory Bird Season Selection Committee. Jimmy Sloan filled in for A. Damminger and met with the Migratory Bird Season Selection Committee at the CRO to select the upcoming year's migratory bird hunting seasons to develop a recommendation for the Fish and Game Council. The Committee is comprised of sportsmen's representatives from NJ Ducks Unlimited, NJ Waterfowlers

Association, and the NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs. Proposed season dates were posted on NJFW website for public comment.

M.K. Lisi assisted with tracking telemetered turkeys.

M.K. Lisi attended Canada goose depredation permit training to take over handling NJFW's goose depredation permits. Applications have been coming in and are being worked on.

M.K. Lisi along with program staff began lowering water levels at the Tuckahoe Impoundments in preparation for spring shorebird and waterfowl migration.

M.K. Lisi began weekly salinity samples at each Tuckahoe Impoundment.

M.K. Lisi coordinated NJ AMWO surveys on behalf of USFWS.

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 13 bear calls from February 20, 2025 to March 21, 2025; this compares with 28 calls from the same time period in 2024.

The black bear unit received 1 Category I calls, 5 Category II calls and 7 Category III calls for the time period February 20, 2025 to March 21, 2025; this compares to 1 Category I calls, 17 Category II calls and 10 Category III calls for the same time period in 2024.

The black bear unit received a total of 30 bear calls from January 1, 2025 to March 21, 2025; this compares with 44 calls from the same time period in 2024.

The black bear unit received 1 Category I calls, 12 Category II calls and 17 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2025 to March 21, 2025; this compares to 1 Category I calls, 21 Category II calls and 22 Category III calls for the same time period in 2024.

As of March 21, 2025, the total number of calls received by the Division decreased 31.8% percent from the same time period in 2024. Category I incidents remained unchanged at 0.0 percent, Category II calls decreased 42.8 percent and Category III calls decreased 22.7 percent for the same time period in 2024. 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

Bear	28	Mink	1
Beaver	12	Mountain Lion	1

Bird	349	Opossum	3
Bobcat	1	Owl	19
Brant	1	Pig	3
Coyote	16	Pigeon	13
Crow	37	Rabbit	1
Deer	44	Raccoon	10
Duck	84	Raven	2
Eagle	7	Skunk	5
Falcon	1	Squirrel	1
Fox	32	Swan	32
Goose	111	Turkey	6
Gull	64	Unknown	2
Hawk	95	Vulture	78
Heron	6	Woodchuck	3

1040 calls for the Federal Aid Project.

Total calls: 1068 (*black bear calls are not included in this project).