

**Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 March - 15 April 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, Assistant Biologist
Kris Schantz, Principal Zoologist
Robert Somes, Senior Zoologist
Brian Zarate, Supervising 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’s monthly meetings. Grant renewals were prepared for calendar 2026. ENSP hosted the Fish & Wildlife Experience day for new/recent employees in NJFW.

Landscape Project –

No new report.

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.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

Biotics staff attended a 4 day Northeast Regional Biotics Workshop hosted by the West Virginia Natural Heritage Program. They took the Advanced training option to learn more about the bulk upload tools and get feedback on the Version 2 of the NJ Wildlife Tracker system that ENSP is currently working on developing. They had a great experience, got some very helpful feedback, and generally now have a more complete understanding of the NatureServe Biotics network and NJ will be able to continue to contribute to consistent data collection and management.

ENSP put out a CHANJ listserve and social media posts soliciting submittal of data from the public via NJ Wildlife Tracker, and will focus on specific species of interest. This month the focus was on the porcupine.

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

G. Fowles participated in a bimonthly call of AFWA's Transportation Community of Practice. She also participated in a couple of Northeast Transportation and Wildlife Conference steering committee calls to discuss a new group structure moving forward, including a fiscal agent, and PA has agreed to host the 2026 conference for the first time.

The CHANJ Team met with Green Acres to review a new prioritized central corridor initiative. The CHANJ also met with members of the WLM E&T Unit to collaborate on revisions to the Road Mitigation section of the CHANJ Guidance Document and the Flood Hazard Area Control Act Technical Manual to make them consistent and incorporate more explicit guidance to improve road mitigation projects going forward. Lastly, the CHANJ Team met with the new Deputy Executive Director of Science and Conservation at Duke Farms about future collaboration ideas.

G. Fowles led the bi-monthly Roads and Wildlife Working Group meeting, which was attended by 27 people from NJDEP, DOT, USFWS, and invited consultants. The meeting covered a variety of topics, including wildlife crossing fencing considerations and issues, and situations where barriers to aquatic connectivity are beneficial to limit movement of invasive or competitive species.

The spring amphibian migration took place throughout March, and the CHANJ team invited several NJDOT environmental program staff and the local county engineers to 'tour' the Waterloo Road crossing site and experience a migration event before amphibian tunnels and guide fencing are installed at this location (potentially later this year).

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

Tree felling for this winter's forestry activities in Stand 2 on Sparta Mountain WMA was completed on March 28, 2025, and everything was off site on April 8, 2025. Staff monitored the activities 7 out of the 15 days work was conducted and seeded the landing and skid trail with a cover crop (grain oats) and a native grass/wildflower mix after completion.

Staff presented information about the Sparta Mountain WMA Forest Stewardship Plan, addendum, and bird survey results to the Sparta Township Council on March 25, 2025.

The public comment period for next winter's forestry activities in Stand 18 on Sparta Mountain WMA that began January 31, 2025, ended on March 31, 2025. Seventeen comments were submitted from 13 individuals and/or organizations. Five of the comments from four individuals contained site-specific comments that will be considered during the planning phase of the activities.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

The adoption of the rule that amends the conservation status of NJ Chorus Frog from U to SC will be complete with May 5th publication.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

Biologists with Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Fisheries, and ENSP completed species profiles for state-listed species. Botanists from Natural Heritage Program continue to review and finalize their species profiles. Nearly all E, T, SC species have a minimum of one photo for their species profile. Biotics staff R. Criollo and D. Turcios finalized species range maps for the profiles.

K. Korth, Doug Rizio (I&E) and DJ Case (contractor) continue regular weekly meetings to build out and test the Wordpress framework for the SWAP website and meet every other week with OIT. D. Rizio and DJ Case continue to test layout and data linkages.

Conservation Action Prioritization: Final prioritization of Conservation Actions will be completed on 4/18, however we were able to use nearly 30 responses to review results and discuss next steps. Key staff met with our Technical Advisory Group's Steering Committee to review those results, and the group saw the need to weigh the results to select the "Highest Priority" and "Priority" Actions from "Important." We elected to use the weighted difference formula to do that. High and Priority actions have been combined into a single category of "Priority Action." However, "Important" actions will be continue to be included in the database.

The group also decided to do a Fatal Flaw review of the "Priority Actions." We will invite our engaged technical stakeholders along with Fish & Wildlife and DEP staff to conduct the review. Contractor DJ Case is working on a spreadsheet for partners to do a fatal flaw review that is a simplified version of the Prioritization exercise—it will include Important Actions, Statewide Actions that were pulled from the regions, and results of the weighting as reference. The Fatal Flaw review exercise will be sent before the end of April.

C-SWG SWAP Enhancement Grant: We were notified that our proposal was funded at a lower level of funding than we requested. After reviewing deliverables, we agreed to accept.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

No new report.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

There were coordination calls this period for the bog turtle Competitive-State Wildlife Grants (C-SWGs) and for regional bog turtle coordination.

We are in the final year of two C-SWGs:

- Bog Turtle C-SWG: Remaining funds will be used to trap sites in both the southern and northern parts of the state. Bids for trapping have been received and purchase order requests will be submitted. This trapping work will expend the remainder of the grant funds.
- Wood Turtle C-SWG: A purchase order request was submitted to acquire fencing to make improvements to an existing crossing project. We expect to begin the install in the summer. The bulk of the remaining grant funds are covering staff time to conduct standardized transect surveys. Those staff surveys have begun this reporting period at three sites. Each transect will be visited three times this spring, which will complete the nine-visit demographic survey protocols.

Bog Turtles: Field site scouting visits were made this period in anticipation of the upcoming bog turtle survey season, which begins on April 15. Three new wetland areas recently acquired for permanent protection were evaluated for traditional visual surveys or camera trapping. This season, coordinated volunteers will survey three wetlands led by ENSP staff and camera trapping in

coordination with CWF will continue at three wetlands, one of which will also be surveyed by volunteers. The first visual survey of the season began on April 15, in which two wetlands were surveyed that day.

Box Turtles: We await a decision on a submitted C-SWG proposal to expand box turtle work in NJ. We anticipate an award, or rejection, announcement within the next two months. Separately, field work has started on the box turtle repatriation project. ENSP staff met with Pinelands Commission scientist to take brumation site measurements to “characterize” box turtle overwintering spots. This data will later be pooled with Pine Barrens overwintering data for possible publication. The value of the information is to better inform conservation measures and practices for prescribed burns and other types of habitat management conducted during the turtle’s dormant period.

B. Zarate presented on ENSP turtle conservation work to the Highlands Science Symposium on March 24, focusing on regional conservation planning and implementation of the plans at the state level.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

C-SWG project lead from Delaware informed the Tiger Salamander Working Group that our project was just on the funding cusp, and there would only be partial funding available to complete the full project as proposed. The group decided it would be better to improve the proposal and resubmit for funding next year.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

B. Zarate continued coordination with NJ Innovation Institute and Marine Fisheries Administration to design and print novel terrapin bycatch devices (BRDs), so these new dimensions may be trialed in controlled and field settings in commercial-style crab pots. Trials in an indoor tank, maintained by a partner NGO, continued this reporting period and results will be shared at the May 14 ENSAC meeting. NJFW is considering an application for NFWF funds

(<https://www.nfwf.org/programs/delaware-river-program/delaware-watershed-conservation-fund-2025-request-proposals>) to support expanded work on BRDs. Applications are due May 13.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

There were five reported roadkilled bobcats, and we were able to find and retrieve four of the carcasses. One of the individuals was previously tagged by NJFW. Necropsies were performed and samples taken from the four recovered carcasses.

G. Fowles compiled and sent in tissue and scat samples that have been collected over the last few months to the National Genomics Center for Fish and Wildlife for genetic analysis.

G. Fowles and Fly met staff at Duke Farms to survey for bobcat scat in areas where Duke’s trail cameras have picked up a bobcat for the first time in 20 years. G. Fowles and Fly also did a demo of Fly’s searching at Assunpink for the Fish & Wildlife new employee experience day.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall had web meetings with NJDEP’s Division of Science and Research offshore wind research and monitoring projects manager and contractor (American Bird Conservancy) regarding the status of a project establishing several new Motus automated telemetry receiver stations on land and on ocean buoys; ENSP is assisting with some of the outreach seeking host sites.

M. Hall continued conversations and logistics for gating two recently discovered bat hibernacula on county parklands.

M. Hall and T. McBride gave access and assisted Rutgers University researchers with a late winter bat survey at Hibernia Mine. UV-lit wing photos and skin swabs were collected from 25 and 50 little brown bats, respectively, to continue monitoring the amounts of white-nose syndrome fungus and tissue damage following an experimental sanitation treatment in the mine.

M. Hall participated in a North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat) community of practice meeting that demonstrated a new data upload template for states willing to share survey results on bats using transportation structures. M. Hall met with USFWS NJ Field Office bat lead and transportation liaison about modifying NJ's database to enable easier data sharing with NABat.

M. Hall met with Conserve Wildlife Foundation to plan 2025 volunteer-based bat projects (mobile acoustic bat survey and summer bat count), which CWF has been contracted to assist with.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles led the bi-monthly Allegheny Woodrat Working Group meeting, which included several invited biologists working on other mammal captive breeding programs/recovery efforts. We heard from biologists working on the New England Cottontail, Mexican Wolf, and New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse efforts. It was very helpful to hear how these other programs are coordinated, and some lessons learned as the Allegheny Woodrat Working Group embarks on the first captive breeding efforts this spring/summer.

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis finalized survey schedule, paperwork, and contractors for the wading bird aerial survey, set for mid-May. She was contacted by local birders in Bayonne who were concerned that city-wide tree trimming would impact nesting Yellow-crowned Night-herons. She reached out to PSE&G and coordinated with their staff to map out all known nesting locations so that work can be avoided in those areas until nesting season is completed. She participated in Atlantic Flyway Council Tech Section calls to continue to determine how to best collect and analyze survey data on a regional level.

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

Seasonal staff began on April 1 and fencing for beach-nesting birds has been placed across all municipal and state sites in anticipation of the nesting season. American Oystercatchers have started laying across the state and Piping Plovers have returned but no nests have been located yet. Colonial nesting birds typically return in early May. Horseshoe Island has been surveyed and has grown again yielding more prime habitat for beach-nesting birds. Posting of the island will take place in mid-April, and will be jointly monitored by NJFW ENSP and Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey through a contract with Edwin B Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. Weekly updates of nesting activity will be provided to all municipalities and stakeholders/partners.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - M. Roach

K. Clark and M. Roach conducted two aerial surveys (by helicopter) to monitor Bald Eagle nests in parts of Atlantic, Cumberland, and Cape May counties. These are mostly nests that cannot be monitored from the ground.

There have been 234 confirmed Bald Eagles nests this season, 34 of which have failed to date. We are now up to 15 new eagle pairs and 22 new nest locations (i.e., a previously-known pair that moved to a new nest location).

The three eaglets at Duke Farms were successfully banded on 4/10 (our first eagle banding of the season). Staff and volunteers went to band the Prospertown eaglets on 4/16, but, unfortunately, the nest was empty when the climber reached it.

There were nine Bald Eagle mortalities the past month. Seven were found dead, one died due to eagle combat. Another was found grounded under a nest and euthanized out of precaution (HPAI).

Two Bald Eagles were released from wildlife rehab the past month, and two new eagles were brought into rehab (one from eagle combat, the other from a vehicle strike).

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – M. Roach

There are currently only 11 Peregrine nests confirmed to have laid eggs, only 2 of these are along the Atlantic coast (which is normally a stronghold for peregrine breeding in NJ). A number of coastal nests are due to be checked again, so there is hope that the number of active nests goes up. Photos from trail cameras suggest that the population of breeding adults is significantly lower than normal because most nest sites are simply unoccupied (or only have one adult).

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

B. Pitts and D. Brant have been maintaining and preparing nest boxes for the 2025 season. There have not been any eggs laid as of April 15. Interestingly, last season started about two weeks earlier than usual.

B. Pitts is scheduled to give a presentation on the kestrel project for Readington Township volunteers on 4/19. New volunteers will receive additional field training for box monitoring and data entry.

Osprey Monitoring – M. Roach

The nesting season for Osprey officially start on April 1 and is well underway with many pairs establishing their territories and presumably laying eggs. M. Roach and K. Clark continue to field questions from the public and cell tower contractors about issues concerning Osprey nests in less-than-ideal locations.

Other Raptors – M. Roach

M. Roach is working on a region-wide survey for breeding American Goshawks as part of a multi-state study led by PA Game Commission.

Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts

B. Pitts and K. Clark attended a Delaware Bay planning meeting on 4/1 with USFWS and DE Division of Fish & Wildlife staff to discuss the 2025 shorebird field season. Purchase orders were encumbered for the Shorebird Steward Project and the Horseshoe Crab Egg Density Survey, and B. Pitts is working on procurement for the aerial survey and resightings personnel.

B. Pitts is working with staff from Delaware to look at the historical aerial survey data by state to find trends for when red knot observations began declining in Delaware.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

A Black Rail/Saltmarsh Sparrow technician will begin work in late-April on placing acoustic recording units, conducting point count surveys and rapid assessment surveys on coastal saltmarshes throughout southern New Jersey. ENSP intends to meet with BLM on Ephraim Island near Wildwood to review where planned restoration will take place and ways in which ENSP can support a monitoring effort prior to restoration efforts occurring. Additional sites include Seven Mile Island Living Laboratory sites, Avalon, and potentially, Abbott's Meadow.

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

S. Petzinger identified over 100 locations for staff to search for grassland birds during the breeding season.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

S. Petzinger virtually attended the monthly Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture Monitoring Team meeting.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

R. Somes and seasonal staff conducted habitat assessments and scouting for Frosted and Hoary Elfin sites for the upcoming spring field season at several sites in Cape May, Atlantic, Burlington, and Ocean counties. A meeting was also held with Bureau of Lands Management staff to plan several planting and habitat management projects for the Frosted Elfin in Cape May and Cumberland counties.

R. Somes met with State Museum Staff to finalize plans for the upcoming Ecosystems in New Jersey Exhibit and to plan pollinator and butterfly habitat management projects on the museum property.

R. Somes and A. Kisurin participated in the New Jersey Dam Removal Working Group meeting to discuss pre and post dam removal monitoring of invertebrate populations.

R. Somes and seasonal staff met with State Park Service staff at Cape May Point State Park to begin a restoration project of their butterfly garden which is an important waystation for migrating Monarch butterflies.

Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes met with State Forest Service and State Park Service staff to plan pollinator habitat management projects on several State Park and Forest properties.

Freshwater Mussels – A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin finalized the request for bid to secure qualified freshwater mussel surveyors for the upcoming Brook Floater surveys. These surveys will focus on historic sites throughout New Jersey to assess current Brook Floater populations and inform conservation strategies. In preparation, A. Kisurin also began conducting site assessments across the South Branch Raritan River, Mainstem Raritan River, Millstone River, and their associated tributaries to help prioritize locations for the

upcoming field season. These efforts aim to refine survey efforts and optimize resource allocation for detecting remaining populations of this state-endangered species.

eDNA TECHNOLOGY – A. Kisurin

No new report.

Photo of the month: Bald eagle feeding her chicks during ENSP's aerial survey, 3/19/2025

