

**Endangered and Nongame Species Program  
Monthly Report for 16 May - 15 June 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.

**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.

Staff continued to work with other staff in NJFW on addressing public comments that were submitted regarding the “Shore Protection Rule”.

**Biotics Database – G. Fowles**

Biotics staff continued the ongoing work of processing rare species data from NJ Wildlife Tracker into Biotics. Biotics staff also completed an annual data exchange with NatureServe to update the central database with NJ’s element occurrence records and to also update taxonomy, etc. to standardize the data in our NJ local database and the central database. NatureServe has started offering regular updates on the next version of Biotics, which will include new data software as a platform. Lastly, a new promotional poster for NJ Wildlife Tracker was printed, which we will plan to distribute to centers and kiosks across the state.

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

G. Fowles participated in a Northern Appalachian Coalition meeting aimed at land protection in the Northern Appalachians region of New Jersey, led by the Nature Conservancy. The CHANJ team put out a listserv email post related to the importance of protecting habitat corridors and also highlighting the new CHANJ acquisition initiative that was launched in collaboration with the Green Acres Program (press release [here](#)). Green Acres also presented a webinar to counties and municipalities describing the initiative in collaboration with the CHANJ Team.

The CHANJ Team, also in collaboration with Green Acres, finalized parcels to target for acquisition as part of a new prioritized central corridor initiative and the programs are now working on the next steps. And the CHANJ Team has offered input regarding priorities for a Rowan/GSPT land acquisition mapping effort.

Members of the CHANJ Team met with the new Deputy Executive Director of Science and Conservation at Duke Farms regarding research projects that are collaboration opportunities, as Duke Farms works to hire new research scientists.

G. Fowles worked with the North Jersey Transportation Authority to enter over 20 priority road projects in their PRIME2 data management system to make transportation planners aware of the need for road wildlife mitigation in specific areas.

The CHANJ Team sent out a listserv email post encouraging the public to use NJ Wildlife Tracker to report sightings of wildlife on roadways, featuring 'On Road' data we have collected in the form of maps and graphs. The post was also shared on NJFW's social media.

### **Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff**

Bird surveys were conducted at 18 locations on Sparta Mountain and Weldon Brook WMAs between May 16 and May 23, 2025. The survey data will be entered and summarized starting in July.

### **Species Status Review – K. Clark**

No new report.

### **State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth**

K. Korth, K. Clark, Doug Rizio (I&E), OIT, and DJ Case (contractor) continue weekly meetings to build out and test the WordPress framework for the SWAP website. D. Rizio and DJ Case continue to test layout and data linkages.

The Fatal Flaw review of the "Priority Actions" was completed. Two regional in-person meetings, one in Cape May County and one at CRO, allowed us to finalize the results. Staff from Marine Fisheries, Freshwater Fisheries, Parks and Forestry, Natural Heritage Program, and ENSP attended at least one meeting. Members of TAG and ENSAC also attended.

K. Korth is working to put the SWAP content out for public comment by July 1. D. Rizio created a basic website to host content for the public to review and comment, and is adding content to webpages. DJ Case uploaded all data, except Conservation Actions, into the database and created tables for SGCN and Threats to include for public comment. R. Criollo finalized the Ecological Priority Maps for habitat conditions. K. Clark and staff are reviewing and editing all content.

## **HERPTILES**

### **Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz**

No new report.

### **Snakes – K. Schantz**

Venomous Snake Response Team:

- K. Schantz sent a “Request for Bid” to qualified personnel to take over venomous snake handling and lecture trainings. Bids are due June 20.
- A dog was bitten by a timber rattlesnake after being surrounded by three dogs. The dog received medical treatment and is recovering.

K. Schantz continued to revise the northern pinesnake Habitat Evaluation Model (HEM) summary of revisions. The revised HEM is near completion and once completed, will require peer review.

K. Schantz continues to work with Rutgers University and the DEP procurement office to compile and review Rutgers’ 2023 expenditure packet for their 2023 completed work as part of their contract for eastern copperhead research. Once this is finalized (i.e., procurement approves the final packet of supportive documents), procurement will issue payment, and Rutgers will compile their 2024 expenditure packet for review and submittal.

Tyler Christensen assisted ENSP’s Biotics staff to catalog copperhead critical habitat features (points and polygons) with photographs, road cones, and Trimble GPS. K. Schantz reviewed the files and photographs and submitted questions to Mr. Christensen.

### **SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts**

There were no regional coordination calls this period, as they are generally suspended during peak field seasons.

We are in the final year of two C-SWG grant projects:

- Bog Turtle C-SWG: Remaining funds will be used to trap sites in both the southern and northern parts of the state. The trapping work on all properties was completed during this reporting period, and unfortunately no bog turtles were discovered at any of the locations, including locations where the prior bog turtle records are still considered extant. Final reports and invoicing are due later this season.
- Wood Turtle C-SWG: A purchase order was issued to acquire fencing to make improvements to an existing crossing project. Some of the materials have shipped during this reporting period. 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 finished during this reporting period at three sites and will continue this fall.

Bog Turtles: Coordinated group surveys continued this reporting period at three sites. The group surveys ended this reporting period as met our target for visits per site.

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 is ongoing with the box turtle repatriation project. ENSP coordinated three group visits to collect a new round of health samples from the released group, which is important to continue to

understand the dynamics of turtle disease pre- and post-release. The majority of the tracked turtles were sampled during the coordinated events and samples will be sent for testing within the next two reporting periods. Work has started this reporting period to identify and evaluate additional protected lands for release of other groups of box turtles that have been seized by Law Enforcement or surrendered. At least four release areas will be assessed next reporting period and there's a potential for a release within the next two reporting periods.

#### **Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts**

No new report.

#### **Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate**

As part of the Regional Conservation Needs (RCN) grant on terrapin, NJ launched a volunteer-driven terrapin headcount survey protocol to a small group of partners. Volunteers choose a location on land where terrapins tend to aggregate and perform multiple rounds of headcount surveys using binoculars or spotting scopes between May and October. Following a standardized protocol, results will be comparable at the location year to year and across multiple sites throughout the state and northeast region. This is the first season NJ is performing these surveys and will likely expand our volunteer pool after this year, learning from this pilot year.

### **MAMMALS**

#### **Bobcat Project – G. Fowles**

There was one reported roadkilled bobcats during the reporting period. ENSP recovered the carcass and sampled.

G. Fowles and Fly continued to survey for bobcat scat at sites in central NJ.

The collaborative study with ENSP, the University of Delaware and DOT continues, using cameras to monitor 40 structures under 6 major east-west running highways in CHANJ mapped areas for use by bobcats and other mammals. An ENSP tech also installed additional cameras under a few structures not included in the study.

#### **Bat Conservation – M. Hall**

New report not available.

#### **Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles**

G. Fowles organized the bi-monthly regional Allegheny Woodrat Working Group call this reporting period with representatives from several states, universities, and zoos across the region. Topics included the status of the new captive breeding programs, with the big news being that the MD Zoo successfully bred a pair of woodrats, producing 3 pups, which were doing well. This marks the first breeding success of this new Allegheny woodrat captive breeding program initiative. The group discussed strategy for moving forward with additional pairs at other facilities that are ready, as well as database needs for keeping track of translocations and reintroductions, etc.

A paper that G. Fowles collaborated on along with colleagues at the PA Game Commission and Towson University was published in the July issue of the Journal of Wildlife Management. The article, [‘Metabarcoding reveals seasonal shifts in the Allegheny woodrat’s generalist diet’](#) involved DNA analysis of woodrat scat collected seasonally at woodrat sites in NJ and PA to elucidate seasonal

shifts in the diet of woodrats. Fungi and invasive plants were consumed more frequently than anticipated.

## **BIRDS**

### **Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis**

C. Davis, M. Roach and a contractor conducted the aerial survey for wading birds in late May. Survey results are not yet available, but the colonies looked on the sparse side. One species whose numbers continue to be robust is the White Ibis, whose meteoric rise in the state continues unabated. There were nearly 1,000 adults tallied (the first year they were documented nesting in the state was 2020 with 6 adults) and the strong evidence to support that they are nesting in Ocean County (for the first time documented by ENSP). C. Davis and a seasonal technician also started night-heron surveys to capture the individuals that are not nesting on the marsh islands and tallied during the aerial flight. This includes birds nesting on the barrier islands and the mainland. Survey results will be available in late summer or early fall.

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

Beach-nesting bird season is in full swing. Staff continues to monitor and manage beaches across the coast. State and municipal sites will soon be recording the first fledglings in the state. Much of the season remains unknown so no official reports on how the birds will fare this year. Staff members have also been out doing a significant amount of public outreach, particularly at sites with heavy dog-walking use like North Wildwood where Piping Plovers are now nesting again after a 10-year absence. Volunteers are also making significant contributions to the nesting season, spending multiple hours on the beach monitoring the birds and providing public outreach. Davis and Heiser continue to interact with towns and municipalities on Beach Management Plans and working to ensure the safest outcome for the birds while balancing the needs of the town/municipality.

### **Bald Eagle Monitoring - M. Roach**

We are up to 44 fledged eagle nests out of 242 in this year's survey, with more to come as the month continues. There are currently 55 (22.7%) nests that have failed. Staff and volunteers continue to regularly monitor nests throughout the state.

Staff were able to band the final Bald Eagle nest of the season, a nest in Cumberland County with one chick this year. AD J. Hearon was able to join and experience eagle banding for the first time.

There were three Bald Eagle mortalities this month. Two were from vehicle strikes (one a car, the other a train). Neither of these were collected for necropsy due to their poor body condition. The third was an injured eagle picked up in Cumberland County and taken to wildlife rehab. The bird had an old, necrotic leg wound and had to be euthanized.

Two other eagles were taken to wildlife rehab: one for lead poisoning, the other a vehicle strike.

Staff and volunteers continued to operate an eagle feeding station in Cumberland County to provide supplemental feeding opportunities for the young eagle released from rehab last month. Trail camera footage has shown multiple eagles (of various ages) coming in to feed from the site.

### **Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – M. Roach**

Five peregrine nests have successfully fledged young this year. Nine are still active (either in the incubating or nestling stage). M. Roach and Z. Bohm banded the nestlings from the Stone Harbor

location. This will be the only nest south of the Walt Whitman bridge to fledge young this year, a stark contrast to previous years.

There are currently five peregrines in wildlife rehab: 1 adult female with a broken wing, and 4 fledglings from 2 separate nest sites in Bergen County. At this time, all are presumed to be releasable after some time in recovery.

#### **American Kestrel – B. Pitts**

As of June 15, there are 138 active nest boxes. B. Pitts and D. Brant have captured 59 adult birds (52 female, 7 male) to date with 35 recaptures (59.3%) and 24 previously unbanded birds (40.7%). A total of 114 young have been banded in 28 successful boxes (4.07/ young per box).

#### **Osprey Monitoring – M. Roach**

The nesting season for Osprey continues with territorial and incubating pairs. 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. M. Roach and Z. Bohm will be conducting Osprey surveys, including banding, in the upcoming month.

#### **Other Raptors – M. Roach**

M. Roach and Z. Bohm continued to monitor Barn Owl nest boxes and band nestlings in the southern part of the state. None have fledged yet, and some are still incubating eggs. M. Roach and Z. Bohm are also in the planning and scouting stages for installing additional Barn Owl boxes in appropriate habitat to support an expanding coastal population.

#### **Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts**

Like the first aerial survey in mid-May, the second survey flight was postponed for a day due to weather. During the peak count on 23-May, 16,335 Red Knots were counted by aerial survey and 25,667 were counted by the ground teams in NJ and DE. On the same date, 18,236 Ruddy Turnstones were counted during the aerial survey and 21,681 were counted on the ground. It was agreed upon by both NJ and DE and the USFWS to use the higher ground counts for the official census number for 2025. A combined survey report will be issued next month. ENSP staff removed all beach restrictions along the Delaware Bay shoreline on 2-June.

#### **Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser**

ENSP's Saltmarsh Sparrow team was able to conduct three Rapid Assessment surveys of habitat in the southern portion of the state with positive results yielding several captures of breeding Saltmarsh Sparrows. These data will be reported and incorporated into the long-standing Saltmarsh Habitat and Avian Research Program's dataset. Additional Rapid Assessment surveys will take place in June/July to assess productivity. Acoustic Recording Units have been deployed at several other sites and Point Count surveys are also being conducted to determine current levels of Saltmarsh Sparrow populations at site with planned or ongoing restoration. C. Davis coordinated water sampling by Rutgers University at a number of sites; the samples will be processed to detect if any DNA from Black Rails can be detected (via eDNA protocols). Black Rail sites also continue to be monitored by passive acoustic recording units, which will be active through mid-July.

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

Bird surveys on private lands enrolled in Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) began on May 13, 2025. A total of 91 locations were surveyed through June 11, 2025: 43 were WLFW locations, 39

were natural control sites, and 9 were other sites not on SMWMA or WBWMA and not enrolled in WLFW. The survey data will be entered and summarized starting in July.

Staff began surveying over 100 locations identified as potential grassland bird habitat through eBird.org and/or older records in Biotics. Observations will be entered into NJ Wildlife Tracker/Biotics Database.

### **Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger**

S. Petzinger will begin netting and tagging Wood Thrush on June 18, 2025, as part of a regional Wood Thrush nanotag effort. The objective in 2025 is to deploy the remaining 4 nanotags on breeding Wood Thrush near active Motus towers.

Detections of the 20 Wood Thrush tagged in 2024 indicated that 8 birds (40%) migrated south and returned to near the breeding area the next spring, 5 birds (25%) migrated south and returned to the US the next spring but not near the breeding area, 5 birds (25%) migrated south but did not return the next spring, and 2 birds did not depart from the breeding grounds (lost tags or suffered mortality before migration). The farthest location a tagged Wood Thrush was detected was in Costa Rica, followed by Honduras and Belize.

- Seven of the 20 Wood Thrush tagged in 2024 were breeding on Sparta Mountain WMA: 3 were in/adjacent to managed forests and 4 were in unmanaged forests. Three (43%) migrated south and returned to the breeding area the next spring, 1 (14%) migrated south and returned to the US the next spring but not near the breeding area, 2 (29%) migrated south but did not return, and 1 (14%) did not depart from the breeding grounds.
- Seven of the 20 Wood Thrush tagged in 2024 were breeding on other public lands in northern NJ. Two (29%) migrated south and returned to the breeding area the next spring, 4 (57%) migrated south and returned to the US the next spring but not near the breeding area, and 1 (14%) did not depart from the breeding grounds.
- Six of the 20 Wood Thrush tagged in 2024 were breeding on public lands in the Pinelands. Three (50%) migrated south and returned to the breeding area the next spring, and 3 (50%) migrated south but did not return.

### **INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS**

#### **Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes**

R. Somes and seasonal staff continued surveys for Frosted Elfin at sites in Cape May, Atlantic, and Ocean counties but poor weather conditions appear to have led to a compressed flight season and no additional elfins were observed at any locations. Habitat conditions are excellent at most sites with the extensive areas of Baptisia (wild indigo) present.

R. Somes and seasonal staff conducted skipper surveys in Sussex and Warren counties at several locations along Raccoon Ridge, and in Stokes and High Point State Park and Forest areas. No Common Roadside Skippers were observed but one new Pepper and Salt Skipper population was discovered.

R. Somes and seasonal staff conducted Helicta/Georgia Satyr surveys in Wharton State Forest with a count of 37 satyrs and 3 Two-spotted Skippers documented.

R. Somes met with USFWS and Cape May County Park staff to plan Frosted Elfin and pollinator habitat management projects for the fall season. R. Somes also met with NJFW-BLM staff to continue planning habitat management projects on Fish and Wildlife property in Cape May County.

R. Somes and seasonal staff worked on several Frosted Elfin habitat management projects on State, county and municipal property in Cape May County by planting wild indigo propagated at our State Tree Nursery.

R. Somes and seasonal staff assisted Cape May State Park with restoring their butterfly garden because this location and area is a critical site during the Monarch migration and also highly visible to the public.

R. Somes conducted a training workshop for the Watershed Ambassadors on pollinator conservation, dragonfly biodiversity, and freshwater mussel conservation.

R. Somes and volunteer staff conducted dragonfly surveys at a variety of locations in Northern New Jersey, but poor weather conditions have hampered these efforts.

#### Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes, State Forest Service and State Park Service staff began distributing kit butterfly and pollinator gardens and planting kits for conservation projects throughout the State. Due to the unusually wet and cool weather conditions this spring, distribution was delayed by a month and many projects will wait until September and better weather conditions. Staff also met to discuss a second planting for fall distribution and planting. Close to 6,000 plants have been propagated including 500 Baptisia tinctoria for Frosted Elfin and 600 common and swamp milkweed for Monarch projects.

#### Freshwater Mussels – A. Kisurin

A. Kisurin coordinated freshwater mussel survey data with USFWS representatives to standardize collaborative datasheets and to support planning for upcoming Dwarf Wedgemussel surveys.

A. Kisurin also assisted with the kickoff of Brook Floater surveys on the South Branch Raritan River alongside contracted surveyors, and met with state counterparts to discuss species assessments and explore coordinated recovery strategies.

Additionally, A. Kisurin provided field assistance with CPM (invasive Chinese Pond Mussel) eDNA sampling, which will help evaluate the success of previous eradication efforts.

#### eDNA TECHNOLOGY – A. Kisurin

No new report.

#### Photo of the month:

American Oystercatcher catches the only shade on beach.

