

BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

MONTHLY REPORT

January 2021

Carole Stanko, Chief

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

STUDY PLAN I. WHITE-TAILED DEER

Jodi Powers, Senior Wildlife Biologist (Northern Region)

Joe Leskie, Senior Wildlife Biologist (Southern Region)

Annual Deer Harvest (Job I-A)

J. Leskie and J. Powers returned inquiries from hunters who experienced errors or needed assistance with their deer harvest reporting during multiple on-going seasons. The majority of the reporting issues were from hunters using the wrong harvest tags and not purchasing the appropriate tags.

Hunting and Trapping Digest

J. Leskie and J. Powers attended multiple virtual meetings to discuss revising the layout and content of the NJ Hunting & Trapping Digest. The end product will use less formal language to make it easier to understand and more intuitive to use.

Special Areas

J. Powers contacted northern region special areas about Digest submissions.

Extension Activities

J. Leskie prepared and delivered monthly highlights for the January Division of Fish and Wildlife Report to members of the Atlantic County Federation of Sportsman's Clubs.

Other Activities

Project staff completed the collection of deer heads for the 2020-21 CWD surveillance effort. Samples have been collected from 2 butcher shops in the northern region and from 3 butcher shops in the southern region. J. Leskie and J. Powers sent appreciation letters to the participating butcher shop owners and workers for assisting and adhering to our Covid-19 safety protocols this year. A special thank you to northern region Deer Project Seasonal Technician Jordan Gyurcsak and to southern region Deer Project Seasonal Technician Courtney Venuti for their outstanding work and dedication during this season's difficult and trying sampling effort. Despite Covid-19 protocols and other issues, the southern region was still able to collect over 200 samples.

J. Powers forwarded multiple sick/injured deer calls to the OWHF. Most were either vehicle strikes or brain abscesses.

J. Powers received a few calls concerning tagged antlered deer either spotted or washed up near the Raritan Bay. It was determined that the deer were part of the sterilization project on Staten Island.

J. Leskie completed the collection of 12 additional white-tailed deer ear samples for a gene flow analysis study throughout New Jersey. The sampling began in 2019 with a focus on the outer coastal plain area of the pine barrens. Samples will be forwarded to G. Fowles of the Endangered and Nongame Species Program for processing and analysis.

J. Leskie assisted the Turkey Project with a nuisance turkey complaint from a farmer in Camden County.

Unit staff began updating the farmer depredation database from 2020 and forwarded returned mortality reports to the appropriate Regional Law Enforcement office.

STUDY PLAN III. UPLAND WILDLIFE AND FURBEARERS

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist
Andrew W Burnett, Principal Biologist
James Sloan, Senior Biologist
Joseph R. Garris, Wildlife Technician I
Keith Santini, 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.

Hunter and Trapper Harvests

During the current segment, deer hunters reported harvesting 20 coyotes and 2 gray fox; trappers reported harvesting 33 coyotes and 2 gray fox; and, Special Permit holders reported harvesting 2 coyotes and 1 gray fox. Reported harvest total to date is 129 coyotes and 10 gray fox.

Beaver and River Otter

Staff continued conducting statewide beaver/otter field inventories.

The one remaining otter permit in Zone 28 was finally sold. Staff responded to several reports of beaver harvests and have encouraged trappers to report their harvest via AHRS. Since this is not required, only 114 beavers and 9 otter have been reported to date. However, weather has been cooperative, and project personnel see no need to extend the trapping season at this time.

Sighting Reports

Reports received during the segment included: the first reported sighting of coyote in Long Beach Twp., Ocean County, and bobcat in Warren County (forwarded from G. Fowles, ENSP). Project files were updated.

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 Technical Committee (NBTC)

Sloan virtually attended a national NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife – Bobwhite meeting on January 12th. Discussions included updates to the national WLFW acreage for bobwhite, and information regarding upgrading bobwhite to a 1.0 species.

Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC)

Sloan has been working with the Eastern Grouse Working Group, specifically discussing desired future conditions and fundamental objectives for the Regional Ruffed Grouse Recovery Plan. A core meeting has been planned for the week of January 19th.

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

Sloan visited a Cumberland County landowner on December 30th to provide technical guidance on past and upcoming plantings on his converted agricultural lands. Spring plantings will be conducted in April to complete his NRCS contract.

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

The Winter 2020-21 Furbearer e-Newsletter was reviewed and subsequently posted on the Division's website.

A number of emails pertaining to coyotes in several Long Beach Island townships were received during the period and responded to by project staff and/or Wildlife Services staff.

Burnett responded to an individual seeking information about controlling rabbit predators (specifically, coyote and fox), and wildlife importation permits.

Project staff participated in a Teams meeting to discuss the August 2021 Hunting and Trapping Digest. Work began preparing revisions.

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

Other Activities

Sloan assisted with preparations for a nuisance turkey capture site in Ocean County.

The project's coyote database contains 12,777 records of mortalities, sightings, and other incidents from a minimum 470 municipalities in all 21 counties.

WATERFOWL - STUDY PLAN IV

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist

Lisa Clark, Assistant Biologist

Objective 1 – Migratory game bird monitoring programs

Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey

In mid-December, Ted Nichols participated in a planning conference call with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and Atlantic Flyway partner biologists concerning the 2021 Mid-Winter Survey (MWS) for Atlantic brant and tundra swans in light of COVID19 issues. In December, the Service experienced a COVID incident as a result of close confinement in an aircraft cockpit during a flight and as a result, altered their policy for flights. The policy included not more than 2 individuals, including pilot, in an aircraft cockpit. Given that nearly half of the Atlantic brant survey occurs within congested air space near Atlantic City, Newark, and New York City, the standard procedure has been to have 3 individuals in the plane, 1 observer on each side of the aircraft counting birds, and the pilot focusing on safely flying the aircraft and communicating with air-traffic controllers. Given the new policy with only 1 onboard observer, the group agreed that the brant survey accuracy would be compromised and as a result thought the best fallback position would be to not complete the 2021 MWS but use the prediction from the Integrated Population Model in lieu of a MWS estimate.

Objective 2 – Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint Ventures

Program biologists began preparing for the 2021 Winter Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section (AFCTS) meeting which will be held virtually. As past AFCTS Chair, Ted Nichols worked with the incoming Chair and virtual host coordinator (SCDNR) to develop the meeting agenda.

Sea Duck Productivity Study

Since the fall of 2018, several Atlantic Flyway states implemented a photo survey to evaluate the utility of digital images to estimate annual productivity of sea ducks. Photos of scoters (white-winged, black, and surf) and long-tailed ducks were taken during the fall and winter and plumage patterns used to develop age ratios for each species. Reliable estimates of productivity are expected to aid in the development of future population models and inform harvest management decisions of sea ducks. Program staff collected photos from 18 October through 10 December. A total of 27 usable photos were submitted to the Atlantic Flyway SharePoint site. These photographs will be combined with other states to develop a 2020 productivity estimate.

Mallard Harvest Strategy Duck Hunter Opinion Survey

T. Nichols worked with Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section collaborators to deliver a hunter survey to Atlantic Flyway hunters concerning developing an Eastern Mallard Harvest Strategy. Surveys were sent out 15 January by e-mail to 10,991 individuals who had provided an e-mail address when obtaining a HIP certification in NJ for the 2020 season. The survey asked hunters to rank the trade-offs between scenarios that maximized mallard harvest opportunity against the opportunity to see birds. The survey responses will be scaled across the flyway geographically as well as be compared to waterfowl hunting avidity.

Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies

Blood Lead Levels in American Black Ducks

T. Nichols coordinated with N. Lewis, C. Lilley, and J. Lovy (all NJDFW Health and Forensics), and Doug Roscoe (retired, NJDFW Health and Forensics), in a paper entitled, “*Blood-lead Declines in Wintering American Black Ducks in New Jersey Following the Lead Shot Ban*” and submitted the manuscript to the Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management for publication. Nicole Lewis is lead author. The draft manuscript received generally favorable reviews, but the Associate Editor requested several revisions. Revisions were made and the manuscript resubmitted for a second time.

Tuckahoe WMA Waterfowl Hunter Survey, 2018-20

Tuckahoe WMA has 6 impoundments totaling 941 acres which were built in the 1940s and refurbished through a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant administered by Ducks Unlimited in 2017. The objective of the refurbishment was to restore the functionality of water control structures to manage water levels for waterfowl and to enhance hunting opportunity. We conducted an opinion survey with the objective to examine the demographics, success, satisfaction, and gauge hunter support for a potential regulation change of the area to a controlled hunting area.

151 surveys were conducted during the 2018-20 duck seasons. 79% of respondents were residents (21% nonresident). 66% of hunters were satisfied with the number of other hunters they encountered and 37% were “very satisfied” with the number of waterfowl observed. When asked to rate their overall experience (0 = poor to 10 = excellent), most (65%) indicated 8 or higher.

When asked whether they would support a hunt plan that would limit entry to enhance the quality of the hunting experience on Tuckahoe WMA (i.e. close gates and adopt a lottery system), opinions from resident hunters were predominantly opposed, although many (16%) were unsure. 48% of residents opposed the hunt program while 36% were in support. There was much less (8% support) support in 2020 (during COVID19) for a managed hunt program than in 2018 (32% support) and 2019 (43% support). When considering support for the program, managers need to consider this survey only reached hunters who were successful in obtaining a hunting spot. It may be logical to assume that hunters who left on a given day due to a perception that the area was overcrowded might be more likely to support a managed hunting program.

Atlantic Brant Ecology Study (2BRANTXX)

Staff continued to collect geolocators and transmitters from brant shot by hunters. Data from geolocators was downloaded and devices with suitable remaining life will be redeployed.

Program biologists prepared GSM backpack transmitters, new geolocators, tarsal bands, leg bands, and other materials for the marking phase of this study. The first brant were trapped on 25 January and 6 1-year old transmitters recovered from hunters were redeployed on new birds.

The Atlantic Brant Ecology Study page was updated.

T. Nichols met virtually with several study partners including a new potential partner, Dr. Chris Williams at the University of Delaware, to explore adding an Atlantic brant energetics component to this study. The GSM devices collect extensive activity data which could be a component of a brant energetics model. Dr. Williams will develop a proposal.

Atlantic Brant Study YouTube Second Video

Atlantic brant winter primarily along the coast of New Jersey and Long Island, New York. During the spring, they migrate about 2,000 miles to breed in the eastern Canadian Arctic. The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and Canadian Wildlife Service are working on a multi-year, collaborative Atlantic brant migration and breeding ecology study. This study has multiple objectives which will guide Atlantic brant conservation on the wintering, staging and breeding grounds. This second video depicts the 2020 spring migration, breeding, and fall migration maps for study birds, as well as an up-close migration chronology from spring through fall for one individual bird that visits the Statue of Liberty.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWfQsmm32oI&feature=youtu.be>

Other

2021-22 Hunting Season Dates

T. Nichols scheduled a meeting with the Migratory Bird Season Setting Committee, drafted an agenda and season dates for deliberation.

WILDLIFE SERVICES SECTION

Anthony McBride, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

Mike Madonia, Principal Wildlife Biologist

Joe Burke, Wildlife Technician I

Amy DeCheser, Wildlife Technician I

Emilia Topp, Wildlife Technician II

Michael Patrick, Wildlife Technician II

Peter Stark, Wildlife Worker

Bear Control: Lethal and Non-Lethal

The black bear unit received a total of 9 bear calls from January 1, 2021 to January 21, 2021; this compares with 4 calls from the same time period in 2020.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 1 Category II calls, and 8 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2021 to January 21, 2021; this compares to 0 Category I calls, 1 Category II calls, and 3 Category III calls for the same time period in 2020.

As of January 21, 2021, the total number of calls received by the Division increased 125.0 percent from the same time period in 2020. Category I and Cat II incidents had zero percent change difference while Category III calls increased 166.6 percent in comparison from 2020. This data does not include 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 will set traps for Category 1 behavior.

Cooperative Research

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

White-tailed Deer Calls and Complaints

A. DeCheser immobilized and euthanized an injured deer in Chatham, Morris County.

J. Hinton with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services immobilized a deer with a plastic flowerpot stuck on a rear leg. The flowerpot was removed and the deer was released at the capture site.

Coyote Calls and Complaints

A. McBride spoke with the Chief of Police for Harvey Cedars on Long Beach Island in Ocean County and provided information on coyotes, including natural history and damage control.

Other Activities

Unit employees continued matching beaver complaint sites with 2020-21 beaver trapping season permit holders. In addition, 10 special site specific permits were issued during the current reporting period.

Wildlife Nuisance Complaints/ Technical Guidance (Federal Aid Project)

BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SPECIES

Bat	1	Goose	2
Bear	9	Raccoon	5
Beaver	26	Squirrel	2
Bird	5	Swan	1
Coyote	19	Turkey	4
Deer	42	Vulture	2
Duck	1	Woodchuck	1
Fox	13		

124 calls for the Federal Aid Project.

Total calls: 133 (*black bear calls are not included in this project)

Wild Turkey Research Project (Federal Aid Project W-68-R-16)

A. McBride and J. Sloan attended the NWTF State Chapter board meeting as technical representatives.

A. McBride attended a meeting to begin the process of Hunting Digest simplification.