

Butterflies, Bobcats and the Summer of CHANJ

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Whether small like a salamander or big and wide roaming like a bear, wildlife need to be able to move through the landscape to find food, shelter, mates, and other resources. NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) project aims to make our fragmented landscape friendlier to wildlife movement so that healthy populations can persist long into the future. It's a daunting task - we're glad you're here.

[It's a Summer of CHANJ!](#)

We've made big progress in the five years since CHANJ launched, but the heat is on to protect critical pieces of NJ's habitat connectivity puzzle. Over the past decade, roughly 70 square kilometers (more than 17,000 acres) of land within CHANJ-mapped habitat cores and corridors became urbanized. Land within habitat corridors is being developed at more than four times the rate within cores, causing more isolation between habitats and a higher degree of difficulty for wildlife trying to get around.



Central New Jersey is especially tough for connectivity. This snippet from our CHANJ mapping shows core habitats (green) in the Sourland Mountain region and the few remaining strands of natural land that serve as corridors (tan/brown) for wildlife to move through. Besides being narrow, these corridors intersect numerous roadways – more hurdles to cross.

CHANJ Featured Species – Part I

For the state endangered Bobcat, habitat fragmentation and roads are NJ's main barriers to recovery. Even though there's suitable habitat in different parts of the state, our Bobcat population is mainly "stuck" in the northwest reaches, with a few confirmed sightings in central NJ just recently. Bobcats need a large home range, and young cats may travel far across unfamiliar terrain to find their own territories. Because they're naïve to road hazards, more than 70% of road-killed Bobcats in NJ are less than 2 years old. Our Endangered and Nongame Species Program gleans a lot of information from road-killed individuals. ENSP's detection dog, Fly, is also one of our best 'tools' to collect Bobcat DNA (via scat) and better understand the population.



The Black Swallowtail – NJ's state butterfly – is a more common and widespread example of a species that also depends on habitat connectivity. Despite having wings to flutter over less suitable landscapes, having a connected network of meadows and other early-successional habitats with food plants and nectar resources (flowers) is key to the movement, distribution and overall success of this species. Black Swallowtail caterpillars feed on plants in the carrot family, like Golden Alexander, dill, and parsley, so they're easy to provide for in a backyard garden!



As the [Summer of CHANJ](#) rolls on, we'll share more project updates, tips and tools to support habitat connectivity for NJ's wildlife. Thanks for tuning in!

[Learn more about CHANJ](#)

How well are animals getting around the Garden State? Read about our gene flow analysis in [Wild Mammal Vs. the Metropolis](#) (January 2023).

[Report wildlife sightings](#) to NJDEP Fish & Wildlife



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