

Endangered and Nongame Species Program
Monthly Report for 16 October – 15 November 2023

Staff:

Kathy Clark, Supervising Zoologist (Chief)
Christina “Kashi” Davis, Principal Zoologist
Gretchen Fowles, GIS Specialist
MacKenzie Hall, Environmental Specialist II
Emily Heiser, Assistant Biologist
Alex Kisurin, Biologist Trainee/Aquatics
Kim Korth, Biologist Trainee/Planner
Sharon Petzinger, Senior Zoologist
Bill Pitts, Senior Zoologist
Kris Schantz, Principal Zoologist
Robert Somes, Senior Zoologist
Brian Zarate, Principal Zoologist
Robert Criollo, Biotics temp services
Daniel Turcios, Biotics temp services

Administration – K. Clark

K. Clark worked on agency planning and policy issues, and regional actions as part of the Northeast Wildlife Diversity Managers technical committee.

Staff continued to work with Bureau of Information and Education staff on field opportunities for videos and photos for outreach to highlight the NJ Endangered & Nongame Species Conservation Act 50th anniversary. NJFW is featuring stories and species in social media posts and videos this year.

Landscape Project –

Staff are meeting monthly with Office of Information Services on the tasks of revising the Landscape Project mapping.

Technical Guidance & Policy/Planning – all staff

Staff continued to review applications for Scientific Collecting permits, and issue permits and amendments for 2023.

Staff reviewed and commented on DEP land use permit applications, energy project reviews, and internal NHR land projects.

Staff contributed to reviews of DEP draft rules and rule amendments.

Staff continued to work with the Office of Environmental Review on outreach to other DEP Divisions conducting permit and plan reviews (e.g., Site Remediation, Solid Hazardous Waste) to discuss the apparent exclusion of E/T species concerns.

Biotics Database – G. Fowles

Our launch of the NJ Wildlife Tracker web application was picked up by the NJ Office of Innovations this month, from a CHANJ listserv post promoting it. A representative contacted NJFW about sharing

an announcement in their Statewide Update – which comes from the Governor’s Office and reaches more than 1 million people.

Biotics staff completed the 2023 bald eagle nest status map and index for the annual Bald Eagle Report in collaboration with K. Clark and L. Smith.

Tri-colored bat data from the Biotics database was shared with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the purpose of developing a range-wide determination key for the species.

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

G. Fowles led the bi-monthly Roads & Wildlife Working Group meeting (Oct 19), which was attended by 19 members from NJDEP, NJDOT, and USFWS. Main topics included plans to camera-monitor for wildlife passage at stream crossings under NJ highways, ideas for incorporating CHANJ with DOT’s climate change plan, the recent training of six DOT staff in NAACC culvert assessment methods, and an update on bridge-bat inspection efforts and findings.

NJDEP ‘CHANJ Team’ members M. Hall (ENSP), C. Albizati and S. Olivera gave a presentation at the annual NJ Association for Floodplain Management titled, “CHANJ Tools and Flood Hazard Rules: Restoring Wildlife Mobility Across NJ’s Roadways,” with an audience of at least 75 people. The CHANJ banner and handouts were also part of an NJDEP exhibit at the conference. Our CHANJ display and handouts were also used in NJFW’s exhibit at the NJ League of Municipalities conference in November.

NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette and Chief of Staff Jane Rosenblatt joined several NJFW staff – including upper management, the CHANJ Team, and Information & Education staff – on a visit to two road-wildlife mitigation project sites in central NJ. Discussions centered on habitat connectivity and climate resiliency, the effectiveness of NJ’s Flood Hazard Area Control Act rules in advancing road-wildlife permeability, funding challenges and opportunities for proactive mitigation projects, and ideas for press/outreach highlighting our successes.

M. Hall gave a presentation at the Nov 15 Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee with updates about the Waterloo Road amphibian crossing project, which is in the final design stage and progressing through various required permits, permissions, agreements and decisions.

Habitat Conservation Management on Public Lands – All staff

No new report.

Species Status Review – K. Clark

D. Jenkins and M. Monteschio continued working on a rule amendment to revise the lists of endangered and nongame wildlife.

K. Clark helped prepare a presentation given by S. Collenburg (BFF) reviewing the freshwater fish that are proposed to be added to the list of endangered species and the list of nongame wildlife. This was presented to the Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee at their 11/15 meeting.

State Wildlife Action Plan – K. Korth

K. Korth, along with ENSP staff, tested the process to prioritize statewide threats. The SWAP Technical Advisory Group (TAG), participated in the testing process and finalized the prioritization

process at an all-day meeting at CRO. K. Korth is working with FW bureau staff and TAG to compile the list of technical stakeholders to participate in prioritizing statewide threats via a survey.

The SGCN list was approved by the TAG and K. Korth is working with D. Rizio (I&E) to get it out for public comment.

K. Korth, K. Schantz, and K. Clark met with Natural Heritage Program staff to discuss adding plants to the SWAP. We provided guidance to NHP staff on the requirements and deadlines they will need to meet for inclusion in the 2025 revision.

A bid request for a contractor to build a database based on the database planning report was sent to three qualified contractors.

HERPTILES

Snake Fungal Disease – K. Schantz

No new report.

Snakes – K. Schantz

No new report.

SGCN Turtles – B. Zarate and B. Pitts

B. Zarate continued to participate in monthly regional coordination calls for bog and wood turtle. Seasonal staff is in the process of conducting standardized wood turtle surveys at target sites, which this fall just includes one transect.

Eastern Tiger Salamander – B. Pitts

Tiger Salamander Northeast Working Group participants reviewed and discussed the Virginia translocation project proposal, the goal of which is to establish populations on preserved lands to supplement recently discovered populations on private land.

Diamondback Terrapins - B. Zarate

ENSP has started a cooperative project with DEP Division of Science and Research to analyze statewide terrapin data, primarily collected by permitted partner groups and volunteers. Outreach has been made to external data holders and analyses with these data sets should begin early next calendar year.

B. Zarate led a statewide terrapin partners meeting on October 27 in Stafford Township.

MAMMALS

Bobcat Project – G. Fowles

One bobcat was struck and killed by a vehicle during the reporting period. The carcass was recovered and samples taken.

G. Fowles met with DOT and the University of Delaware to discuss a new collaborative research project analyzing bobcat habitat connectivity in NJ via cameras under 4 major highways.

Bat Conservation – M. Hall

M. Hall participated in a USFWS learning series webinar about incorporating bats into State Wildlife Action Plans.

With help from the Biotics Team, ENSP provided our program's current Tricolored bat data to the USFWS for use in range-wide consultation products, should the species become federally listed.

M. Hall met with staff of the NJ Forest Service and Forest Fire Service about undertaking a bat Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Once written and approved by the USFWS, the HCP will formalize bat conservation management zones across NJ and establish minimization and mitigation measures for listed bat species related to forestry activities like timber harvest and prescribed burning.

Our first bat hibernaculum visit of the winter was done in early November to deploy climate loggers (to document temperature and humidity conditions through the winter) and enable NJFW's Information & Education staff (J. Carlucci) to gather images for an upcoming video highlighting the 50th anniversary of NJ's ENSCA.

M. Hall had a visit to Petty's Island with staff of NJ Natural Land Trust, to plan a first effort at acoustic bat surveillance on the island next spring. We are particularly interested in learning about migratory bats' use of the island in spring & fall, and bat residency during the summer months.

Allegheny Woodrat – G. Fowles

G. Fowles, A. Bunker, B. Quade, and J. Martinez joined biologists with EcolSciences to conduct a short camera study at a historic Allegheny woodrat site at Picatinny. An array of 8 cameras were deployed across a large talus slope. Raccoon scats were also collected for roundworm analysis. EcolSciences is being funded by a grant from Picatinny Arsenal for the work, which also includes a vegetation assessment around the talus slope.

BIRDS

Colonial Waterbirds – C. Davis

C. Davis compiled data from the 2023 wading bird aerial survey. Adult numbers were down compared to surveys in 2021 and 2019, but as this is a snapshot survey, it is difficult to obtain population estimates that are reliable and comparable year to year. To better home in on 2023 numbers, staff and contractors completed three surveys over a two-week period (versus the standard one survey per season). The results did not appear to lead to better estimates, but more analysis is needed. The number of colonies again declined. As this is more a presence/absence portion of the survey, there is more confidence that the decrease of number of active colonies reported over the last few decades is a true decline, which is obviously cause for concern.

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

The annual Beach-Nesting Bird Summary report and the Piping Plover report was finalized and distributed to partners and stakeholders across the range.

A total of 118 pairs of Piping Plovers nested in New Jersey in 2023 and produced 0.53 fledglings/pair, the second lowest productivity record in New Jersey since intensive monitoring began in 1987. Black Skimmer population numbers remain similar to years past and had a moderate year of success in terms of productivity. Least Tern population numbers remain similar to years past but had another low year in terms of productivity. American Oystercatcher pairs nested at a higher rate than last year but suffered low productivity as well.

Various novel approaches to predation management were attempted this year in partnership with USDA-APHIS.

E. Heiser attended the American Oystercatcher Working Group meeting in Plymouth, MA to present work done in New Jersey in 2023.

More information regarding the 2023 nesting season and other items of interest can be found on the Beach-Nesting Bird project page on the website. C. Davis and E. Heiser will host the annual statewide meeting for beach-nesting birds in mid-December.

Bald Eagle Monitoring - K. Clark

Staff worked together to review the 2023 nesting data for updates to Biotics and to create data and maps for the 2023 annual report.

Staff documented and took possession of several deceased eagles found across the state or died while in rehab care. Dr. E. Miller has been conducting the necropsies to document cause of death.

Peregrine Falcon Monitoring – K. Clark

No new report.

American Kestrel – B. Pitts

B. Pitts attended the second American Kestrel workshop hypothesis scoring virtual meeting. Participants reviewed preliminary scores for initial workshop hypotheses for Kestrel decline across North America with the goal of prioritizing the hypotheses with the highest relevance and greatest potential for reducing threats to Kestrels. Threats include intensive agricultural practices, competition, predation, and determining factors specifically focused on post-fledging survival.

Osprey Monitoring – K. Clark

No new report.

Other Raptors – K. Clark

Volunteers and cooperators checked Barn Owl nest boxes for evidence of late summer-fall nesting in Cumberland County.

Migratory Shorebirds – B. Pitts

No new report.

Secretive Marsh Birds – C. Davis and E. Heiser

C. Davis has begun compiling data from the 2023 season for Black Rail. Acoustic recording units were deployed in four previously known occurrence areas for Black Rail and analysis is on-going. A call-playback survey was not conducted, as a seasonal worker could not be located for this task (speaking to the difficult nature of attracting qualified seasonal staff when NJFW cannot offer seasonal housing in the extremely expensive Atlantic coast portion of the state).

No new report for Saltmarsh Sparrow.

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

Nothing to report.

Regional & National Bird Coordination – S. Petzinger

No new report.

INVERTEBRATES & AQUATICS

Butterflies, Dragonflies and other Insect Species – R. Somes

R. Somes attended the Newark Entomological Society annual meeting

Pollinators – R. Somes

R. Somes met with Woodbridge Township to plan several pollinator conservation projects within the municipality.

Freshwater Mussels – R. Somes, A. Kisurin

R. Somes gave a presentation on Freshwater Mussel Conservation to the NJ Statewide Dam Removal Partnership.

R. Somes and A. Kisurin participated in the Brook Floater Conservation Working Group meeting.

R. Somes participated in the USGS/AFWA Science Vision for Native Freshwater Mussel Research in the United States Webinar

R. Somes and A. Kisurin met with USFWS staff to plan mussel conservation projects and surveys for the 2024 field season.

Crayfish – A. Kisurin

Nothing to Report.

eDNA Technology – A. Kisurin

Nothing to Report.