

September/October 2004

Connecticut Wildlife

PUBLISHED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION





From the Director

As our family traveled across northern New Hampshire and Maine this summer, we passed a seemingly uncountable multitude of "moose alert" signs. The wording varied: "Brake for moose: it could save your life," "Thousands of collisions," etc. But the message was pretty clear – hit an 800-pound animal with your vehicle and bad things happen.

In the Great Northwoods, the benefits of a large moose population may exceed its danger. Moose-based tourism, including viewing and hunting, is booming. The fact that most moose occur in regions of sparse human population and low road density certainly improves the level of compatibility. Yet, the growing number of moose/vehicle collisions in northern New England now exceeds 1,000 per year. Several people die as a result each year and this is a serious cause for concern.

Connecticut's moose population is small, but growing quickly due to resident reproduction and a steady stream of immigrants from Massachusetts. The Great Northwoods has the luxury of open space – lots of it. We don't. Certainly, Connecticut has forested land that could provide trouble-free habitat for moose that establish permanent home ranges. However, dispersing and wandering moose present a serious problem in a small state with a dense network of high-speed, heavily traveled roads.

The moose episode we experienced this past July was a portent. In just over a month, an adult female traveled more than 150 miles until it was darted by wildlife biologist Howard Kilpatrick in Old Lyme, less than half a mile from Route 1 and Interstate 95. The further this animal traveled into Connecticut, the greater the threat it posed to the public. Due to a combination of good fortune and perseverance by a well-trained DEP staff, we were able to tranquilize and move this moose successfully. However, had the moose been unapproachable, we were prepared to take lethal measures due to the animal's location and the high probability that a vehicle collision was imminent.

The time to evaluate options to address a growing moose population is now, while the population is relatively small. The high cost, high degree of difficulty, and questionable effectiveness of instate relocations virtually eliminate this option as a practical response to wandering moose. While we can be thrilled that this symbol of the wilderness has expanded its range into our state, we must also recognize the challenges of maintaining a species while balancing risk. The department does not have the resources to repeatedly mobilize staff to locate, tranquilize, and move, or destroy, every moose that wanders "out of bounds." There will be no easy answers.

Dale W. May

Cover:

An osprey perches on a nest platform in a Connecticut tidal marsh as the sun burns through the early morning fog.

Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco

Connecticut Wildlife

Published bimonthly by
State of Connecticut
Department of Environmental Protection

www.dep.state.ct.us

Arthur J. Rocque, Jr. Commissioner
 David K. Leff Deputy Commissioner
 Edward C. Parker Chief, Bureau of Natural Resources

Wildlife Division

79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127 (860-424-3011)

Dale May Director
 Greg Chasko Assistant Director (Assessment)
 Mark Clavette Recreation Management
 Laurie Fortin Wildlife Technician
 Brenda Marquez Secretary
 Shana Shafer Office Assistant
 Chris Vann Technical Assistance Biologist

Eastern District Area Headquarters

209 Hebron Road, Marlborough, CT 06447 (860-295-9523)

Ann Kilpatrick Eastern District Biologist
 Paul Rothbart District Supervising Biologist

Franklin W.M.A.

391 Route 32, N. Franklin, CT 06254 (860-642-7239)

Paul Capotosto Wetlands Restoration Biologist
 Mike Gregonis Deer/Turkey Program Biologist
 Min Huang Waterfowl Program Biologist
 Howard Kilpatrick Deer/Turkey Program Biologist
 Heather Overturf Program Assistant
 Winnie Reid Secretary
 Julie Victoria Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist
 Roger Wolfe Mosquito Management Coordinator

Sessions Woods W.M.A.

P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013 (860-675-8130)

Trish Cernik Program Assistant
 Jenny Dickson Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist
 Peter Good Supervising Wildlife Biologist
 Geoffrey Krukar Wildlife Diversity Program Technician
 Dave Kubas CE/FS Coordinator (West)
 Peter Picone Western District Biologist
 Paul Rego Furbearer Program Biologist
 Laura Rogers-Castro Education/Outreach Program
 Jim Warner Field Assistant
 Judy Wilson Private Lands Habitat Biologist

Connecticut Wildlife

Kathy Herz Editor
 Paul Fusco Media Designer/Photographer

Wetlands Habitat & Mosquito Management Crew

51 Mill Road, Madison, CT 06443

Steven Rosa Mosquito Control Specialist
 Daniel Shaw Mosquito Control Specialist



The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program was initiated by sportsmen and conservationists to provide states with funding for wildlife management and research programs, habitat acquisition, wildlife management area development and hunter education programs. Each issue of Connecticut Wildlife contains articles reporting on Wildlife Division projects funded entirely or in part with federal aid monies.



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Massachusetts Moose Wanders into Connecticut

Written by Howard Kilpatrick, Deer/Turkey Program

On June 5, 2004, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife tranquilized a young female moose 30 miles outside of Boston in the town of Clinton. The moose was in a heavily populated area and was relocated near the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border in the town of Winchendon. A radiocollar and ear tags were attached to the moose to allow its movements to be monitored. In late July, about three weeks after its release in Winchendon, the moose was seen just north of the Connecticut border in the town of Monson. Over a 17-day period (June 25–July 11), the moose was observed traveling southward in Connecticut through the towns of Stafford, Coventry, Columbia, Lebanon, Montville, and Old Lyme. From June 5 to July 11, the moose traveled over 100 miles from the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border to Old Lyme, along the southern Connecticut coastline.

The moose appeared to temporarily settle down in a three-square-mile area between Route 1 and I-95. Moose have large home ranges (about 10 square miles) and this moose, in particular, demonstrated a tendency to wander great distances. These facts, coupled with its close proximity to a major highway, resulted in the decision to relocate the moose to a more suitable location. DEP Wildlife Division personnel tracked the moose in a heavily wooded area, looking for the opportunity to tranquilize and relocate it. After five days, residents on Whippoorwill Road contacted the DEP to report that a moose was bedded down in a field behind their houses.

Within one hour, Wildlife Division and Law Enforcement personnel arrived on site, assessed the situation, and prepared an action plan. A Wildlife Division biologist stalked within 20 yards of the moose and fired a tranquilizer dart in its hindquarter. In less than nine minutes, the moose was sedated and found at the bottom of a slope near a large wetland. Over the next hour, an eight-person team from the DEP's Divisions of Wildlife, Law Enforcement, Fisheries, and Parks, carried the 600+-pound moose on a stretcher about 70 yards up hill to an access road. A neighboring Old Lyme resident offered the use of his bucket-loader to transport the moose from the access road

to a horse trailer, which was provided by the Department of Agriculture. Because moose can overheat on hot summer days, the DEP team quickly loaded the moose onto the trailer, cooled it off with water and ice, administered drugs to reverse the effects of the tranquilizer and quickly transported the moose to a large state forest in northwest Connecticut. Within four hours of being tranquilized, the moose was released back into the wild.

While many factors contributed to the successful capture and relocation of this moose (e.g., easy access to the animal, availability of a bucket loader and horse trailer, and the ability to keep the moose from becoming heat stressed), much time (more than 300 man hours) and resources were expended to locate, capture, and relocate it. The cost of capturing and relocating this moose is estimated at \$6,000. In addition, based on what this moose did after being relocated in Massachusetts and past experiences of relocating other problem moose, the likelihood of this moose staying at the release site is extremely low.

If the moose had remained in Old Lyme, adjacent to I-95, it likely would have caused a serious moose-vehicle accident like the one that occurred on I-95 in Westbrook in 1998.

Fortunately, no human fatalities have resulted from the eight moose-vehicle collisions that have occurred in Connecticut in the last decade. However, the public needs to be aware of the significant hazard that moose represent. Motorists are 12.5 times more likely to be killed in a collision with a moose than with a deer. As Connecticut's moose population grows and moose continue to disperse into Connecticut from neighbor-



DEP Wildlife Division biologist Michael Gregonis (left) and DEP Conservation Officer Todd Chemacki prepare to transport an immobilized moose to a more remote location in Connecticut.

ing states, this kind of situation will inevitably become more common unless some type of population management program is initiated. The cost and logistics of addressing these issues will become prohibitive. Recently, Massachusetts proposed a bill that would allow the state to open a moose hunting season as a means of managing the growing moose population. This bill was introduced to reduce the increasing number of moose-vehicle accidents in the state.

Moose Making Tracks in Connecticut

- The first reported moose-vehicle accident in Connecticut occurred in 1995. Since then, eight moose-vehicle accidents have occurred in the state (1995-2004).
- The first problem moose was tranquilized in Connecticut in 1987. Since then, five moose have been tranquilized and relocated.
- The first documentation of a cow moose with calves was reported in 2000 in Hartland. Since 2000, at least 21 calves have been born in five different Connecticut towns (Hartland, Granby, Barkhamsted, Goshen, New Hartford).
- In 1995, the DEP received three sightings of moose from the public. In 2003, the DEP received 34 sightings of moose from the public.

Soaring High

with Ospreys on the Connecticut Coast

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

If Jerry Mersereau had been asked 30 years ago how Connecticut's osprey population was faring, he would have answered that the birds were headed for extinction. Jerry should know. He's been helping to monitor the state's osprey population since it was first noticed in the 1960s that eggs were not hatching and osprey numbers were plummeting. Ask Jerry today how ospreys are doing and he would reply, "better than he ever expected."

The story of the osprey may be familiar to many...how a species headed for extinction because of human actions has made a remarkable recovery with the help of human hands. Jerry Mersereau is one of those many "helping hands."

Jerry has had an avid interest in raptors his whole life. When he was in his late teens, Jerry was invited to visit a raptor banding station in Pennsylvania. From that moment on he was hooked and he eventually took the necessary steps to become a licensed bird bander for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. His "day job" eventually brought him to Connecticut, where he made a name for himself in the birding circles. That is how he came to know the late Roger Tory Peterson, a famous ornithologist, who lived near Great Island in Old Lyme. By the late 1950s, Peterson, among others, had become concerned about the devastating decline in raptor numbers. He had noticed that fewer osprey pairs were nesting at Great Island—once a hotspot for ospreys—and no young were fledging from those few nests. He asked Jerry and his birding associates to try to find out why no young were fledging.

So, Jerry and members of a study team began observing and inspecting osprey nests at Great Island. What they found was that most of the eggs were cracked and broken. Not knowing what was causing the broken eggs, the study team decided to watch the nests more closely. They wanted to determine if crows or gulls were coming to the nests and damaging eggs while the adult ospreys were away fishing or getting nesting material. It was important to confirm or eliminate these birds as a source of the problem. To help with closer observations, the team constructed a blind on the mainland, next to the boat launch ramp, and towed it to Great Island behind their small boat. The blind had long legs so that observers would be above the top of the nests. By having the blind already built, it could be set up in about 45 minutes near an occupied osprey nest with as little disturbance as possible to the nesting pair. After the blind was set up, two members of the team would go to the blind—one would go inside and the other would walk away. This seemed to fool the ospreys, which did not appear to be bothered by the blind and resumed their nesting activities. The study team observed normal nesting activity and watched the adults at each of the nests turn and incubate the eggs. No other birds were seen coming to the nests. At this point, team members knew that outside disturbance from other birds was not the problem. It had to be something that was not yet understood, but what?

As the story goes, it was eventually discovered that the widespread use of the pesticide DDT caused populations of ospreys and other raptors to plummet. During the 1950s and

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1960s, DDT was used for mosquito control in salt marshes. Absorbed by the invertebrates and, in turn, by fish, on which ospreys depend for food, DDT ultimately caused osprey eggshells to weaken, resulting in nest failures due to cracked eggs. By 1974, only nine active osprey nests were recorded in Connecticut. Fortunately, DDT was banned in the United States in the early 1970s, thus helping osprey populations make a steady recovery in the Northeast.

DDT, however, was not the only cause for the decline in ospreys. Development along Connecticut's shoreline in the mid-1900s resulted in the loss of trees for nest sites. At one point, ospreys resorted to making huge ground nests at places like Great Island. During the 1940s, when this sight was most common, predators like raccoons and house cats were not as much of a threat as they are today. Because of an increase in predators, ospreys continued to adapt by using telephone poles, light stanchions, and channel markers for nest sites. The biggest help came when "helping hands" pitched in to build and erect nesting platforms in suitable habitat along Connecticut's shoreline.

This is where Jerry and dozens of other volunteers come in again. Once the two factors that were hurting ospreys—DDT and the lack of nest sites—were addressed, it needed to be known if ospreys were making a comeback. The DEP Wildlife Division couldn't undertake that effort alone with its small budget and small staff. So volunteers throughout the state stepped up to the plate to help the Division monitor ospreys during the nesting season. For over 35 years, dedicated volunteers have been making note of nest locations, watching for osprey nesting activity, and some (like Jerry Mersereau) have even helped to band the young before they fledge from the nest. The link between past and present osprey volunteers and DEP biologists, starting with Tom Hoehn, then Greg Chasko (currently an assistant director for the Wildlife Division) and now Wildlife Diversity Program biologist Julie Victoria, has been Jerry Mersereau and his continuous devotion to this species. "We owe Jerry many thanks for his time and attentiveness that

have kept the welfare of Connecticut ospreys in focus," said Victoria.

Jerry's efforts to band ospreys provide biologists with important information. The recovery of leg bands lets biologists track where the young birds migrate to, where they eventually have nests of their own (usually in the general area where they were born and raised) and how long they live. According to Jerry, bands from ospreys born in Connecticut have been recovered recently in Ecuador, Paraguay, and Columbia, unfortunately after the birds were shot and killed. Jerry has spent countless hours each summer visiting as many osprey nests as possible to band the young before they are old enough to fledge. In recent years, he has visited between 50 and 60 osprey nests between late May and early July.

On one such day of banding in late June 2004, Jerry was accompanied by his longtime friend and helper, Mike O'Leary, a retired teacher. (Mike has logged in many volunteer hours with the Wildlife Division over the years, helping to band Canada geese, as well as ospreys.) Mike came along to climb the ladder to retrieve ospreys from the nests and then hold them while Jerry attached the leg bands. Greg Decker, a biologist at the Millstone Power Station in Niantic, organized this ambitious day of osprey banding. Joining the group were DEP biologist Julie Victoria, Meg Nieman from the Environmental Management Department of Northeast Utilities, Len Beebe and Steve Neddeau, operators of a bucket truck provided by Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P), and Greg's son Eric. The plan was to check the four active osprey nests at Millstone, as well as several nearby nests on public and private land. The bucket truck generously provided by CL&P was needed to access the osprey platforms that were too high to reach by ladder.

There are nine osprey platforms located throughout the



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The link between volunteers and DEP biologists has been Jerry Mersereau and his continuous dedication to Connecticut's ospreys.



(From left to right) Mike O'Leary, a longtime volunteer, Greg Decker, a biologist at Millstone Power Station, and Greg's son Eric hold three osprey chicks that were banded by Jerry Mersereau.



A silver U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band, that has a unique, identifying number, is attached to the left leg of young ospreys.

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2004 Spring Wild Turkey Season Results

Written by Michael Gregonis, Deer/Turkey Program

Connecticut spring wild turkey hunters reported harvesting 2,081 birds in 2004. The challenge of harvesting a wild turkey has lured both residents and nonresidents to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in our state. Connecticut turkeys were harvested by hunters from North Carolina, Montana, California, Utah and all the New England states, as well as Canada.

The 2004 spring wild turkey season harvest decreased by 12 percent from 2003's harvest of 2,367. Of the 7,330 turkey hunters with permits, 1,375 hunters harvested at least one bird. A

total of 547 hunters harvested multiple birds: 388 hunters harvested two birds and 159 hunters harvested three birds. Statewide hunter success rate was 19 percent.

At least one turkey was harvested from state or private land in 152 of Connecticut's 169 towns, with Lebanon reporting the highest harvest at 69 birds, followed by Sharon (50) and Redding (46). State land turkey hunters reported the highest harvest in Cockaponset State Forest (32) and Naugatuck State Forest (17). Highest harvest levels were consistent with areas of the state which contain the best

quality turkey habitat. Private land hunters accounted for 88 percent (1,827) of the total harvest and 77 percent (5,629) of the permits issued. Total reported spring harvest consisted of 653 jakes, 1,420 toms, and eight bearded hens.

In general, the highest harvest occurs on opening day and the Saturdays of the season. The 2004 spring season was no exception as 18 percent (368) of the total harvest occurred on the first day of the season and 26 percent (551) occurred on the four Saturdays during the season. This is to be expected as the majority of hunters have time off and are able to enjoy recreational activities on these days. Although the majority of turkeys are harvested during the early portion of the season, a significant number of birds are still available throughout the entire season. The last three days of the 2004 spring season accounted for 10 percent (212) of the total harvest.

In an effort to provide a quality turkey hunting experience for Connecticut's junior hunters (age 12 to 15), the second youth wild turkey hunting day took place on Saturday, May 1, 2004. Junior hunters harvested 35 wild turkeys, which was an increase of 22 birds over last year. The youth turkey hunting day was well received as participants and mentors had many positive comments on the 2004 spring turkey hunter surveys. As more people become aware of this opportunity, the youth turkey hunting day is expected to become more popular in the future.

P. J. FUSCO



2003-2004 CWD Testing Nearing Completion

Written by Andrew M. LaBonte, Wildlife Technician, University of Connecticut, Wildlife Conservation Research Center

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a neurological disease (brain and nervous system) that affects deer and elk and belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE). This disease attacks the brain of infected animals and produces small lesions that eventually result in death. While CWD is similar to other TSE diseases, such as mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, there is no known relationship between CWD and any other TSE of animals or people (see the September/ October 2002 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* for details).

In 2003, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts developed a regional "Southern New England CWD Surveillance Plan." The plan was initiated to determine the

presence and distribution of CWD in southern New England. The DEP Wildlife Division initiated the study in Connecticut with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The objective of the study was to document the presence or absence of CWD in free-ranging white-tailed deer throughout the state by collecting a random sample deer.

During the early archery hunting season (September 15–November 15, 2003), about 118 deer heads were collected from butcher shops throughout the state. During the firearms and muzzleloader seasons (November 15–December 31), about 100 heads were collected by DEP staff at state-operated deer check stations. An additional

20 heads were collected from vehicle-killed deer picked up by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, town garages, and public works departments. An additional five samples were collected from crop damage permit hunters during the spring and summer of 2004. Of the 233 samples tested, all were negative for CWD. Samples were collected from 92 towns throughout Connecticut. All tests from Massachusetts and Rhode Island also were negative.

In addition to sampling, the DEP tested four deer displaying some symptoms consistent with CWD (emaciation, abnormal behavior, excessive salivation), all of which tested negative. Nearly all animals showing symptoms of CWD were injured, likely by motor vehicles and were emaciated or in poor condition. To inform the public about CWD, the DEP is developing a brochure that is expected to be available soon.

In 2004, about 300 samples will be collected from areas with high deer densities (deer management zone 11) and tested for CWD. Anyone interested in donating deer heads from **zone 11** for testing this coming season should contact the Wildlife Division's Franklin office. Zone 11 includes

the towns of Bethel, Bridgeport, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, New Fairfield, Newtown, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Shelton, Sherman, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Weston, Westport, and Wilton.

All heads should be kept in a cool place or refrigerated until pick up can be arranged. Anyone observing deer displaying symptoms associated with CWD should contact DEP Emergency Dispatch (860-424-3333), the Franklin Wildlife office (860-642-7239) or the Sessions Woods office (860-675-8130). Those interested in finding out more about CWD should log onto the DEP's website www.dep.state.ct.us or the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance website www.cwd-info.org.

The DEP would like to acknowledge all participating hunters, processing facilities (Hiller Brothers, Litchfield Locker, Lebanon Green Market, Large Game Company, Maurice's Slaughter House, Salem Prime Cuts), and all local and state police and highway departments for their time and cooperation in assisting with the project.

Keeping Track of Collared Geese

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

In late June and early July, the DEP Wildlife Division continued field work associated with a four-year study to assess the growing resident Canada goose population in the state. One aspect of the current project involves the assessment of movement patterns and survival rates of Connecticut's resident geese. To acquire this information, geese are captured throughout the state and then fitted with individually coded plastic neck collars and metal leg bands. These fixtures cause no harm to the birds, and allow biologists to assess movement patterns, survival rates, and population size.

During this past field season, DEP staff and numerous volunteers captured 1,857 geese at 43 different sites throughout the state. A total of 500 yellow neck collars were placed on geese, with approximately 60 birds in each of the eight counties receiving collars. Geese were caught during the annual flightless period. Canada geese, like all waterfowl, undergo an annual wing feather molt when they shed all their flight feathers. During the period of feather regrowth, which lasts approximately four weeks, the birds cannot fly. Geese were corralled into a portable net and then aged, sexed, and fitted with collars and legbands. Subsequent sightings of these collared

birds will provide valuable information on movement patterns.

One important piece of information that is being gained from monitoring collared geese is that a percentage of the juvenile and a smaller percentage of adult resident geese undergo a "molt migration" to Canada. Over the past two years, the Wildlife Division has received over 20 reports of collared geese in Canada during the annual molting period. These birds migrate out of Connecticut in early June, molt in Canada, and then return to the state in September and October. Biologists have known that geese undergo these "molt migrations" for some time. The frequency and cause of these movements are of great interest. If actions could be taken to force some of the state's resident birds to undergo molt migrations, it may be possible to alleviate many of the goose nuisance issues that occur during summer. Molt migrating resident geese, apart from not being present in the state during summer, are also subject to higher mortality rates, as they experience greater hunting pressure during their journey home.

Sport hunting of resident geese is a prominent tool for managing over-abundant resident goose populations. Connecticut's special resident goose

hunts, which are held in September and in late January through early February, are specifically timed to occur when migrant geese are not present in large numbers. These hunts have been successful in reducing resident goose numbers from rural parts of the state. The Division is investigating innovative ways to target urban birds, such as working with golf courses and water companies to structure goose hunting on their areas and coordinating hazing activities within urban areas to coincide with operational hunting seasons. Placing collars on several geese in certain flocks will assist with the assessment of this latter technique. Ultimately, an overall assessment of the efficacy of sport hunting to reduce goose-human conflicts is paramount in achieving the proper balance between goose numbers and human tolerance.

Anyone seeing Canada geese with yellow neck collars is urged to report sightings to the Wildlife Division's Migratory Bird Program at 860-642-7239 or min.huang@po.state.ct.us. The information needed includes the individual collar codes, number of collared birds present, number of uncollared birds present, the location where seen and the date.

What's All the Rattle About Rattlesnakes?

Written by Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program

The timber rattlesnake is so rare in Connecticut that it is protected as an endangered species. What made this snake rare is the past indiscriminate killing (even bounties in some Connecticut towns), illegal collection, and loss of habitat due to development. Rattlesnakes occur in low numbers along the New York-Massachusetts border and in a small pocket in central Connecticut. One of two venomous snakes found in Connecticut, the timber rattlesnake, with its larger size and venom capacity, can deliver a more severe bite than the northern copperhead, the only other venomous snake in the state.

Rattlesnakes in the News

So why did this species in such jeopardy receive so much media attention this past summer? On July 26, a hiker on the Appalachian Trail (AT) in Connecticut was supposedly bitten by a rattlesnake, treated at Hartford Hospital, and released. The DEP Wildlife Division does not keep records of snakebites and thus was not contacted with the details of this incident. This situation confounded many of the news reporters who called the DEP wanting a quick story.

In the days that followed, Sam Thompson, a volunteer for the Wildlife Division who monitors the timber rattlesnake population, met the hiker on the trail. Sam reports that the hiker was Jim Hailey, a 62-year-old Virginian who was hiking the AT from Georgia to Maine.

On that warm Monday of July 26, Mr. Hailey was walking a stretch of trail in Salisbury that was deeply rutted with high banks on either side. He kicked up a rock and felt something hit the back of his leg. He never saw a snake or heard a snake rattle. There were, however, two puncture wounds that were very painful. Mr. Hailey met another person on the trail who had an extractor kit (that suctions out the venom) and the kit was applied to his wound. He was subsequently taken to Sharon Hospital and flown to Hartford Hospital. He was not treated with antivenin (an agent that neutralizes the venom) and was released that night. Sam reports that when he met Mr. Hailey three days later, there was

no swelling or discoloration around the wound and Mr. Hailey indicated that he did not get sick from the bite. During his hike from Georgia to Connecticut, Mr. Hailey had seen about a dozen rattlesnakes but none in Connecticut, and he planned to continue his hike to Maine.

Rattlesnake Advice

Hank Gruner, of the Science Center of Connecticut, was consulted for information on rattlesnakes and the effectiveness of using “extractors.”

According to Hank, a bite by any venomous snake, including the timber rattlesnake, should be treated as a serious medical emergency. Because of their size and venom yield, timber rattlesnakes are capable of delivering a fatal bite in humans. However, because antivenin is highly effective at treating bites and is readily available in hospitals throughout the eastern United States, fatalities are almost nonexistent. There are several factors that will determine the severity of a particular bite, including the amount of venom injected by the snake (dry bites where little or no venom is injected occur in an estimated 25-30% of bites), the location of the bite on the body, whether the bite occurred on bare skin or through clothing, and the age and overall health of the victim. **The top priority in any case of venomous snakebite is to get the victim to a hospital for observation and treatment.**

Although timber rattlesnakes may be encountered along the AT in eastern New York, northwestern Connecticut, and the Berkshires of Massachusetts from mid-May through September, the chances of being bitten by a rattlesnake are extremely remote. Of the six confirmed rattlesnake bites in Connecticut dating from the 1950s to the present, only one did not involve the individual attempting to handle the snake (this most recent bite). Of these six bites, only two have occurred along the AT. Timber rattlesnakes are large and difficult to miss if they are on the immediate trail. Their non-aggressive disposition also makes it unlikely that an unseen rattlesnake coiled near the trail or in the forest will strike unless seriously provoked.

When hiking in “rattlesnake areas,” you should do the following:

- Be observant. Watch where you place your feet and hands, especially in areas along rock outcrops and where there is thick growth of lowbush huckleberry. Do not place your feet immediately next to or reach under large slabs of rock with open spaces underneath.
- Learn to identify a timber rattlesnake.
- Do not, under any circumstances, attempt to kill or handle a rattlesnake. This is when mistakes occur and most bites take place. If you see a rattlesnake, enjoy this “wilderness observation” and let the snake be.
- Be respectful. If a timber rattlesnake is encountered, back away slowly. Snake vision is designed to detect motion and sudden, fast movement may alert the snake. Timber rattlesnakes do not strike without provocation.

An “extractor” for treating venomous snakebites is a device with a plunger that is placed over the bite. The plunger creates suction to remove venom from the bite area. Upon injection by the fangs, venom is rapidly absorbed into the tissue in the vicinity of the bite. There is debate concerning the effectiveness of applying an extractor device following a venomous snakebite to remove venom from the wound. **However, under no circumstances, should any incision be made at the bite or any other area!**

Several case histories and studies demonstrate the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of using extractors. These cases indicate that severe envenomation and tissue damage can occur despite the use of an extractor. Also, the location of the bite on the body can limit the ability to form a snug seal with the extractor, and the use of extractors may increase the incidence of pools of blood at the bite location. However, several medical websites note that extractors may be useful if applied rapidly.

Questions Remain

While we can never get a definitive story, since the snake or whatever caused Mr. Hailey’s wounds was never seen and identified, several other

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Sessions Woods WMA Grows by 311 Acres

The DEP's Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Burlington grew by 311 acres in July when property purchased for \$475,000 from the New Britain Water Department was added to the 455-acre area. Funds were provided through the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

In 2001, the DEP reviewed the property for potential acquisition. An offer was made to purchase the property in June 2003 and was accepted by the New Britain Water Department. The property is part of a 3,393-acre watershed (Whigville Reservoir System), which is an integral part of the public water supply system. It consists of Class 1 and Class 2 watersheds. Class 1 is essential for water supply protection, while Class 2 is not essential for source protection, but provides additional buffers and protection for Class 1 land. Potential use of the property is restricted to any type of passive recreation that will not have an adverse effect on the public water supply. The types of recreational activities that will be permitted on the new acquisition will be determined by the DEP in the near future and will require Department of Public Health approval.

The new addition to Sessions Woods is a contiguous block bounded by Milford Street (Route 69) in Burlington on the north and east, East Chippen Hill Road on the west and the existing wildlife management area on the south. The extensive roadside frontage includes 4,500 feet on the west side of Route 69 and 5,850 feet on the south and east sides of East Chippen Hill Road. The habitat is primarily forested, with approximately 20 percent wetlands, including feeder streams to Negro Hill Brook, which flows through the Sessions property. An added highlight is the blue-blazed hiking trail, which is part of the Tunxis Trail System, that traverses through the new property and into Sessions Woods WMA.

Sessions Woods is the site of the DEP Wildlife Division's Conservation Education Center. Facilities include an education center with an exhibit area and a large meeting room, as well as interpretive trails, habitat management



P. J. FUSCO

Wildlife viewing has become a popular activity at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington. Observers may catch a glimpse of various bird species, like the yellow warbler.

demonstrations, and a backyard wildlife area. Local residents, as well as visitors from around the state and country, come to Sessions Woods year round to hike the several miles of trails, attend educational programs, and view exhibits. Bowhunting and waterfowl hunting are allowed by permit only during regulated seasons. With the addition of more than 300 acres, there will be an opportunity to expand the recreational and educational benefits of Sessions Woods.

Visitors are reminded to observe the following rules to ensure a safe and enjoyable visit:

- Trails open at sunrise and close at sunset.
- Dogs **must** be on a leash at all times.
- Carry out what you carry in.
- Motorized vehicles, horses, and horseback riding are prohibited. Mountain biking is restricted to graveled trails.
- Bowhunting and waterfowl hunting are by permit only.
- Fires and unauthorized camping are not allowed. Youth group camping at a designated area on the property is available by permit.

- Collecting of plants and wildlife or feeding of wildlife are prohibited.

Sessions Woods is fortunate to have the assistance of an active all-volunteer organization known as the Friends of Sessions Woods. This nonprofit organization has been in existence since 1998 and has supported projects and programs to enhance the value of Sessions Woods. The Friends organization sponsors activities, such as nature walks, bird house workshops, and various hands-on activities, throughout the year. It has also raised money and received grants to help purchase educational materials for visitors and wildlife mounts for exhibits in the conservation education center.

For more information on the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area and Conservation Education Center, as well as the Friends of Sessions Woods, contact the DEP Wildlife Division at P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013, call (860) 675-8130, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM, or visit the DEP's website at www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/geninfo/sessions.htm.

Peeps - The Smallest Sandpipers

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Unit

Members of the shorebird family are some of the most difficult birds to identify. Over 30 species can be found in Connecticut and many are very similar in appearance. Among the most difficult are the five regularly occurring sandpipers, known as “peeps,” which are the smallest members of the shorebird family. Each of these species has brownish plumage above and white on the underside. They have varying amounts of streaking on the breast and/or flanks (lower sides). The bill structures are basically the same, but with subtle and distinguishing differences. All are about the size of a sparrow, and all use the same wetland and mudflat habitats. If this isn’t confusing enough, these birds can be seen in a variety of plumages in the state as they migrate south in late summer and fall, making identification even more difficult.

These peep sandpipers do not breed in Connecticut and are only found here during migration. One, the Baird’s sandpiper, is only found in the state on its southbound trip in late summer or early fall. In fact, late summer migration is when the biggest numbers of peep sandpipers are found in the state. Large flocks, made up mostly of semi-palmated sandpipers, can be seen gathering at certain shoreline locations, waiting for the right conditions of wind and tide before heading to the next stop in a journey that will take them to South America.



Semi-palmated sandpipers are common along the Connecticut shoreline in late summer. At this time of year, adults have a patchy appearance as they molt into their winter plumage.

During spring migration, many shorebirds take the most direct route from South American wintering areas to their Arctic and subarctic breeding grounds by shooting straight up the Great Plains. Most of those that move up the east coast move inland once they get to the Delaware Bay, thus bypassing Connecticut on their way north. Lesser numbers continue up the coastline and pass through our state.

Beginning in July, fall migrants moving south pass through Connecticut in larger numbers than we see in spring. Adults are the first to arrive, some of them still sporting their breeding attire, while others are in full molt between breeding and winter plumage. At this time of year, most adults will have worn breeding plumage, frequently showing tattered feather edges and faded color. The worn feathers are gradually replaced by new winter plumage, so the “in-between” molt can look very messy. By mid-August, juveniles start arriving in the state and stand in contrast with their freshly grown feathers and crisp appearance. Their new plumage is brightly colored with rich brown and rust tones. Making the determination between adult or juvenile can be helpful in correctly identifying these sandpipers.

Because most shorebird species, especially the “peep” sandpipers, appear similar in color and form, using such traits to identify them can be very difficult.



An overall buffy appearance, long wing tips that extend beyond the tip of the tail, a slightly curved bill, and a strong scaly feather pattern on the back are characteristic of a juvenile Baird’s sandpiper.

P.J. FUSCO

All photos show birds in late summer plumage, when adults are typically molting out of breeding plumage and juveniles have crisp new feathers.



P. J. FUSCO (6)

Generally a bit darker than the other small sandpipers, the least sandpiper can be identified by its yellowish legs. Juveniles (left) have neatly patterned plumage with bright rufous coloring on the back, compared to the duller brown and patchy molting plumage of an adult (right). The bill is slightly downcurved toward the tip.



Western sandpipers are paler in comparison than the other peeps, especially around the head and neck. Note the more distinctive whitish eyebrow stripe. They also have a long, slightly curved bill that has a fine tip. Here, a molting summer adult (left) is compared to a juvenile (right) with fresh plumage. Note the rufous-tipped scapular (shoulder) feathers of the juvenile.



A juvenile semi-palmated sandpiper shows a beautiful, fresh feather pattern. A close look at the bill reveals it to be rather short and stout, with a blunt tip.



White-rumped sandpipers (adult shown) are grayish overall, with heavy streaking that extends into the flanks. Note the long wing tips that extend beyond the tip of the tail.

Semi-palmated Sandpiper

Sometimes seen in large flocks in Connecticut during late summer, the semi-palmated sandpiper is our most common

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Prepare for the 2004-2005 Hunting Season

P. J. FUSCO



Connecticut's deer population is healthy and harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2004 deer hunting season.

White-tailed Deer Season

Connecticut's deer population is healthy and harvest rates are expected to be high during the 2004 deer hunting season. The size of the deer herd, the abundance of acorns, and weather conditions during the hunting season are variables that will influence hunter success. For example, snowcover late during the shotgun and muzzleloader seasons increased the 2003 harvest rates.

Since 1995, a replacement antlerless tag system has been used to increase the harvest of antlerless deer in specific areas of the state where deer populations are growing. During the 2004 season, hunters who harvest an antlerless deer on private land and have permission to hunt on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12 (see the 2004 Connecticut Hunting and Trapping Guide) will be eligible to obtain a free replacement antlerless tag. In 2004, replacement tags will be available for use during the shotgun/rifle, archery, and muzzleloader hunting seasons. A limited number of replacement antlerless tags will be available at designated vendor

locations on a first-come, first-serve basis. Bowhunters who harvest a deer are still required to submit a kill report card at the vendor location where the replacement tag is obtained. The replacement tag program has resulted in an increased harvest of female deer in southwestern Connecticut and in many Connecticut shoreline towns.

Hunters are reminded that bowhunting is permitted during the shotgun/rifle hunting season only in designated deer bowhunting areas and on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12 only. On private land in zones 11 and 12, bowhunters can also hunt deer during January.

2004 will be the sixth consecutive year that the antlerless only deer tag on private land shotgun/rifle and muzzleloader permits will NOT be valid in deer management zone 4A. Antlerless tags will be valid in deer management zone 4B.

To increase deer harvest rates in high deer density areas, hunting with the use of bait was allowed in 2003 on private land in deer management zones 11 and 12. This change resulted in a 16.8 percent increase in harvest in zones 11 and 12,

compared to only a 1.4 percent increase in harvest in the remaining portions of the state (zones 1-10). In 2004, hunting with the use of bait will be allowed during the archery, shotgun/rifle, and muzzleloader seasons on private land in zones 11 and 12.

Fall Wild Turkey Season

The 2004 fall turkey season harvest should exceed last year's because this past spring was relatively warm with no extended periods of rain, resulting in limited mortality on nesting hens and good poult survival. Connecticut's wild turkey population continues to remain healthy throughout the state.

This fall, turkey hunters should concentrate their efforts on oak ridges, cut cornfields, and forest openings. Each of these areas contains a food source that turkeys will use during fall. Hunters should scout several locations, prior to the seasons, to find scratchings, feathers, and droppings to determine whether turkeys are present. By scouting several locations, hunters can maximize their efforts and minimize hunter interference.

The fall bowhunting and firearms seasons will be open statewide and start on September 15 and October 16, respectively. During the bowhunting season, the bag limit is two birds of either-sex taken on either state or private land. During the firearms season, the bag limit will be one bird of either-sex on state land or two birds of either-sex on private land.

Waterfowl Season

September Canada Goose Season:

This season will be held in the north zone (portion of the state north of Interstate 95) from September 1-3 and from September 7-30, 2004. The south zone (portion of the state south of Interstate 95) season will run from September 16-30, 2004. The daily bag limit is eight geese.

The September goose season provides the opportunity to harvest resident Canada geese. The growing resident goose population continues to cause substantial nuisance problems. While the September season helps address a growing management need, hunters should recognize that some citizens are not aware of the early season.

The DEP urges hunters to be judicious in selecting hunting sites and to be respectful to others who will be outdoors during this season.

Ducks, Mergansers and Coots:

There are a few changes in the duck season frameworks this year. As in 2003-2004, a 30-day season for canvasbacks will be offered. The daily bag limit for canvasbacks will be one, and the season will run from December 6, 2004, through January 8, 2005, in the north zone and from December 20, 2004, through January 22, 2005, in the south zone. Black duck populations continue to show stability, and one black duck will be allowed during the early season in both zones. One major change is a reduction in the daily bag of sea ducks from seven to five. The daily bag limit for long-tailed (oldsquaw) ducks is reduced from seven to four. Declining numbers of wintering sea ducks and increased hunting pressure on these long-lived species warrants more conservative regulations.

Specific details on waterfowl season dates and bag limits can be found in the 2004-2005 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide available at DEP offices, town clerks' offices and the DEP website, (www.dep.state.ct.us.)

Regular and Late Canada Goose

Seasons: As was the case in 2003-2004, the North Atlantic Population (NAP) hunt zone for Canada geese is split into two zones—the NAP L-Unit, and the NAP H-Unit—based on differences in the proportion of resident to migrant geese between the two areas. These zones were created to exert more harvest pressure on resident geese in areas (primarily southwestern Connecticut) where there have been persistent nuisance problems. The seasons for these two units are identical to last year: a 70-day season with a three-bird daily bag limit in the NAP-L unit and a 60-day season with a two-bird daily bag limit in the NAP-H unit.

The Atlantic Population (AP) of Canada geese continues to recover. Breeding pair estimates were 174,000, above last year's estimate. Production in 2004 looks like it could be low, but a good fall flight of AP breeding geese is forecast. The season will be 45 days, with a three-bird bag limit.

Sportsmen will also have the opportunity to harvest resident Canada geese during the special late season (in the south zone only) from January 15

through February 15, 2005. No special permit is required for this season.

Specific details on the Canada goose season dates and bag limits can be found in the 2004-2005 Migratory Bird Hunting Guide.

Hunters are reminded to please report waterfowl bands. Band returns provide vital information for the continued management of the waterfowl resource. Additionally, the Wildlife Division has begun a four-year resident Canada goose study. Anyone observing yellow neck collars on geese is urged to call 860-642-7239 with the location and individual collar code information (see page 7 for more information).

More Pheasants to Be Stocked this Year

Opening day for most small game hunting will be Saturday, October 16. The DEP will purchase 20,770 adult pheasants for the upcoming fall season, an increase of 3,145 birds from the previous year's purchase. Most stocking areas will receive allotment increases of approximately 18 percent. In addition to adult pheasants, 1,050 eight-week-old pheasants were purchased and delivered to Norwich Fish and Game and Sprague Rod and Gun Clubs for eventual release on permit-required hunting areas.

The Pheasant Program budget continues to be determined by the net revenue collected in the previous year. An increase in the pheasant tag and license fees in 2003 resulted in more than \$30,000 of additional revenue collected from pheasant hunters, which will be used to directly support the stocking program.

A total of 55 areas will be stocked during the 2004 fall season. Stocking will be restored on five of the 20 areas which were discontinued in 2003. A number of lower quality/lower public use areas will not be stocked in an effort to address continuing labor shortages and to increase allocations for the better quality sites. Areas will be stocked two to three times per week for the duration of the seven-week distribution period. Pheasants will be nearly evenly distributed, with one-half of the allocations released in October and one-half during November. All stocking will conclude by Thanksgiving Day.

In an effort to provide opportunities for the weekend hunter, the DEP will continue to use volunteers for Friday evening releases and the stocking of selected areas on variable Saturday mornings. Cooperative sportsmen's clubs that provide public

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Junior Hunter Training Days Scheduled

Regulations adopted in December 2002 established designated days for youth hunting in Connecticut. On these days, licensed junior hunters may hunt when accompanied by a licensed adult hunter 18 years of age or older. The adult mentor may not carry a firearm. These training days provide junior hunters with an opportunity to learn safe and effective hunting practices from experienced hunters.

Pheasant - Saturday, October 9, 2004

Private Lands Only: Licensed junior hunters must have valid pheasant harvest tags. Harvest tags must be used except when hunting as members of a registered private hunting club with a pheasant tagging exemption.

Waterfowl - Saturday, October 9 and Monday, October 11, 2004

Participants must be 15 years of age or younger, possess a valid small game junior hunting license and a HIP permit and be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years of age. Adults must possess a valid hunting license; however, they are not allowed to carry a firearm. Ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots may be hunted. Bag limits and shooting hours are the same as for the regular duck and goose hunting seasons.

Deer - Saturday, November 13, 2004

Private Land: The licensed junior hunter must have a valid private land shotgun/rifle deer permit and written consent from landowner. Adult mentor must have a deer permit and written consent from the landowner. Harvested deer must be brought to a deer check station.

State Land: The licensed junior hunter must have a state land shotgun deer permit for the specific area being hunted. Adult mentor must have a valid deer permit. Harvested deer must be brought to a deer check station.

Just for Kids

Hawk Watching!

On a clear, crisp fall day, look to the sky for a phenomenon not known to most people--the annual fall hawk migration!

Hints to Hawks

There are several different types of hawks in Connecticut. The shape of their wings and tails tells them apart. Buteos have long, wide wings and fan-shaped tails. Accipiters have short wings and long tails. Ospreys have long, narrow wings, which make an "M" shape when soaring. Falcons are related to hawks and have narrow, pointed wings and long tails.



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Hawks can be identified by the shape of their bodies, wings, and tail. The long tail and rounded wings of this sharp-shinned hawk help to identify it.

Hawk Watching Hot Spots!

- Lighthouse Point in New Haven
- Quaker Ridge in Greenwich

Here's to Hawks!

Which hawk....

... is called the "fish hawk?"

...is common almost coast to coast in the United States?

...loves to eat grasshoppers and other insects?

How Do Hawks Hit the Road?

It takes a lot of energy to fly hundreds of miles each fall. But, if you "ride" the thermals, it's easier! Warm air rises, creating "thermal" winds. Hawks ride the thermals by letting air currents bring them up into the sky. Then, the hawks can glide down and head forward. Usually, very little wing flapping is needed and the hawks save energy.

Want to Learn More?

A great book called, "Raptor! A Kid's Guide to Birds of Prey," by Christyna and Rene Laubach and Charles W. G. Smith, will tell you a whole lot more about hawks!

Answers on page 19



Bear Caught in the Act

Photographs sent in by reader Paul Wickersham, from Weatogue, remind us how important it is to “bear proof” if you want to avoid having your bird feeders destroyed by a black bear.



Do you have an interesting wildlife observation to report to the Wildlife Division?

Please send it (and any photos) to:

Wildlife Observations
DEP - Wildlife Division
P.O. Box 1550
Burlington, CT 06013

Email: katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us

(submitted photos will be returned at your request)

This black bear visited Paul’s backyard during the afternoon in late July 2004. After the bear finished the bird seed, it took an hour long nap in the backyard.

Paul did what the Wildlife Division suggests all bird feeding enthusiasts should do, take down the bird feeders. The bear has not been seen since Paul removed the feeders. Bird feeders can be put back up in the fall, but removed by spring to avoid attracting hungry bears as they come out of their winter sleep. To learn more about how to “bear proof,” check out the DEP’s website (www.dep.state.ct.us) or request a bear fact sheet and tip cards from the Sessions Woods office. The Division encourages anyone who observes a black bear to report the sighting on the DEP website or call the Wildlife Division’s Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130.

Six Peregrine Falcon Chicks Fledge

Written by Julie Victoria, Wildlife Diversity Program

The DEP Wildlife Division tracked six pairs of peregrine falcons in 2004. One pair was territorial but did not nest and five pairs were active. Of the five active pairs, three pairs lost their eggs or chicks early, either due to predation or natural causes. The two pairs that had successful nests each produced and fledged three young for a total of six.

The Falconcam located on the Travelers Tower in Hartford was turned on again in conjunction with the Science Center of Connecticut. Amelia laid two eggs but was never able to hatch them. During the incubation period, which is done mostly by the adult female, the male brings food to her several times a day or relieves her and takes a turn on the eggs while she hunts. While the problem was never clearly answered, it is speculated that Amelia either wasn’t fed by the male

or relieved from incubation and had to leave the eggs to feed herself.

The Wildlife Division attempted to band the six chicks from the successful nests, but three were old enough on banding day that they flew away before they could be banded. Aluminum bands were attached to each leg of the other three chicks -- one of the bands was black and green and can easily be read with a spotting scope. Banding provides a way for wildlife managers to trace movements of individual falcons, estimate population changes, and determine lifespans.

All of the active peregrine nests in the state are on private property. The Wildlife Division doesn’t disclose the exact locations of the nests to protect the falcons from disturbance and out of respect for the landowners who do not

want trespassers on their land. The active nests are in Hartford, Middlesex, New Haven, and Fairfield Counties.

The DEP Wildlife Division would like to thank the volunteers that helped with the time-consuming task of peregrine falcon monitoring: Mary Baier, DEP Conservation Officer Bill Meyers, Steve Broker, Tom Nurse, and Mona Ayer.

A Sad Note

On a sad note, the adult male at the active nest in New Haven County was picked up with a broken wing and taken to the Shakespeare Veterinary Hospital in Stratford. The veterinarians pinned the wing but the bird later died of shock. In the future, it is hoped that this specimen can be preserved and used for educational purposes at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center.

Wildlife Holiday Gift Workshop to be held at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center on November 6. Make a bird feeder or nest box for holiday giving and learn about feeding birds. See the Wildlife Calendar on page 19 for more information.

“peep.” Big flocks can be seen gathering on offshore sandbars and sand spits when the tide nears high. The most distinguishing trait is a straight, stout bill of variable length, which is blunt at the tip. In comparison, the closely-related western sandpiper has a longer, tapered bill with a drooped and more finely pointed tip.

Semi-palmated sandpipers are grayer overall than least or western sandpipers. Streaking is absent or minimal on the flanks and in the center of the breast. In their plain gray winter plumage, semi-palmated and western sandpipers are virtually indistinguishable, except by bill characteristics and voice. The semi-palmated’s call is a short “*chit*,” or “*churk*.”

Western Sandpiper

The western sandpiper is abundant in other parts of North America, but is not commonly found in Connecticut. When here, they are frequently seen in small numbers, usually mixed into flocks of semi-palmated sandpipers.

The long bill of the western sandpiper is one of the most apparent field marks. Breeding adults have fine streaking that reaches across the breast and down the flanks. In summer, adults may show more rust on the back, crown, and cheek than the semi-palmated. In juvenile plumage, the western sandpiper is paler, especially around the head and breast, than its close relative, the semi-palmated. The pale “eyebrow” stripe is helpful in identification. The call of the western sandpiper is a high-pitched “*jeet*.”

Least Sandpiper

Very common in Connecticut during migration, the least sandpiper is the smallest of the group. Its topside plumage is darker than the other peeps. It has a thin, slightly downcurved bill, similar to the western sandpiper, but different than the straight bill of the semi-palmated. It is our only peep with yellowish legs. All of the others have black legs. Juvenile least sandpipers have bright rufous tones in their plumage and a buffy wash across the breast. The call is high-pitched “*kreee*.”

White-rumped Sandpiper

White-rumped sandpipers occur regularly in small numbers in Connecticut, more frequently during fall rather than spring migration. Their body structure and size are similar to the Baird’s sandpiper, but grayer overall. The breast is heavily streaked, with the streaking extending into the flanks. The namesake white rump is usually visible only when the bird is in flight and traveling away from the observer.

Both the white-rumped and Baird’s sandpipers are slightly larger than the other peeps and have long wings, the tips of which extend beyond the tail when the birds are standing, giving them an elongated appearance. The white-rump’s call is a very thin, high-pitched “*jeet*,” the tone of which is unlike the other four peeps.

Baird’s Sandpiper

A rare bird in Connecticut, the Baird’s sandpiper occurs in very limited numbers, usually either singly or in small numbers in late summer or early fall. The birds that occur in the state are usually juveniles that have strayed from the main migratory path of the interior part of the continent. These juveniles have a distinctive, scaled appearance to the

edges of the back feathers that is a definitive and obvious field mark. Similar to the white-rumped, the Baird’s sandpiper has a heavily streaked breast. It differs from the former in that the streaking does not extend into the flanks. The call is a low-pitched “*kreeep*.”

Conservation

Each of the “peep” sandpipers has conservation concerns with either poorly understood population status or known population declines. According to the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, published by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, semi-palmated, western, and least sandpipers are all documented to be in long-term population declines. There is insufficient information on the populations of white-rumped and Baird’s sandpipers to make a determination, although it is thought they are declining as well. The major factor in these population declines is loss of habitat, especially along migration paths. Loss of habitat can take many forms, including degradation by encroachment from development and pollution, overuse by humans and pets, as well as the outright destruction of wetlands. Additional pressures on sandpiper populations include predation, food shortages, and severe weather. Abnormally cold and wet weather can have a devastating impact on breeding efforts, as may have happened this year. Biologists and birders have reported extremely low numbers of juvenile shorebirds migrating south this year due to a cold and wet breeding season throughout northern Canada which may have resulted in a widespread failure of nesting efforts.

Migration stopover sites, known as staging areas, are critical to sandpipers, which depend on these locations along their migration route for food and rest. When not resting or preening their flight feathers, these birds feed constantly on small crustaceans, worms, and insects, packing on fat reserves in preparation for the next leg of their journey. Each staging area along the path is a link in the chain that brings them to and from their breeding and wintering areas. Those birds that cannot build up their energy reserves have low survival rates.

Connecticut has a number of significant staging areas for these birds. The Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area (WMA)/Milford Point area at the mouth of the Housatonic River in Milford and the Great Island WMA/ Griswold Point area at the mouth of the Connecticut River in Old Lyme are among the most important stopover areas in the state. Other significant staging areas for sandpipers are the tidal habitats of New Haven Harbor, including Sandy Point in West Haven, and the wetlands in and around Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

Protection and restoration of wetland habitats is critical for the conservation of sandpipers. Many of the habitat management and wetland restoration projects being undertaken by the DEP Wildlife Division will benefit sandpipers, as well as many other species that depend on wetlands.

Many of the state’s critical shoreline habitats, including WMAs, were originally purchased using funds from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program. This money is paid by hunters in the form of a federal excise tax placed on hunting equipment and ammunition. Connecticut’s wildlife management areas are open for use by the general public, including hunters, birders, hikers, photographers, and others.

Ospreys,
continued from page 5

Millstone Power Station property. Six of the platforms have had active nests in recent years, but only four platforms were used in 2004. Two of the nests were accessible by the banding team. After a short hike through a marsh, a ladder was used to reach the first nest. Mike climbed to the nest and handed down two young ospreys to those waiting below. The young stayed fairly calm while they were being held. But, with all of the activity going on at the nest, the adult ospreys took to flying overhead, making alarm calls to alert the chicks. One of the adults flying overhead had a fish in its talons and must have just returned with food for the young.

According to Jerry, a bird is old enough to be banded if the band does not slip over the foot. The two young in the first nest were old enough to be banded and about two weeks



P. J. FUSCO

Ospreys usually lay four eggs but, on average, only two young survive to fledging. According to Jerry Mersereau, it is unusual to find three young in the nest. He was surprised, but pleased, to find three nests with three chicks in one day of banding this past June.

away from flying. Before banding the ospreys, Jerry examined the crops of the birds. A full crop indicates that the young are receiving an adequate amount of food from the adults. The nest was also checked for food scraps and any dead nestlings or unhatched eggs. Each young osprey was fitted, around the left leg, with a silver, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band that has a unique, identifying number. After banding, the birds were returned to the nest and the banding group made a quick exit so that the adults could resume feeding and caring for their young.

Helium Balloons Pose Danger to Ospreys, too

Shortly after I wrote an article for the June/July 2004 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* about how dangerous helium balloons are to wildlife, I saw firsthand how timely that article was. While working on the osprey banding article for this issue, I accompanied the banding team and saw the items, both natural and man-made, that end up in osprey nests. Ospreys are notorious for collecting junk (often our trash) to decorate their nests. Jerry, Mike, and Greg (from the banding team) recalled some of the junk they have found in osprey nests over the years: tiny American flags, ribbon, plastic, paper, rope, mussel shells, fishing line, and popped helium balloons with the string still attached. Obviously, some of these items are deadly. Every year, the Wildlife Division receives reports of young ospreys entangled in fishing line or balloon string that was brought to the nest by the adults. Sometimes these birds can be helped, most times they cannot and end up dying.

Of the 11 nests visited in late June with Jerry, Greg, Wildlife Division biologist Julie Victoria, and the others, balloon string was found and removed from two different nests. Also in June, Julie received a report of an adult osprey so tangled up in balloon string that it couldn't fly. Fortunately, before it could be caught, the osprey was able to untangle itself. Upon checking the nest, a large mass of seaweed and a mylar balloon (that said "Good Luck") was found on the ground underneath.

Helium balloons, discarded fishing line, kite string, and litter all pose a hazard to wildlife. Everyone can make an effort to help wildlife and clean up our natural areas at the same time. DO NOT release helium balloons...remember, it is against Connecticut state law to release 10 or more helium balloons. It is good sense to not release any balloons at all! Tangled fishing line and kite string should be disposed of in a covered trash receptacle. And, of course, don't litter! *Kathy Herz, Editor*

The second accessible nesting platform at Millstone was located in a brushy area near a cliff bordering Long Island Sound. The nest at the top of a tall utility pole contained two large osprey chicks, just about ready to fly. This time the bucket truck was needed to reach the nest and Greg used a special hook to move the birds closer to the bucket so that he could grab them and bring them to the ground.

After all four nests at Millstone were checked and the young ospreys that could be accessed were banded, the group headed out to check several other osprey platforms located on both public and private property in Niantic, Waterford, and Stonington. The first platform visited in Waterford was located along a creek on property owned by Gail and Jim Hamsher. The Hamshers were thrilled to have ospreys nesting on their property as they have a keen interest in wildlife.

continued on next page

Ospreys,
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They are involved with the Purple Martin Society and have participated in COVERTS training sponsored by the University of Connecticut Extension Service. This nest became the first of three nests checked that day that had three healthy osprey chicks. Ospreys usually lay four eggs but, on average, only two young survive to fledging. According to Jerry, it is unusual to find three young in the nest. He was surprised, but pleased, to find three nests with three chicks in this one day of banding.

As the banding group moved along from one nest to the next, it was amazing to see the human interest this activity generated. People driving by one platform located along a roadway stopped to ask questions and get a close look at the birds. Property owners and their neighbors came out to watch the banding activity and all seemed eager to have a chance to see, up close, the ospreys that they have been observing from afar all nesting season. Several of the property owners gave Greg permission to erect platforms on their property and, over the years, all have closely watched the adults and their young throughout the nesting

Jerry and his helpers banded 134 young ospreys in 2004 compared to 109 in 2003. Better weather in 2004 helped enhance the survival of the young ospreys and resulted in better fishing for the adults.

seasons. Some of the osprey platforms were constructed by youth involved with the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center in Mystic. Greg coordinated the project with the nature center and the landowners where platforms were erected.

The response of the adult ospreys was similar at each nest, too. At every nest, the adults circled over, making alarm calls to the young. Some of the adults even carried a fish in their talons. At a few of the nests, the adults were bold enough to dive-bomb the person reaching into the nest and there were a few close calls.

By the end of the long day, 19 ospreys were banded from 11 different nests. In Jerry's opinion, it was a very successful day. As it turns out, the

2004 osprey nesting season was one of the best. Jerry and his helpers banded 134 young ospreys and could have banded about 20 to 30 more, if the birds hadn't been too big and too close to flying. Last year, Jerry banded 109 ospreys and 128 in 2002. The lower number of young banded in 2003 was probably due to the cold and rainy weather experienced that year, which resulted in a poor food supply for the ospreys. It seems that the better weather in 2004 helped enhance the survival of the young ospreys and resulted in better fishing for the adults.

Now that fall is here and the adults and their young have migrated south to warmer locales, Jerry and his team of dedicated volunteers are already looking forward to monitoring osprey platforms for another successful season. Staff members at the Wildlife Division know that the recovery of Connecticut's osprey population was made possible, in part, by the many "helping hands" of the countless and dedicated volunteers who erect platforms and watch them closely. The Division appreciates all of the time and effort expended by these volunteers and the multitude of others who help with other Division projects and programs.

Rattlesnakes,
continued from page 8

questions have been asked repeatedly. Why didn't the snake rattle and warn the hiker of its presence? Timber rattlesnakes shake their tail in a noisy attempt to scare off a potential attacker. They usually rattle upon detecting an unfamiliar presence but they can also remain silent, so as to remain undetected. If timber rattlesnakes don't strike without provocation, how did a hiker who didn't see

one get bit? It is thought that Mr. Hailey was struck by a young snake, which can be quicker to strike if it feels threatened. It is also possible that when Mr. Hailey kicked up a rock on the trail, it was near where the snake was coiled or that he brushed up against the snake and didn't see it.

Sam insists that you can hike the AT in Connecticut and never see a rattlesnake. Rich Viele, a DEP employee who hiked the entire AT several years ago, indicated that he never saw any rattle-

snakes in Connecticut during his hike. In fact, he only saw about six rattlesnakes during the whole trip and they were in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York.

For more information about timber rattlesnakes or to request a color brochure describing the snakes of Connecticut, email julie.victoria@po.state.ct.us

Hunting Season,
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hunting access to permit-required hunting areas will continue to stock state-purchased birds on those areas. The following areas will **not** be stocked during the upcoming 2004 fall season:

Eastern District – Assekong Swamp, Bolton Permit-Required, Mansfield State

Leased (Chaplin section only), Tolland State Leased and Wopowog WMA.

Western District – BHC State Leased, Black Rock Dam, East Swamp Permit-Required, Great Swamp Flood Control, Pequonnock Valley Permit-Required, Pootatuck State Forest, Sunnybrook State Park, Whiting River Flood Control, Wickwire State Leased and Wyantnock State Forest.

A complete listing of all major stocking areas is on the DEP's website. Pheasant tags (\$14 for 10 tags) can be purchased at town halls or at DEP's License and Revenue office, at 79 Elm Street, in Hartford.

Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- Sept. 2004 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices (\$14 for 10 tags).
 Report use of bluebird nest boxes by sending a Bluebird Nest Box Network survey card to the DEP Wildlife Division. Cards are available by calling (860) 675-8130.
 Report use of bat houses to the Wildlife Division. Call (860) 675-8130 for more information.
 Sept. 15-Nov. 16 ... First portion of archery deer and turkey hunting seasons.
 Oct. 16 **Tree Identification Workshop**, starting at 1:30 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Join DEP Forester David Irvin on a walk to identify Connecticut's native trees. Dave will offer a few of a forester's little secrets and pointers in this hands-on workshop and participants will take a leisurely walk during fall foliage season at Sessions Woods. The total hike is less than two miles. Wear appropriate footwear for the woods and come dressed for the weather. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.
 Nov. 6 **Wildlife Holiday Gift Workshop**, from 1:00-3:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. Make a bird feeder or nest box for holiday giving. Buy an outdoors-themed book from the Friends of Sessions Woods Bookstore. Learn about feeding birds through mini-presentations at 1:30 and 2:30 PM. Several activities for upcoming holidays are planned. Call the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 to preregister.

Interested in Becoming a Master Wildlife Conservationist?

The DEP Wildlife Division will be offering its fifth Master Wildlife Conservationist Program series in February 2005. The program is designed to professionally train adult volunteers in the field of wildlife conservation and education. Participants receive 40 hours of classroom and field training by DEP professionals and learn about wildlife conservation, management, ecology, Connecticut-specific wildlife issues, and interpretation. After completing the training, volunteers commit to 40 hours of service in the next year for the Wildlife Division and other environmental organizations. To maintain certification, volunteers also commit to 20 hours of service in subsequent years.

Master Wildlife Conservationists can lead wildlife interpretive walks for the public, present programs at local libraries, conduct presentations at schools, enhance habitat for wildlife, and assist biologists with research.

The training is primarily held in Burlington, Connecticut, at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. Usually, classes meet during the evening but there are three all-day sessions, held either on Fridays or Saturdays. Applications will be mailed to interested individuals in November with a return date of mid-December.

For more information, contact Laura Rogers-Castro at the Wildlife Division at 860-675-8130 or laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us.

Step Up to the Plate for Wildlife...

and show your support by displaying a wildlife license plate on your vehicle.

There are two great designs to choose from: the state-endangered bald eagle or the secretive bobcat.

Funds raised from sales and renewals of the plates will be used for wildlife research and management projects; the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, and management of wildlife habitat; and public outreach that promotes the conservation of Connecticut's wildlife diversity.

Application forms are available at DEP and Department of Motor Vehicle offices and online at www.ct.gov/dmv.



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Osprey, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel

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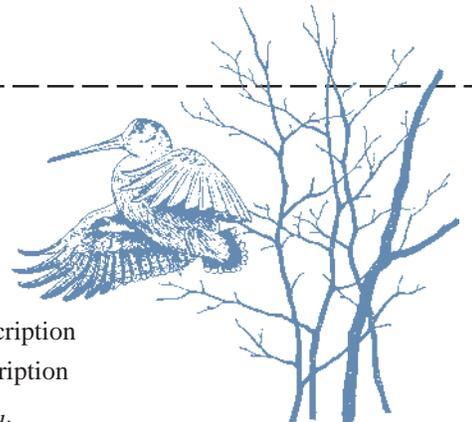
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A flock of semi-palmated sandpipers rises from an offshore sandbar along the Connecticut coast. Offshore sandbars and sand spits are important habitats for migrating shorebirds which depend on these areas for food and rest.

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