

July/August 2004

# Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



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# From the Director

*"Ecosystems are not only more complex than we think, they are more complex than we can think." This is a meaningful quote I committed to memory early in my professional career. Another is Aldo Leopold's advice that "keeping every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering." Both quotes convey the concept that the design of nature exceeds our intellectual capacity, but both also convey that we should be thoughtful in our approach. We must constantly ask "why" if we want to advance our understanding of nature and coexist with it.*

*People who become biologists are typically those who have asked "why" since a young age. For the most part, they deviated from the norm. They were the kids that watched with fascination as the spider built its web. They looked for snakes rather than ran from them. They learned the sounds and signs of animals so they could identify them sight unseen. They learned the scientific method and they earned their degrees. We are blessed to have many fine scientists working here in Connecticut at the DEP, at universities, and with public and private conservation organizations. We also have a treasure of birders, sportsmen, and lay people who have an intimate knowledge of local wildlife. These naturalists are important partners in our efforts to preserve the state's biodiversity.*

*Two hundred years after Lewis and Clark, we are about to embark on our own voyage of discovery right here in Connecticut. Fueled by funds from the Pittman-Robertson Program, State Wildlife Grants, and the new Wildlife Conservation license plate, and guided by the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, we are on the precipice of an unprecedented era of acquiring information about our wildlife resources. This is an exciting time for the biologists at DEP; it's why we are in this profession. If the new funding opportunities materialize, our ability to conduct surveys, restoration, and research will be dramatically increased. We will be that much closer toward attaining the goals of maintaining Connecticut's rarest species and keeping common species common.*

*With ever-increasing development pressures on Connecticut's landscape, we **need** sound biological information to help towns, landowners, and citizens make wise land use decisions. We **need** to conduct research to tell us why some once common species are declining. We **need** to better understand the relationships between habitat quality, quantity, and species abundance. We **need** to monitor the impact of land use changes on natural communities and to monitor the effectiveness of habitat restoration efforts. These needs will be met by framing questions and conducting good scientific work. The answers will guide us in the responsible stewardship of our wildlife resources.*

Dale W. May

## Cover:

*Connecticut's Threatened and Endangered Species List was recently revised, as required every five years. The bobolink is a newcomer to the list as a species of special concern (see page 4).*

*Photo courtesy of Paul J. Fusco*

# Connecticut Wildlife

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# In Search of the Ruffed Grouse

## Your help is needed on a new research project

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

When thinking of native, forest game birds in Connecticut, the wild turkey might be the first one to come to mind. However, we should not forget about the ruffed grouse, a secretive bird that makes its presence known in early spring. Starting in April and into early May, male ruffed grouse advertise their presence and attempt to attract females by “drumming” from atop fallen logs, rocks, stumps, or mounds of soil. The drumming sound is created by the rapid beating of the grouse’s powerful wings.

Ruffed grouse are nonmigratory, spending their entire life in a small area. Local populations tend to fluctuate in abundance, most notably in certain areas where grouse may be plentiful one year and almost nonexistent the next. The reasons for these year to year fluctuations appear to be related to weather conditions and variations in the food supply. For example, grouse populations usually decline after a cold, wet spring due to a low survival rate of newly-hatched young.

When grouse numbers fluctuate, the population usually makes some sort of recovery in other years. The problem in Connecticut is that very little recovery has been seen. Biologists are concerned about the continuous decline in the state’s grouse population and they want to know what the causes may be.

### What’s Causing the Decline?

One cause for the decline is a lack of suitable habitat. Grouse require young forest habitat with a mixture of trees of various ages and forest openings. In other words, they need early successional stage habitat, which has been disappearing in Connecticut. In pre-colonial times, early successional stage habitat was created in mature forests by natural events, such as fires and major storms. In the early 1900s, when the extensive farms were abandoned and replaced by young forests, grouse and other early successional wildlife started to flourish. But,

Connecticut’s landscape has changed, and with the absence of fire and forest management, many of our forests have matured to the point where they are no longer suitable for ruffed grouse. The problem is compounded by the extensive development and fragmentation of habitat in the state. Abandoned farms and forestland are being converted to housing developments, shopping centers, and industry. Fragmented habitats provide little cover or corridors for grouse to move safely between, and many of the birds end up being killed by predators.

### Helping the Ruffed Grouse

Habitat and forest management can help ruffed grouse and the DEP has undertaken projects on state and private lands to enhance early successional stage habitat. Most notably, the Wildlife Division and the Ruffed Grouse Society have a long-standing, cooperative agreement to provide optimum habitat conditions for grouse at Kollar Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Tolland. Management activities at Kollar WMA include firewood cutting and maintaining old

fields. These activities also benefit bluebirds, turkeys, deer, woodcock, and other wildlife.

However, habitat management alone may not help Connecticut’s ruffed grouse population. It is possible that there is more to the decline than just habitat, and that is what a new Wildlife Division research project hopes to discover. The project is in the early stages; however, the goal is to better assess the status of ruffed grouse in the state and try to find ways to help the population grow. As more information becomes available, it will be highlighted in future issues of *Connecticut Wildlife*.

### Report Grouse Observations

In the meantime, the Wildlife Division needs your help by reporting observations of ruffed grouse. Record the date, town, specific location, what was heard, and the actual observation and send the information to Deer/Turkey Program biologist Michael Gregonis at the Division’s Franklin office (391 Route 32, North Franklin, CT 06254; 860-642-7239; send email to [michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us](mailto:michael.gregonis@po.state.ct.us)).



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# Connecticut's Endangered Species List Revised

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

In 1989, the State Legislature passed the Connecticut Endangered Species Act to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance endangered or threatened species and their essential habitats. The Act also enables the DEP Commissioner to request that wildlife and plants of interest be studied so that biologists can have a better understanding of their distribution, population, habitat needs, and limiting factors which help determine conservation and management measures.

One of the first steps in the implementation of the law required the Commissioner to develop lists of endangered, threatened, and special concern species. In 1991, initial lists were developed by DEP staff and groups of experts in various taxonomic fields. The first state Endangered Species List became official in 1992 with the passage of the DEP regulations.

The Endangered Species Act also stipulates that the list be reviewed every five years. The first revision to the list was initiated in 1997, becoming official in 1998. At that time, some new species were added to the list and others were reclassified. For example, both the osprey and fisher were species of special concern on the original list. However, because these two animals have made such remarkable recoveries, they were removed from the list during the first revision.



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Because of a declining breeding population, the status of the horned lark has changed from threatened to endangered in Connecticut.

The second revision to the list occurred during 2003. The most recent recommendations have been approved and include changes for several species of plants and animals.

During the review process, six different Scientific Advisory

Committees examine the status of the species on the list and discuss if any species should be added, removed, or have its status changed. Once the advisory committees finish their review, the DEP Commissioner and the appropriate DEP staff review the recommendations and then formalize changes to the list in a regulation proposal. Public comments on the proposed changes are then solicited and evaluated. After the regulation proposal is approved by the Regulations Review Committee of the State Legislature, it is submitted to the Secretary of the State. The most recent revisions became effective on June 4, 2004.

## Revisions to the List

The status of the common nighthawk, horned lark, and golden-winged warbler has been revised from threatened to endangered because these birds' populations continue to decline and fewer documented nesting locations have been found in Connecticut.



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When Connecticut's Threatened and Endangered Species List was created in 1992, the willet was listed as threatened. The species was reclassified as special concern in 1998. Willets have continued to increase and are now so common along Connecticut's coastline that the species was removed from the list.





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Once considered a threatened species in Connecticut, the Cooper's hawk has been removed from the Threatened and Endangered Species List. The population has been steadily increasing in the state in recent years.

The American kestrel and purple martin have had their status changed from special concern to threatened. Biologists are concerned about the kestrel because there are very few documented nest sites in the state and the population is declining throughout the entire region. There are few established purple martin nesting colonies in Connecticut, and these colonies, as well as the establishment of any future colonies, require human management for success.

The bobolink is a newcomer to the list as a species of special concern. This bird was added because suitable nesting areas (grassland habitats) are disappearing and its regional population has been declining.

On a good note, the Cooper's hawk has been removed from the threatened list, while the cattle egret, red-shouldered hawk, willet, and olive-sided flycatcher, all formerly classified as special concern, have also been removed from list. The Cooper's hawk, red-shouldered hawk and willet populations have been increasing steadily in Connecticut in recent years.

Several invertebrates have been added to the list or their status has changed with the new revision. Of special note is the silvery checkerspot butterfly which has been added as an endangered species. This butterfly hasn't been seen in the state for at least 10 years. There have also been several changes in the plant listings.

The Connecticut Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species brochure is being revised to reflect the new changes. Copies should be available by the end of the summer. Those interested in obtaining the new checklist for 2004 should contact the DEP Wildlife Division, at 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106, (860) 424-3011. There also are plans to publish the revised list of threatened and endangered species on the DEP's website ([www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us)).

## *Is It Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern?*

What is the difference between an endangered, threatened, or special concern species? Connecticut's Endangered Species Act has very specific definitions of each classification to aid in the development of a list.

### **Endangered Species**

Any native species documented by biological research and inventory to be in danger of extirpation throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state and to have no more than five occurrences in the state, and any species determined to be an "endangered species" pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act.

### **Threatened Species**

Any native species documented by biological research and inventory to be likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state and to have no more than nine occurrences in the state, and any species determined to be a "threatened species" pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act, except for such species determined to be endangered by the Commissioner in accordance with section 4 of this act.

### **Species of Special Concern**

Any native plant species or any native nonharvested wildlife species documented by scientific research and inventory to have a naturally restricted range or habitat in the state, to be at a low population level, to be in such high demand by man that its unregulated taking would be detrimental to the conservation of its population or has been extirpated from the state.

# Breeding Waterfowl Survey Numbers Up for Wood Ducks, Mallards, and Canada Geese

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

DEP Wildlife Division staff completed the annual breeding waterfowl surveys in April. Since its inception in 1989, the states from Virginia north to New Hampshire have participated in this important survey. The survey in Connecticut is ground-based and targets randomly placed square kilometer plots. Division staff visit the same plots every year to obtain an estimate of breeding waterfowl numbers. In the northern states and Canada, breeding waterfowl surveys are conducted from the air along fixed transects.

The spring breeding waterfowl survey provides part of the data that drives the Eastern Mallard Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) models. Outputs from these models determine the season lengths and bag limits of duck hunting seasons in the Atlantic Flyway. As the Black Duck and Canada Goose AHM processes become formalized, the data derived from these surveys will be used in those models. Additionally, the breeding waterfowl survey provides managers with an index to both habitat condition and waterfowl production.

Spring habitat conditions in 2004 were ideal for breeding waterfowl. A wet winter, followed by near normal spring precipitation resulted in good waterfowl nesting conditions throughout the state.

All survey plots contained wetland habitat, although many had less water than expected. Timing of waterfowl nesting throughout the state was fairly typical. Overall, breeding waterfowl numbers were higher than in 2003, and production throughout the state should be good.

## *Mallards and Canada Geese*

As is typical, mallards and Canada geese dominated the survey. Mallard breeding pair estimates were 20,174. This is a 47% increase from 2003 and 18% above the five-year average. Mallards remain Connecticut's most abundant breeding waterfowl species. Canada goose pair estimates were 12,345. This represents a seven percent increase from 2003 and a six percent increase from the five-year average. Despite liberal resident goose hunting seasons and increasing use of permitted management practices, resident goose numbers continue to show no significant downward trend.

## *Wood Ducks*

Wood ducks benefitted from the good water conditions in 2004, and were estimated at 7,562 pairs. This is 38% higher than last year, and 53% above the five-year average for this

species. Increasing numbers of beavers in Connecticut have resulted in excellent wood duck habitat throughout the state. It is likely that there is now more wood duck habitat in Connecticut than there was in the early 1900s.

## *Black Ducks*

For the second straight year, black ducks were not observed inland. The coastal black duck estimate was 202 pairs. Statewide, the black duck pair estimate was similar to last year's estimate, but still below the five-year average of 611.

## *Mute Swans*

Mute swans, a deleterious and introduced species, were observed in only seven percent of the plots this year. As was the case in 2003, only one nesting pair was observed in an inland plot in 2004; three pairs were observed in 2002. All of the inland observations of mute swans in the 2002 survey, however, were made on private ponds or lakes. Failed nesters from 2002 may have relocated to other nesting areas this year which were not covered by the plot surveys. Nesting swans continue to be present along the coast where they were detected in half of the coastal plots. In 2001, no swans were detected in any of the coastal plots.

## *Rare Species*

Rare Connecticut breeding species, such as gadwall and green-winged teal, were also observed during the survey. Interesting to note was the presence of a pair of pintails, as well as a pair of lesser scaup.

## *Comparing Results*

Since the beginning of the breeding waterfowl survey in 1989, there has been annual variation in breeding pair estimates for all species, but particularly with black duck and wood duck counts. Some of the year-to-year estimates for these two species differ by over 400%. These

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During the 2004 breeding waterfowl survey, Canada goose pairs were estimated at 12,345.

changes in estimated breeding pairs do not correlate with harvest estimates, thus are likely the result of bias. Much of this variation is likely attributable to bias introduced by different observers from year to year, changing habitat conditions, and the secretive nature of wood and black ducks relative to mallards and Canada geese. Both mallards and Canada geese will readily use park ponds, backyard

ponds, and large lakes--highly conspicuous areas. Black ducks and wood ducks typically use more forested wetlands for breeding. Ground surveys can be difficult to conduct, and less conspicuous species that use habitat characterized by thick cover can easily be overlooked.

Breeding waterfowl and all species dependent upon healthy wetland systems face an increasingly uphill

battle in Connecticut. Wetland loss, the effects of exotic species, and the overall degradation of wetlands have and continue to result in a gradual decline in both species abundance and diversity. The continued acquisition, conservation, and enhancement of Connecticut's remaining fresh and saltwater wetlands are of paramount importance to the future biodiversity of this state.

## Connecticut Envirothon 2004 Held at University of Connecticut's West Hartford Campus

*Written by Peter M. Picone, Habitat Management Program*

Twenty-six high school teams recently competed in the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Connecticut Envirothon competition held at the University of Connecticut's West Hartford campus. This year's top scoring team was Litchfield High School, followed by E.O. Smith High School in second place and Thomaston High School in third place.

Preparation for the Connecticut Envirothon occurs during the school year when team members study five environmental subjects and attend workshops to hone their knowledge of the environment and how it is managed. The five subject areas are forestry, wildlife, soils, aquatics, and natural resource management in the urban environment. Subject matter includes definitions of terms, hands-on identification, and applied science questions. During the competition, the teams have 30 minutes to answer a 100-point test in each subject, using their knowledge and teamwork skills.

Litchfield High School will go on to compete at the Canon National Envirothon, from July 26 to August 1, at Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, West Virginia. The Wildlife Division wishes them the best of luck.



**Connecticut Envirothon 2004 winning team from Litchfield High School. Team members are (from left): Erik Watkins, Amy Katzin, Alexandra Rogenbogen, Jonathan Zullo, Matthew Dickinson, and Team Advisor John Markelon.**

The mission of the Connecticut Envirothon is to promote environmental awareness, knowledge, and active

personal stewardship among Connecticut high school students through education and team competition.

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*The hunting season is just around the corner. Sign up for a hunter education course today! Courses on firearms, bowhunting, and trapping are offered year-round. To find a course near you, call 860-675-8130 or 860-642-7239, or visit the DEP's website at [www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us).*



# Wildlife License Plates Unveiled at Official Ceremony

In late June, the DEP and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) unveiled two new license plates dedicated to funding wildlife research and management programs in the state. In a ceremony at Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill, DEP Deputy Commissioner David K. Leff joined DMV Commissioner Gary J. DeFilippo to unveil the plates. State Senator Biagio “Billy” Ciotto and representatives from several conservation organizations also were present for the unveiling. One plate features a state-endangered bald eagle and the other features a bobcat. Applications for the plates initially will be offered at the DMV’s Wethersfield office or by mail and eventually will be available at most DMV and DEP offices or online at the DMV’s website ([www.ct.gov/dmv](http://www.ct.gov/dmv)).

“Protecting Connecticut’s rich and diverse wildlife populations is a prime mission of the DEP,” said Commissioner Rocque. “The income that will come from the sale of these beautiful plates will be an important funding source to many of the state’s wildlife management programs, particularly those benefitting species that have received limited funding in the past.”

A portion of the purchase of each plate will be deposited into the Wildlife Conservation Fund established by the State Legislature in October 2003. The Fund can be used to support wildlife research and management projects with an emphasis on those wildlife species in greatest need of conservation; wildlife habitat acquisition, restoration, enhancement, and management; and public outreach that promotes the preservation of the state’s wildlife diversity. The Fund can also be used



(From left to right) DMV Commissioner Gary DeFilippo, State Senator Billy Ciotto, DEP Deputy Commissioner David Leff and Tom Baptist, Executive Director of Audubon Connecticut, unveil one of the new wildlife conservation license plates.

for matching federal and private conservation funding, as necessary.

“I was pleased to be able to play a role in enacting the legislation that led to the issuance of these two wildlife license plates,” said Senator Billy Ciotto. “It was a privilege to work with Audubon Connecticut and its members, with the Connecticut wildlife organizations, and hopefully many plates will be sold with the Wildlife Conservation Fund receiving \$35 from the sale of each plate.”

“Whether it is walking in the woods, along the beach, in a town park, or just looking out the window at our own backyards, hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents enjoy wildlife,” said Tom Baptist, Executive Director of Audubon Connecticut. “The funds generated by this license plate will enable us to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, and allow us to leverage federal funding that might otherwise go unclaimed. Audubon is grateful for the opportunity to work with DEP, DMV, and the General Assembly in establishing this much-needed program.”

“We are very pleased to assist the DEP in this worthwhile endeavor,” said Commissioner DeFilippo. Connecticut motorists can transfer their existing plates for “off-the-shelf” Wildlife Conservation Fund license plates for \$50. The Wildlife Conservation Fund will receive \$35 of the \$50 purchase price. Vanity, low number, and current marker plate numbers can be transferred to the wildlife background for \$70. New vanity plates can be ordered on a wildlife background for \$135. It will cost an additional \$15 to renew the plate every two years, with \$10 of that money going into the Wildlife Conservation Fund.

## 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](http://www.ct.gov/dmv).





# 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails

Written by Adam R. Moore, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association



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The Blue Trails are familiar to all of those who have interest in the outdoors in Connecticut. We have seen the familiar oval, royal blue signs where the trails cross state highways. We've hiked our favorite trails and followed the light blue blazes to our destination. We know their names – Nipmuck, Natchaug, Mohawk, Mattabesett, Metacomet, just to name a few.

But did you know that the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System (or the “Blue Trails,” as they are popularly known) will be 75 years old this year? The Blue Trails were established on December 29, 1929, by the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) at the first meeting of its Trails Committee. The Trails Committee convened at the Graduate Club in New Haven, and present were Chairman Edgar L. Heermance of New Haven, J. Walter Bassett of Mt. Carmel, Arthur Perkins of Hartford, Robert E. Platt of Waterbury, Herbert O. Warner of Hartford, and E. O. Waters of New Haven.

## Why Blue?

There is a reason why the trails are called “blue trails” and why they are all blazed with the same light blue color. Dr. Edgar Heermance, founder of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System, was a Yale Divinity School professor and avid hiker. In experimenting with different colors of paint on trees, he found that light blue was the color that showed up best at dusk. Hence, light blue (Witherall's Atlas Paint No. 137, to be exact) was chosen as the paint for blazing all Connecticut Forest & Park Association trails.

Within two months of that first meeting, the first Blue Trail was designated. That trail was the Quinnipiac Trail, and the system has since grown to 700 miles. Today, the Blue Trails have a presence in every county in Connecticut, passing through 80 towns. They are maintained entirely by Connecticut Forest & Park Association volunteers. Each trail is divided into sections and each section has its own Trail Manager, appointed by the Trails Committee.

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

CFPA is marking the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in a number of ways. It is being celebrated from Trails Day 2004 (June 5) to Trails Day 2005, with special Blue Trail hikes for each of those events. Commemorative Annual Meetings have been scheduled in each year. Through the generosity of the Ensign-Bickford Foundation, CFPA has printed a commemorative poster that is being displayed statewide. Anniversary t-shirts are available for sale from the Association. Of topmost importance, CFPA is hard at work publishing the new 19<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *Connecticut Walk Book*, which will be produced in two volumes, East and West. The Eastern volume will be released in time for the fall hiking season.

Other special events to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary have been planned and will be announced throughout the year.

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association is a private, nonprofit membership organization that relies on dues and donations to carry out its mission. CFPA seeks new members and volunteers and invites anyone interested to visit the website at [www.ctwoodlands.org](http://www.ctwoodlands.org), to phone the office at (860) 346-2372, or to drop by Association headquarters at the James L. Goodwin Forest & Park Center on Route 66 in Middlefield.



Take a hike...  
to some of the most  
beautiful hidden places  
in Connecticut

75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE BLUE-BLAZED  
HIKING TRAILS

Connecticut  
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Maintaining  
The Blue-Blazed  
Hiking Trails  
For the People  
of Connecticut  
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# Fire in the Forest

Written by Paul Fusco, Wildlife Outreach Unit

Moving through the forest in blazing color, a medium-sized songbird searches methodically among the thick foliage of the tree-tops. Insects, including caterpillars, are its main quarry. Its brilliant fire-red plumage is set off by the forest's green foliage and brownish gray tree bark. The bird is a male scarlet tanager, a neotropical migrant that comes to North America only to breed and raise its young. Most of its year is spent in the low levels of the Andes mountains in South America, where many other bird species sport brightly colored plumage.

Tanagers are New World birds, with almost 250 species in the family. There are four species of tanagers in North America that breed north of Mexico. Two are found east of the Mississippi River and one of those, the scarlet tanager, breeds in Connecticut.

The other eastern tanager is the summer tanager. Its breeding range extends across the southern United States, as far north as Maryland and southern New Jersey. On rare occasions, most likely in spring, isolated individuals can be found in Connecticut, but summer tanagers do not breed here. A fifth tanager, the stripe-headed, can be seen in south Florida irregularly.

## Scarlet Tanager

During the breeding season, the male scarlet tanager has a bright red head and body plumage with jet black wings and tail, while the female is greenish above and yellow below. In basic (winter) plumage, the male's head and body color is similar to the female, while the wings and tail remain black.

Scarlet tanagers are slightly smaller than robins. They have stout bills that are notched. Caterpillars, wasps, beetles, and moths make up the majority of the diet. Berries and fruit comprise a lesser portion of the diet and are especially consumed in fall before and during migration.

Male scarlet tanagers usually arrive in Connecticut by the second week of May. They quickly claim territories and begin singing from the canopy of the tallest trees in the forest. Their



The male scarlet tanager in breeding plumage is one of the more striking birds to be encountered in a Connecticut forest during summer.

song is a hoarse "*querit, queer, query, querit, queer,*" similar to the song of a robin, but not as melodious. A few days later, females begin to arrive. Females are attracted and courted by the male's singing and his flashy red plumage. Females build the nest, usually out on a horizontal limb of a large tree. A normal clutch of four eggs is laid in the nest, which can be up to 75 feet off the ground. Breeding territories are usually about six to 10 acres in size.

## Habitat

Scarlet tanagers prefer unfragmented, mature deciduous or mixed deciduous/coniferous forests as their primary breeding habitat. In Connecticut, oak and pine are important habitat components. Nesting and population densities are higher in areas that have some conifer habitat. Tanagers will forage in all levels of the forest, from the ground to the canopy of the tallest trees. Even the brilliantly colored male scarlet tanager may be difficult to see when it is high up in the thick foliage of the canopy.

Although scarlet tanagers are known to sometimes use large shade trees in suburban areas and parks, they are typically absent from most urban and suburban settings and areas with high development. They are considered to be a forest interior species, one that does not do well in habitats other than large unfragmented forests.



## Conservation

Neotropical migrants, including tanagers, live in the tropical areas of the New World (Central and South America, and the Caribbean), but migrate to North America for the breeding season. These birds make incredible journeys each year to take advantage of the massive food supply (mainly insects) that is available when they raise their young.

Neotropical migrants are subject to a wide range of survival pressures, including habitat loss along migration routes, predation, and the physical demands of long distance migration. Stopover areas for migrants to rest safely and refuel are critically important habitats to protect and conserve. Some stopover sites may be enhanced for migrants, especially at coastal locations, by adding native plants to the existing habitat to provide cover and a food source.

As with a multitude of forest species, including black bear and wild turkey, the regrowth and maturation of forests in Connecticut and our region over the past 100 years have been beneficial for scarlet tanagers. Although this large-scale change has improved habitat for forest species, there is a more recent trend that has been detrimental. Development, road building, and suburban sprawl have created forest fragmentation on an equally large scale that is cutting large forests into smaller and smaller blocks. Forest fragmentation opens a path into the forest for nest predators, cowbirds, and human disturbance. Forest interior bird populations cannot withstand being squeezed into smaller, less desirable space without being affected in a negative way. Their habitat needs are only met by maintaining larger blocks of forest unfragmented by development. Long-term land use planning that protects intact, large blocks of forest needs to be undertaken to benefit these birds today, and for the future.

## Migratory Bird Surveys

If you would like the chance to observe scarlet tanagers and other neotropical migrants in Connecticut, consider volunteering to help with the DEP Wildlife Division's migratory bird surveys. In spring and fall, observations are recorded from targeted properties across the state in order to



P. J. FUSCO (3)



The greenish-yellow plumage of the female scarlet tanager (top) is similar to that of the non-breeding male (middle). Note that the male retains his black wings and tail throughout the year. The male summer tanager in breeding plumage is entirely rose-red (bottom).

establish a data base of migrant occurrence in Connecticut. If you are interested, please contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at Sessions Woods (860-675-8130).

## Tower Collision Mortality

Most neotropical migrants migrate at night and sometimes become disoriented by artificial light sources, including office lights in tall buildings and lights on communication towers and smokestacks. With the expected growth in the communications industry and the installation of thousands of bigger and taller towers, the future looks perilous for migratory birds unless standards are agreed on and set to reduce the bird kill rate. Conservative estimates indicate that between four and 10 million migratory birds are killed each year in the United States in collisions with towers and their guy wires. Some estimates put the figure closer to 50 million birds per year. Accurate estimates are difficult to quantify because birds are killed at night and then quickly scavenged. The problem is not limited to neotropical migrants either. On one bad weather night in Kansas in January 1998, between 5,000 and 10,000 lapland longspurs (migrants from the Arctic) were killed at one tower. Disoriented by tower lights, they apparently circled around and around the tower, colliding with the structure and its wires. On the brighter side, at least one study has shown a dramatic decrease in bird strikes after standard spot lights were replaced with flashing strobe lights at a number of electrical generating stations in Ontario. This indicates that conservation concerns may be addressed with simple design modifications to tower structures to minimize bird mortality.

# Deadly Balloons

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

During a recent community event in Connecticut, dozens of colorful balloons were released into the sky. As everyone around me watched in delight, I looked on in dismay because I knew that not only was this act against the law, but it was also deadly to wildlife. At that moment, I realized that very few people in Connecticut know that it is illegal for anyone or any group to release 10 or more helium balloons in a 24-hour period. This law was passed for a very important reason...to protect wildlife, particularly marine animals.

Released helium balloons can ride air currents for hundreds of miles. And, in Connecticut, balloons released in inland areas can make their way to Long Island Sound with the help of a little wind. Once in the ocean, the popped balloons—just like plastic bags and other floating plastic garbage—look like food (mainly jellyfish) to some sea creatures. When marine creatures, particularly sea turtles, eat the balloons and plastic garbage, their digestive systems become blocked and the animals eventually die. Balloons and plastic garbage have been documented as the cause of death of countless sea turtles, whales, porpoises, sea birds, and other animals. Many of these animals are on the federal Endangered Species List. Four species of sea turtles that are found in Long Island Sound are

all on Connecticut's Threatened and Endangered Species List, in addition to being on the federal threatened and endangered species list (see article in July/August 2003 issue of *Connecticut Wildlife*).

There are other reasons for not releasing helium balloons besides the threat to marine animals. When balloons are let go for a celebration, it may not seem like littering. But the fact is, **it is littering**. What goes up must come down somewhere. The balloons, with their long strings attached, eventually pop or lose their helium and come back to the ground. Even if they don't land in Long Island Sound, the balloons and their strings end up somewhere in our landscape as litter. The strings can cause problems of their own. The long, colorful strings are often picked up by birds as nesting material. Problems arise when the strings get wound around the birds or even nestlings, often causing death by strangulation or starvation.

You can make a difference for wildlife by spreading the word about the dangers of releasing helium balloons. And, the next time you are celebrating with a helium balloon, don't let it go!

## Releasing Helium Balloons is Illegal

*According to the Connecticut General Statutes Section 26-25c, "No person, nonprofit organization, firm or corporation, including the state and its political subdivisions, shall knowingly release, organize the release of or intentionally cause to be released into the atmosphere within a twenty-four-hour period ten or more helium or other lighter-than-air balloons in the state. Any violation...of this section shall be an infraction."*

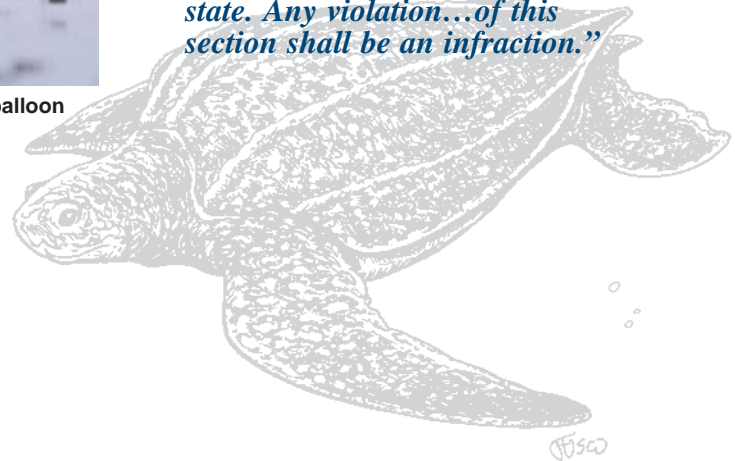
P. J. FUSCO



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This juvenile laughing gull is doomed to a slow death caused by the balloon ribbon that is wrapped around its head and neck.

*You can make a difference for wildlife by spreading the word about the dangers of releasing helium balloons. And, the next time you are celebrating with a helium balloon, **don't let it go!***





## Cooper's Hawk Nest Found at Sessions Woods

The Cooper's hawk had been listed as a threatened species in Connecticut since 1992 until it was recently removed from the Threatened and Endangered Species List (see pages 4-5). The population has been steadily increasing. Evidence of that was noted at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington this past spring when a nest was discovered fairly close to buildings and a well-used trail.

Staff at the Sessions Woods office kept close watch over the nest and as the chicks appeared almost ready to fly, the decision was made to band the chicks. Jerry Mersereau, who has been banding raptors for many years, came to Sessions Woods to do the job. Wildlife Division Technician Geoff Krukar climbed the tall pine tree to reach the nest. However, two of the four chicks were much closer to fledging than realized. They flew out of Geoff's reach. The two remaining chicks were brought to the ground, where a silver leg band, with a unique identifying code, was placed on the left leg of each chick. The chicks were then returned to the nest as one of the adult hawks flew overhead.

Leg bands are placed on raptors to help researchers track their movements and survival. Look for an article in the September/October issue of *Connecticut Wildlife* to learn more about the use of leg bands to track ospreys born along Connecticut's coastline.



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After placing a leg band on a Cooper's hawk chick, Jerry Mersereau (right) put the chick in a leather bag held open by J.T. Stokowski, a contracted researcher for the Wildlife Division. A rope was used to raise the bag up a tree where Wildlife Division technician Geoff Krukar waited at the top. Geoff carefully placed the chick back in the nest while one of the parents circled overhead.

## Sessions Woods Public Program Series

The DEP Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods have planned several educational programs for the upcoming months. Those interested in participating should preregister by calling 860-675-8130 (Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Programs are free unless noted. An adult must accompany children under 12 years old.

**Full Moon Nature Hike, July 31, 2004 (Saturday), at 8:00 p.m.** -- Appalachian Mountain Club Hike Leader Lisa Meunier and Master Wildlife Conservationist Shirley Sutton will co-lead this three-mile hike along the Beaver Marsh Trail at Sessions Woods. The hike will focus on nocturnal wildlife, feature a beaver marsh and is suitable for adults, ages 18 and over. Participants should wear sturdy hiking shoes and bring along a flashlight or headlamp. Limited space is available, so please register early.

**Dragonfly Walk, August 7, 2004 (Saturday), at 10:00 a.m.** -- Join Master Wildlife Conservationist Henry Perrault for an exciting look into the world of dragonflies. Henry will introduce participants to dragonfly natural history and identification in this walk to the beaver marsh at Sessions Woods. Meet at the flagpole in front of the building.

**Beaver Marsh Hike for Families, August 12, 2004 (Thursday), at 9:30 a.m.** -- Enjoy a slow-paced walk to the beaver marsh at Sessions Woods to learn about the animal life that abounds in this unique habitat. The walk is almost two miles roundtrip with a few short inclines; however, all ages are welcome!

**Wildlife Management Areas Hike, August 22, 2004 (Sunday), at 8:00 a.m.** -- Join Wildlife Division Field Assistant Jim Warner on a three-mile hike at Sessions Woods. Jim's hike will feature the unique highlights of Sessions Woods, in addition to providing insight on managing properties for wildlife and recreational use. Participants should wear sturdy shoes and bring along bottled water.

**Halloween in September, September 26, 2004 (Sunday), from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.** -- Bats, spiders, owls, and fun will be on the agenda at Sessions Woods the last Sunday of September. Children can participate in animal-related crafts, bob for apples, and try a donut on a string! Costumes are encouraged!

**Fall Bird Walk, October 2, 2004 (Saturday), at 9:00 a.m.** -- Join Paul Fusco of the Wildlife Division on a morning bird walk at Sessions Woods. Paul will provide bird identification tips to participants. This walk is suitable for adults and children over 12. Bring binoculars and meet at the flag pole in front of the building.



### More Marsh Restoration Projects

The DEP Wildlife Division's Wetland Habitat and Mosquito Management (WHAMM) Program recently completed two wetland restoration projects:

#### Minore Marsh Restoration Project in Branford

-- The invasive plant Phragmites was controlled on five acres of this 10-acre tidal marsh.

A new creek was created and a small channel to three ponds was installed. Funding for this project was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Branford Land Trust through a grant from Save the Sound, and the WHAMM Program.

**Castle Rock Marsh Restoration Project in Branford** -- To bring tidal waters throughout this five-acre marsh system, old mosquito ditches needed to be plugged and a new channel created. Three ditches were plugged to make a pond and panne area and a small pond was built in a severe mosquito breeding site. A new channel was created to bring salt water into an area dominated by Phragmites. The reintroduction of salt water results in a gradual replacement of Phragmites by native vegetation. The project was paid for by the Castle Rock Condo Association, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the WHAMM Program.

Work is also continuing on the **Lynde Point Marsh Restoration Project in Fenwick in Old Saybrook**. Fill is being removed from 10 acres of this 20-acre site to form a new tidal marsh. The spoil material is being placed at a five-acre site so that a warm season grassland can be established. The other five acres of this area consist of upland and beach dune habitat. This project is being funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, the Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, and the DEP. This project should be completed over the summer.

*Paul Capotosto, WHAMM Program*



P. J. FUSCO

Over 130 people attended the Friends of Sessions Woods (FOSW) annual meeting in mid-May. President Clark Spencer gave an overview of the group's accomplishments during the past year, including purchases of hands-on materials for the Sessions Woods classroom area, educator backpacks, new tree trail signage, and recent taxidermy mounts. These purchases were made possible by a grant distributed by the James R. Parker Trust and the Main Street Community Foundation, as well as private donations. Future goals for the group include the construction of a pavilion behind the Conservation Education Center by an Eagle Scout candidate and obtaining funding to complete the classroom space in the exhibit area.

Following the business meeting, Hank Gruner of the Science Center of Connecticut presented a program on venomous snakes of Connecticut. Hank provided interesting information on copperheads and timber rattlesnakes and also talked about the differences among venomous snakes in North America. Participants were also thrilled when Hank displayed a live northern copperhead and timber rattlesnake. The audience posed several questions to Hank following the presentation and left the program thoroughly informed about venomous snakes.

The FOSW is an all volunteer organization which facilitates projects and programs that are designed to enhance the value of the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center as a resource for education, research, and the enjoyment of nature. For more information on the organization, contact Laura Rogers-Castro at 860-675-8130 or send an email message to [laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us](mailto:laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us).

*Laura Rogers-Castro, Outreach Unit*



**Report black bear sightings to the DEP Wildlife Division at (860) 675-8130 or on the DEP's website, [www.dep.state.ct.us](http://www.dep.state.ct.us).**

### Sharon Audubon's Summer Festival: August 14-15

Mark your calendars and save the dates! The 37th Annual Sharon Audubon Festival is taking place August 14 and 15 at the Sharon Audubon Center located on Route 4 in Sharon. Both days offer information for adults, children, and families on a variety of nature-related topics. Learning your birds? Take a bird walk with one of our birding experts. Interested in pond life? Sign up for the canoeing program! Live raptors and reptiles are always a big hit as well. Music, food, and fun are included in the festival, so check the newspapers closer to the date for the full festival supplement, or call the Center at (860) 364-0520 for more information. ([www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/sharon](http://www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/sharon))



## Report Sightings of Collared Geese

The DEP Wildlife Division would like to know if you've seen Canada geese with bright yellow neck collars. These individually coded collars have been placed on Canada geese for the past few years as part of a four-year study to assess the growing population of resident geese (see September/October 2003 issue). So far, 1,000 geese have been fitted with collars. Collars will be placed on an additional 500 geese during late June and early July of this year. Collars also will be placed on 500 more geese in the summer of 2005.

Sightings of collared geese will provide valuable information on movement patterns. The data will be used in a Geographic Information System to analyze landscape attributes and other human influences that might attract geese to particular areas. Results from this project should help the Wildlife Division devise innovative management strategies to better alleviate nuisance goose problems.

Anyone seeing geese with yellow neck collars is urged to report sightings to the Division's Migratory Bird Program at 860-642-7239 or [min.huang@po.state.ct.us](mailto: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.



P. J. FUSCO

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## Wildlife Division Receives LIS Fund Grant for Interpretive Sign Projects

The DEP and the Long Island Sound (LIS) Fund Advisory Committee recently announced \$286,731 in grants awarded from the LIS Fund. This year, 19 projects were funded to help preserve, protect, and enhance public access to Long Island Sound. Some of the proposals receiving funding included: protection of tidal wetlands and upland coastal areas adjacent to Hemingway Creek in New Haven; research on Atlantic sturgeon and their critical habitats in Long Island Sound; public access projects providing fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing access and park improvements for passive recreational activities in coastal areas; and educational projects, including a video about the Connecticut River, various educational signs along the coast, and installation of remote web cameras focused on harbor seals to provide public viewing and research opportunities to learn more about this species.

The LIS Fund is supported by the sale of *Preserve the Sound* license plates, a portion of the proceeds from the *Preserve the Sound* affinity credit card, and direct contributions to the Fund. The LIS Fund supports projects in the areas of education, public access to the shoreline, habitat restoration, and research.

The DEP Wildlife Division was granted funds for two projects. The first project involves the replacement of educational signs at coastal parks and wildlife management areas. In the mid-1990s, the Wildlife Division created interpretive signs on wildlife and wildlife habitat. Topics included nesting shorebirds, waterfowl, osprey, fish, herons, egrets, and terns. These signs were placed at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, Rocky Neck State Park, Sherwood Island State Park and Milford Point, to name a few. Over the years, weather and the elements have taken their toll on the signs and many need to be replaced.

The second project involves the creation of a new handicapped accessible viewing area at Barn Island Wildlife Management Area in Stonington. Interpretive signs also will be developed to describe the recent addition of 144 acres of coastal habitat to Barn Island, as well as the unique coastal resources at this site.

## Art from Connecticut Forests Exhibition Open

The *Art from Connecticut Forests* exhibition opened to the general public in mid-July. It can be seen at the Charter Oak Cultural Center, 21 Charter Oak Avenue in Hartford, until August 20. Gallery hours are 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Exhibits are free to the public. This exhibition will be on display at various locations throughout the state until 2005.

Fifty artists have created artwork from a single white oak tree that was felled from Meshomasic State Forest, in Portland, Connecticut's first state forest. The art pieces are available for sale and a portion of the proceeds will help fund environmental education programs in Connecticut. The art pieces include sculptures, paintings, fabrics, furniture, decorative pieces, musical instruments and environmental statement pieces. For information on the exhibition schedule, call the DEP's Kellogg Environmental Center at 203-734-2513.

## Fourth MWC Program Series Completed

Twenty adults recently participated in Master Wildlife Conservationist Program (MWCP) training at the DEP Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. The MWCP is designed to train individuals in wildlife conservation to provide high-quality volunteers with the knowledge necessary to educate others and assist with Wildlife Division research projects. Participants in the past training included people from Burlington, Bristol, Easton, Coventry, Cromwell, East Hartford, Fairfield, Glastonbury, Guilford, Harwinton, New Haven, New Hartford, North Granby, Plainville, Stratford, Torrington, Willington, and Woodstock Valley.

Several of the newly trained Master Wildlife Conservationists have already begun education, outreach and research initiatives. They have conducted bird surveys, presented programs, remarked bird survey routes, and monitored state wildlife management areas for wildlife following management techniques. Each month, MWCs receive a newsletter that lists volunteer opportunities and contact information. The Wildlife Division receives numerous requests for programs each year from school, civic, and scout groups. There also have been several requests to have representatives of the Wildlife Division participate in town and local fairs by providing wildlife information to attendees. MWCs are invaluable in assisting the Division with these multiple requests, in addition to providing valuable assistance on research projects.

*Laura Rogers-Castro, Outreach Unit*



## Is It a Bird or an Insect?



The following note and photograph were sent by Terri Lang of Lebanon:

*"Last summer (August 2003), I was relaxing on my deck when I spotted this strange visitor on my butterfly bush. I immediately ran for my camera and got as close as I could and snapped several pictures. It looks as if it is an insect/hummingbird. I checked my Audubon bird handbook and could not find anything resembling this visitor. Hopefully you can help me with identification."*

Response from the Wildlife Division's Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro:

Is it a bird or an insect? The hummingbird clearwing, *Hemaris thysbe*, is a frequent visitor to butterfly bush during summer. It is a daytime-flying moth and is often confused with the ruby-throated hummingbird, Connecticut's only hummingbird species.

The hummingbird clearwing is a

member of the insect family Sphingidae, a group of medium to very large moths. The five-spotted hawk moth is the best known moth in the group as its larvae, tomato hornworms, are familiar to most gardeners. The hummingbird clearwing gets its name from the reduced number of scales on its wing. It can be seen hovering like a hummingbird as it feeds on the nectar of various flowers.

## Gone Squirrely?

This wildlife observation and photograph were sent by reader John Lamb:

*"While hiking the Howard Reservoir in Manchester, in late April, and searching for a good shot of the red breasted nuthatch, I walked upon this red squirrel. During the spring, red squirrels, which are much smaller than gray squirrels, have a distinctly rust-colored coat that fades somewhat as summer progresses. The reservoir is perfect habitat for the squirrels because of the mixed forest, which is also home to many other critters. Deer, geese, ducks, and turtles can be found there, too. Although I wasn't able to get any pictures of the normally abundant nuthatch, I did get a few of a foraging Eastern towhee and a fearless chipping sparrow that let me get within 10 feet of it."*



*The red squirrel's reliance on hardwood/coniferous forests limits its distribution in Connecticut.*

## Eight Pairs of Eagles; Four Successful Nests

Again this year, as in 2002 and 2003, the DEP Wildlife Division, along with several dedicated volunteers, kept track of eight pairs of bald eagles. All eight pairs were active, but four pairs lost their eggs or chicks early, probably due to weather conditions. As in 2002, four pairs had successful nests, with seven young fledged.

Wildlife Division technician Geoff Krukar climbed the nest trees so that the chicks could be lowered to the ground for examination and measurement. Dr. Rich French and Dr. Inga Sidor of the University of Connecticut collected

blood samples to detect the presence of heavy metals and determine the general health of the birds. Aluminum bands were attached to each leg of the chicks. One of the bands, which is black and white and contains an identifying code, can easily be read with a spotting scope. Banding provides a way for wildlife managers to trace movements of an individual eagle, estimate population changes, and determine lifespans.

All of the active eagle nests are on private property. The Wildlife Division does not disclose the exact locations of the nests to protect the eagles from

disturbance and out of respect for the landowners who do not want trespassers on their land. The active nests were in Hartford, New London, and Litchfield Counties.

The Wildlife Division would like to thank the volunteers that helped with the time-consuming task of bald eagle monitoring: Don Hopkins, Jerry Mersereau, Mike O'Leary, Hank Golet, Ed Nash, and Ned Pfeiffer.

**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](mailto:katherine.herz@po.state.ct.us)

*(submitted photos will be returned at your request)*



# Nest Boxes for Wood Ducks

Written by Min T. Huang, Migratory Gamebird Program

The wood duck, which is one of the most beautiful of the North American ducks, is present in Connecticut from March to November. It is a medium-sized dabbling duck, about half the size of a mallard and weighing approximately 1.5 pounds. A wood duck measures between 16 to 21 inches long and has a wingspan of 24 to 28 inches. In proportion to its wing length, the wood duck has the broadest wings of any duck. It also has the largest eyes of any of the duck species. The short, broad wings and large eyes likely evolved to enable the wood duck to fly through the trees and branches characteristic of the habitats they frequent.

## Habitat

Wood ducks are distributed throughout Connecticut, with the highest densities located in the northeast corner of the state. Habitat features dictate wood duck usage. Slow-moving or shallow waters near forested habitats provide optimal habitat for wood ducks. In Connecticut, wood ducks inhabit freshwater wooded swamps, marshes, ponds, rivers, and streams. Important nesting areas include forested swamps (red maple, standing dead timber), shrub swamps, and emergent marshes. Ponds and lakes with shoreline cover (overhanging shrubs and trees) are also readily used by wood ducks. Waters with woody debris (logs, stumps, standing trees) and green vegetation provide the best habitat for wood ducks. Adults use the woody debris for loafing; vegetation provides both cover and food resources. Invertebrates, which provide an important source of protein to ducklings and the hen, are typically higher in waters with woody debris and emergent vegetation.

## Nesting Cavities

Although wood ducks are cavity nesters, they cannot excavate their own holes. Therefore, wood duck breeding numbers are limited by the number of naturally occurring cavities



This female wood duck, which is not as colorful as the male, swims with its brood. Young wood ducks leave the nest cavity within 24 to 36 hours of hatching to follow the female.

located in suitable habitat. Hens typically search for cavities in close proximity to water, but have been known to successfully nest one-half mile from the nearest water source. Wood ducks form pair bonds on the wintering grounds and head north in late February and early March. The majority of Connecticut's wood ducks winter in the Carolinas and Georgia. Wood duck pairs typically begin arriving in Connecticut in early to mid-March. The hen searches for and chooses a suitable cavity to use as a nest site. Hens tend to return to the areas from which they were fledged or had previously nested successfully. Wood ducks do not carry nest materials to the nest, as do most other birds. They use whatever materials exist within the chosen cavity to create the nest.

Because of their reliance upon existing cavities in suitable habitat, local wood duck populations can be enhanced through the use of artificial nest boxes. Wood ducks readily use well-placed and maintained artificial nest boxes. Successful wood duck nest box programs throughout the United States have led to a dramatic increase in the number of wood ducks in North America. Once nearly extirpated, wood ducks are now numerous

throughout the Northeast. In Connecticut, the wood duck is the second most common breeding duck behind the mallard.

## Checking Nest Boxes

Annually, the DEP Wildlife Division checks and maintains wood duck nest boxes that are located on state land. Boxes are checked to determine if they were used by wood ducks or other species, and whether or not chicks were produced. The boxes are then cleaned and made ready for the upcoming nesting season. In 2002-03, the Wildlife Division completed a comprehensive evaluation of wood duck boxes on state land. A strategy was then developed for the maintenance and annual checking of those boxes. Statewide, the annual goal is to check approximately 360 boxes. In the winter of 2003-04, staff checked 431 boxes throughout the state. Approximately 77% of these boxes were in good condition. This is important because the use of a nest box by wood ducks is dependent, in part, on the condition of the box.

Statewide, wood ducks used 41% of the available and usable nest boxes. This was similar to the 43% reported

continued on page 19

# Just for Kids

## Snags Are Super!

Snags are dead trees that are still standing. They may be dead, but they are not dull! Snags are used by over 100 different animals for perching, foraging, nesting, hiding, and denning.

### *These Cavities Are Good!*

*Many animals use cavities, or holes, in trees for nesting. Flying and tree squirrels, woodpeckers, chickadees, wood ducks, and hooded mergansers are examples of animals that nest in snag cavities.*

### *Dynamite Dens*

*Dens provide cover and sometimes a place to have young. Standing, broken off and large hollow trees are perfect dens for black bears and fishers.*

### *Perfect Perches*

*Birds, such as bluebirds and flycatchers, may perch on a branch of a snag while looking for insects to eat. American kestrels use perches when eyeing a field for grasshoppers.*

### **Fit for Foraging**

*Snags provide food, such as ants and beetles, for foraging woodpeckers. They also provide a perfect place for squirrels and mice to store nuts.*

### **Hidden Cover**

*Loose bark on a snag provides cover for bats, butterflies, moths, beetles, and treefrogs.*



### **Tell Others About Snags!**

*Design a poster to educate others about the benefits of snags. See if your local nature center will post it on their bulletin board.*

*The wildlife will certainly appreciate it!*



Wood ducks,  
continued from page 17

in 2002-03. Average statewide productivity (number of eggs hatched) for all available wood duck boxes was 1.53.

As was the case in 2002, marked differences in both box use and productivity were found between areas east and west of the Connecticut River. In areas west of the river, wood duck box use was only 15%. East of the river, wood duck

box use was 51%. Productivity east of the river was also much higher than on the western side of the state. The mean number of eggs hatched on the eastern side of the state was 2.0 for all available boxes. However, productivity in boxes that were only used by wood ducks was 3.84. On the western portion of the state, productivity in all available boxes was 0.41 and only 2.78 per used box.

The hooded merganser is another duck species that breeds in Connecticut and uses cavities for nesting. There

continues to be an increase in the use of wood duck nest boxes by hooded mergansers. Interestingly, there were again differences between the eastern and western sides of the state in hooded merganser use of boxes. On the western side of the state, hooded mergansers were found in 14% of the usable, available boxes. On the eastern side, only 2% of the boxes were used by hooded mergansers.

## Wildlife Calendar Reminders

- July ..... Federal Duck Stamps are available at post offices.
- July-August ..... Keep dogs off of Connecticut beaches to avoid disturbing nesting shorebirds.
- ..... Herons and egrets are nesting on offshore islands in Long Island Sound. Refrain from visiting these areas to avoid disturbing the birds.
- ..... Dispose of fishing line in covered trash receptacles. Improperly discarded fishing line is a hazard for wildlife.
- August 4 ..... **Educator Workshop: Insects of Connecticut**, from 9:00 AM-12:00 PM, at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. This popular workshop introduces participants to insect diversity, research projects, and activities to use in the classroom. Preregistration is required. Contact Laura Rogers-Castro at the Sessions Woods office at (860) 675-8130 or [laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us](mailto:laura.rogers-castro@po.state.ct.us).
- August 14-15 ..... Sharon Audubon's Summer Festival (see page 14 for details).
- Sept. .... 2004 pheasant tags available from town clerks' offices (\$14 for 10 tags).
- Sept. 1 ..... Early squirrel hunting season opens.
- Sept. 3-6 ..... Visit the DEP Wildlife Division's booth in the Agricultural Building at the Woodstock Fair.
- Sept. 15 ..... 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.
- Sept. 15-Nov. 16 ... First portion of archery deer and turkey hunting seasons.
- Sept. 30 ..... Report use of bat houses to the Wildlife Division. Call (860) 675-8130 for more information.

*Several educational programs on a variety of topics are planned for the summer and fall at the Wildlife Division's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center in Burlington. See page 13 for all the details.*

# Connecticut Wildlife

## Subscription Order

Please make checks payable to:  
**Connecticut Wildlife, P.O. Box 1550, Burlington, CT 06013**

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1 Year (\$6.00)     2 Years (\$11.00)     3 Years (\$16.00)

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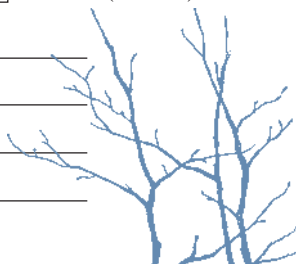
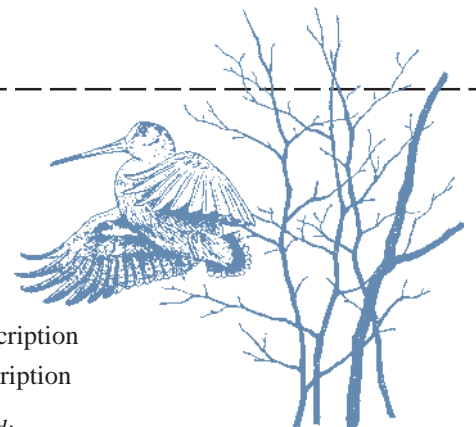
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You can find more than just beavers in a beaver marsh. River otters have benefitted from the wetland habitats created by Connecticut's high beaver population.

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