

Wildlife

Spring 2006
www.njfishandwildlife.com

Combined Landowner Incentive Program a HIT

When Melba Battin moved back to her family's farm in Somerset County in the early 1990s, she and her two sisters wanted to do the right thing for the land and the flora and fauna that depended upon it.

But for landowners like Battin, figuring out how to do that, and how to best take advantage of various state and federal incentive programs, could be difficult – until now.

That's because the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program and Bureau of Wildlife Management have banded together with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other non-governmental organizations such as the New Jersey Audubon Society, the National Turkey Federation and Pheasants Forever.

The result: The New Jersey Habitat Incentive Team (NJ HIT), a one-stop shopping service for landowners. NJ HIT provides a single biologist as the primary contact for the variety of habitat programs available

to landowners from the U.S. Department of Agriculture/NRCS Farm Bill Programs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the N.J. Division of Fish and Wildlife's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP).

"The biologist will assess their property, craft suitable habitat conservation plans and help them apply for appropriate funding," says Kim Korth, LIP project manager.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife and the USDA/NRCS fund one biologist; the other works with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation, funded through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant acquired by NJ Audubon Society.

Battin's property illustrates the potential impact.

Currently she is in the second year of a five-year plan to convert her open land to native warm-season grasses, which aren't mowed for hay until after July 15 – after grassland birds have fledged. Already her property is supporting state-threatened bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows. State-endangered northern harriers also have been seen during the winter.

"An individual farmer would have a hard time doing this alone," says Battin. "You need a partnership: the expertise of the farmer who knows how to care for the land with the

expertise of someone who knows about wildlife and someone who knows about native grasses.

"With this program, everything has come together to create and manage a native habitat for grassland birds and other species."

Combined with 75 acres of the farm Battin and her sisters sold to Franklin Township and another adjacent tract managed by the NJ Audubon Society, within four years the grassland restoration program

will encompass about 180 acres – one of the largest native grassland restoration projects ever undertaken in New Jersey. Statewide, this year NJ HIT will protect an impressive total of nearly 1,100 acres of grasslands, including the conversion of more than 400 acres to native warm-season grasses. Wetland enhancement will be another NJ HIT focus.

"This approach is working really well," says Troy Ettl, the NJ Audubon Society's director of conservation and stewardship. "Only by having all these programs and agencies working together with landowners do we have a chance to most effectively target the most critical habitats in New Jersey."



Landowner Melba Battin and Kim Korth, LIP project manager, plant native warm-season grasses.

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ENDANGERED AND NONGAME SPECIES PROGRAM MISSION

"To actively conserve New Jersey's biological diversity by maintaining and enhancing endangered and nongame wildlife populations within healthy functioning ecosystems."



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NJ's Wildlife Action Plan Receives Federal Approval

Message from Dave Chanda, Acting Director
Division of Fish and Wildlife

Last fall Larry Niles's message informed you that New Jersey's Wildlife Action Plan was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), which had to approve the plan in order for New Jersey to qualify for future State Wildlife Grants (SWG) from the federal government. I am happy to report that the New Jersey Wildlife Action Plan was approved by the USFWS! In fact, our plan was one of 12 top plans selected by the Defenders of Wildlife from the 54 plans submitted from across the country for identifying threats to wildlife and habitats and developing strategies to address the threats.



Now that the plan has been approved, we can begin the task of implementing the Action Plan to conserve wildlife before it becomes more rare and more costly to protect. These actions – developed by scientists, sportsmen, conservationists and members of the community working together – will allow us to identify and prevent problems before they threaten wildlife and affect humans. We owe a debt of gratitude to all of you who participated in putting the Action Plan together and who will help maintain and expand our partnerships as we implement the plan.

The completion of New Jersey's plan provides a powerful new tool for wildlife conservation. As the acting director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, I look forward to the challenges that we face in implementing this ambitious plan to conserve New Jersey's wildlife and vital natural areas for future generations. Certainly the continued funding from the State Wildlife Grants will be critical to implementing the plan. Also critical will be the state's funding commitment to this program.

Last year the state budget included an appropriation of approximately \$400,000 to be used as a match for this important program. This year, Governor Corzine's proposed budget once again contains this critical funding. However, a greater future investment in the New Jersey Wildlife Action Plan will be necessary to fully implement it. It is our responsibility to conserve the state's wildlife and their habitats for future generations. Adequate funding and professional staff to manage this resource is absolutely essential if we are to succeed in our mission.

In the long run we can't afford not to invest in this ambitious plan to conserve our wildlife and natural places. I look forward to your continued support as we protect the state's wildlife resources together.

Would you prefer an e-mail version of *Conserve Wildlife*?

To maximize our funds for rare wildlife conservation, we'd like to know if our readers are interested in receiving *Conserve Wildlife* via e-mail, rather than through regular mail. If so, please send us an e-mail at pola.galie@dep.state.nj.us. If enough readers respond, we will produce an e-mail version of our newsletter for those who request it.

ANNUAL REPORT

Following is Conserve Wildlife's annual review of the status of some of the wildlife populations with which the ENSP worked in 2005:

BALD EAGLES: Record number of nesting pairs (53), active nesting pairs (48) and young (64).

PEREGRINE FALCONS: New highs of 20 pairs and 42 young, with newest nest additions in northern NJ. A contaminants study of eggs from 1993-1999 raises some concerns and provides a reason to keep monitoring nest success.

OSPREYS: Ground surveys showed above-average productivity in all areas.

BLACK SKIMMERS: Number of breeding adults increased significantly; number of chicks fledged relatively high.

BOG TURTLES: Known habitat has good federal and state protection, and additional sites have been located, but no turtles found at some previous sites.

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS: Productivity okay, but overall number of birds matched 2004's lower totals.

FRESH-WATER MUSSELS: Yellow lampmussels thriving in Delaware River, more triangle floater populations discovered, but no green floaters found since 1996.

COLONIAL WATERBIRDS: Great blue herons increased, yellow-crowned night herons, snowy egrets and great egrets stabilized, but little blue and tri-colored herons, black-crowned night herons and cattle egrets declined.

PIPING PLOVERS: The breeding population dropped a steep 18 percent, to 110 pairs from 135. Productivity was poor statewide at just 0.77 chicks per pair, for the fourth straight year well below the levels believed to be necessary to sustain or increase the population.

LEAST TERNS: The breeding population decreased sharply for the second consecutive year, and nearly all colonies failed to produce any young.

MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS: Red knots, ruddy turnstones and semipalmated sandpipers declined last year; sanderlings maintained their long-term average.

WOOD TURTLES: Upland habitat near streams continues to be downgraded.



Field Notes: Searching for Elusive Eastern Tiger Salamanders

If you were asked to look for salamanders, no doubt you'd pick a bubbling brook on a sunny spring day.

So what was Dave Golden, clad in waders, doing marching through thigh-high pools in a shallow abandoned sand pit in the dead of winter? The assistant senior biologist was looking for signs – either egg masses or adults themselves – of the largest and most unusual salamander in New Jersey, the eastern tiger salamander.

The state-endangered salamanders converge upon seasonal woodland ponds from December through March to breed – in some years, even under the ice. After depositing and fertilizing their egg masses, the 7- to 8-inch-long adults use their broad heads and blunt, rounded snouts to burrow underneath the adjacent upland woodlands, where these members of the mole salamander family spend the rest of the year unseen.

Golden was wading through a pool in Cape May County's Middle Township on property that is jointly owned by the state and The Nature Conservancy. Quickly he began to see gossamer, black-flecked egg masses anchored to reedy grass stalks underneath the surface. One was nearly 9 inches in diameter.

"It's been a good year, with plenty of rainfall," said Golden. "We've seen lots of egg masses." In the first of the sand pit's ephemeral pools, which dry up during the summer and, importantly, are thus free of predatory fish, Golden located 15 dozen egg masses. He found 14 more elsewhere, for a very good count of 29 egg masses in the entire pool complex. He saw no adults, but he often finds them more easily by flashlight at night, when they are more active.

Golden's next stop, however, behind a new building elsewhere in Cape May County, illustrated the salamanders' tenuous plight. An area where Golden previously had found egg masses was bone dry, and his search of a series of newly excavated retention ponds, which apparently helped drain the previous site, yielded no adults or egg masses.

Historically found in 20 of the state's 21 counties, the salamanders' stronghold has been reduced primarily to Cape May County, with a few more sites in Cumberland, Atlantic and Ocean counties. The loss and degradation of both vernal pools and adjacent upland woodlands – due to development, pollution and illegal dumping – along with periodic dry winters has continued to plague the eastern tiger salamander since it was declared state endangered in 1974.

"This year, they're holding on," said Kathy Clark, ENSP principal zoologist. "With all this winter's precipitation the water levels were above average. But some reports indicate the adults might breed only every other year, so even when you get excellent conditions like this year, some ponds have fewer egg masses than what you would expect.

"That's just one of the issues that make this an endangered species."

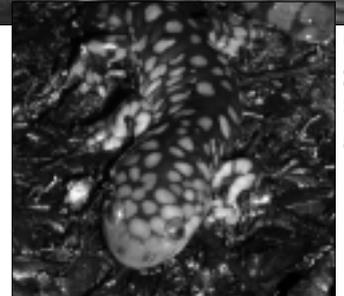


Photo: John F. Bunnell

Watchable Wildlife

The spring and summer are terrific times to visit the state's Wildlife Management Areas, including:

GREENWOOD FOREST WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Most of these 24,000 acres in the Pinelands west of Barnegat are upland pine-oak forest interspersed with some fields. The lowlands contain pitch pine forests and Atlantic white cedar bogs, including Webb's Mill Bog. Three small lakes and wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl, fish, reptiles and amphibians. An extensive system of sand roads provides ample opportunity for hiking and wildlife watching. Among the species present are rare Pine Barrens treefrogs and pine snakes, corn snakes, eastern timber rattlesnakes and northern pine snakes. Abundant bird life and an array of interesting plants, including endangered swamp pink, are also found here.

DIRECTIONS: From the junction of NJ Route 72 and County Route 539, turn north on CR 539. Go about 6.2 miles to the pull-off for Webb's Mill Bog trail on your right. To reach the small lakes and wetlands, look for the Greenwood WMA sign 0.9 miles east of CR 539 on Rt. 72. Turn left at the sign. Within a mile, turn right onto any of the sand trails and park. Walk east to the lakes.

INFORMATION: DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife, (609) 259-2132.

WHITTINGHAM WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Headwaters of the Pequest River, this extensive complex of freshwater marsh and diverse upland forests and fields in Sussex County harbors a rich variety of wildlife. Fed by springs bubbling up through limestone, the marshes harbor beavers, river otters and other wetland wildlife. Waterfowl include nesting wood ducks, American black ducks and mallards. Snapping, wood and eastern painted turtles are present, while wood frogs, spring peepers, American toads and spotted salamanders breed and live in ephemeral pools in the forest. You also might see or hear ruffed grouse.

DIRECTIONS: From the junction of U.S. Route 206 and County Route 611, take CR 611 west about 1 mile to the wetland overlook on the right. From there, go back to U.S. 206 and turn left onto Springdale Road, proceeding 0.2 mile to a parking lot on the left. The trail there goes through a natural area to Big Spring wetlands.

INFORMATION: DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife, (908) 637-4125.



Citizen Scientist Volunteers Wanted for Spring BioBlitz

Would you like to help ENSP biologists conduct a comprehensive one-day wildlife survey of a wildlife management area (WMA) this spring?

The dates for the first-ever ENSP BioBlitz are:

NORTHERN NEW JERSEY:

June 3, Sparta Mountain WMA in Sussex County.

SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY:

June 10, Lizard Tail Swamp Preserve in Cape May County.

The latter is being conducted in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy, which co-owns the swamp.

For more up-to-date information and to sign up, consult the www.njfishandwildlife.com website and our ENSP page there.



Spawning horseshoe crabs.

Horseshoe Crab Moratoriums Are Proposed

Both the state and an interstate agency have proposed two-year moratoriums on the harvest of horseshoe crabs to help bring back red knots – one of the migratory shorebirds that depend on the crab eggs for sustenance during their migration to their Arctic breeding grounds. Last May on Delaware Bay red knot numbers plummeted to about 15,000.

In February the state Department of Environmental Protection proposed a two-year ban on collecting the crabs, which are used for conch and eel bait. The only exception: collecting and drawing blood from the crabs for medical use, provided the crabs are returned alive to the water.

Later in February the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission proposed a two-year ban from Delaware Bay to Virginia. After public comment periods, both the state and commission were expected to decide on the moratoriums later this spring.

For an update on these proposals, check the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's website, www.njfishandwildlife.com.

Schedule ENSP Speakers Bureau

ENSP's Speakers Bureau offers groups an informative, entertaining 30-minute slide presentation on how the ENSP works to protect NJ's endangered and threatened wildlife. To schedule a program for your group, contact Terry at ENSP's Tuckahoe office, 609-628-2103.

Tesauro is Succeeded by O’Gorman as Executive Director of Foundation

Margaret O’Gorman, the former director of development for two New Jersey nonprofit environmental organizations, has succeeded Linda Tesauro as executive director of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ.

“Margaret is a bright, energetic and committed environmental advocate who the board feels has the experience – both in terms of fundraising and the environment – to innovatively lead the CWF as we build upon our current successes,” said Robert A. Bonazzi, chairman of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

For the past two years, O’Gorman served as director of development for NJ Future, a smart growth advocacy group. Prior to that, she served four years as the director of development for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. (See her message on the back page.)

The private, not-for-profit foundation that O’Gorman now leads was created to support the efforts of the Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program, which has no dedicated state funding source. It does so through financial assistance, public education efforts and community outreach initiatives.



Linda Tesauro

Tesauro was the founder and executive director of CWF since it was created in 1998. During her tenure, some of the foundation’s accomplishments include:

- Developing a loyal base of more than 3,500 supportive foundation members.
- Funding an additional seven assistant ENSP biologists and GIS specialists.

- Aggressively promoting the purchase of Conserve Wildlife license plates and donations to the state income tax check-off program.

- Creating and financially supporting the Citizen-Scientist program.

- Educational initiatives, including teacher workshops, providing resources on environmental topics and the Species on the Edge fifth-grade art and essay contest, now in its fourth year.

- Creating a multi-media traveling exhibit celebrating ENSP’s 30th anniversary in 2003.

- Publication of “Endangered and Threatened Wildlife of New Jersey,” a book that the foundation helped fund.

“The Conserve Wildlife Foundation’s success is a testament to Linda’s advocacy for a greener New Jersey,” said Bonazzi. “We all appreciate her lasting contributions to preserving the state’s endangered wildlife.”

Added Larry Niles, ENSP chief, “Linda took a small disorganized support group and made it into an important conservation organization that has become a model for other states across the country. She provided backstop support for the ENSP in very meaningful ways, and helped us see we aren’t just biologists or state employees, but we also are the voice of these species that need protection.”

“I’ve been continually gratified by the passionate support for New Jersey’s wildlife, which so many residents have shown,” said Tesauro, who recently moved to Florida with her husband, Ralph. “But there’s so much more that needs to be done, and the ENSP and the foundation cannot do it alone. It can only be done with the continued and growing support of the citizens of New Jersey.”

CFW’s Women and Wildlife Awards Honor Wildlife Biologists



DEP Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson (right in both photographs) presents the 2006 Women and Wildlife Leadership Award to (left) Dr. Joanna Burger, distinguished Rutgers biologist and author, and the 2006 Women and Wildlife Inspiration Award to Hannah Bonsey Suthers, dedicated avian rehabilitator, bander and researcher.

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Conserve Wildlife Foundation News

Message from Margaret O'Gorman, Executive Director

It is with great pleasure that I introduce myself to the readers of the Conserve Wildlife newsletter. And, it is with much humility that I succeed Linda Tesauro, who graced this page for many years and who built the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ from a small, earnest "friends" group into the wonderful collection of dedicated individuals it is today.

Linda, who has left the foundation to pursue new goals, has handed down a legacy that anyone would be happy to inherit. Her bequest is a dynamic group of people – educators, biologists, fundraisers, board members and volunteers – united by their dedication to the preservation of New Jersey's wildlife and the wild places that sustain it. She has created an institution where science, research, volunteer commitment, education and generous contributions of time and money combine into a powerful force supporting our natural world.

Taking charge of this legacy is a daunting task and one that I cannot take lightly. Unique among the challenges we face is protection and enhancement of the wildlife populations that exist, some in survival mode, in our complex state. The Conserve Wildlife Foundation and Endangered and Nongame Species Program are committed to addressing this challenge together.

Our members, individual donors, philanthropic foundations, Corporations for Conservation of Wildlife, sponsors and others help us carry out our work and are the backbone of wildlife protection in New Jersey. Their generous contributions of time, money and materials allow us to carry out projects such as the Kestrel Nest Box Project, the PeregrineCam Project and the Species on the Edge Art and Essay Contest. Thank you for your continued support.

Remembering Kurt Hoenigsberg

We deeply regret the recent passing of Kurt Hoenigsberg, founding trustee and executive council member. Kurt's dedication to the foundation, including his request that memorial contributions be made to the foundation in his name, represents an enduring legacy for New Jersey's wildlife.



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