



ENDANGERED SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

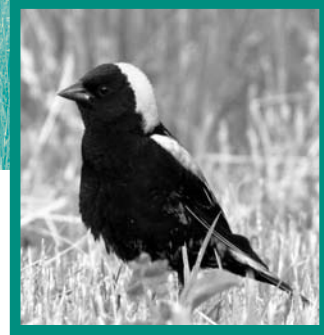


Photo: Robert Linn

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

The first time a bobolink was pointed out to me, I was slogging through a soupy muck in Sussex County– it was late May– everything was fresh and leafy green.

The bird made a ruckus at the wetland’s edge. Mike, my field companion, compared the bobolink’s song to the mechanical bleeps of R2-D2 from *Star Wars*. A captivating little animal, with its energetic flight and funny plumage - the male bobolink gives the impression of having put its clothes on backwards. He’s the only American bird that is black underneath and white on back. And that metallic, bouncing, beeping, beautiful song of his is like nothing you’d expect to hear coming out of an organic being.

A few minutes later, a tractor with a wide mower attachment made its first pass around the perimeter of that field. The bird and the tractor provide a fitting introduction to

grassland birds whose story in this region is tied to a fine balance with agriculture.

Historically, grasslands in the Northeast were itinerant landscapes, shifting with disturbance and succession. They were found in the gaps created by fire, blow-downs, drought, beaver activity, grazing, and clearing; those gaps slowly closed again as trees grew back. Today, our grasslands occur mostly in the form of hay fields, pastures, and fallow crop land. New Jersey loses a few *thousand* acres of farmland each year, and much of the remaining ground is farmed right to the margins in order to be economically viable. Hay fields are often mowed three times during the growing season for maximum yields. Grassland birds like the bobolink, eastern meadowlark, vesper sparrow, and upland sandpiper – who require large swaths of open grassland

and build their nests right on the ground – are vulnerable to both the loss of agricultural lands and intensive management of them.

This land use has a consequence to the bobolink. Populations have dropped by about half over the last few decades (some estimate a *three-quarters* decline over the last forty years). The bird was already considered rare at the time of its “threatened” listing in New Jersey in 1979. Forty-one percent of New Jersey’s endangered bird species and 29% of our threatened birds are grassland-dependent.

The challenges are not just in New Jersey. Along their 6,000 mile fall migration to South America, bobolinks take more punches. The species is called *oryzivorus* – or “rice eater,” named for the birds’ habit of barraging southeastern US rice fields to feed en route

continued on page 2

Editor's Commentary

I would like to congratulate all the winners of our 2008 Species on the Edge Art & Essay Contest (see pg. 5) whom we met recently at the awards ceremony in Trenton. Every year, we look forward to meeting the budding artists, essayists and wildlife biologists who take such care writing about, and depicting, the rare wildlife that live in New Jersey. Every year, we receive 2,000 plus entries from across the state and marvel at the wonderful ways our 5th graders have of expressing their support for our natural resources. We remark how these children choose species that are not necessarily the charismatic fauna of New Jersey. Yes, we see our share of bald eagles and bobcats, but we also see wonderful pieces of art depicting the eastern tiger salamander, tidewater mucket and silver-bordered fritillary.

These children arrive with their parents and teachers at our awards ceremony and are so excited to be recognized for their work. Meeting them, and hearing their enthusiasm for their chosen critters is one of the highlights of our year. We tell them that they have worked like wildlife biologists – getting to know a species, understanding its needs and the challenges it faces and determining how best it can be protected. We hope that this experience will induce some to keep an interest in the subject and follow a career path into wildlife conservation.



Conserve Wildlife Foundation Presents 2008 Women & Wildlife Awards



(left to right) Thomas J. Gilmore of New Jersey Audubon Society and Margaret O'Gorman, Executive Director of Conserve Wildlife Foundation congratulate Barbara Brummer for her Leadership Award.



Inspiration Award winner Diane Nickerson (center) poses with friends L. Paul Lanctot, VMD, and his wife Marilyn.

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The ENDANGERED SPECIES SPOTLIGHT – Bobolink

to their wintering grounds. Hundreds of thousands of bobolinks were shot throughout the early 1900s to protect crops. It still happens in some of their winter range. Also Bobolinks are considered a tasty catch ("butter bird" is another nickname) and collected in the Caribbean for food. Lastly, a pretty bird with a pretty song, bobolinks occasionally end up as caged pets.

The bobolinks' reception in New Jersey each May is a friendlier one. They return to our fields and wet meadows a protected species, an icon of a bucolic past. Here, bobolinks feed mostly on pest insects, worms, and weed seeds, making them a farmer's friend. And there is now a huge state-wide effort to restore and manage grassland habitats for wildlife like the bobolink who depend on them.

The state's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is one avenue for restoration and management. More than thirty landowners and farmers across New Jersey have enrolled in the program since its inception in 2004, amounting to 3,500 acres of grassland



Female Bobolink

Photo: Robert Linn

managed to benefit the birds. Each contract contains a mowing restriction that avoids disturbance during the nesting season. Around half of those 3,500 acres were converted to native warm-season grasses like switchgrass and big bluestem. For bobolinks, who prefer older fields of tall grasses mixed with wildflowers, these warm-season grasses do the trick.

Roy Pauch, one LIP participant, was born and raised on the same farm where

he still resides in Hunterdon County. He remembers seeing his first bobolink at the age of ten. Mr. Pauch hasn't seen a bobolink in a few decades.

In the spring of 2006, Mr. Pauch planted 60 acres with warm-season grasses and wildflowers with assistance from LIP as well as partners at Conserve Wildlife Foundation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

So far, bird surveys at grassland project sites have not revealed an increase in bobolink numbers. It could be that the native grasses don't pop up right away. Mr. Pauch's fields took two full growing seasons to establish. It could be that the birds' preference for older, thatchier fields means that we need to give them some time. Hopefully, that's all it is. A few other grassland birds, like the horned lark and state-endangered vesper sparrow, have shown positive responses to our management. I'll take the small victories for now – Mr. Pauch and I heard a bobolink in his field this week. ↗

written by MacKenzie Hall



Conserve Wildlife Foundation Birding Team Receives Honors

On Saturday, May 10, 2008, the Wrending Talons, our veteran birding team, won first place in the Limited Geographic Area competition in the 25th Annual World Series of Birding. In this unique competition, teams of birders attempt to identify as many birds as possible in a 24-hour period. Birds make up nearly 40% of the animals identified as endangered or threatened in New Jersey. This competition raises awareness about our state's biodiversity and the habitat needs of birds of all kinds.

Birding teams can complete statewide or in a specified region as our team did. The Wrending Talons identified 162 species throughout Atlantic County, representing an amazing 81% of all bird species that can be found in this region.

We would like to extend our special thanks to President Richard Dovey and the Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA) of Pleasantville, New Jersey for sponsorship of our team in the World Series of Birding competition. The ACUA sponsorship

makes it possible for Conserve Wildlife Foundation to receive all the funds that the team members raise through pledges. ↗

Congratulations all around!



Members of the Wrending Talons (l to r) Matthew Klewin, Werner Raff, Margaret Atack-Klewin and Joseph Delesantro

Halting the Harvest to Protect Horseshoe Crabs and Shorebirds

On March 25th, Governor Corzine signed legislation to create a moratorium on harvesting horseshoe crabs in New Jersey coastal waters. This important law was passed to protect the populations of shorebirds, including the particularly imperiled red knot, from further decline. Shorebirds need massive quantities of horseshoe crab eggs to nourish their annual migration. Recent declines in horseshoe crab numbers led to declines in eggs being laid on the beaches, further causing the populations of these birds to crash. The moratorium will be held in place until the populations of both horseshoe crabs and red knots have returned to a level where they will be self sustaining.

Many conservation groups in the state worked hard to encourage lawmakers and the Governor to approve this measure. Much of their work was helped by the findings of the international shorebird team as funded by Conserve Wildlife Foundation



Governor Corzine signs into law the bill placing a moratorium on horseshoe crab harvesting.
Photo: Jane Galletto

of New Jersey. Our legislators were also moved to take action after they saw "Crash: A Tale of Two Species," which was completed thanks to the generosity of Conserve Wildlife Foundation's members.

This effort was a true grass roots campaign that would not have been possible without the members of Conserve Wildlife who invested in the research and helped make the movie happen. This is a true example of your contributions making a difference.

But we cannot become complacent. Currently, two bills are pending that could drastically reduce the strength of the moratorium. One significantly reduces the penalties to those caught harvesting crabs and the other seeks more lenient measures of population recovery. We will all be keeping an eye on these developments and hope that the moratorium can hold firm to allow the birds to recover. ↗

Wildlife Action Plan Public Meetings

We are currently planning a series of meetings to introduce the state's Wildlife Action Plan to people and groups interested in wildlife and their habitat in our state. We hope you will consider coming out for one of these events to meet us and our partners. Our hope is to create meetings that are informative and provide people with the tools and information they need to implement actions from the Wildlife Action Plan into their communities.

Not many people know that management of New Jersey's wildlife is governed by the state's Wildlife Action Plan. This plan, completed in 2006, is a detailed assessment of rare and imperiled wildlife living in our state, the challenges they face, and the actions we can take to ensure they continue as a presence in New Jersey.

The Plan is structured around the five landscape regions of the state: Skylands, Piedmont Plains, Pinelands, Delaware Bay and Coastal. Each of these regions is defined by similar habitat and biodiversity and as such, share similar challenges.

The Wildlife Action Plan takes each region, assesses its habitats and designates Priority Conservation Areas according to a variety of factors including geography, geology, watershed and sub-watershed delineation. For each Priority Conservation Area, a list of habitats and the rare and declining wildlife that live in them was developed. Threats to wildlife were delineated and a series of Conservation

Goals were established to address these threats. Conservation Actions for each goal are listed and have been prioritized.

The Conservation Actions are the key to making the Wildlife Action Plan effective. These actions can be adopted by any group or individual working in wildlife management, conservation or habitat restoration.

There are actions contained in the plan that address the Army Corps of Engineers and actions that address a neighborhood nature group or an individual gardener. Actions include studying wildlife through research, surveys and monitoring; managing wildlife through a variety of means; and restoring habitat for wildlife across the state.

Underpinning all of the actions are calls for continued monitoring and surveying, development and sharing of best management practices, and coordination of Conservation Actions across sites within Priority Conservation Areas.

The plan is over 500 pages long and can be an unwieldy physical document. But, online it is easy to navigate. The plan is available on NJ DEP's website at www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/ensp/waphome.htm. At the bottom of the page, you can link to a pdf version of the plan or an interactive version. This gives you access to an interactive map of the state which, when clicked on, will bring you to the Conservation Area you are interested in.

continued on page 6

Species on the Edge Art & Essay Contest

The *Species on the Edge Art & Essay Contest* is one of the highlights of our year. It's a celebration of children and the rare wildlife that share our great state. Open to all 5th grade students throughout the state, the contest encourages students to learn about the wildlife living right here in New Jersey and it challenges them to come up with creative ways to help protect the wildlife that shares our forests, fields, wetlands, and waters with us.

Each winter we receive thousands of entries from students hopeful that their artwork and essays, depicting an endangered species living in New Jersey, will be chosen as a winner from their county; this winter was no different. Every year, we invite a group of judges to view and read every entry. This year, renowned artist Al Barker; Kathy Klink, a teacher from Delaware Township School in Hunterdon County; and Todd Pover, our Beachnesting Bird Project Manager, volunteered to help us. It was a tough job but after a day of hard work and discussion, they emerged with the best artwork and essays from across the state. These children and their winning pieces help us to tell the stories of our rarest wildlife residents and better engage everyone in keeping New Jersey's wildlife in our future.

Kids of All Ages Get Out and Look!

Currently about 51 million Americans watch birds as a regular hobby. Whether you are an avid birder or a beginner, bird watching is an exciting way to get out and connect with the natural world. It can be done just about anywhere, even in our biggest urban centers. It's easy to get started. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a field guide. Many nature centers and libraries can offer loaner field guides and binoculars, so little or no investment is needed (until you are hooked and want equipment of your own!)

Don't worry about scientific names. Spend your time looking at the more common species such as mourning doves and American robins. Discover some of their finer details. How many birds can you identify in your backyard? Now, take a walk at a local natural area - how many birds can you identify? Are they different from those in your backyard?

Some great tools have been developed for the budding naturalist. Nature Backpack Kits, found at www.hometrainingtools.com, are packed full of tools to help kids start exploring the natural world. So help a budding naturalist blossom into a biologist and start a life-long enjoyment of nature! GET OUT with them today!

Attention 5th Grade Teachers and Students!

Enter the 2009 *Species on the Edge Art & Essay Contest*. The contest will open on November 1, 2008 and close on January 31st, 2009. To reserve your contest kit, contact Maria Grace at (609) 984-0621 or by email to maria.grace@conservewildlifenj.org. ↗

"In order to see birds it is necessary to become a part of the silence." Robert Lynd

Species On The Edge



"I am the Vesper Sparrow. I am also known as the Poocetes gramineus. My numbers have been declining, and I am close to extinction, but with your help, more people in New Jersey may enjoy the heart-lifting chirp of the Vesper Sparrow."
Elizabeth Teng, Mercer County, NJ



"...Only if these aliens called Humans would stop throwing trash in the stream, and if they stop building stuff on our homes, we might not be a threatened species any more. You heard it folks! This long-tailed salamander wants you to stop polluting its home. If you still are polluting, this awesome species will go extinct."
Joshua Jiang, Somerset County, NJ

Legacy Gifts

April of last year left our hearts heavy. We learned that our friend Linn Pierson, a naturalist with a passion for raptors, had passed away. Our Peregrine Cam viewers knew her as the enthusiastic author of the online nature diary entitled “Nestbox News” that describes the lives of a nesting pair of peregrine falcons and their young in Jersey City. For five years, Linn volunteered her time to write about the fascinating lives of these birds of prey.

As the number of peregrines in her region increased, Linn delighted in monitoring their activities as they re-established their nests on the Palisades of the Hudson River, their historic home. She shared her passion for hawks, eagles and vultures at classes she taught for the Palisades Interstate Park and participated in many surveys to collect vital information about birds for the New Jersey Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

Working closely with endangered wildlife, Linn knew that the future held many challenges for New Jersey’s wild creatures. She knew the value of our wildlife research and education efforts and had experienced first-hand the careful monitoring and management needed to restore the endangered peregrines to healthy numbers. Linn maintained her commitment to rare wildlife to the end; after she passed away, we found out she had left a bequest to us to support our work.

A bequest is simple way you can help us continue the work you care about, just as Linn did. It is simply a distribution from your estate through your personal will and testament. Your estate is the sum of your assets including property you own, insurance policies, retirement accounts, cash on hand, etc. Even people like Linn who aren’t wealthy can make charitable bequests. Bequests of all sizes are important to us.

There are a variety of ways to make a bequest to Conserve Wildlife Foundation:

- You may designate a **specific amount** in your will.
- You may contribute a **percentage** of your estate through your will.
- You may contribute the **remainder** of your estate after making specific gifts to family and friends.

Everyone, regardless of circumstances, should draw up a will. Talk with an attorney or financial advisor about which way of giving best suits your individual circumstances.

You can designate a particular program or species to benefit from your bequest, but because priorities change with the times, an unrestricted gift provides more flexibility for our organization to apply the bequest where it is needed the most.

Linn Pierson gave generously of her time and energy to New Jersey’s wildlife and her generosity continued after she left us. Her legacy will work hard to protect the species she cared most about. Consider what you want your legacy to do. ✈



Wildlife Action Plan Public Meetings

(continued from page 4)

Already, non-profit conservation groups and federal agencies are using this plan to guide their work. These same groups and agencies participated in the development of the Plan through a stakeholder process that gathered their input to make the Plan as comprehensive as possible.

Our hope is to engage more people in this plan and to create a way for people and organizations engaged in wildlife and habitat conservation and restoration to share ideas for projects and success stories. We want to engage as wide an audience as possible in implementing this plan and create a way to communicate more effectively with the public.

Our public meetings are the first step in that direction. Designed as an Open House, these meetings will give you an opportunity to meet with groups and people who are implementing Conservation Actions in their Priority Conservation Areas. You will learn more about the plan and the actions you can take to implement it.

We are planning public meetings for two locations in the state. If you would like more information about these meetings, please check out our website at www.conservewildlifenj.org or call Debbi at (609) 984 6012. ✈

BEHIND THE SCENES *MacKenzie Hall*

What is the worst thing you have to do for your job?

All the driving. I have major carbon-conscience issues...I guess that’s a good thing? I cannot wait for something to replace gas and oil in cars.

What is the best thing you get to do?

I get to help people create better habitats on their properties. Sometimes they’re big habitats! And a lot of times, I can see people starting to pay more attention to their land and to nature. That’s a dream job to me.

What delights you in your daily work?

I wish it were truly “daily,” but having that up-close experience with an animal always makes me feel 5 again. Seeing a turtle depositing eggs or a snake shedding its skin or a bird bringing food to its chicks...those delicate moments remind me what we’re fighting for.

If you couldn’t do what you are doing now, what profession would you attempt?

There’s almost nothing else I would feel right about doing. I get bizarrely excited about recycling and reuse, so either some artsy-craftsy recycling angle or green, sustainable design would be up my alley.

What is the best thing anyone ever taught you?

The “Do unto others...” adage, maybe. I’m not a religious person, but thoughtfulness and compassion could save the world this minute if everybody just took a second to get over ourselves.

If you could be one animal (that lives in New Jersey, of course!) what would you be and why?

Northern gray treefrog. They do it all! They start out in water world and end up in the treetops. I would love that perspective. And they can cling to stuff and are majorly cute.

One thing most people (most co-workers) don’t know about you?

I guess only a few people are privy to my love of 80s music. Pop an old Pet Shop Boys tape in the boom-box and I’ll dance around my house for an hour, totally envisioning myself as a backup dancer in a music video! Wait...can I change my “other profession” answer?? ✈



Explorations

In addition to TRACKS, we also produce an electronic newsletter called Explorations. This newsletter tells more stories about New Jersey’s wildlife enabling us to take advantage of electronic communications to present more full-color photographs and more links to information. The most recent edition of Explorations talked about our efforts restoring Atlantic white-cedar stands in Bass River State Forest, a report from our Species on the Edge: Art and Essay contest and other interesting topics.

If you would like to subscribe to Explorations, please send your email address to info@conservewildlifenj.org and put “Explorations” in the subject line.

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TRACKS TRACKS

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PHENOLOGY FUN

Phenology is the study of the timing of natural events. The word comes from a Greek word that means "coming into view." Events like the first openings of leaf and flower buds and the first calls of frogs and toads are all considered phenological events. The timing of these events indicate local and global weather and climate changes, as well as other changes to the landscape and habitat. These events are also fun for you and your family to discover and record.

Share your seasonal observations by linking to our blog at www.conservewildlifenj.org/teacher/info.html.

June

First week: Shorebirds begin to leave Delaware Bay for their breeding grounds in the Arctic.

Northern Gray and Cope's Gray Treefrogs begin to call. High humidity and temperatures over 62° F initiate breeding activity. *Have you heard the trill of these treefrogs?*

Second week: Peregrine falcon chicks start to fledge, or fly for the first time.

Third week: Bald eagle chicks fledging. Depending on the nest hatch date, chicks could fledge as early as late May and as late as mid-July.

Most American kestrels chicks have hatched. Biologists will begin banding the chicks in late June to early July. *Have you ever seen New Jersey's smallest falcon?*

Piping plover chicks begin to hatch. Adults may still be sitting on eggs as late as mid-July. Chicks can be found from now until mid-August. *Have you ever heard the "peep-lo" of the piping plover?*

July

First week: Blue-spotted salamander larvae begin leaving vernal ponds and disperse to their terrestrial locations in mature hardwood forests.

Fourth week: The timber rattlesnake breeding season begins. Breeding will continue throughout August and into early September.

The last of the least tern eggs will begin to hatch. Least tern chicks are present on New Jersey beaches from mid-June to mid-August. Least tern chicks will fledge about three weeks after hatching.

August

Second week: Wood turtles begin to hatch. Hatching will last through the last week of August. If the young turtles survive, they may live 20 to 30 years.

Third week: Songbirds begin to arrive and pass through the Cape May peninsula on their southbound migration.

Fourth week: Timber rattlesnake females who bred the previous year begin giving birth to live young. Timber rattlesnakes have soft egg casings that form inside the female. When the young are ready to be born, the egg casings break open and the female gives birth to live young. Hatching will continue through early September. *Where do rattlesnakes go in the winter?*

Bog turtle eggs begin to hatch after an incubation period of 48 to 58 days.