



Photo by Pamela Jo Byrd Capone

A Band of Skimmers

by Emily Heiser, Wildlife Biologist

Black Skimmers, one of the most recognizable waterbirds, are endangered in New Jersey. Their knife-like orange and black bill – featuring a lower mandible that is distinctly longer than the upper – allows them to skim for fish along the surface of shallow tidal waters.

CWF biologists work with the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJDFW) to monitor skimmer populations. While skimmers previously nested on marsh islands, we recently observed a shift to nesting on barrier islands. Sea level rise is suspected to be a contributing factor to this shift. Since 2010, over 80% of the state population now nests at just one location.

In 2016, CWF along with partners including NJDFW, New Jersey Audubon, and The Wetlands Institute, began banding black skimmer chicks to better understand the distribution of juveniles

post-fledging, wintering, and where they return to breed. After fledging, most juvenile skimmers return to breed within two to four years.

Field-readable color bands help keep track of those birds; each state has its own color assignment, and New Jersey's is dark blue. An alphanumeric code identifies each individual.

Eighty-six juveniles were banded between 2016 and 2018, and 32 have been resighted in migratory or wintering roosts. New Jersey skimmers have been seen wintering in large flocks in Georgia, New York, Virginia, and the Carolinas, and along both the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of Florida.

Two birds had very distinct migrations. Skimmer A16 was banded and fledged from the Belmar colony in 2016. The bird traveled north to Coney Island, New York, before being seen in the winter

on beaches in Florida and Georgia. This short northern migration before moving south for the wintering season is common among some terns but fascinating to find in a skimmer.

Skimmer A23 was also banded at the Belmar colony in 2016 and found at that same colony on June 27, 2017. Just two days later, A23 was seen 50 miles south with a small colony of nesting skimmers! A23 has been documented wintering on Cumberland Island, Georgia.

Skimmers arrive in coastal New Jersey in May to breed in colonies, typically alongside Common and Least Terns.

Keep an eye out for these stunning birds. Once you see a black skimmer, you won't forget it!

Photo above: Banded juvenile black skimmers in Belmar, New Jersey.

A Note From Our Executive Director

by David Wheeler, Executive Director

It's the time of year when nature seems to be on overdrive in New Jersey.

Migratory species visit our skies and waters – inland songbirds and bats, coastal shorebirds and beach nesters, marine mammals and sea turtles.

Raptors raise their gangly young until they fledge and leave for good, now mighty apex predators themselves.

Amphibians breed in vernal pools. Reptiles dig their nests and lay their eggs. Pollinating insects vibrantly

paint nature's canvas with flowers, leaves, berries, and seeds.

At Conserve Wildlife Foundation, each day of spring brings scientific findings from across the state and beyond. Our devoted biologists shift into overdrive in their own seasonal adaptation. They tirelessly trek through the marshes, bogs, forests, and yes, downtown districts, to survey, monitor, study, and track species ranging from bald eagles and American kestrels to bog turtles and Atlantic Coast leopard frogs.

Inside, nature's action is just as non-stop. Our webcams broadcast big moments daily, celebrated or lamented by legions of wildlife watchers. Our educators journey around the state, connecting kids to nature through in-school programs

as the school year winds to a close. Visiting wildlife and expert biologists thrill students in the classroom. Field trips open minds and hearts to a wild world closer to home than kids ever imagined.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation's fast-growing education program brings monthly programs to Newark, Linden, and Trenton, summer programs to Asbury Park, Duke Farms, Belmar, Leonardo State Marina, and Long Beach Island, field trips to Island Beach State Park, and adult and family programs statewide.

There's a lot happening in nature right now – so whether you're getting outdoors or getting online, let Conserve Wildlife Foundation be your guide.



An All-American Recovery: Bald Eagles in New Jersey

by David Wheeler

A few decades ago, just one lonely bald eagle nest remained in New Jersey. The pesticide DDT had taken a terrible toll on these apex predators, poisoning the food chain and weakening eggshells so they couldn't incubate.

We nearly lost our national bird from the Garden State entirely. Heroic measures were needed – and New Jersey's scientists and volunteers did their part, backed by stronger federal regulations. DDT was banned, the Clean Water Act helped water quality rebound, and scientists supported the eggs from that last remaining nest with eaglets from Canada reintroduced to the wild.

Yet even those heroics wouldn't have been enough without the eagles themselves proving adaptable and resilient. The eagle population grew and so did their popularity, which posed new

threats. Eagles will potentially abandon nests if people encroach on them during the January to July nesting season.

To ensure the eagles' remarkable comeback continues, CWF and the state's Endangered and Nongame Species Program, built the Bald Eagle Project around a small number of biologists and an army of volunteers. Today, almost every nest in the state is monitored by a volunteer for nesting behavior, egg laying, hatching, and fledge dates.

'Eyes on Eagles', new in 2019, gave people the chance to safely watch eagles at Mercer Lake through a spotting scope during weekly, naturalist-led events. Eyes on Eagles is a partnership between CWF, PSEG, the Mercer County Park Commission, Mercer County Wildlife Center, and Wildlife Center Friends. CWF partners with Duke Farms on a popular Eagle Cam, while additional CWF eagle funding is provided by

Wakefern Food Corp./ShopRite Markets, Wells Fargo, and the American Eagle Foundation.

Today there are over 200 pairs of bald eagles in our state. Halfway through the 2019 nesting season we have seen eggs laid in 168 nests, with 114 nests already hosting eaglets. Visit ConserveWildlifeNJ.org to learn more.



Photo by Mercer County Parks Commission

Bald Eagle fishing at Lake Mercer.

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Photo by MacKenzie Hall

A Jefferson salamander crosses a road during its annual migration.

Putting CWF's Amphibian Crossing Project into a Statewide Perspective

by Allegra Mitchell

In CWF's long-standing Amphibian Crossing Project, managed with the New Jersey Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) for over a decade, dedicated volunteers chauffeur migrating amphibians across roads each spring as they trek from their upland hibernation sites to their breeding ponds. This program has saved tens of thousands of frogs, toads, and salamanders from deadly vehicle strikes, preventing local amphibian populations from being wiped out. This is especially important for species of concern, such as the Jefferson and spotted salamanders.

Seeking a more long-term solution to the amphibian road mortality problem at the state's top crossing site, ENSP has secured funding to construct a crossing structure system for amphibians to move safely across Waterloo Road in Byram Township, Sussex County. This system – which includes under-road tunnels and guide fencing – will help amphibians avoid problems on the road all season long.

CWF began its third year of pre-construction monitoring of wildlife mortality along Waterloo Road. This data will be compared with post-construction data to track the changes in vehicle-caused amphibian mortality before and after this system is installed. This information will be used to verify the success of the crossing structure system and ideally provide support for similar projects in the future.

This crossing structure system installation is one piece of the larger Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) initiative spearheaded by ENSP.

CHANJ will help land-use managers, conservationists, and transportation planners work collaboratively and make New Jersey's landscape and roadways more permeable to wildlife movement. Last year, CWF joined representatives from over 40 other natural resource, transportation, and conservation agencies and universities to help finalize the first version of CHANJ that was released in early 2019. CHANJ is designed to help a variety of at-risk terrestrial wildlife, from bobcats and quail to wood turtles and pine snakes.

A New “Plover Park” in the Shadow of Old Barney

by Todd Pover

Barnegat Light is best known for its iconic lighthouse. Yet the beach in the shadow of the lighthouse was once considered one of New Jersey’s most important breeding sites for endangered beach nesting birds. A remnant population still exists today, but its prominence has faded in recent decades as the habitat has degraded.

The site is being returned to its former suitability for nesting shorebirds, especially the state endangered piping plover, through a restoration plan spearheaded by Conserve Wildlife Foundation and Rutgers University, and funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Beach nesting birds prefer open, sparsely vegetated beaches. Before the south jetty was built, the area along the Barnegat Inlet was a dynamic sand spit that periodically overwashed. By keeping vegetation at bay, this offered exactly the type of habitat these specialized birds prefer. However, jetties have a stabilizing effect. Mature dunes formed and dense vegetation choked out most of the desirable nesting habitat.

This past winter, in partnership with the state’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we recontoured the beach and dunes along the inlet. We thinned out the existing vegetation, completely removing invasive species such as Japanese Sedge. Next up, a latter project phase will include the construction of a shallow pond, an important foraging feature for piping plovers.

We were excited to see plovers return to the restored site in April, marking the start of a new ‘Plover Park’ in the shadow of Barnegat Lighthouse.



Photo by Northside Jim

Piping plover, the state endangered species that is the focus of the Barnegat Light restoration project.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation Offers Exciting Summer Wildlife Programs for Children and Families



We are proud to offer a variety of learning experiences this summer, ranging from half-day through a full week:

- Duke Farms Wildlife Explorer Program
- Bayshore Adventure Program at Leonardo State Marina
- Beach. Birds. Biology. A Wildlife Experience! at Belmar and Barnegat Light
- Sedge Island Sampler
- Sedge Island Field and Fishing Experiences
- Sedge Island “Bay to Bowl” Locavore Program

Visit our website for more details and to sign up. Make this summer a memorable one for your family!



Photo by Northside Jim

Support New Jersey’s Wildlife
Donate online at
conservewildlifenj.org/donate

New Boat and Webcam Greet Osprey Nesting Season Along New Jersey Coast

by Ben Wurst

Ospreys have returned to New Jersey to nest and are finding new and improved nesting sites, thanks to your support.

CWF has purchased a boat for the Osprey Project because your donations to our GoFundMe campaign reached the amount needed to meet a generous matching gift challenge from the Osprey Foundation. After much research and consideration, we purchased a 2018 May-Craft Cape Classic 22 Hancock Edition from a dealer in North Carolina. It's a skiff that's built like a tank, great for accessing the shallow waters of our coastal estuaries to maintain and survey osprey nests.

The boat will allow CWF to expand our 2019 osprey conservation work, which kicked off in March when we installed three new nesting platforms near Atlantic City in partnership with the South Jersey Transportation Authority, New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife, Stockton University, and Atlantic City. We also repaired and re-installed a platform in Gateway National Recreation Area to replace one that repeatedly fell down in the past.

And thanks to a grant from the Osprey Foundation, we installed the new "Barnegat Light Osprey Cam" near a nest along the bay on Long Beach Island. View the intimate life cycle of these majestic birds online at conservewildlifenj.org/ospreycam.



Photo by Ben Wurst

Osprey in nest near Barnegat Light, one of the stars of our new Osprey Cam.

Leopard Frogs: A New Program for a New Species

by Allegra Mitchell

In 2018, CWF launched the Kauffeld's Calling Frogs program, recruiting and training volunteers to document the calls of the newly discovered Atlantic Coast leopard frog in select New Jersey locations during the breeding season.

Long mistaken for the southern leopard frog, the new frog was determined to be a separate species with unique habitat requirements in 2012 – a thrilling discovery of a new species right in the heart of the greater New York City metropolis.

Most Atlantic Coast leopard frogs live relatively close to the coast, with just under half of all known populations found less than one kilometer inland. They face habitat loss as a result of major storms and sea level rise, in addition to critical wetland breeding habitat loss and fragmentation.

CWF biologists are eager to document the extent of this frog's range within New Jersey so we can mitigate threats and promote its habitat needs and population stability.



Photo by Brian Zarate

ENSP biologist Brian Zarate holds an Atlantic coast leopard frog.



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CWF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

CWF education programs are growing as fast as the kids we teach! Our statewide Species on the Edge Contests and school presentations engaged more students than ever.

We brought our monthly 'Soaring with STEAM' programs to kindergarten, third, and fifth grade classrooms across Newark, using our falcon, eagle, and osprey webcams to get kids excited about learning. Teachers and administrators flocked to our professional development workshops.

A fifth grade student from Newark's Sussex Avenue Renew School shows off her 'Soaring with STEAM' artwork.



CWF gratefully thanks the following companies and foundations for their support: PSEG Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Phillips 66, David & Carol Lackland Family Foundation, Zoological Society of New Jersey, Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund, New Jersey Natural Gas, Mercer County Parks Department, Mercer County Wildlife Center, Wildlife Center Friends, Wakefern Food Corp./ShopRite, Atlantic City Electric, GAF, The Merrill G. & Erita E. Hastings Foundation, New Jersey Education Association, Duke Farms, and the Osprey Foundation.