

Photo by Herb Houghton



## ROOFTOP RETROSPECTIVE:



# 20 Years of Peregrine Falcons in Jersey City

by Alison Levine, Communications Coordinator

Twenty years ago, a silver-banded female peregrine falcon soared over the Jersey City skyline. Peregrines were struggling to survive in the Eastern U.S. Populations had crashed from a high of an estimated 350 nesting pairs in the 1930s, all the way down to zero in 1964.

In New Jersey, falcons had been reintroduced, but the state Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) noted in 2000 that the species was failing to meet their recovery goal, instead finding “generally poor nesting on bridges, and recent erratic success at coastal towers.”

There was hope though. Falcons had taken to nesting on high-rise buildings and appeared to be thriving in urban environments. That year’s report cited a new nest box at 101 Hudson Street in Jersey City. The silver-banded female

and her mate “aggressively claimed” the rooftop site and produced two young. ENSP and Conserve Wildlife Foundation installed a webcam shortly after, providing New’s Jersey’s first live streaming wildlife camera.

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of people have tuned into the peregrine reality show being broadcast 24-7 on our Jersey City webcam. They celebrated each egg laid and hatched. Falcon fans learned about diseases and contaminants that plague young falcons, and how they are banded for future tracking. Family dramas unfolded in real time – orphans were fostered in the nest and falcons waged fierce battles for territory. State biologists struggled to fund the camera, and in 2014 CWF took over the initiative entirely, raising private funding to upgrade to a new digital camera system.

Falcons continued to thrive in city life, and high rises proved to be good breeding sites. Less than 10 miles to the southwest, CWF partnered with Union County to set up a second falcon cam at the Elizabeth courthouse in 2016, giving people another window into the intimate lives of these birds of prey.

Our most recent Peregrine Falcon Report notes that building-dwelling falcons are an integral part of the species’ recovery. While the silver-banded female who ruled the skies in Jersey City was replaced in 2015, her legacy lives on in her many young. Falcons continue to nest high atop urban skyscrapers, soaring across our skies, raising families on our screens, and holding a wild place in so many hearts. Visit our Jersey City Falcon Cam at [conservewildlifenj.org/education/falconcam](http://conservewildlifenj.org/education/falconcam).

Photo above: Peregrine falcons are the fastest animal on earth, flying over 200 mph.

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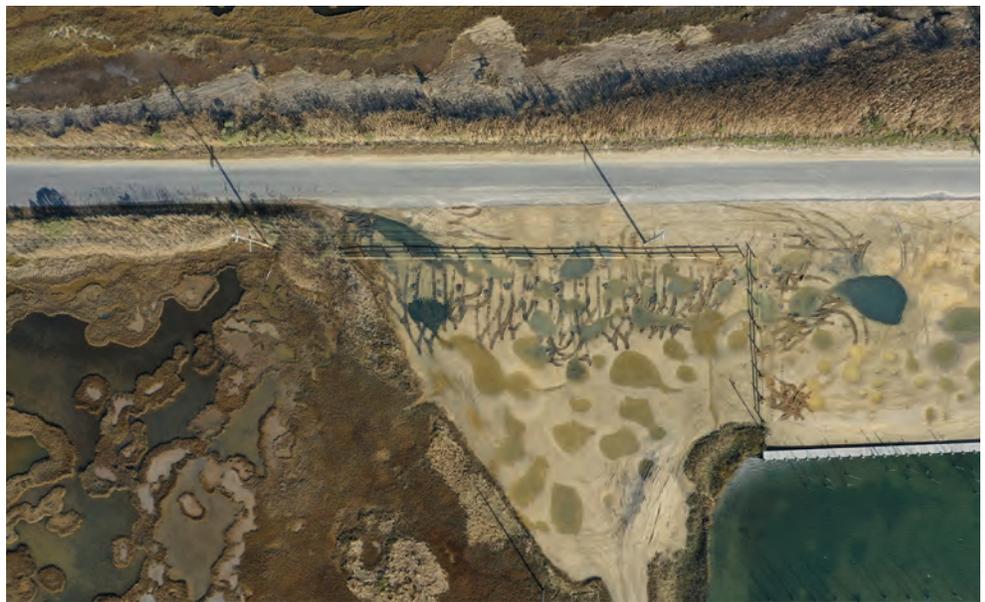
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An aerial photo of the habitat enhancement site inside Great Bay Boulevard

## Great Bay Terrapin Habitat Enhancement Project

by Ben Wurst, Habitat Program Manager

This past winter CWF began a large habitat enhancement project, in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife, to benefit northern diamondback terrapins. The project, located within Great Bay Blvd. Wildlife Management Area, will create a half-acre nesting site at a former marina.

The nesting habitat is located in an area where we've worked to reduce roadkills of adult female terrapins over the past decade. Over the years we've encountered over 6,000 terrapins on Great Bay Blvd. and have successfully reduced the number of roadkills while engaging the local community.

In late November, we installed a split rail fence to delineate the border of the project area, and a couple die-hard volunteers helped to install around 250 linear feet of coir logs. The coir logs, which are logs made from jute and coconut fiber, will help stabilize the sand and prevent it from moving too far. Then, in late January approximately 3,000 tons of sand was delivered on site. Once the sand settles, it will be graded to cover the coir logs and planted with native herbaceous and woody vegetation. During the spring and summer we will monitor the site for nesting and exclose nests to protect them from predators.

With the creation of this important habitat, we help ensure the long-term survival of terrapins along our coast. Climate change is visibly underway here, as sea levels are expected to rise a foot or more over the next ten years in New Jersey. As their former habitat floods more frequently, terrapins will lose many of their historic nesting areas. In addition, the hardening of shorelines to prevent flooding in coastal communities will block off even more essential habitat for terrapins to reproduce. Lastly, the creation of this site will drastically help improve the chances of the survival of young through direct monitoring and protection of nests by CWF staff and volunteers.

A portion of the funding for this project is being supplied by Forked River Power LLC through a NJDEP Supplemental Environmental Project which CWF obtained this year.

# Grassland Bird Study

by Meghan Kolk, Wildlife Biologist

A new and exciting grassland bird project is on the horizon for CWF this summer. For the past three years, CWF has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct grassland bird surveys and habitat restoration projects in the northern Pine Barrens region. In addition to continuing these projects in 2020, the team will begin a research project this May.

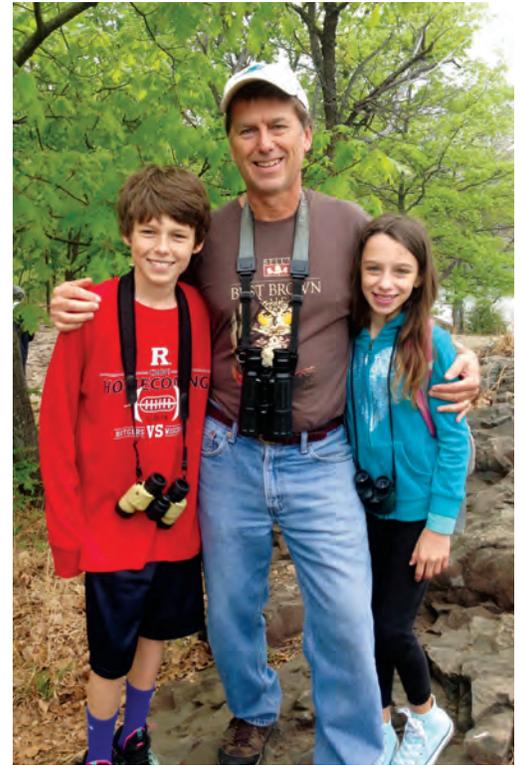
The project will study bird use and occupation by numerous grassland bird species on a 300-acre plot of habitat during the breeding season. One half of the plot will remain un-mowed for the entire breeding season, while the other half will be mowed to maintain a grass height of 7-14 inches. Ten weekly point count surveys will be conducted throughout the season, with points evenly divided between the two study areas. The results from the two halves will be compared to determine the best management practices for maintaining grassland bird breeding sites near runways on airfields.

Species of interest include State-listed birds such as the grasshopper sparrow (threatened), bobolink (threatened), eastern meadowlark (species of concern), and upland sandpiper (endangered). These species are all in steep decline due to habitat loss. The upland sandpiper's status in New Jersey is of great concern because the last remaining breeding sites occur in airports. Upland sandpipers require a very large, un-fragmented patch of grassland for their home range, which is just not found elsewhere in our state. Finding the most effective way to manage these nesting birds in airports is essential to keeping them in New Jersey.



The endangered upland sandpiper's only known breeding grounds in New Jersey are located in airports.

## Making a Difference for Wildlife



CWF Board member, Rick Weiman, a monthly giver himself, encourages wildlife enthusiasts of all ages to make a commitment to protecting wildlife.

by Liz Silvernail, Director of Development

CWF appreciates the dedicated group of supporters who sustain our work by making monthly donations. We count on these loyal friends to keep our biologists in the field protecting wildlife and our educators in the classroom teaching children. Their gifts cover anything from planting pollinator gardens and repairing osprey platforms to creating turtle gardens and providing free school programs.

Monthly donors receive special updates, wildlife photos, volunteer opportunities, and invitations throughout the year. We are always thrilled to welcome new members to the club. Please join today at [ConserveWildlifeNJ.org](http://ConserveWildlifeNJ.org) to make a difference for wildlife.

Support New Jersey's Wildlife  
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# The Endangered Eastern Tiger Salamander

by Larissa Smith

The Eastern Tiger Salamander is a New Jersey state endangered species that is only found in the southernmost part of the state along the coastal plain. The largest salamander in the state, ETS can reach up to 13 inches in length. They are mole salamanders, spending their adult life in upland woods burrowed under the ground.



Eastern Tiger Salamanders spend most of their adult lives underground, coming out to breed on rainy winter nights.

These salamanders come out on warm, rainy nights in the winter, and migrate to seasonal vernal pools to breed. Once widespread, there are currently only about 15 known ETS breeding pools in New Jersey, mostly in Cape May and Cumberland Counties.

Vernal pools are extremely important habitat for not only ETS and other amphibians but for many other species. Vernal pools are vulnerable to habitat loss, pollution, climate change, and off-road vehicles. A small but dedicated group of volunteers surveys the known ponds each year for egg masses and larvae. Volunteers also survey potential ETS breeding pools to document if ETS are using them.

Even though most people will never see an ETS in the wild, they are a species we should all care about protecting. They, and other amphibians, are indicator species to the health of the environment and water quality. It's awesome to know that these beautiful and secretive creatures still live in the wild in our state.

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## Rare Beach Plant Recovery

by Todd Pover, Senior Biologist

CWF has a long-established track record for protecting New Jersey's at-risk beach nesting birds, so recently we turned our attention to help recover rare beach plants that share much of the same habitat. Since 2018 CWF has deployed a more proactive approach to protecting seabeach amaranth, by identifying the annual plants earlier in the growing season and placing fencing around them so they are not accidentally trampled by beachgoers or run over by the vehicles used by towns to maintain their beaches.



The effort is already reaping rewards. In 2019 nearly 15,000 plants, a record number, up from only 300 plants in 2013, were found by surveyors. In addition, the plants were distributed more widely along the coast, including at some sites managed by CWF. Based on this success, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is funding the initiative again in 2020 in hopes of sustaining this year's population increase.

# A Note From Our Executive Director

by David Wheeler, Executive Director

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans participated in the first Earth Day celebration. This watershed moment may well have been unimaginable less than a decade earlier – when Rachel Carson’s seminal *Silent Spring* awakened us to how we were losing the wildlife and nature around us.

In the 50 years since, Earth Day has grown substantially. Over a billion people are expected to participate this milestone year, representing every nation in the world. The

event’s growth mirrors our increased environmental awareness and demand for sustainability.

The challenges can be daunting, even overwhelming. Climate change, habitat destruction, marine debris, pollution, and invasive species pose major threats to people and wildlife across the planet – and here in New Jersey. Yet there remains reason for hope. Generations have now grown up with the importance of environmental protection already assumed, not something on the fringes of activism. Through social media, digital photography and video, today’s youths have unparalleled access to knowledge, sharing the importance of causes true to their heart.

That grassroots leadership is vital in a place like New Jersey, where

inordinate challenges – the nation’s densest population, an industrial legacy, a vulnerable coastline – are countered by positives like vast preserved land, an active and well-educated populace, a range of habitats, and unparalleled wildlife diversity for a place our size.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation’s biologists, naturalists, educators, and volunteers provide much of the leadership that wildlife and a healthy environment depend on. But anyone can make a difference – by planting native plants, installing a bird or bat box, or donating to support CWF’s wildlife programs. Visit [www.ConserveWildlifeNJ.org](http://www.ConserveWildlifeNJ.org) to learn more about our innovative projects – and the many ways that you can lead!



## Barnegat Light Habitat Restoration – Winter 2020, Phase 2

by Todd Pover, Senior Wildlife Biologist

"If you build it, he will come" may be famous from the movie *Field of Dreams*, but we think it is also fitting for the habitat restoration at Barnegat Light. In this case, "he" is the piping plover, an endangered shorebird, and instead of building a baseball field, we are creating suitable nesting habitat.

A few decades ago, the beach along Barnegat Inlet was one of the state’s more important nesting areas for piping plovers and other beach nesting birds. Piping plovers prefer open, sparsely vegetated, and largely flat habitat to nest. Unfortunately, over time the site became dominated by large densely vegetated dunes, and even some maritime forest, causing nesting shorebird populations to decline.

Storms and strong tides have the power to reset the beach to the ‘early

successional stage’ that piping plovers prefer. But the jetties along the inlet have a stabilizing effect that prevents natural processes from occurring, so we need to use artificial means to enhance the habitat.

Last winter, through a partnership led by CWF and Rutgers University, the area along the inlet was cleared and recontoured by bulldozers to make it more desirable for nesting shorebirds. This winter, we completed the second phase, constructing a large shallow pond to provide better feeding opportunities for vulnerable piping plover chicks.

The goal is to provide more space for nesting plovers, in order to increase their low breeding population in New Jersey, as well as improve the annual production of chicks. Piping plover chicks tend to return to the same site or region each

year, so the prime means to recover the population is to increase chick success.

Other partners on the project include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NJDEP’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



Photo by NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife

Piping plover habitat restoration at Barnegat Light.



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*by Alison Levine, Communications Coordinator*

## LISTEN UP: NEW PODCAST EXPLORES...

### Wildlife and Climate Change in New Jersey

New Jersey's wildlife already face many challenges living in the country's most densely populated state. As the climate changes, new threats are challenging even the most resilient species. Take a deep dive into how our changing climate is impacting the face of conservation in the Garden State in our new podcast series, State of Change.

Climate change brings superstorms and sea level rise, coastal erosion and salt water intrusion, invasive species, disrupted life cycles and increased diseases - and they all pose potentially disastrous challenges for local species.

Hosted by CWF executive director David Wheeler and produced by Matt Wozniak, each episode highlights a different climate change issue - and every story helps paint a portion of the big picture of our changing world.



Shorebirds, pollinators, fish, amphibians and more are at risk. Take a listen at <http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/education/podcast/>.