FALL 2000

Wildlines

The quarterly newsletter of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

Piping Plovers Defy the Odds

Near the entrance of Hampton Beach State Park, where beachgoers flock to the sand just about the time tiny piping plover chicks hatch and scamper among the dunes, something wonderful happened this summer. Two plover chicks survived to fledge. And down the coast a bit, at Seabrook's town beach (which is considerably quieter than Hampton Beach), 12 chicks fledged from five nests.

Piping plover

The six successful nests represent a return of a species that, before 1997, had not been documented nesting on New Hampshire's coast for 25 years. The Hampton Beach success came thanks to a roped off area around the nest that extended to the high tide line, enabling the birds to access an area where much of their food is found without battling beachgoers.

"They matured nicely. They ate enough to grow and build up fat reserves to be able to fly and migrate," said Mindy Spiegel, a Fish and Game seasonal biologist who monitored the birds throughout the summer months.

Blanding's Turtles, Intrepid Pioneers

Little do they know it, but six Blanding's turtles fitted with radiotransmitters over the summer are pioneering for the good of their own species and a bunch of other reptiles and amphibians, too. Sure, they're diving down to the bottom of ponds or lazily soaking up the sun atop their log hang-outs, eyeing those juicy tadpoles. But they're also part of a two-year study to find out what habitat these critters rely on the most. We know they need wetlands, of course, but what kind of wetlands, and how much of a buffer between them and human development do they need?

By tracking the turtles' movements over land and water with hand-held, radio receivers that beep when a turtle is near, researchers will be able to see where the turtles spend most of their time. Using

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Wildlines
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What a Great Donation!

Kids Sell Lemonade to Help Eagles

Pokemon toys, Barbie clothes, candy – there are lots of ways kids could spend $53.77. However a group of kids in Greenland sold lemonade this summer, not to earn money for treats, but to help protect eagles.

Customers, intrigued by the "Save the Eagles" sign near the kids' lemonade stand, were very supportive, according to Michela Marsh, 8.

"A lot of people just gave us money and didn't buy any lemonade," she said. Marsh was joined at the lemonade stand by her sisters, Emma and Katie Marsh, and friends Tyler and Ian McFarland, Griffin and Hunter Mayhew, and Patrick Carrigan. The kids brought their earnings in a tin box to the Sandy Point Discovery Center in Stratham, where staff members suggested that the most appropriate place to give money to save eagles would be the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

A possible use of the donation will be to help pay for improving the quality of human-made nests built at Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Raptor Breeding Report

Bald Eagle nests fail; Peregrines and Ospreys triumph

The Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program contracts with the Audubon Society of New Hampshire to monitor and manage the state's bald eagles, peregrine falcons and ospreys. Below are field reports for each of these species.

Bald Eagles

There's bad news and good news about the state's breeding bald eagles this year. No chicks were produced, but four pairs built nests, which is the most nests documented in the state since recovery efforts began. The nests are on Lake Umbagog, Spoonwood Pond, Pontook Reservoir and the Connecticut River in Hinsdale. Lake Umbagog hosted a second eagle pair this year that did produce two chicks, but their nest is right across the border in Maine (so we can't officially count them as "ours," no matter how much we welcome them to the area!) Eagles in three of the four New Hampshire nests produced eggs, but no chicks were ever observed.

"It's hard to pinpoint exact causes, and the exact cause is probably not the same at each site," said Chris Martin, a senior biologist with the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

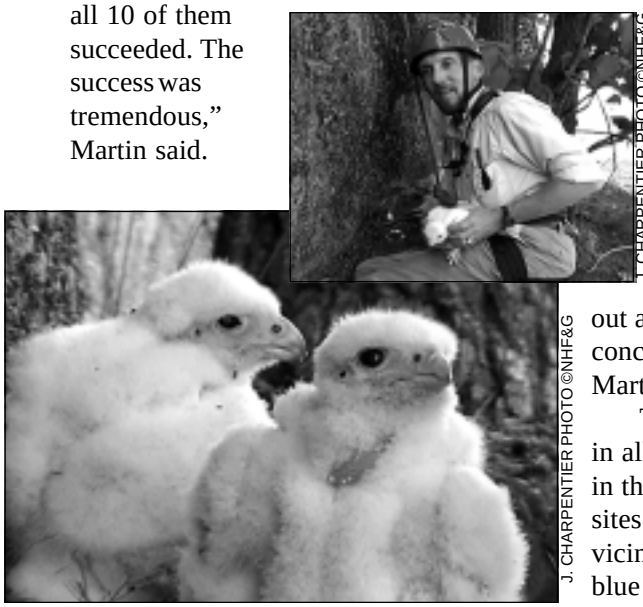
One season without chicks isn't as bad as it sounds, Martin said, because eagles are long-lived. They'll likely have better luck next breeding season and in the seasons following. In fact, there's great promise for the future, because, besides the four previously mentioned pairs that built nests, two additional pairs of bald eagles have been observed that will likely try to produce young next year.

"There's very clear evidence of at least a territorial pair at both Squam Lake and Moore Reservoir," Martin said.

Peregrine Falcons

Peregrine falcons triumphed over cold, wet nesting conditions to fledge 25 chicks, tying last year's breeding record. It was a mere 40 degrees for several days while the birds incubated their eggs on exposed mountain ledges, where they hunkered down against the assailing sleet. Amazingly, none of the nests failed.

"What was outstanding was that out of 10 territorial pairs, all 10 of them nested and all 10 of them succeeded. The success was tremendous," Martin said.



J. CHARPENTIER PHOTO ©NHF&G

J. CHARPENTIER PHOTO ©NHF&G

Audubon Society biologist Chris Martin scales the peregrine nesting ledges, successfully banding 24 of the 25 fledged chicks.

In addition to the 10 pairs at cliffs, a lone peregrine was observed in the downtown Manchester area during the breeding time, bringing the total occupied territories to 11.

Other highlights of the breeding season:

• Peregrines fledged chicks at Owl's Head Cliff in Benton, an historic nesting site that hosted nesting peregrines for the first time in decades.

• At Holt's Ledge, a new 1-year-old female moved into the territory in the middle of the breeding season and, against the odds, produced a chick with a male that has been there for several years.

• Biologists and volunteer rock climbers were able to reach the nesting ledges and put identification bands on 24 of the 25 chicks.

Ospreys

Forty osprey chicks fledged from nests around the state this year. That's the second highest number of fledglings documented since monitoring began 20 years ago. Even better, 18 out of 24 active nests fledged chicks, for a 75 percent success rate – the highest on record.

"One thing that particularly excites me is that unlike 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago, the nesting pairs are spread out across the state and not concentrated in one area," Martin said.

The birds are now nesting in all the major river drainages in the state. Two new nesting sites were discovered in the vicinity of Great Bay, in great blue heron colonies. The ospreys actually refurbished existing heron nests and nested right among the herons. This resourcefulness comes as a welcome surprise, because biologists have been concerned about limited suitable nesting areas for ospreys.

"This really changes our search image for ospreys," Martin said. "It's good for ospreys because there are lots of existing heron colonies out there."

Habitat Work Continues for Karner Blue Butterfly

Biologists and volunteers continued habitat enhancement work over the summer at the site of the state's last Karner blue butterfly population in hopes that the struggling butterflies will make a comeback.

Teams laboriously cleared brush in an effort to open up the area to more sunlight and expose the soil. They also seeded the areas with wild lupine and nectar plants. Results were greatly enhanced with the use of heavy equipment, supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, John Brown Company and Public Service Company of New Hampshire, which continues to support the project, with both equipment and staff.

The Concord Karners are fighting an uphill battle, with less than 25 butterflies comprising the population. "It is disheartening that the Karner blue butterfly population in Concord remains low; however, past management, along with intensified management efforts this summer, make me optimistic that we will see some positive response by the Karner blues to our efforts next summer," said Carla Palaschuk, who is leading the Karner work for the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

Since Karner numbers have dwindled so precipitously in recent years, New Hampshire biologists have added a new approach to Karner restoration: translocating Karner eggs from New York. Biologists traveled to Saratoga, in upstate New York, over the summer to collect and bring back 50 eggs. The eggs, stuck fast to wild lupine leaves, will spend the winter under protected conditions. After they hatch and the emerging larvae turn into butterflies, they will be released at the Concord Airport, near the state's existing population.

"The goal is to once again have a Karner population, or several small populations, at the airport site, which has been an historic Karner site up until 1993," Palaschuk said.

Palaschuk worked with Michael Amaral of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Steve Fuller, a Karner blue expert working as a Nongame Program consultant, to collect the eggs. Translocation has brought good results elsewhere; Ohio has imported female Karner blues from Michigan since 1998, resulting in a successful reintroduction of the species.

MARQUIS WALSH PHOTO ©NHF&G

Karner blue butterfly

Re-established Tern Population Growing Fast

The word must be spreading: "The Isles of Shoals is one great place to raise a family" – if you're a common tern. Common terns exceeded all expectations this year when 446 pairs of the state-endangered species nested on White and Seavey islands off the New Hampshire coast.

In just the fourth year of a recovery effort led by the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program and the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, biologists and volunteers banded close to 300 chicks and observed many more hopping amongst the wind-swept rocks. "Just the sheer number of birds was exciting. You'd see thousands of birds on any day," said Audubon biologist Diane DeLuca.

A pair of the nationally endangered roseate terns also spent the breeding season on the Isles, exhibiting courtship behavior but not building a nest as far as monitors could tell. Endangered arctic terns were seen regularly as well, but as with the roseates, no nests were observed.Two full-time biologists, Dan Hayward and Matt Charette, spent the summer watching the birds from behind blinds.

Four years ago, Audubon and Fish and Game biologists began the process of scaring away predatory gulls and enticing migrating terns to the islands by broadcasting sounds of an active tern colony and by setting up tern-like decoys. Keeping the gulls away by establishing a human presense on the islands early in the breeding season has worked very well. In 1997, 300 pairs of gulls used the area; this year, only nine pairs actually attempted to nest.

Tern recovery efforts are taking place around the region, but New Hampshire is standing out among them. "We had the second highest production of any island in the Gulf of Maine or Massachusetts," DeLuca said. "We've definitely gone beyond our expectations."

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geographic positioning system (GPS) readings, they can pinpoint the locations.

"We will develop home-range maps and see what habitat they're using and what their range is. We'll also look at dominant wetland plants, water depth, air and water temperatures and other data," said Tracey Tarr, a UNH research technician helping to carry out the study.

Teams of biologists and volunteers searched for the Blanding's turtle – a good representative of other herp species in terms of habitat needs – using traps baited with cat food and sardines.

The teams focused on two areas of the state. John Kanter, coordinator of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, led a team looking in the Hopkinton area, while Tarr led a team in Durham and Newmarket. The Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program is coordinating the project, which involves the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, UNH and local volunteers, under a grant from the Department of Environmental Services. Next year, the teams hope to find many more turtles and fit them with the transmitters. The grant has provided for 21 transmitters, which are glued onto a turtle's carapace, or top shell, in an unobtrusive fashion. "We don't want it to get in the turtle's way," Tarr said.

MARQUIS WALSH PHOTO ©NHF&G

This photo shows how the small radio transmitters are carefully glued to the back of a turtle's carapace.

The study will generate a lot of new information, because little is published about the turtle's habitat, and what has been published has been conflicting and representative of other areas of the country. "We want to find out what Blanding's turtles are doing in New Hampshire," Tarr said.

FALL OUTDOOR CALENDAR

October

- Monarch butterflies pass overhead on a journey to Mexican mountains. Some will fly as far as 3,000 miles.
- Say goodbye to robins and sparrows as they head south.
- Say hello to juncos as they arrive from points north.

November

- Watch and listen for Canada geese passing overhead.

December

- Take a trip to the coast to look for migrating seabirds. Some species you're likely to see: common eiders, oldsquaws, scoters, common loons, common goldeneyes, buffleheads, red-necked grebes, horned grebes, purple sandpipers and red-breasted mergansers.

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