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Wildlines

WINTER 2010

New Hampshire Fish and Game's quarterly newsletter of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program

The State of New Hampshire's Birds

A look at the conservation status for breeding bird species

A new report, *The State of New Hampshire's Birds: 2009*, completed this past summer, provides a comprehensive overview of the conservation status of the roughly 180 bird species that breed in New Hampshire.

Wildlife populations are always changing, so it is normal to see some species increasing, others declining and some remaining stable during a given time period. However, when several species in the same habitat all show similar population increases or decreases, or when population changes are maintained for several years in a row, biologists can assume that additional factors are influencing these changes in either positive or negative ways.

"Ideally, we need to identify birds at risk before they reach threatened or endangered status," said Pam Hunt, a biologist with New Hampshire Audubon and author of the report, working under contract with N.H. Fish and Game's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. "Out of 186 species that breed in the state, 42 are increasing, 65 are decreasing and 27 appear stable. For many of the remaining 52 species, there is not enough

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Populations of the American three-toed woodpecker are in decline in New Hampshire



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Thanks, Nongame Supporters!

New England Cottontail Work Is Now Underway!

Last fall, the Nongame Program asked for your help on a special project to protect New England cottontails. With only eight known locations in the entire state where these rabbits still exist, New England cottontails are one of the species at greatest risk of extinction in New Hampshire

This winter, thanks to contributions from over 200 generous supporters, biologists will be working to restore habitat and relocate New England cottontails from low quality habitats to protected areas with high quality habitat.

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Northern harrier
(*Circus cyaneus*)

Fast Facts: Northern harrier

Status: Endangered in New Hampshire

Description: 17½ to 24 inches long. Males are pale gray with white underparts, and females are brown on top with streaked underparts. Both have a white rump patch. When flying, harriers have long tails and long wings and often glide unsteadily.

Habitat: Breeds in old fields, wet meadows, fresh and salt water marshes and uses many open habitats for foraging. Prefers low woody vegetation for nesting sites.

Range: In N.H., breeds almost entirely north of the White Mountains. Winters from South America to British Columbia, with some spending the winter along the N.H. seacoast.

Diet: Primarily mice and other small mammals and birds.

Fun Fact: Northern harriers have better hearing than other birds of prey because their faces are more round in shape, similar to an owl. They are also the only hawks that hunt by flying close to the ground and catching their prey by surprise, rather than searching from the air or a perch.

Schoolyard Habitat Grants Deadline

With funding from the sale of New Hampshire conservation license plates (“Moose Plates”), the Nongame Program is able to offer mini-grants to educators interested in doing wildlife habitat-related projects with their students. The Homes for Wildlife Action Grant Program involves youth in making a difference for wildlife through habitat projects on schoolyards and community lands. Applicants can apply for up to \$300, or \$600 with matching funds. Habitat projects may take place on school grounds or other areas, such as local conservation lands.

Last year, the program awarded

\$1,650 to four New Hampshire schools. Each school created wildlife habitat gardens and outdoor learning spaces by planting native plants and providing food and shelter with a direct benefit for birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

For more information on the Action Grants Program, contact Marilyn Wyzga at marilyn.wyzga@wildlife.nh.gov or 603-271-3211. The deadline for submitting applications is February 1, 2010.

For a complete list of projects made possible by the sale of Moose Plates, or to find out how to purchase one, visit www.mooseplate.com.



Mt. Lebanon elementary students plant little bluestem grass to enhance butterfly habitat in their schoolyard.

information available to determine how their populations are faring,” explained Hunt.

For *The State of New Hampshire's Birds: 2009* report, Hunt used a combination of state and regional population trend data, as well as the threats and conservation strategies identified in the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan, to determine each species' conservation status.

The report is organized by habitat. Since the New Hampshire landscape is dominated by various types of forests, the majority of New Hampshire's bird species are found in one forest type or another. However, no species is restricted to a single type of forest. As a result, the report includes two broad forest categories: spruce-

fir forests and hardwood-mixed forests.

In the spruce-fir forest, twice as many species are decreasing as are increasing, and in many cases the causes of decline are unknown. “There is a clear need for better information, since very little data is available for nearly a third of these species,” Hunt said. Species showing clear declines include the olive-sided flycatcher, Bicknell's thrush, Canada warblers, American three-toed woodpeckers and many others.

“In contrast, in the hardwood/mixed forests, there are good population trend data for most birds, and these show an even split between increasing and decreasing species,” said Hunt. “Increasing species tend to be those that adapt well to human-altered landscapes. Declining forest species tend to be those that prefer early successional stages, including the least flycatcher and the wood thrush.”

It's not just in forests that early successional birds are in trouble. “Birds that rely on shrubland habitats exclusively are one of the groups showing the most pervasive declines,” said Hunt. The same is true for grassland birds, whose habitats revert to forest as farmlands are abandoned.

Unlike birds that use terrestrial habitats, little is known about many species that occur in aquatic habitats, such as freshwater wetlands and estuarine marshes, as they are rarely detected by most monitoring programs. As a result, over half the New Hampshire bird species that use wetlands have unknown or uncertain trends.

Thanks to intensive population management and habitat protection, there is good news for other bird species that use aquatic habitats, including common loons, ospreys, bald eagles and three species of terns. These populations have rebounded in recent years as a result of dedicated management and monitoring. “It's important to keep in mind that these species' recoveries are only as good as our ability to remain vigilant and continue to manage their habitats or populations,” Hunt noted.

The report also takes into consideration that most birds found in New Hampshire also spend a great deal of time outside of the state. While many species breed and raise their young here, and many more species stop by to feed and rest along migration routes, a significant portion of each bird's life is spent outside of New Hampshire.

“Most of our birds are affected by broader regional factors. We need to

New Look for Nongame Website

The Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program has a whole new look – online, that is! We've been working to make the Nongame portion of the N.H. Fish and Game website easier than ever to use, allowing you to follow the progress of specific projects and find the tools you need to help nongame wildlife in your own communities.

Visitors can now connect to virtually any aspect of the Nongame Program right from the main Nongame web page. New features include dedicated nongame project pages, where you can check in on the latest developments with Karner blue butterflies, piping plovers, bald eagles or amphibians and reptiles – just to mention a few. We've also added many new species profiles and a whole new section on invertebrates, including mussels, moths and butterflies.

One new feature that should be especially useful is the addition of direct links to specific species sections of the N.H. Wildlife Action Plan. No more combing through hundreds of pages to find the information you need from this critical reference. Plus it will be easy to learn about Wildlife Action Plan workshops and conferences going on in your community.

So, please visit www.wildnh.com/nongame and check us out on the web today!



consider another whole suite of habitats and issues when we think about conservation at the scale of a species' annual cycle,” explained Hunt.

According to Hunt, priorities for bird conservation here in New Hampshire include: 1) conserving important habitats; 2) managing habitats; and, 3) gathering data to better our understanding of bird population trends.

The *State of New Hampshire's Birds: 2009* report is the first publication that provides a complete review of all of New Hampshire's birds. The report makes it clear which populations are in greatest need of conservation and will be a useful tool for guiding decision makers in future research and conservation efforts.



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Donations received for this special fall appeal also count as part of the private matching funds we need to help the Nongame Program qualify for a critical federal grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service awarded last spring. Fish and Game's Nongame Program was chosen to receive one of just 13 grants available nationwide. The Rangewide New England Cottontail Initiative was selected as one of the country's highest priority projects for grant funding because it is an innovative public-private project that will restore habitat and New England cottontails throughout their range from the Gulf of Maine to the lower Hudson River.

This project will also benefit a great diversity of wildlife, including many species of birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects. Ultimately, it is hoped that the focused efforts of the Rangewide New England Cottontail Initiative will boost their populations enough to prevent the need for federal endangered species listing. Thank you for your support!



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WINTER Wildlife Almanac

JANUARY

- The woods abound with wildlife, even in winter. Look high for birds fluttering in the trees and low for tracks left in the snow by animals passing through. Owls may be heard and seen as they perch on bare tree branches. Otters sometimes leave long trails in the snow, as they slide on their bellies down snow-covered slopes.

FEBRUARY

- Listen as you step outside – black-capped chickadees, tufted titmice, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, northern cardinals, blue jays and even mockingbirds make a beautiful winter chorus.

MARCH

- Sounds of spring start ringing through the air! Listen as some of the early amphibians, like wood frogs, start to emerge and warm up their bodies and voices. Early migratory birds, such as red-winged blackbirds, return to marshes and let out their loud “conk-a-ree.”

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