



Photo by Kevin Buynie

New Jersey Bald Eagles Soar to New Highs in 2019

by Larissa Smith, Wildlife Biologist

Bald eagles experienced a record year in New Jersey, with more young spreading their wings and taking their first flights in our state than we've ever seen before. Our biologists and volunteers tracked 238 fledglings from 189 nests through the New Jersey Bald Eagle Project. This continues a remarkable comeback for a state that saw just one nest with one fledgling in 1982.

A recovery of this magnitude only happens when hundreds of people dedicate thousands of hours working on multiple fronts. The long road from one failing nest with one fledgling to today's highs started with banning the pesticide DDT, which made eagle eggs too fragile to hatch. The passing of the Clean Water Act then helped fish, and in turn, eagle, populations rebound.

With the stage set for a comeback, years

of labor-intensive fieldwork to monitor and manage eagles and their nests made that recovery a reality. For the past 20 years, CWF has coordinated the New Jersey Bald Eagle Project with our partners at the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Program. The project fields a small army of devoted volunteers who gather data and monitor nests to prevent disturbances that can lead to parent eagles abandoning their young.

In 2019 roughly 85 volunteers headed out, binoculars in hand, spending thousands of hours collecting the data that conservation demands, and heading off potential problems for eagles.

That huge level of commitment and dedication from many people all over the state ensures that eagles can continue to thrive. To keep New Jerseyans excited

about helping eagles, CWF connects them to these awe-inspiring birds through webcams with partners at Duke Farms and in Mercer County, tracking Jersey-born eagles on our website, hosting free educational programs for the public, and getting the next generation ready to step up for eagles through in-school and after-school programs.

Special thanks to the Eagle Project volunteers, PSEG, the Mercer County Park Commission, Mercer County Wildlife Center, Wildlife Center Friends, Duke Farms, Wakefern Food Corp./ ShopRite Stores, Wells Fargo, Chemours, and the American Eagle Foundation for supporting and working with us to protect bald eagles in New Jersey.

Photo above: Bald eagle soars above Mercer County, New Jersey.

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CWF Biologist Todd Pover putting up fencing to protect seabeach amaranth.

2019 Dispatch from the Beach

by Todd Pover, Senior Wildlife Biologist

As one of CWF's flagship initiatives, the 2019 breeding season for the beach nesting bird project was as busy as ever.

New Jersey recorded an increase of almost 20 pairs of piping plovers, a much-needed boost for this critically endangered shorebird, after a near-record low of just 96 pairs last year. CWF was at the forefront of the effort to protect plovers, directly managing over a third of the state's pairs at two coastal sites. CWF has long partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in our stewardship at the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, one of the state's most important sites, and we also monitor the New Jersey National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt, which successfully produced chicks this year.

CWF also assisted the state with coastwide management of least terns, black skimmers, and American oystercatchers. It was a particularly challenging year, as they colonized several new beaches, including some unexpected heavily visited ones, such as Point Pleasant and Belmar.

Another exciting new development was our work conserving seabeach amaranth, an endangered beach plant. CWF conducted surveys to find the plants, then erected fences and coordinated with local towns to protect them. All the work has paid off. 2019 was a record year with over 10,000 amaranth plants occurring along the state's coastline.

Finally, work continued on our piping plover habitat restoration at Barnegat Light in partnership with Rutgers University, with a second major phase scheduled to kickoff later this winter. Building on that success, CWF also embarked on a multi-year habitat enhancement at Sandy Hook with the National Park Service, to remove the invasive Japanese sedge plant, which reduces the beach's suitability for other at-risk native species.

Saving Diamondback Terrapins along the New Jersey Coast

by Ben Wurst, Habitat Manager

Northern diamondback terrapins are a coast hugging, saltmarsh living, shellfish eating, aquatic turtle. Their ultimate survival depends on the ability of adult females to safely access nesting areas during summer months. Since 2010 CWF has worked to document and reduce roadkills of terrapins on roads in southern Ocean and northern Atlantic Counties.

Our main project area is within Great Bay Boulevard Wildlife Management Area, where at times there are more terrapins than cars on the road. Each year CWF recruits two volunteer student interns to lead fieldwork with assistance from dedicated local volunteers. They conduct surveys and collect data on terrapins that are encountered on area roads. Since 2016 we have been notching a small percentage to identify them when recaptured. Mark-recapture data collected can help biologists to estimate the size of the local population, which is currently unknown. We believe that the population here is quite robust, but there are still many threats, like poaching, drowning in ghost crab pots, and sea level rise, which threaten their long-term stability.

To help give females a better chance of successfully reproducing, during the fall of 2019 CWF began partnering with New Jersey Fish & Wildlife to create a half-acre “turtle garden” at a former marina. Once complete, this sand-restored site will enable terrapins to nest more safely and avoid the dangerous roadside nesting spots that often result in fatal collisions with oncoming traffic.



Photo by Ben Wurst

CWF thanks terrapin volunteers Emily and Gabi.

CWF Helps Kids Soar with STEAM



Kids enjoy beach based learning at the Bayshore Adventure Program.

by Liz Silvernail, Director of Development

Learning about their wildlife neighbors—and identifying the threats to these animals’ survival – teaches children how their everyday actions impact the natural world around them and that environmental science is an important, and in-demand career option.

CWF's Soaring with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) educational curricula uses structured lessons and interactive activities to address the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and National Art Standards through summer learning experiences, in-school programs, live webcams, field trips, and technology.

We just launched a new NGSS-aligned herpetology program for sixth graders centered on the newly discovered Atlantic Coast Leopard Frog. Students work alongside biologists, learning real-world science and technology skills, while providing data for CWF research projects in partnership with Rutgers and Montclair State Universities.

Soaring with STEAM is generously funded by Victoria Foundation, PSEG Foundation, Phillips 66, The Merrill G. and Emita E. Hastings Foundation, David A. and Carol B. Lackland Family Foundation, NJEA, Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund, E.J. Grassmann Trust, OceanFirst Foundation, New Jersey Natural Gas, and The Zoological Society of New Jersey.

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[conservewildlifenj.org/donate](https://www.conservewildlifenj.org/donate)

Ospreys Continue Coastal Resurgence in 2019

by Ben Wurst, Habitat Manager

These days, it's hard not to notice ospreys along the New Jersey coast. Their conspicuous nests adorn many structures, from communication towers to duck blinds (and yes—they still nest in trees!).

The ospreys' collective health has a direct correlation to the quality of our coastal waters, which is a major driver of our coastal economy. Each summer we coordinate surveys of some of the most densely populated colonies to determine their productivity. Early results show that ospreys enjoyed another exceptional year in 2019, with around 575 active nests documented throughout the state. The outcome was determined in 75% of active nests which produced a total of 834 young.

We banded a total of 286 ospreys, including banding 68 young with red auxiliary bands on Barnegat Bay for future tracking. Our work was made much easier this summer by our first ever Osprey Project student intern Marissa M. from Rider University. She assisted with all aspects of the project and proved to be very helpful to the project this year!

CWF is incredibly grateful to the Osprey Foundation and everyone who donated to our GoFundMe campaign to purchase a new boat—a 2018 MayCraft Cape Classic Hancock Edition 22. This larger boat helped to carry more gear and guests while conducting nest surveys throughout the coast of New Jersey. This fall we will be visiting many nests to clean off nesting material and repair any damage that has emerged. Keep an eye out for osprey volunteer opportunities as they arise!



Photo by Ben Wurst

Osprey Project intern Marissa approaches a nest.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation Helps reTURN the Favor for Horseshoe Crabs



Photo by Sandra Anderson

Overturned horseshoe crab.

by Meghan Kolk, Wildlife Biologist

CWF completed its seventh season partnering with the reTURN the Favor program to help recover the horseshoe crab population in the Delaware Bay. This multi-partner program, permitted by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, organizes volunteers to rescue stranded horseshoe crabs during the spawning season.

Horseshoe crabs are a vital keystone species, with many species depending on them for survival. Populations have been in sharp decline since the 1990's due to overharvesting and habitat loss. Yet dedicated volunteers have saved more than 360,000 crabs since the program started. This highly successful program has proven that a simple act like flipping a crab right side up can be a powerful conservation tool that makes a real difference for these highly vulnerable creatures.

Reach out to CWF
if you would like to get involved

info@conservewildlifenj.org

A Note From Our Executive Director

by David Wheeler, Executive Director

In a state like New Jersey, wildlife faces an incredible number of obstacles. Habitat paved over for new developments. Roads and highways crisscrossing natural areas. Hundreds of thousands of people living in a small area. The legacy of centuries of heavy industry.

Climate change brings a new set of challenges to wildlife here in the Garden State – and to the scientists at Conserve Wildlife Foundation who work hard to protect them.

New Jersey has already begun experiencing many of these challenges, including fiercer and more frequent storms, sea level rise, shifts in habitat, disruption of the timing of food sources for migrating species, and invasive species and diseases exacerbated by a warming climate.

We have to address climate change impacts for nearly all of the species we work to manage or restore in New Jersey. And none of it takes place in a vacuum—some species are directly affected, while others may suffer from changes to their prey, predators, or parasites.

CWF has the right combination of hands-on, solution-driven biologists and partners who bring their own diverse expertise and skills. Of course,

we also have the most inspiring and dedicated volunteers around, who bring unmatched passion and knowledge to their work for New Jersey's wildlife.

Over the next year, we'll be taking a closer look at climate change's impacts on New Jersey's wildlife. Watch our blog for a new podcast series, "State of Change," detailing personal and compelling stories, each focusing on a different species or habitat challenged by climate change.

Visit
www.ConserveWildlifeNJ.org

to learn more about climate change in New Jersey—and what you can do to help wildlife survive!



Helping Bog Turtles and Amphibians Survive a Changing Landscape

by Allegra Mitchell, Wildlife Biologist

Bog turtles have declined more than 50% across their range nationally, and New Jersey is no exception. Throughout 2019, CWF conducted population surveys on five private properties throughout New Jersey with historical bog turtle observations, or potentially suitable habitat. Our surveys occasionally also find state-listed wood turtles and box turtles, a species of special concern. CWF plans to survey new sites in 2020 to expand our understanding of bog turtle range in the state.



Photo by Allegra Mitchell

CWF interns help conduct turtle surveys.

In coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CWF assisted in restoring wetland habitat at five active bog turtle sites. By managing invasive plants and tree overgrowth, these habitats are better suited for bog turtle movement and nesting. CWF will continue to reach out to landowners to facilitate bog turtle habitat management where populations exist.

Many amphibian species have undergone similar declines, as they have proven highly vulnerable to road crossings, water quality impacts, and habitat destruction. In 2019 CWF volunteers assisted in moving almost 1,200 amphibians across three busy roads in Sussex and Warren Counties during the early spring breeding migration. In preparation for a wildlife passage system installation at the busiest of these roads, volunteers surveyed daily vehicle-caused mortality, recording

almost 5,000 amphibians hit from late February through June during 2019. Installation is planned for late 2020, with continued monitoring to determine amphibian road mortality reduction.

Other volunteers throughout New Jersey assisted CWF biologists in identifying five new Atlantic Coast leopard frog populations through the Kauffeld's Calling Frogs program. This project aims to verify the range of this newly discovered species throughout the state.



Photo by MacKenzie Hall

Helping a spotted salamander across the road.



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CWF LAUNCHES NEW PODCAST SERIES

State of Change: Wildlife and Climate Change in the Garden State

Though New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the country, the Garden State remains an unparalleled oasis for wildlife and biodiversity. Yet as climate change looms, many species that call our state home are facing uncertain futures.

The State of Change podcast will bring together expert voices to explain these threats. Episodes will be released online, free to stream and download at all major sites where podcasts are found.

Keep an eye on our blog, www.conservewildlifenj.org/blog/,
to listen to our latest episodes.

