



Photo: MacKenzie Hall

ENDANGERED SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



Photo: Jim Gilbert



American Kestrel

The American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is the smallest, most beautiful and widespread falcon in North America and one of two falcon species that nest in New Jersey. Kestrels are colorful birds of prey about the size of a mourning dove. American kestrels have reddish-brown backs and tails, blue-gray crowns with variable amounts of rusty color, and two vertical stripes on the sides of their heads. They have two dark “eyespot” on the back of their head. Male kestrels have blue-gray wings while females have reddish brown wings with black barring.

Although the American kestrel is widespread, meaning they live year round throughout much of the United States, the northeastern kestrel population is declining. Today the kestrel is listed as a Species of Special Concern in New Jersey

(not yet endangered or threatened but on its way).

Kestrels are found in open, grassy habitats – especially ones that have cavities for nesting and perches for hunting. Kestrels can be seen hovering in grasslands, pastures and parklands or perched along the road on telephone lines. The decline of kestrels in New Jersey is likely due to destruction of grasslands from development. Also, nesting cavities are lost. As we clean up our fields, we remove trees with nest cavities the kestrels use.

American kestrels are versatile, opportunistic hunters feeding on assorted small prey, such as grasshoppers, lizards, mice, snakes and small birds. Unlike peregrine falcons, kestrels don't use velocity to kill their prey. They perch to see their prey and then they use a stationary, hovering

flight that allows them to dive down short distances to capture their prey. The eyespots on the back of their heads provide protection from other aerial predators, like Cooper's hawks. The eyespots make it appear that the kestrel is “looking” up at the predator causing it to move on to find a less alert victim. The eyespots allow the kestrel to focus on hunting for the prey beneath them.

Researchers have not determined the exact reason for kestrel declines but, we do know that the availability of cavities for nesting appears to be a limiting factor. Kestrels are secondary cavity nesters. They don't make their own cavity but use existing natural or man-made cavities. They prefer nest sites surrounded by suitable hunting grounds with unobstructed entrances. Kestrels nest in buildings and other man-made structures including nest boxes.

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Women & Wildlife – honoring women, celebrating wildlife.



Back in 2006, Conserve Wildlife Foundation honored two outstanding women for their contributions to understanding and protecting New Jersey's wildlife populations and habitats.

Hannah Bonsey Suthers and Professor Joanna Burger inaugurated the program as the first recipients of our annual Women & Wildlife awards. The two honorees, with over 50 years experience between them, exemplify everything we choose to honor with this program and were the perfect pick for its launch. You can read about their, and the other honorees, achievements on our website which lists short bios of all the winners.

Over the five years since its inception we have honored ten women working at the top of their profession making a huge difference to New Jersey's biodiversity. We've also awarded two posthumous honors to women whose contributions to wildlife ended far too soon. Every award was given to a woman who has distinguished herself in the field of wildlife protection and conservation.

Every year we receive more nominations than the year before. Every year the caliber of the women professionals nominated humbles us. Every year the selection panel struggles to make a choice from so many worthy nominees. 2011 will be no exception and we look forward to celebrating two more fascinating and exemplary women at our awards event in March next year.

Working in the field of wildlife protection is challenging. Past honorees and present day practitioners will attest to the demanding nature of a profession that requires you to be physically capable and intellectually swift, as well as practical, patient, innovative and curious.

Wildlife species are not the best co-workers. They can't be depended upon to show up on time and where you want them. They don't always respond in the ways you anticipate. They are impacted by things you don't even see, and they interact with the world in ways that you can't even know. Protecting imperiled populations can seem almost Sisyphean at times, but the rewards, when they come, are worth it.

We like to think of our Women & Wildlife awards as a small reward for a career in a tough profession. We hope the program sheds a light on all the professionals working in the field and leads to a greater understanding of the important role wildlife, and those who seek to protect it, plays in ensuring New Jersey's biodiversity continues to enrich our lives.

The deadline for the receipt of nomination forms is Friday, January 21st. A nomination form can be downloaded from our website. We will announce the 2011 honorees in February, and the awards ceremony will be held on Sunday, March 27th at the wonderful Prallsville Mill in Stockton, New Jersey. Join us for a celebration of wildlife and the professionals who have dedicated themselves to protecting it.

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for our Women & Wildlife awards, please contact me at mogorman@conservewildlifenj.org

Get Out! And look for eagles

The winter months are perfect for viewing bald eagles in New Jersey. Bald eagles that nest in New Jersey remain here year-round. But many northern nesting eagles make their way south to spend some of the winter months. Some of these migrating eagles stop and overwinter in New Jersey while others continue south and overwinter in parts of Delaware, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and perhaps even Georgia and Florida.

Check out some of these eagle hotspots here in the garden state. You probably don't have to travel very far to catch a glimpse of this majestic animal.

North – Merrill Creek Reservoir, Washington, Warren County or Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

Central – Manasquan Reservoir, Howell, Monmouth County

South – Mannington Meadows, Salem County ➤

ENDANGERED SPECIES SPOTLIGHT – American Kestrel

Nest-box programs are an effective management option to grow the number of kestrels in areas where nest sites are limited.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, in partnership with the Endangered and Nongame Species Program implemented a nest box installation and monitoring program in 2006. Nest boxes have been erected in three geographic areas in habitat determined to be suitable for kestrels. The boxes are monitored by biologists during the breeding season. Because kestrels reuse nest sites particularly if they have successfully raised young, we focus on boxes that have been successful at least once since 2006. Currently, 139 boxes are being monitored

by staff and volunteers. In 2010, 38 boxes were used by kestrels and we banded 62 fledglings.

In New Jersey, kestrels lay 4-7 (average of 5) eggs as early as late April and incubate them for about 30 days. Females do most of the incubating and males bring food to them. After the chicks hatch, the male brings food to the female who then feeds the chicks. The chicks grow quickly; in about 30 days they go from helpless fuzzy, down-covered chicks to fully feathered fledglings. After fledging, the adults continue to feed their young for several weeks. Less than a month after fledging, young kestrels leave the nesting area to begin life on their own.

The nest box program in New Jersey appears to be successful; we are adding to the population. Since 2006, we have banded over 300 fledglings. The kestrel you see hovering over a field may be one from our nest box program! ↗

ENDANGERED OR THREATENED

What's the difference?

An endangered species is in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or most of its range. A threatened species is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Eagles Up Close and Personal

For the second year, Conserve Wildlife Foundation will be bringing bald eagles into classrooms, offices, and homes, throughout New Jersey and beyond. Through collaboration with Duke Farms, CWF is offering on its website, the Duke Farms EagleCam, a live action webcam that captures the trials and tribulations of a pair of bald eagles as they breed, incubate, and raise young. It is a wonderful tool for learning about bald eagles as a means of personal enjoyment and as a useful scientific tool for research and education. Scientists, as well as the general public, can learn quite a bit about bald eagles while watching the eaglecam. They can discover what food resources are being utilized and come to understand behaviors such as incubation, brooding, and fledging.

Teachers across the state are using the webcam in their classrooms too. It is a perfect tool for teaching about animal behavior, bird biology and natural history, endangered species, food webs, contamination, and more. The webcam can be used in many different subject areas including science, social studies, language arts, and technology. Teachers wrote to us expressing how important the webcam was to them and their students:

“The students...are so excited to have this special window to watch the beauty of the eagle's nest.”

“Thank you for providing an amazing first-hand experience for my students and a look at nature up close that they might not have ever seen. A healthy new respect was developed for our responsibility to this planet and I hope you will continue to provide such experiences in the future.”

“Thank you for providing this wonderful opportunity for my students to learn first hand about why we are all responsible for everything that co-exists on this our planet, Earth.”

Tune into the webcam in early 2011 and be prepared to become hooked! Visit www.conservewildlifenj.org.

Teachers - Lesson plans and other educational materials for using the Duke Farms Eaglecam are available on our website at www.conservewildlifenj.org. ↗

CWF Staffer Receives Awards for Service

On August 19th, Todd Pover, CWF's Beach Nesting Bird Project Manager, received three awards for outstanding service.

In recognition of Todd's outstanding contribution to a case of the unlawful killing of a piping plover chick by beach rake, the US Fish and Wildlife Service – NJ Field Office and the NJ Department of Environmental Protection honored Todd's biological skills and unflinching commitment from 2007 to 2010 that went well beyond his normal duties to the conservation needs of rare beach species.

At the same time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Northeast Region Office honored Todd for his professional dedication and outstanding contribution to the conservation and recovery of the federally listed piping plover and other beach nesting birds. Well Done Todd! ↗



Ups and Downs for the 2010 Eagle Nesting Season

In 2010 the New Jersey bald eagle nesting season had some up and downs. The good news is that our eagle population continues to rise! This season we monitored 90 territorial eagle pairs, which is a record high. Eighty-two of these pairs were active (laid eggs) and 8 were territorial. Thirteen new pairs of eagles were located this season, eleven in the south, one in central and one in north jersey. Staff and volunteers continue to monitor possible new nesting sites throughout the state.

Forty-three pairs were successful in producing 69 young, for a productivity rate of 0.84 young per active nest. This is well below the average for NJ in recent years, and is below the long-term stable population rate. Unfortunately 32 nests failed to produce any young this season, with most of the failures attributable to the spring storms that produced snow, rain and wind. While these losses were disappointing, the lower productivity rate in 2010 won't have a detrimental effect on the NJ eagle population in the long term; our eagle population has produced at a rate above that required for population maintenance for the past 17 years.

The 2011 eagle nesting season will be starting soon. The pairs will begin returning to their nests in the early winter and start sprucing them up in preparation for the nesting season. New Jersey eagles lay their eggs anywhere from January through March. The earliest known laying date in New Jersey is January 4th. The dedicated eagle project volunteers will continue to monitor the eagle nesting activity closely in 2011.



Photos: George Cervera


More details on the 2010 nesting season are available in the 2010 New Jersey Bald Eagle Project report 

New Jersey Wild Outdoor Expo Draws 4,000 Outdoor Enthusiasts

New Jersey's bountiful natural resources were on full display when 4,000 visitors from across the state came to experience a great variety of outdoor recreational activities at the Assunpink Wildlife Management Area in Upper Freehold Township on September 25 and 26. Whether event participants fished, hiked or kayaked, attended seminars or demonstrations, or enjoyed the many environmental and conservation exhibits, they joined in celebrating the Garden State's special wildlife and outdoor heritage.

We were pleased to partner with the NJ DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife and Division of Parks and Forestry in presenting this inaugural event. Our exhibit was busy throughout the two days

with a record number of new people becoming members and signing up to learn more about New Jersey's rare wildlife. Our four bat-house building workshops were packed with individuals, as well as whole families, working together to create places where female bats will be able to give birth and raise their young next summer. The support for New Jersey's imperiled bat population, as well as our many endangered and threatened wildlife species, provided welcome encouragement for the staff and board members of Conserve Wildlife Foundation working to strengthen populations and protect habitat.

The New Jersey Wild Outdoor Expo successfully showcased the outdoor recreational opportunities available to all New Jersey residents and visitors. Thank you to everyone who attended or helped with the event. 



Board Member Rick Weiman shares a corn snake, a NJ endangered species, with visitors at CWF's exhibit.



Workshop participants learned about the importance of our bat population while constructing bat houses.



Kayaking and fishing were among the recreational opportunities featured at the event.

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New Jersey's Wildlife Populations in Danger: Our 2010 Status Report

Weather had a huge impact on wildlife this past year. The cold winter led to a higher than normal loss of young bald eagles while the hot, dry summer was favorable to beach nesting birds which are often impacted by coastal floods. Disease still impacts our state's bats and disturbance by people or predators plays a role in fledging success. Volunteers make surveying possible and without them we would not be able to report with such certainty on the successes and disappointments we have experienced this year.

Allegheny Woodrat: Annual monitoring recorded a 77% increase in the capture rate for woodrats from 2008 to 2010. This rebound follows 4 full years of decline.

Arogos Skipper: Surveys yielded two new locations near a known site in Northern New Jersey.

Bald Eagles: A record number of 90 territorial eagle pairs was recorded, 82 active nesting pairs monitored and 69 young fledged.

Black Skimmers: Statewide breeding population remained nearly the same as last year, with the vast majority of the birds in just one colony. About 1000 chicks fledged at this large colony showing good productivity.

Bobcat: All suitable habitat in the area north of I-80 and west of Rt. 287 appears to be occupied with bobcats and the population seems to be increasing. However, highly traveled roads appear to be a significant barrier for bobcat movement to other suitable habitats.

Bog Turtles: Several locations produced new records of turtles this year, including many young turtles and nests. At one of these sites, no turtles had been observed in nearly 30 years.

Freshwater Mussels: A population of eastern pondmussels was found within the Cohansy River; the first record for the species there. A second green floater shell was found within the Pequest River. This species has not been found alive in NJ since 1996.

Frosted Elfin: Extensive surveys were conducted for this butterfly. Frosted elfin was found in most of its historic/known locations though very often in low numbers. Several new colonies were located including one fairly large population.

Harbor Seals: The second and third highest seal counts documented for the Great Bay colony were made during 2010

while the highest number recorded for the Sandy Hook haul-out site was also recorded. Harbor seals have been increasing in NJ waters in recent years and are considered secure/stable within the state.

Indiana Bats: All known Indiana bat hibernacula in NJ have been affected by White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in bats. First year mortality in Hibernia Mine, the largest hibernaculum exceeded 90%. We have not yet been able to assess mortality to Indiana bats but we fully expect that the population has been severely impacted by WNS.

Least Terns: The breeding population has remained the same since 2004. The number of chicks fledged this year was low to moderate due to predator problems.

Migratory Shorebirds: Shorebirds on the Delaware Bay remained at historically low levels. Red knots and Ruddy Turnstones, the two species that most rely on horseshoe crab eggs, are at especially low numbers. The percentage of red knots gaining sufficient weight to reach the Arctic increased 40%; up from 15% last year.

Ospreys: Just over 600 young were produced this year, more than any other year in the project's history.

Peregrine Falcons: 25 pairs are known to nest in New Jersey. Productivity was above average at 1.68 young/active nest. Cliffside nests continue to have reproductive difficulty.

Piping Plovers: The number of breeding pairs (108) remains about the same as last year but on the low side historically. The highest ever number of chicks fledged per pair was recorded this year, 1.39.

Silver-bordered Fritillaries: These butterflies remain present at many historic locations. Surveys in North and Central NJ failed to locate any new populations.

Terrapins: A barrier fence along Great Bay Boulevard in Little Egg Harbor reduced road kills and increase public awareness of terrapins while driving.

Wood Turtle: An artificial nest pit installed in 2008 was visited by a pregnant female wood turtle for the first time this year. Although she did not nest, it was important to learn that she found this new nesting area on her own. Creating safe nesting areas for wood turtles may be a tool to help conserve this species.

Attention Middle School Students!

Apply to attend the 2011 Sedge Island Summer Field Experience

We are excited to announce the 2011 Sedge Island Summer Field Experiences in Barnegat Bay. In partnership with the Sedge Island Natural Resources Education Center, we have planned 2 sessions for the summer 2011 for students entering grades 7 to 9 interested in exploring New Jersey's salt marsh environment. The Field Experiences will run July 6th through July 10th and August 8th through August 12th at the Sedge Island Natural Resource Education Center. Sedge Island Natural Resource Education Center is located in Barnegat Bay in New Jersey's only marine conservation zone. Participants will spend a week at Sedge Island

and explore the natural and cultural history of Barnegat Bay.

For more information about the Sedge Island Summer Field Experience visit www.conservewildlifenj.org/education/students/sedge/.

An Informational Open House has been scheduled for Saturday, February 26th, 2011 from 10am to 12pm at Island beach State Park Interpretive Center, Seaside Park, NJ. Come on down to learn more, ask questions, and meet the instructors.

Wildlife Action Plan In Action – Partner Spotlight: Crystal Springs Golf Resort

Golf courses are not always bastions of biodiversity. Covering about 40,000 acres of New Jersey, golf courses are an important part of the landscape, and these days course managers are getting serious about their role as land stewards.

Crystal Springs Golf Resort is comprised of seven public courses in Sussex County. The courses were carved from farmland, forests, limestone ridges, and spring-fed wetlands – hallmarks of the New Jersey Skylands. As those habitats get whittled away by development, the remaining lands become ever more critical to the survival of wildlife and the health of our soils, water, and air. The Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) is designed to help us all make effective land management choices for wildlife – whether we have postage-stamp backyards, larger suburban lots, or responsibility for hundreds of acres. Crystal Springs falls on the larger end of that spectrum, and they've been tackling the laundry list of WAP actions to keep their holdings alive with wildlife both common and rare.

At their Ballyowen course in Hardyston, for example, Crystal Springs maintains a mosaic of “no-mow” grassland amongst the golf greens. In 2006 they also planted native warm-season grasses in an adjacent farm field. As well as reducing labor and adding to the course's Celtic flair, these areas provide a combined 60 acres of shelter, nesting, and foraging grounds for grassland birds like the bobolink (a threatened species), which are now regular residents at Ballyowen.

Two other courses contain large wetland areas that are home to rare species. With help from state and federal agencies, Crystal Springs has plugged old agricultural ditches that had drained wetlands for decades, removed invasive plants that were choking

their open “emergent” habitats, and planted a small woodland buffer around an amphibian breeding pool. Work is ongoing to safeguard habitat for bog turtles, a federally listed species with a special stronghold in northwestern NJ.

Most recently, Crystal Springs offered up 600+ acres of forest land for bat habitat and research. Crystal Springs has a mix of forests, floodplains, and wetlands that is attractive to forest bats like the federally endangered Indiana myotis, who roost and raise their young under the bark of dead or dying trees. An assortment of artificial roosts were installed in one section of forest this fall as part of a pilot project, and Crystal Springs staff will be girdling select trees to provide a greater array of natural roosting options for bats.

While they could have taken a much different tack, Crystal Springs' ownership and staff have embraced their role as endangered species caretakers. Superintendent Brad Sparta and grounds manager Craig Worts deserve special kudos for moving these projects along. A number of partners have provided guidance and funding, including the NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, GoNative! consulting, Audubon International, and the Conserve Wildlife Foundation.

Check out the things you can do for wildlife in your area: www.njfishandwildlife.com/ensp/waphome.htm. Or contact us to feature your project! ✈



Native warm-season grasses at Ballyowen provide nesting habitat for birds like the bobolink and grasshopper sparrow.



Craig Worts plugs an old farm ditch at Crystal Springs, restoring water to a previously drained wetland.



Biologist Karena DiLeo uses cedar shakes to create bat roosts, mimicking the loose bark that many bats prefer.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Bob Coleman is a board member for Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ. He is a passionate supporter of wildlife conservation. Bob works for Church & Dwight in Princeton, New Jersey.

What delights you in your daily work?

In my current role of sustainable development, it is very gratifying to get the opportunity to raise employee awareness about sustainability and help integrate sustainable practices and behaviors into our business processes so we can have a positive impact on the environment.

If you couldn't do what you are doing now, what profession would you attempt?

I would probably want to be an environmental scientist or wildlife biologist. My participation on the Board of Trustees of CWF has provided me the opportunity to see firsthand the results of our efforts to protect New Jersey wildlife and habitats. I am so impressed with the staff, their passion and what they continue to learn as they perform their jobs. Actually, I am a bit envious but extremely grateful to them for their work.

What wildlife "lives" in your office?

I call it "wall wildlife". From my bird clock to my migratory bird poster, bobcat Adopt a Species certificate and photographs of tree swallows, oystercatchers and an Osprey, I keep myself surrounded with wildlife and enjoy looking at them every chance I get.

If you could be one animal (that lives in NJ of course!) what would you be and why?

Simple—a bobcat, and not just because of the name! I have been an

animal lover my whole life, but cats of all sizes have always intrigued me. I enjoy their "attitude" and marvel at their strength and adaptability. I think they are one of the most beautiful animals in the wild and I am proud to have adopted the bobcat through CWF's Adopt a Species program.

What were you doing before you answered these questions?

I was fulfilling my Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) training requirements and completing my training report. The learning never stops. As part of an organization that manufactures and markets a diverse line of consumer products, I have to be up to speed on a wide variety of requirements and how we go about meeting them so we can operate efficiently and deliver quality products that delight our customers. ↗



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Explorations

In addition to TRACKS, we also produce an electronic magazine called Explorations. This e-magazine tells stories about New Jersey's wildlife, enabling us to take advantage of electronic communications to present full-color photographs and links to more information. The most recent edition of Explorations featured reports about piping plovers, osprey, the Calling Amphibian Monitoring Project, and more.

If you would like to subscribe to Explorations, please send your email address to info@conservewildlifenj.org and put "Explorations" in the subject line.

Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey
P. O. Box 420, Mailcode 501-03E
Trenton, NJ 08625-0420
609.292.1276
www.ConserveWildlifeNJ.org

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Our mission is to protect and preserve the rare and imperiled species of wildlife that live, breed, and migrate through our state by restoring habitat, managing species, educating and engaging citizens, and conducting research.

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CONSERVE WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF NEW JERSEY • VOL. 03 NO. 04



PHENOLOGY FUN

Phenology is the study of the timing of natural events. The word comes from a Greek word that means "coming into view." Events like the first openings of leaf and flower buds and the first calls of frogs and toads are all considered phenological events. The timing of these events indicate local and global weather and climate changes, as well as other changes to the landscape and habitat. These events are also fun for you and your family to discover and record. What natural wonders have you discovered today?

December

Second week: Wintering raptors, such as northern harriers, long-eared owls, and short-eared owls, are present throughout the state.

The Christmas bird count begins this week and continues through January 5th, 2011.

Most Delaware River shortnose sturgeon overwinter from December to March in the area of Roebling, Bordentown, and Trenton.

Fourth week: Bald eagle pairs begin courtship rituals and nest rebuilding. Their displays can be quite spectacular, with the pair locking talons and tumbling towards the ground.

January

First week: Bald eagles begin courtship and nest rebuilding. The earliest eagle pair to nest in New Jersey in 2009 occurred this week.

Third week: Long-tailed salamanders mate in underground tunnels near freshwater springs. The female will secure her clutch of approximately 90 eggs to stones or wood within the water.

February

First week: Humpback whale females give birth after a pregnancy which lasts for 11 months. Newborn calves are 13-16 feet long and grow quickly feeding on the milk of their mother.

Second week: Bald eagles begin laying eggs. Incubation lasts approximately 35 days.

Third week: Northern goshawk pairs return to their nesting territories. Northern goshawks are the largest accipiters in North America. Accipiters are also known as "forest hawks."

Bobcats begin breeding. Breeding will continue into April. The gestation period for bobcats is about 60 days.

Final week: Jefferson, blue-spotted and spotted salamanders start laying eggs in vernal pools.