

Wildlines


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

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2003 Breeding Season Update

Once again, we've come to the end of the breeding season with much to report about New Hampshire's nongame, threatened and endangered wildlife species and efforts to restore and protect them. It was a promising season for bald eagles, Karner blue butterflies and some of our coastal birds. It was a fruitful season for

researchers who took to forest and field to study pine marten, songbirds and Blanding's turtles. Read on for updates on these and others of the 400+ species under the stewardship of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. Thank you for your continued support, which makes these and other efforts possible. 

Piping Plovers Increase Breeding Success

After a tough year in 2002, when piping plovers struggled to raise just one chick, biologists were happy to see that this year was more productive, with seven piping plover chicks successfully fledging from the New Hampshire seacoast.

Five pairs of piping plovers returned and nested at Seabrook Town Beach, and two pairs returned and nested at Hampton Beach State Park. These locations have been the steady nesting sites of plovers ever since the protection effort began seven years ago for these state-endangered and federally threatened birds.

Last year, spring storms wiped out many of the nests before the eggs could even hatch. This year, the weather was more forgiving and the nesting success rate was much higher.

Plover nests are very susceptible to foul weather. High tides can wash eggs away and strong winds can bury eggs with blowing sand. This year, one storm did exact a toll. "There was a big storm over Memorial Day weekend, and two of the nests (with eggs) got covered in sand, so that was tough," said Mai Mahegan, who

monitored plovers for the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program over the spring and summer.

In general, cooperation by beachgoers has been the norm since monitoring efforts began. Signs alerting beachgoers of nesting plovers, and temporary fencing, called exclosures, placed around plover nests have been well respected. Unfortunately, one nest with eggs failed this year because of human disturbance.

One of the exclosures on Seabrook Beach was vandalized. "Ten to 12 days after incubation, I went out to check the nest on a Monday and saw human footprints actually on the inside of the exclosure," Mahegan said. "There were beer bottles lying around, and I saw someone had actually ripped the netting on the top of the exclosure, and one egg was missing. I assume someone took the egg, because if it had been a

predator, there would have been evidence of that." Conservation Officer Timothy McClare and USF&WS Special Agent Kevin O'Brien are investigating the



Piping plover chick

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Executive Director

Wildlines

John Kanter, Nongame and
Endangered Wildlife Program
Coordinator

Allison Briggaman, Editor
Brenda Charpentier, Writer
Victor Young, Graphic Design



603-271-2461

wilddiv@wildlife.state.nh.us

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Common Tern

Population Continues to Expand



terns and making sure predatory gulls were kept at bay.

“One of the highlights of the season was seeing the roseate tern population increase so dramatically. That was really exciting,” said Dan Hayward, the biological technician coordinating the restoration project. “Having six Arctic tern pairs nest was also amazing.”

Roseates tend to form sub-colonies within established common tern colonies, Hayward said. On Seavey Island, there were many small sub-colonies spread out among the common tern nests.

A couple of signs show that Seavey Island is now home to an established


colony – rather than a nesting area chosen by chance – that is at or near capacity.

For one, the terns arrived from their migration “on time” and all at once, indicating that for most of the terns, Seavey is an established destination. “The majority of the birds came in right at the beginning of the season and nested. We didn’t have a significant second wave, which has been the norm up until this year. It’s the first sign of it being a cohesive colony,” Hayward said.

Also, the birds are incubating fewer eggs, but the success rate is similar to previous years. “They seem a little more efficient,” remarked Hayward. “Larger

colonies may tend to have smaller clutch sizes because there’s more competition.”

“Seavey Island is definitely getting full,” Hayward said. “I can’t see a whole lot of space for many more terns

there, so I don’t see our numbers going up much higher. It will be interesting to see what happens next year.” 

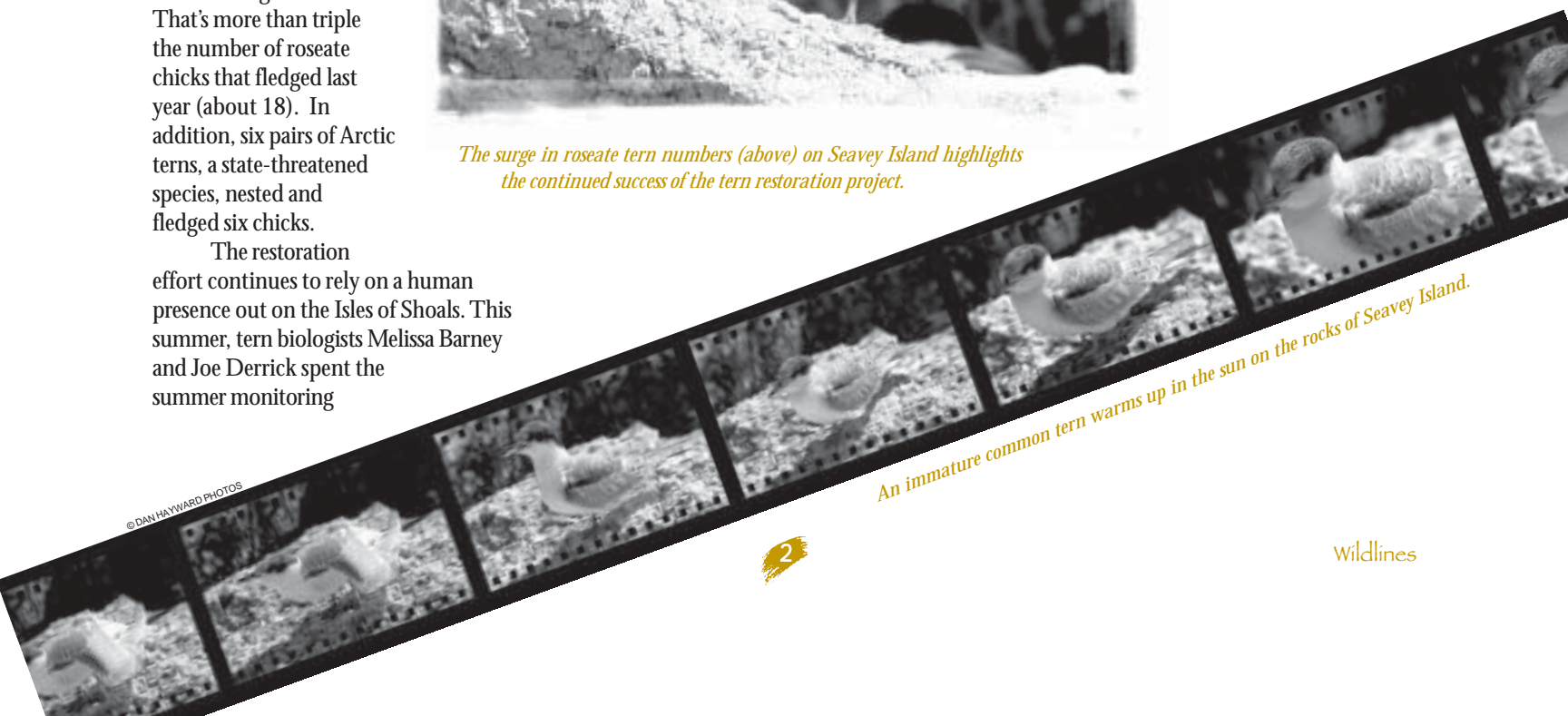
The tern population at the Isles of Shoals has grown so much that several signs indicate the colony may be reaching the carrying capacity of Seavey Island. This year, 2,414 pairs of common terns, listed as endangered in New Hampshire, raised 3,212 chicks – about 700 more chicks than last year. Since the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program and the Audubon Society of New Hampshire launched the restoration effort in 1997 with six nesting pairs of common terns, the colony has grown exponentially.

That’s only part of the good news about terns: this year, 63 pairs of roseate terns – a species listed as endangered on both the federal and state levels – fledged 56 chicks. That’s more than triple the number of roseate chicks that fledged last year (about 18). In addition, six pairs of Arctic terns, a state-threatened species, nested and fledged six chicks.

The restoration effort continues to rely on a human presence out on the Isles of Shoals. This summer, tern biologists Melissa Barney and Joe Derrick spent the summer monitoring



The surge in roseate tern numbers (above) on Seavey Island highlights the continued success of the tern restoration project.



An immature common tern warms up in the sun on the rocks of Seavey Island.

Encouraging Signs for Karner Blues

For the first time in several years, captive-reared Karner blue butterflies that were released into the wild were seen mating at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Karner blue butterfly conservation easement – encouraging evidence that extensive restoration efforts there are working. Biologists also found eggs laid by the mated females that will hatch next spring. Karner blue butterflies are listed as endangered on both the state and federal levels.

The Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the N.H. Army National Guard and many other agencies and volunteers to restore the Karner blue and its habitat, most of which has been lost to development. The captive-rearing program was very successful this year, with biologists releasing eggs, larvae and over 100 butterflies into the wild. This number eclipses past years' releases and bodes well for reproductive success.

"You want to release large numbers of Karner blues, because if you release small numbers, they will disperse and could miss

mating opportunities," said Alina Pyzikiewicz, a biological technician with the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

The released butterflies hatched from eggs collected from captivity and from a wild Karner blue population in New York. In a happy twist this year, Concord biologists were able to provide New York with some eggs and larvae, since weather conditions had hampered their wild population.

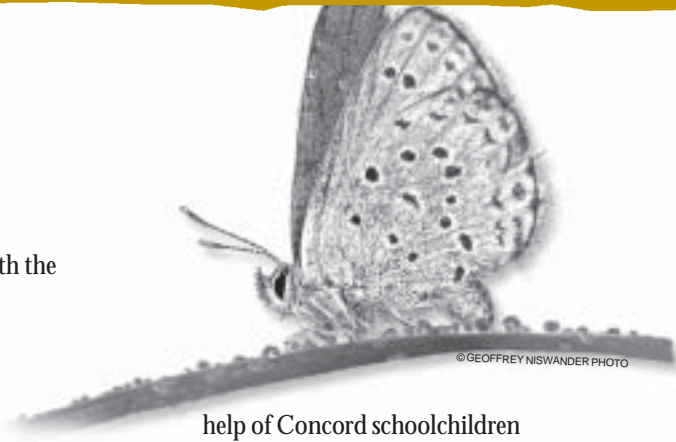
Karner blue habitat restoration efforts are focused on the conservation easement next to the Concord airport and the surrounding area. Over the spring and summer, a firebreak was created on the easement property to prepare for a prescribed burn planned for this fall. Historically, natural fires maintained the pine-barrens type of habitat required by Karner blues, so the prescribed burn will create the same kind of conditions to foster growth of wild blue lupine and other nectar plants that Karners require.

The Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program continued to enlist the

help of Concord schoolchildren in the project. This year, students from five schools raised 300 wild blue lupine plants in their classrooms and transplanted them at the easement. Kids from a summer camp planted another 200 plants.

The seedlings are being planted in areas that have been disturbed by heavy machinery to simulate fire disturbance. Most of the Karner blues raised in captivity and released on the site congregated in these areas this year, providing more proof that the restoration efforts are working.

"I feel like we've accomplished so much more this year – and that's happening more every year," said Celine Goulet, the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife biological aide in charge of habitat restoration. "Things are really picking up. Things are good!" 🐦



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Study Spotlights Blanding's Turtles

For the past three years, the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program has led a study to learn more about the habitat requirements of Blanding's turtles in New Hampshire. This summer, the study was expanded to look at the nesting patterns of female Blanding's turtles.

"The overall goal of the study was to track female Blanding's turtles in order to identify nesting habitat, chronicle the characteristics of that habitat and examine the risks they face while traveling to nesting sites," said Annie Curtis, an intern from Connecticut College who conducted the field work.

Two female turtles were fitted with radio transmitters, and Curtis spent the summer tracking them through Weare and Dunbarton, where the study took place. By tracking them daily, Curtis was able to find out where and how far the turtles traveled while in search of suitable nesting sites.

Researchers were surprised to find that neither of the females stopped at the closest suitable habitat to nest.

The female turtles traveled surprisingly long distances – one to two kilometers over a variety of terrain – and faced many dangers along the way to nesting areas. One traveled through a grassy meadow, through woods, through an area being converted into a field and then into a sandy area. She didn't stop to nest there, though, as the researchers expected her to. Instead, she plodded on in her journey across a road, to a marsh and even through someone's yard where a dog lived. "The last time we saw her, she was heading up toward a sand pit on top of a hill," Curtis said.

Another part of the study involved visiting several potential nesting sites to look for nesting activity by other female Blanding's turtles. On one such visit, Curtis observed a



© NHFAG PHOTO

female Blanding's as it laid its eggs. That nest was monitored daily and researchers witnessed eight hatchlings emerge.

This summer's findings will be added to previous years' study results to help create a clearer picture of the habitat needs of New Hampshire's Blanding's turtles. The information will be used to generate a long-term plan to conserve Blanding's turtles and their habitat in New Hampshire. 🐢

State's First Pine Marten Study Begins

The state's first assessment of pine marten distribution got underway this summer in Coos County.

The pine marten, considered a threatened species in New Hampshire, was nearly extirpated after the turn of the century by habitat loss and over-trapping. The trapping season has been closed for marten since the 1930s.

Pine marten are members of the weasel family that are about the size of a small house cat. They have pointy noses, black eyes and rounded, cat-like ears. Their once-sought-after fur varies in color, but the most common hue is light golden brown with darker brown on the legs and yellowish orange on the chest and throat.

The study involves live-trapping pine marten to see what kind of habitat they're using and get an idea of their overall distribution. It will cover two field seasons. This summer, a study team led by Jillian Kelly, a masters candidate at the University of Massachusetts and biological technician for the nongame program, captured 34 pine marten.

"We captured more than we expected," Kelly said. "It was super successful in the

number of marten we captured."

Kelly set up five baited trap lines with 34 to 36 traps in each line. She put them in a variety of habitat types and caught marten in all of them, even in some places marten wouldn't be expected to be using. The captured marten were a variety of ages, from juveniles to older adults. Just two were females.

"It was exciting to find some juveniles, because that's evidence pine marten are breeding in the state," Kelly said.

Before releasing them, Kelly took hair samples and body measurements and pulled a tooth from each marten to age the animals.

She also put ear tags on them for future identification. All the marten captured appeared to be in very good condition, according to Kelly.

This season's study covered the area north of Route 26 – the towns of Pittsburg, Clarksville, West Stewartstown, Columbia, Colebrook and the Dartmouth Land Grant. Next year, Kelly will focus on the area south


of Route 26 and north of Route 2.

Pine marten populations have slowly increased over the last three decades, as fields from former farms have increasingly turned back into forests. Two reintroduction attempts took place in the North Country, one in 1953 and one in 1974-75. Pine marten were released on land granted to Dartmouth College along the Maine border near Errol and land in the Wild River drainage, also along the Maine border.

Kelly said funding constraints prevented follow-up studies to see if the

reintroduction attempts were successful, but it's possible that the state's current pine marten

population resulted from those efforts and/or from colonization by populations in Maine.

The study will form a much-needed baseline of information about pine marten and their habitat needs, beginning a better understanding of these beautiful creatures and what we can do to encourage their continued existence in New Hampshire. 

"It was exciting to find some juveniles, because that's evidence pine marten are breeding in the state."

Bat Study and Relocation Efforts Continue in Cornish


The finishing touches have been put on a shed custom-made to provide a home for the large population of little brown bats living in the Cornish Town Hall. Scott Reynolds, an independent biologist working for the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, installed temperature monitors, and Don Snowden, of the Cornish Conservation Commission, installed a window to provide access for the bats now living next door.

Bat droppings prove that some bats have found the shed, but they haven't yet moved in en masse. Reynolds hopes his ongoing research project on the bats will change that. He plans to band about 400 of the bats this fall – he estimated that about 1,000 bats are currently in the building. The banding will do two things:

first, it will provide information about population size and the bats' migratory patterns; second, it will disturb the bats, so that they'll be more inclined to leave the town hall and – in the best of all scenarios – find the bat shed. It's the old carrot-and-stick trick, Reynolds said. "We've built the carrot and now we're carrying a soft stick," he said.

Although previous research has confirmed that this is a large maternity colony during the summer, the banding work will also help determine whether the bats are using the town hall as a migration stopover en route

to their winter hibernacula.

Bats have historically used older wooden structures as roosting habitat in New Hampshire. As these structures are renovated or demolished, bat sheds are proving to be an effective way of ensuring that these helpful insect eaters have an alternative place to live. 



Bats roosting in the new Cornish bat shed

© SCOTT REYNOLDS PHOTOS

Landowners Assist New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Thanks to many landowners who allowed access to their land, biologists



American woodcock

from the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, UNH Cooperative Extension and Audubon

Society of New Hampshire, together with the help of several volunteers, took part in field surveys over the summer to verify


computer-driven predictions of the location of prime wildlife habitat – areas that offer habitat for a wide variety of species and/or for rare and endangered species.

The work is part of the New Hampshire Estuaries Project (NHEP). This project is a massive survey of the Lamprey River and Piscassic River watersheds, an area of some 85 square miles that directly impacts the water quality of New Hampshire's estuaries.

Major partners include the Office of State Planning and Energy Programs, the Nature Conservancy of New Hampshire, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

The field survey crews went to areas targeted by the computerized Geographic Information System (GIS) as potentially significant habitat areas. The GIS combined all existing natural resource data on these watersheds to find areas that may be most critical to wildlife and most in need of protection.

The surveys are needed to see if the computer predictions are accurate and to take stock of the condition of the habitats. Species targeted in this summer's field surveys included American woodcock, whip-poor-wills, blue-winged and golden-winged warblers, grassland birds and wetland birds.

The survey results are currently being analyzed. When the analysis is complete, contributing biologists will report results to the NHEP partners. They will also provide a summary to towns in the region to use as a guide in land-use planning efforts. 



Blue-winged warbler

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The survey was made possible by the generosity of the following volunteers:

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- Jay Sullivan
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- Greg Tillman
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North Country Breeding Bird Survey

Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program staff helped conduct breeding bird surveys this summer on the Second Dartmouth Land Grant, which covers 28,000 acres along the Maine border just north of Errol.

Dartmouth College manages the property for both timber production and wildlife habitat. The bird surveys are designed to see if management policies are having the desired effect of keeping

bird habitat viable, healthy and diverse, according to John Kanter, coordinator of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

“This study is important to the state's conservation program, because it's a long-term, permanent monitoring program that has a scientific design and is repeatable. It's like taking a pulse of how the birds in northern New England are doing,” Kanter said. “The study is one of a very few long-term breeding bird surveys of remote areas in the region.”

Dartmouth has committed to providing permanent survey areas over a broad range of habitat – early successional forests, mature forests and wetlands. Other agencies pitching in to help monitor the property are the University of Vermont and the Audubon Society of New Hampshire. Researchers conduct point-count surveys, which involve both looking and listening for individual bird species at certain points throughout the study area. The survey lasts for three weeks each year. 

Successful Season for Bald Eagles

The state continues to partner with Audubon and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore and monitor bald eagles, which are listed as endangered in New Hampshire and threatened nationally. The state's bald eagles fledged five chicks this summer, the second highest number since the late 1980s. Seven territorial pairs were documented. Five pairs incubated eggs, and three pairs were successful in their nesting attempts.

Two of the successful nests were located in the Androscoggin River valley at the Pontook Reservoir and on the southern part of Lake Umbagog. The other successful nest was at Squam Lake, a new nesting area for bald eagles since recovery efforts began. Territorial pairs were seen at Vernon Dam in Hinsdale, near Nubanusit Lake in Antrim, along the Merrimack River in Bedford and at the traditional nesting site on the northern end of Lake Umbagog.

Biologists were able to visit both nests in the Androscoggin River valley to band



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the young eagles and take blood samples. "The blood sampling will help us understand local mercury levels in the

environment," said biologist Chris Martin of the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

Many of the breeding bald eagles had leg bands visible that provided information about their age and place of origin. The bands show, for example, that the female eagle nesting at the southern end of Umbagog originated in New York, as did the five-year-old male at Pontook Reservoir. The Pontook female is a seven-year-old from the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts. At Squam Lake, the six-year-old male is from a different part of Quabbin Reservoir.

"We're benefiting from recovery efforts in both New York and Massachusetts, which are further along in their efforts. The eagles are spreading out to New Hampshire and elsewhere," said Martin. With seven territorial pairs in the state, chances are good for strong reproductive success in the future. At the Bedford site, for example, two adult eagles built a nest this spring, but disappeared before laying eggs. Soon after, two more eagles were seen at the nest for several days before they also left. The activity shows

this area along the Merrimack, where wintering bald eagles are monitored as well, is valuable eagle habitat.

"We've never seen interest in the same site like that before," Martin said. "It's making it clear to those of us who monitor bald eagles in New Hampshire that eagles in general clearly recognize this as an attractive site, so it's valuable and should be protected year-round, not just as a wintering site." 🦅



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The future looks bright for New Hampshire's bald eagle population. The number of breeding pairs increased again in 2003.

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incident. To date, there are no leads in the case.

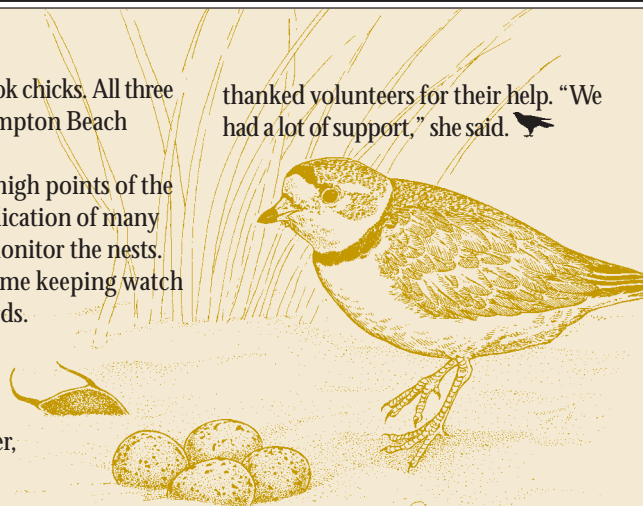
The parent birds initially remained at the site, raising hopes that perhaps they would make another nesting attempt. But a couple of days later, the birds abandoned the site. Mahegan said she saw cat tracks nearby. "The cat being around may have been the last straw for them," she said.

Dogs, feral cats and other predators, as well as natural challenges like high tides, combined to result in the

loss of eight of 12 Seabrook chicks. All three chicks that hatched at Hampton Beach survived to fledge.

There were many high points of the season, including the dedication of many volunteers who helped monitor the nests. About 30 people spent time keeping watch over the nests and the birds. Mahegan organized a potluck barbeque at Hampton Beach, and together with John Kanter, program coordinator,

thanked volunteers for their help. "We had a lot of support," she said. 🦅





NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE PROGRAM

2003 Annual Fund Campaign

Roster of Donors

4/1/03 - 8/14/03

Fifteen Years and Growing!

2003 marked the 15th anniversary for the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program at Fish and Game, giving us an opportunity to reflect on the program's growth and success, as well as to focus on what lies ahead. Perhaps most importantly, this year has provided Nongame Program staff the opportunity to recognize many of those who have been an instrumental part of our accomplishments.

The dedicated support of hundreds of people – from volunteers to generous donors and colleagues in partner organizations – enables the Nongame Program to continue to work to

protect, connect and restore New Hampshire's threatened and endangered wildlife and their habitats.

It is with the greatest appreciation that we recognize more than 680 donors who graciously contributed to this year's annual fund campaign. Thank you for your continued support.

John J. Kanter

Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Coordinator

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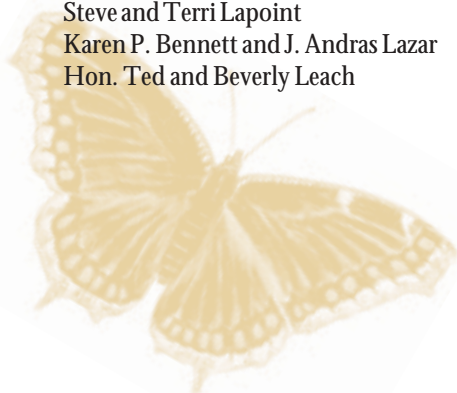
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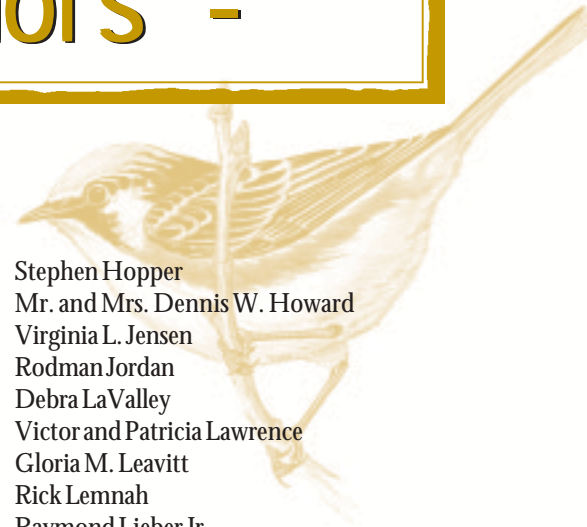
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FALL Wildlife Almanac

OCTOBER

- Peregrine falcons from the Arctic migrate down the eastern seaboard.
- Monarch butterflies migrate.

NOVEMBER

- Spring peepers take cover under the forest floor until next spring.
- Canada geese can be seen and heard passing overhead.

DECEMBER

- Wintering eagles may be seen along the Merrimack River and on Great Bay.
- Audubon Society of N.H. conducts its annual Christmas Bird Count. For more information on how you can get involved, visit www.nhaudubon.org.

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