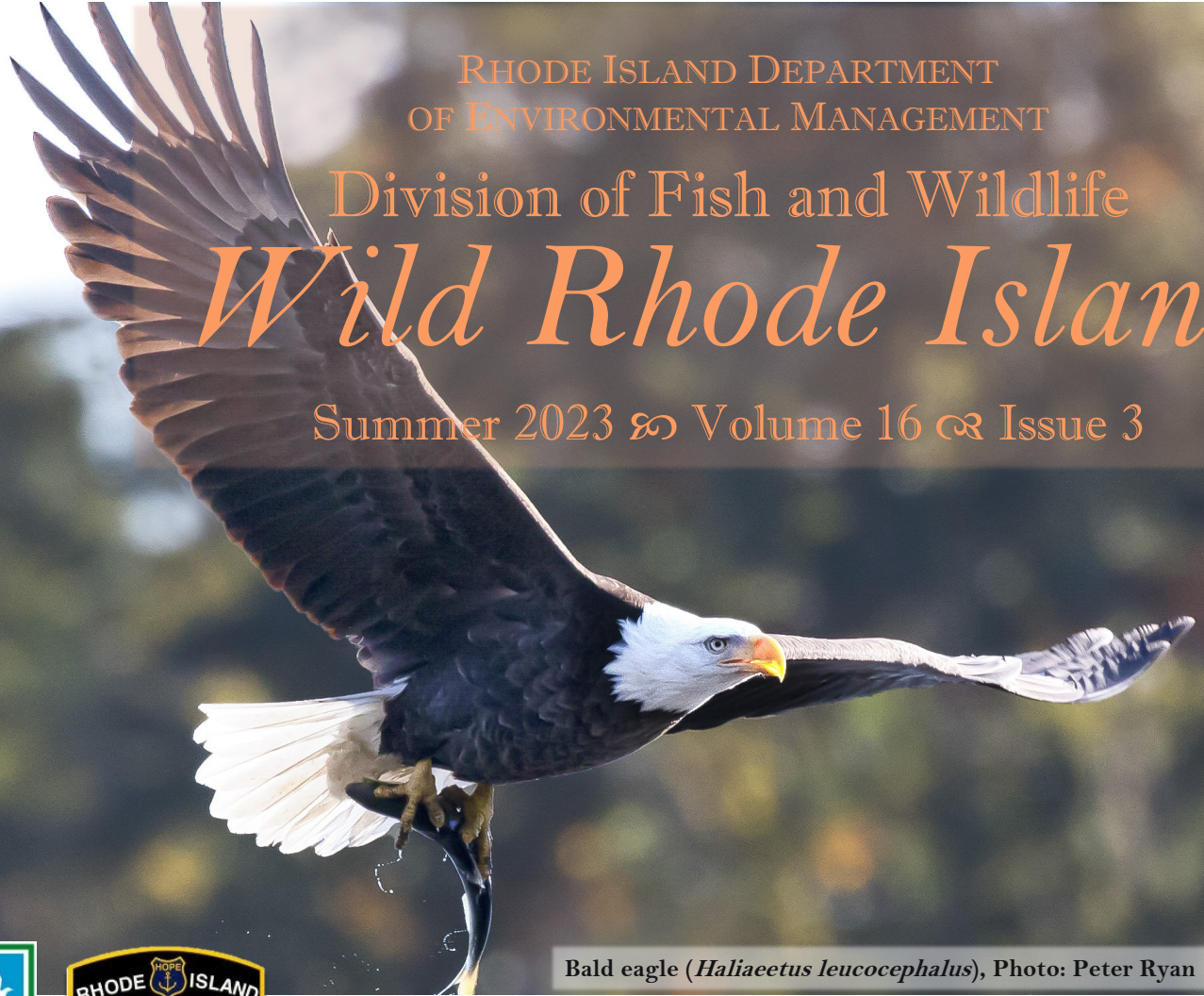
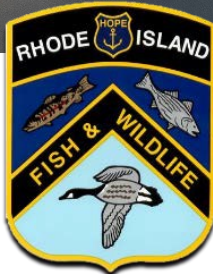


Wild Rhode Island

Summer 2023 ☞ Volume 16 ☞ Issue 3



Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Photo: Peter Ryan



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Get Wild About Turkey Poults!

By: Dr. Lizzi Bonczek, Upland Gamebird Biologist, DFW

Have you ever been captivated by turkey chick puff balls as they chase bugs or sleep under the wings of their mom? Observations of turkey chicks, or poults as they are scientifically known, and their moms (hens) are more than just entertainment, they are useful scientific data. Chick survival and the proportion of nests that hatch are key population characteristics which influence turkey population growth rates. These metrics can be difficult for DFW to obtain with just biological staff. Instead, turkey biologists across the country survey for broods, or groups of chicks, to get an idea of how productive turkey populations are in a given year. The data gleaned from these observations gives biologists an estimate of the number of hens and chicks



Photo Left: Turkey poults in a tree. Photo: P. Topham

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THE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ensure that the freshwater, wildlife, and marine resources of the state of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.



Black bear (Ursus americanus) Photo: USFWS



Wild Rhode Island is a quarterly publication created by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish and Wildlife. Printing is supported by Sportfish & Wildlife Restoration funds.

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT Terrence Gray, Director

Dr. Jason McNamee, Deputy Director

RIDEM, DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE Phil Edwards, Chief

Sarah M. Riley, WRI Editor/Designer Chief Implementation Aide

Veronica Masson, WRI Editor Federal Aid Coordinator

Melissa Curry, WRI Editor Administrative Assistant

Mary Gannon, WRI Editor Wildlife Outreach Coordinator

Gabby DeMeillon, WRI Editor DFW Biotechnician

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LEARN ABOUT RHODE ISLAND'S LARGEST BIRD OF PREY, THEIR LIFE HISTORY, REPRODUCTION AND WHERE THEY'VE BEEN SEEN IN RI!



CHECK OUT THE LATEST ISSUE OF WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER!

The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Rhode Island is Available for Purchase!

The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is announcing the much-anticipated publication of *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Rhode Island*, a rich account of the data captured in collaboration with the University of Rhode Island (URI) during a 2015-2019 community science survey. This publication is a must-have for anyone invested in the future of bird conservation in Rhode Island.

In 2014, DFW collaborated with URI to initiate Rhode Island's second Atlas on breeding birds. The project was completed between 2015 and 2019 with the support of over 200 volunteers, 20 biological technicians, and dedicated project leads, authors, editors, statisticians, and mapmakers. Together, a total of 3,705 breeding season point count surveys were conducted and 173 species were detected in the state.

Written by Charles E. Clarkson, Jason E. Osenkowski, Valerie A. Steen, Roland J. Duhaime, and Peter W. C. Paton, this new resource provides key information to aid in effective land management and conservation for Rhode Island birds. The 480-page book includes the life history, breeding ecology, migration phenology, distribution, abundance, management recommendations, and climate vulnerability for all 173 species that were detected during a state inventory of avifauna in collaboration with URI. The exclusive maps that are included were generated by pairing these data with the habitat information available through the [Rhode Island Geographic Information System \(RIGIS\)](#) to predict occupancy and demonstrate the changes since the first breeding bird atlas, which was performed over 30 years prior.

"DEM is grateful for its partnership with URI and the authors, professionals, and hundreds of volunteers whose dedication along with DFW staff has resulted in the publication of this valuable resource which will help guide conservation efforts," said DEM Director Terry Gray. "Rhode Island's birds can often serve as important indicators of our environment and how it's changing. The Saltmarsh Sparrow and American Black Ducks depicted on the cover are two of these sentinel species whose populations monitored in the atlas indicate habitat degradation due to sea level rise, informing climate change impact mitigation projects and future conservation in Rhode Island."

This project was conceived and funded by DFW, through the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration \(WSFR\)](#) Program which provides support to state fish and wildlife agencies to restore, conserve, manage, and enhance populations of wild birds, mammals, and their habitats.

Books may be purchased for \$45 which includes taxes, shipping, and handling. Accepted forms of payment include check or money order. Please allow up to six weeks for processing and delivery. To purchase your own copy, or for more information on other DFW publications, please visit: www.dem.ri.gov/bookorder.



Get Wild About Turkey Poults! continued from page 1

observed, average brood size, and the proportion of hens with chicks. In Rhode Island, the summer brood survey began in 1993 in conjunction with the wild turkey restoration effort, allowing us to compare trends in the data spanning almost three decades!



Using a fixed route to survey turkeys is difficult because turkey hens and their broods often move around looking for food. Fortunately, turkeys use open habitat so that they can see predators, which makes them conspicuous in addition to being unique and easy to identify. They often forage along roadsides and in urban/suburban habitat. These patterns make hens with their broods the perfect candidates for opportunistic observation by biologists AND the public.

Here's where you come in! Long ago, the scientific community realized that they could utilize observations from non-

professional participants to help collect valuable data. This method of data collection dates as far back as 1880, when an ornithologist used a network of observers to collect information on the arrival dates of migratory birds which eventually became known as the North American Bird Phenology Program. Audubon's Christmas Bird Count was established not too long after that in 1900. This method of data collection is called community science. Over the past few decades, the internet revolutionized the ability to further the impact of community science with increased public engagement and easier data entry, especially with the introduction of smartphones. Harnessing the power of community science is especially critical for research which may be limited by cost and personnel, so that we can obtain enough data to make informed management decisions.

Although many states perform turkey brood surveys, there were differing survey methods and analyses among state agencies, making it hard to compare results. In 2019, biologists across the country worked together to standardize the survey protocols to ensure the collection of the same type of data, over the same time period, which would be analyzed using the same methods. This change improved the ability of scientists and wildlife managers to monitor turkey trends and has resulted in a more meaningful biological impact.

We estimated the 2022 brood index to be

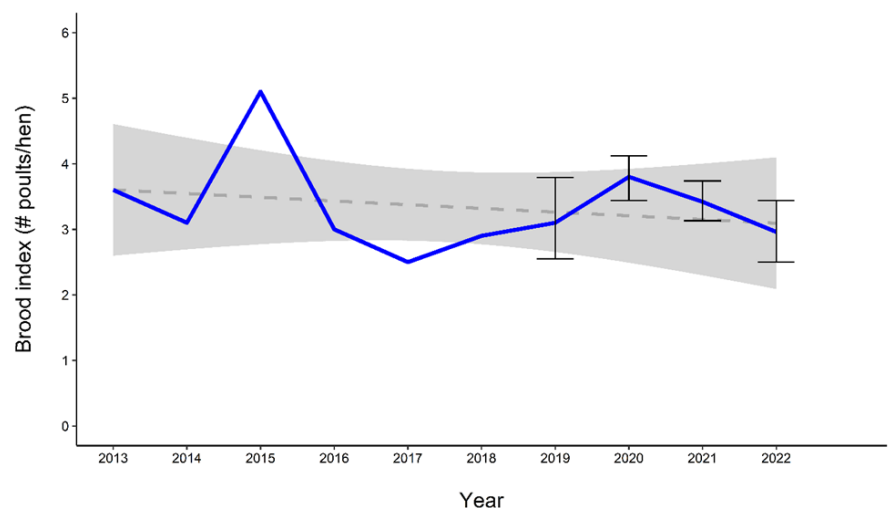


Figure 1. Rhode Island 10-year average brood index (# chicks/hen) collected from public observations, 2013–2022. The dashed trendline indicates a slight decrease in the brood index between 2013 to 2022, but the trend was not significant ($p = 0.51$). Black error were bars obtained for 2019–2022 once survey protocol became standardized.

2.96 chicks per hen, gathered from 109 observations (Figure 1). This estimate was slightly above average compared to other states that conduct summer brood surveys. The brood index fluctuates from year to year and likely reflects the impacts of weather and rainfall on hen success and brood survival. In 2022, the average number of chicks per brood was 4.14 and 65% of hen observations were in association with a brood. We also accept observations of males and estimated the male to female ratio at 0.23 males per female. Overall, the brood index depicted good survival during the spring of 2022 and is similar to the ten-year average (3.3 chicks/hen).

Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife is hoping to increase our turkey observations up to 300 to obtain more accurate brood estimates! If you are interested in helping with the 2023 summer wild turkey brood survey, it's easy! The survey period runs between July and August. All you need to do is record the date, location, number of females (hens), chicks (poults), males (jakes and toms), and/or unknowns, and whether or not you think you have observed the turkey group before. You can input your observations into the Survey123 app or browser on your phone or computer! Need help learning to identify turkeys? Scan the QR above for a guide outlining survey protocol and turkey identification or get in touch with our upland gamebird biologist, Lizzi (contact info below) who would be happy to help!



Scan this QR code with your smartphone to learn how to report sightings of wild turkeys in Rhode Island!

Lizzi Bonczek • Elizabeth.Bonczek.ctr@dem.ri.gov • (401)284-3536



Summer Volunteer Opportunities with the Division of Fish & Wildlife!

Sign up to volunteer with DFW at:

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/KbXMYuX>

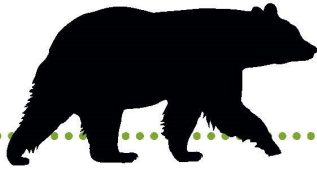
Reporting wildlife observations is as easy as Survey123!

Did you know that the Division of Fish & Wildlife collects wild animal sightings throughout the year? With the easy to use, FREE Survey123 app, you can report sightings of turkey, deer, frogs, turtles and more! Click the link below to learn how to download the app and submit your sighting!

Learn more [Here \[DEM.RI.GOV\]](https://DEM.RI.GOV)

Rhode Island Wild Bee Observer

The Rhode Island Wild Bee Observer is an ongoing community science project to help determine the status and distribution of Rhode Island's wild bee species. This information is essential for the effective conservation and management of these important pollinators. To participate, members of the public can easily submit their incidental observations of bees from anywhere in the state through the popular wildlife observation website and phone app, [iNaturalist \[r20.rs6.net\]](https://iNaturalist.org) Observations of all species, both common and rare, are welcome! Every time you see a bee just snap a photo and submit it to iNaturalist – it's that easy!



BearWise® BULLETIN

#1

Attract Birds, Not Bears

You don't have to choose between watching birds and being BearWise. Just think outside the bird feeder, and you'll discover how easy it is to invite in birds without attracting bears.



Bird feeders are bear magnets. So many calories, so little work. So easy to find. Teaching bears to rely on people for food creates big problems with no easy solutions.

What Attracts Birds?

Natural Foods • Shelter • Water • Safe Nesting Sites

Create a Natural Oasis

No matter how much or how little space you have, you can add features that will attract birds. Using native plants commonly found in your area, including trees, flowers and bushes, provides proven food sources and shelter from predators and bad weather. An added benefit for people: native plants attract more species and are often easier to grow and care for than non-native plants. **TIP: Avoid pesticides;** many birds rely on insects for a big part of their diet.

Grow Your Own Bird Food

Sunflowers, coneflowers, asters and marigolds are just a few of the flowers that produce seeds birds like to eat. Colorful tubular flowers are Mother Nature's always-filled hummingbird feeders. Many bushes and trees attract insects and produce seeds while also providing safe places to perch and nest. Containers, window boxes and hanging baskets make it easy to offer up a smorgasbord for birds, butterflies and pollinators.

CAUTION: Most fruits, nuts and berries attract bears and other wildlife. If bears are common in your area, it's best to avoid planting them. Even if bears are only occasional visitors, you should plant well away from the house, pick fruits before they are fully ripe, and consider electric fencing around fruit and nut-bearing trees.



Calibrachoas (Million Bells) look like tiny petunias, come in a rainbow of colors, are self-pruning and prefer to grow in a hanging basket or any type of container.

Offer Shelter And Perches

Birds need places to perch and to hide from predators. Small branching trees and dense bushes provide perches and shelter. A colorful wind chime, sculpture or other decoration can also provide a handy perch.

continued...



BearWise.org

Helping People Live Responsibly with Black Bears



PAGE 2

BearWise BULLETIN #1



Turn on the Faucet

All birds need fresh water for drinking and bathing and are always on the lookout for dependable sources. The sound of moving water is highly attractive. Adding a simple bird bath, hanging water feeder, fountain or a small pool with a bubbler is sure to bring in birds. Pea gravel in the bottom of your bird bath makes it easier for birds to use. Adding a few flat stones to a small pool also creates a handy spot for bathing.

Help Birds Stay in Great Shape

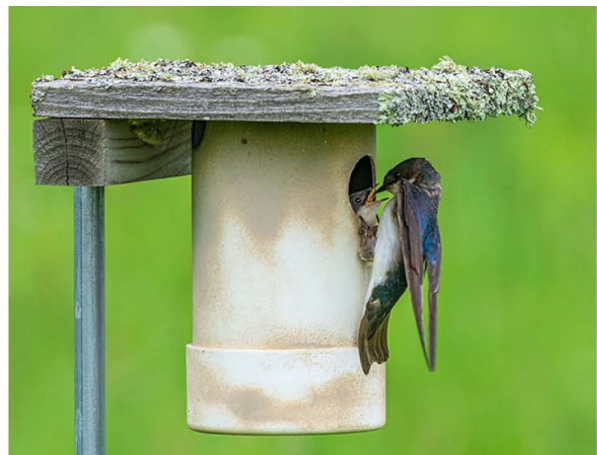
Birds take dust baths to remove excess oil and parasites; you can make a simple dust bath using fine sand surrounded by pavers or landscaping timbers. Position it near cover so birds are safe from predators. Birds don't have teeth; their gizzards digest food and need grit to work properly. Birds will appreciate a corner with sand and small bits of gravel and stone.

Provide Safe Places for Birds to Nest

Many cavity-nesting birds, including wrens, bluebirds, chickadees and some warblers, will use nest boxes because they resemble natural cavities in trees. (If it's safe to leave standing dead trees on your property, you'll provide a home for a variety of cavity-nesters.)

Summer is a great time to scope out locations and buy or make boxes so you're ready to put them up in late winter. Then you'll be all set to enjoy watching courting, nesting and baby birds growing up come spring.

Nesting boxes come in a variety of shapes and sizes designed to make the perfect home for many different species.



It is easy to attract and monitor birds with a Gilbertson PVC nest box. (Photo: Alan Olander)

Benefits of Kicking the Bird-Feeder Habit

- A bird-friendly habitat attracts many more species than a bird feeder, including butterflies, pollinators and birds that don't visit feeders.
- Snakes, cats, foxes and birds of prey won't have a place to hang out and eat your birds.
- Skunks, mice, rats, raccoons and bears won't come to chow down your expensive birdseed.
- By creating year-round beauty and bird-friendly features, you'll always have something to watch.
- You will be helping to keep bears and other wildlife wild.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- The Audubon Society's native plants database contains thousands of plants; just enter your zip code and you'll get a selection of best choices for your area, along with photos and local and online resources. Your local chapter of the Audubon Society may be able to offer in-person expert guidance. www.audubon.org/native-plants
- The Pollinator Partnership provides regional planting guides and recommendations. www.pollinator.org/guides
- Visit NestWatch.org for help finding the right boxes for the bird species nesting in your area.
- Contact your county's **Cooperative Extension Service**.

BearWise.org



BearWise® CREATED BY BEAR BIOLOGISTS, SUPPORTED BY STATE WILDLIFE AGENCIES

© 2021



DEM Sets May 27 as Implementation Date of Emergency Action Limiting Size of Striped Bass Taken Recreationally

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is announcing that it has set Saturday, May 27, as the date it will implement a maximum size limit of less than 31 inches for striped bass recreational fisheries. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) took emergency action earlier this month imposing the size limit because Atlantic striped bass are overfished and because of “the unprecedented magnitude” of the fishery’s 2022 recreational harvest, which was “nearly double that of 2021,” [ASMFC said May 3](#). In 2022, the commercial striped bass fishery, which is managed under a hard quota, had no increase in harvest. The emergency limit is effective through Oct. 28, 2023, but could be extended by ASMFC.

According to the ASMFC interstate fisheries management plan, DEM will be filing this new state regulation. DMF is working with other New England states to align the rule change at the same time throughout the region. The implementation date of May 27 is the product of working with neighboring states to provide complementary rules for improved sustainability of the stock and enforceability of the measures. That said, DMF strongly encourages anglers fishing in the waters of neighboring states to check the regulations for that state before their trip because they must follow the rules of where they are fishing along with where they launch from or return to. In other words, the most restrictive rules apply. States must implement measures that comply with the ASMFC action no later than July 2, 2023 – or risk being found out-of-compliance and having a full harvest moratorium enacted.

“The goal of the emergency action by the ASMFC

Striped Bass Management Board is to help preserve the 2015 year-class,” said DEM Marine Fisheries Chief Dr. Conor McManus. “With what appears to be poor year-classes in recent years, it is imperative to help preserve the spawning stock as best as possible to rebuild the striped bass population.”

The basis for the ASMFC’s emergency action was that so many more striped bass were caught recreationally in 2022 than were expected that the current plan to ensure striped bass remain plentiful for years to come no longer appeared viable. The main reason for the increase in harvest was that some striped bass from the abundant 2015 year-class — those fish born in 2015 — had grown enough to be harvested under the 2022 “slot limit” (28 inches to more than 35 inches long). Like people, fish grow at different rates and in 2023, the 2015 year-class would be entirely recruited into this size range. This means they would all be available for harvest if the slot remained 28 inches to more than 35 inches, suggesting the potential for even greater recreational harvest in 2023 without swift action to change the slot limit. The 2015 year-class is important to the future of Atlantic striped bass because it is one of the few large year-classes that has been produced in the past 20 years. With fewer surviving striped bass born in the years before and after 2015, it is important for as many bass from the 2015 year-class to grow to spawning size and have as many chances to reproduce (and hopefully create more strong year-classes) as possible if striped bass stocks are to recover in coastal waters.

For more information on DEM programs and services, visit www.dem.ri.gov. Follow DEM on [Facebook](#), Twitter ([@RhodeIslandDEM](#)), or Instagram ([@RhodeIsland.DEM](#)).



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2023 RHODE ISLAND RECREATIONAL

Saltwater Fishing

Mahi and mackerel and tuna, oh my!

Fishing for pelagic species in RI - Pg. 16

The official regulations provided by the Rhode Island Division of Marine Fisheries
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

THE 2023 SALTWATER FISHING REGULATION GUIDE IS AVAILABLE NOW

Pick up a copy at bait & tackle or sporting shops around the state, at the RIDFW Great Swamp Office, the DMF Ft. Wetherill Office in Jamestown, or online using your computer or mobile device. Stay informed of fishing season dates, changes to laws, improvements to fishing areas, and much more.

GET THE REGULATIONS GUIDE ONLINE:
WWW.EREGULATIONS.COM/RHODEISLAND

A copy can be mailed or emailed by contacting
DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov or 401-789-0281

The information in this brochure outlines general recreational fishing regulations in state waters ONLY. It is not a comprehensive text of regulations. Contact the Division of Marine Fisheries at (401) 423-1920 for further details or visit our website at www.dem.ri.gov/marine

Please report Violations to DEM Environmental Police @ (401) 222-3070

RI Recreational Saltwater Fishing License
Available online at: www.saltwater.ri.gov
Also available from various bait & tackle shops

- Fees: \$7.00 RI residents (annually) \$10.00 Non-residents (annually)
- 55.00 7-day license
- Applies in RI, MA, CT, ME, NY and offshore federal waters
- Free licenses for RI residents over 65, or active military stationed in RI
- No license required for children under 16, blind or disabled RI residents, as well as anglers on party & charter boats.

Lobsters

- A recreational lobster license is required to harvest lobsters in RI waters
- Available to RI residents only
- **Red license:** 5 lobsters/license
- **Blue license:** 8 lobsters/day
- Minimum size 3 3/8" carapace length
- Possession of egg bearing or v-notched lobsters is prohibited.
- Egg-bearing, v-notched lobsters, and underage lobsters must be returned immediately to the water
- Harvest between sunrise and sunset only

Blue Crabs

- Minimum size 5" spike to spike. All undersized must be returned to the water immediately.
- Possession limit: 5 crabs
- **Red License:** 5 crabs/year
- **Blue License:** 8 crabs/day
- Possession of egg bearing blue crabs is prohibited (return to water immediately)
- Harvest between sunrise and sunset only

Circle hooks are required when recreationally fishing for striped bass while using bait, see DMF website for details.

Shellfishing

- No License is required for RI residents; Non-residents must obtain a Non-Resident Shellfishing License (call 222-6647)
- Harvest between sunrise and sunset only
- Possession Limits: Bay scallop, soft-shell clams, surf clams, blue mussels, and oysters

Shellfish Management Areas (SMA's)

Recreational Shellfishing: 1 bushel/person/day
License: Non-resident: \$6/person/day
Non-Management Areas: 1 bushel/person/day
License: Non-resident: 1 bushel/person/day

Oyster seasons: September 15 through May 15

Bay scallops: Season: First Saturday in November through December 31 (RI residents only)
Possession limit: 1 bushel/person/day

Shellfish Management Areas: Commicut Point, Potowomut, High Banks, Bissel Cove/Fox Island, Mill Cut, Bristol Harbor, Konomah Basin, Saltonstall River, Providence River, Greenwich Bay, Pt. Judith Pond, Potter Pond, Mignet Pond, Quonochontaug Pond, Winnapaug Pond, Bissel Cove/Fox Island and Quonochontaug Pond. Oyster harvest prohibited.

Measuring from tip of spike to tip of spike.

Interested in trying out a new data collection system? Log your catch on the VOLUNTARY recreational in-line angler logbook. Go to www.saltwater.ri.gov page to sign up

Recipe: Black Sea Bass Ceviche

RECIPE:

Black Sea Bass Ceviche



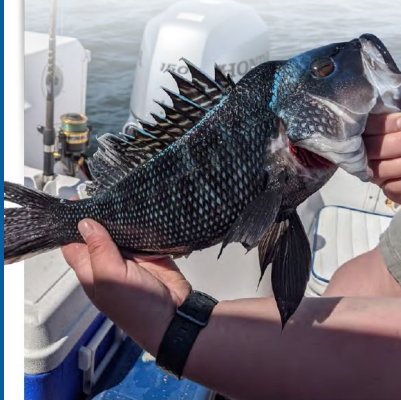
By Katie Rodrigue, Principal Biologist, RI DMF

Ceviche is a Peruvian dish made from fresh raw fish that is marinated in some sort of acidic liquid, typically citrus juice. Because the fish is not cooked with heat, but rather cured from the acidity of the citrus, only the freshest fish should be used. Any mild fish with a firm texture works well, and during peak fishing season in RI, black sea bass is the perfect candidate. Light, refreshing, and colorful, black sea bass ceviche is the perfect summertime seafood dish.

Ingredients:

- 2 black sea bass fillets (about 2 cups)
- 1 lime (juice and zest)
- 1 lemon (juice and zest)
- 1/4 cup of chopped or crushed pineapple (with juice)
- 1/2 of a red onion
- 1/2 of a white onion
- 1/2 cup of bell pepper (any color)
- 1-2 jalapenos (diced)
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
- Handful of finely chopped cilantro
- 1-2 teaspoons of salt (to taste)
- 1-2 teaspoons of sugar (to taste)

1. Cut sea bass fillets into 1/2-inch cubes. Place in large bowl.
2. Using a microplane or grater, zest the lime and lemon and add. Avoid grating too deep - only add the green/yellow outer skin. The white pith below tastes bitter.
3. Add the lime and lemon juice.
4. Add the pineapple and juice.
5. Dice the onions. Add both (about 1/4 cup of each).
6. Dice the bell peppers about 1/4 cup. Like to mix colors, so typically use 1/2 of a pepper of each color. Green bell peppers taste vegetal, while orange, yellow, and red taste sweeter (due to being riper).
7. Dice the jalapeno. Always taste first, as their heat level can vary greatly! Remove the seeds and white pith if you want less heat.
8. Add the chopped garlic and cilantro.
9. Add the salt and sugar.
10. Mix well, making sure the fish is completely coated in liquid. Let sit refrigerated for 1-2 hours, until fish turns opaque white (and looks cooked). If needed, add more salt or sugar to taste.
11. Serve with tortilla chips and enjoy! Best consumed the same day, but can be kept refrigerated up to 2 days. If storing, drain excess liquid.



2023 Rhode Island Saltwater Regulation Guide

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Division of Marine Fisheries
2023 Recreational Finfish Regulations

Species	Min. Size	Season	Possession Limit
American Eel	5"	Open year round	25 fish/person/day
Black Sea Bass, Shore and Private	16.5"	May 22 - Aug. 30 Aug 27 - Dec. 31	2 fish/person/day
Black Sea Bass, Party and Charter	16"	Jun 18 - Aug. 31 Sept. 1 - Dec. 31	6 fish/person/day
Weakfish, Shore and Private	No minimum	Open year round	3 fish/person/day
Bluefish, Party and Charter	No minimum	Open year round	5 fish/person/day
Cobia	31"	Open year round	3 fish/person/day
Cod	22" - 29" girth	May 1 - July 31	5 fish/person/day
Haddock	18"	Open year round	No limit
Menhaden	No minimum	Open year round	< 4" No limit > 4" 200 fish/person/day
Scup, Private	10.5"	May 1 - Dec. 31	30 fish/person/day
Scup, Shore	9.5"	May 1 - Dec. 31	30 fish/person/day
Scup, Party and Charter	10.5"	May 1 - Aug. 31 Sept. 1 - Oct. 31 Nov. 1 - Dec. 31	60 fish/person/day 30 fish/person/day 30 fish/person/day
Striped Bass	28" x 31" girth	Open year round	1 fish/person/day
Summer Flounder	18"	May 3 - Dec. 31	4 fish/person/day
Summer Flounder Special Shore*	2 of the 4 fish > 17" & 3 of the 4 fish < 18"	May 3 - Dec. 31	4 fish/person/day
Tautog**	16", One fish only	Apr. 1 - May 31 June 3 - July 31 Aug. 3 - Oct. 14 Oct. 15 - Dec. 31	3 fish/person/day Closed 3 fish/person/day 5 fish/person/day
Weakfish	16"	Open year round	1 fish/person/day
Winter Flounder***	12"	March 31 - Dec. 31	2 fish/person/day
Witch Flounder	14"	Open year round	No limit
Yellowtail Flounder	13"	Open year round	No limit

* Special Shore Angling Sites (Shore): India Point Park in Providence, Commicut Park and Rocky Point in Warwick, Stone Bridge in Tiverton, East and West walls in Narragansett, Fort Adams in Newport, or Fort Wetherill in Jamestown.

** Max 10 fish/season (except licensed party charter vessels)

*** The harvest or possession of Winter Flounder is PROHIBITED in Potter Pond, Potter Pond, the Harbor of Refuge and the Management Bay north of the College Inn.

Possession limit for bait fish/season: Two (2) quart/person/day.

Oh Snap, Momma!

Summer is Egg Laying Season for Snapping Turtles

By: Melissa Curry, Administrative Assistant, DFW



Photo: Gabrielle DeMeillon

Have you ever discovered a HUGE turtle in RI and wondered if the dinosaurs have come back?! Most likely you were looking at a common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*). There is a large populations of snapping turtles in Rhode Island and yet springtime is when people most frequently see them and that's not by accident! Snapping turtle's nesting season in Rhode Island is typically between late May and early July. Let's talk about what you should you do if you see a snapping turtle laying eggs in your yard!

During late May through June, reproductive females leave their ponds and streams to travel on land, often long distances from water, to find a nesting place in which to lay between 11 and 83 eggs. The female will dig a hole in soil, mulch, lawns, fields, and leaf piles. She then guides the eggs into the nest with her hind feet, covering them for incubation and protection. These eggs will incubate throughout the summer and hatch in late August to early September, about two months. In the Northeast, they typically lay one clutch per year.

If momma snapping turtle has chosen your property to lay her eggs, consider yourself lucky! Here are some things to know. It can take a few hours, and up to a day, for a snapping turtle to lay her eggs. Colder temperatures can slow her down in this process, so if you see a turtle just relaxing on your property and it's cool out, she's probably just biding her time. Once she is done laying and covering her eggs, she will move along back towards her water home. Once the eggs are laid

and covered, snapping turtles do not return to the nests until following year when it's time to lay eggs again.

Now it's time to wait! Turtle eggs in RI are subject to predation by crows, mink, skunks, foxes, raccoons, and more. Although it might seem sad, this is a high-energy, natural food source for many wild animals, and an important one during the summer months.

When the hatchlings are ready, they will break free from their shells and dig their way to the surface. Once hatched, their instincts will kick in and they will know where to go. There's no need to interfere in this stage of the process, except when moving them out of a roadway, in which case you should always move them along to the side in which they were headed. Bringing them to a water source can potentially spread disease, and prevent them from getting to where they were headed. This is a process which has been taking place long before people, yards and houses. Wildlife does best when people don't interfere.

Unfortunately, snapping turtles have a bad reputation. Their beak-like jaws have a powerful bite which can be scary. That's why it's important to just leave them alone and observe. Snapping turtles are a vital part of our ecosystem as both prey (especially eggs and hatchlings) and predator; they are omnivorous and important aquatic scavengers.

They also prey on invertebrates, fish, frogs and other amphibians, reptiles (including snakes and smaller turtles), unwary birds, and small mammals. You may see them basking on top of the water or on a nearby rock in ponds or streams that offer an abundance of aquatic vegetation. They are an enduring species which has thrived despite continuous and widespread development across the region.

Rhode Island's turtles face growing threats from habitat loss, climate change, disease, and vehicles when crossing roads. The illegal collection of wild turtles is making matters worse. You can help our turtles by becoming a community scientist and submitting your observations of amphibians and reptiles to DEM biologists using:

[Herp Observer](https://arcg.is/1P1X9r0) app: <https://arcg.is/1P1X9r0>.

Species Spotlight: Bald Eagles in Rhode Island

There are few birds better known to the public than the bald eagle. As our national bird, and impressive species at every level, it's hard to find one less admired. With so much access to open water in Rhode Island, this primarily piscivorous (fish-eating) species, easily finds the Ocean State a fitting home. Although there are only a few confirmed bald eagle nests in the state so far, observations have been increasing over the last several years, and it is likely that they will become more commonly seen in the coming years.

Physical Characteristics.

The bald eagle is the largest raptor (bird of prey) in Rhode Island, with a longer wingspan and greater weight than even the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), which is commonly seen soaring over roadways and fields. Adult bald eagles have a striking white head and tail, with the rest of their body solid brown. However, it takes three to four years for the adult breeding plumage to come in, and immature bald eagles are brown head to tail, sometimes with streaking white throughout. Sometimes immature bald eagles are mistaken for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) which are only rarely seen migrating through Rhode Island.

Breeding/Wintering Range in RI.

Rhode Island is home to a few breeding pairs which reside here year-round, and can be seen during both the breeding and wintering months. Other “non-resident” eagles passing through during the fall migration may be seen as they head south to the mid-Atlantic region. Resident birds may use and build on their nest throughout the year. Non-resident or transient birds may be seen passing through as well, as they seek out suitable territory.

Breeding Phenology.

Typically mated pairs will establish and utilize the same nest year after year, raising one clutch of 1-2 eggs per brood. Both the male and female attend to the eggs in nest, as well as hunt and scavenge for food. The incubation period is only 35 days, but the eaglets spend another 3 ½ to



Photo: Peter J. Ryan

4 ½ months in the nest before they fledge between July and August. After fledging, they will usually stay with the adults another one to two months before they head out on their own, and may disperse a great distance across the region.

Listing Status.

Bald eagles have been protected under federal law, now known as the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, since 1962. These laws prohibit the take of these eagles, their eggs or nests, except for a limited purposes such as research and education, depredation and, in the case of golden eagles only, falconry.

Historically, eagle populations had been on a decline due to being perceived as nuisance “vermin” to ranchers, farmers and the general public, and were shot, poisoned and otherwise persecuted. The pesticide DDT, outlawed in

Bald Eagles in Rhode Island continued

1972, impacted bald eagle populations by causing thinning of eggshells and a loss in viable chicks. Since then, conservation measures, education programs and other coordinated efforts, helped bring eagle population levels back up and they are now considered a species of low concern, meaning that their numbers remain at sustainable levels. They are protected under both federal and state law in Rhode Island.

Sightings in Rhode Island.

Bald eagles have been observed across all of Rhode Island, from the shoreline in Matunuck (South Kingstown), Wordens Pond in West Kingston, over the Pawcatuck River in Westerly, North Kingstown, Barrington, Exeter, Cranston, North Smithfield, Coventry and more. Both adults and immature bald eagles have been observed, and occasionally sparring with osprey pairs as the eagle tries to steal fish from them. Although it would be hard to get a firm estimate on how many year-round resident bald eagles we have in Rhode Island, the annual number of reported sightings and photo submissions have been steadily increasing, and may indicate the numbers of individuals frequenting and residing in Rhode Island are on the rise.

Report Sightings.

DFW continues to take reports of eagle sightings, they can be emailed to DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov or by calling 401-789-0281. For more information, visit the USFWS bald eagle information page at <https://www.fws.gov/species/bald-eagle-haliaeetus-leucocephalus>.



Photo: Dean Birch

*Thank you for your continuing support of the
Rhode Island DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife!*