

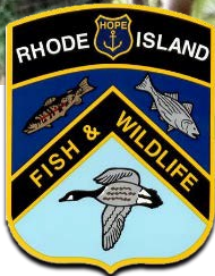
Division of Fish and Wildlife

Wild Rhode Island

Spring 2024 ∞ Volume 17 ∞ Issue 2



White-tailed deer. Photo: D. Martin



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

2024 FRESHWATER FISHING REGS GUIDE & LICENSES.....	3
REDUCING DEER DAMAGE IN YARDS.....	4
WILD GARDENING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1.....	7
CONNECT WITH DFW ON SOCIAL MEDIA.....	10

Wild Gardening in Your Backyard

By Mary Gannon, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator, DFW

Spring has sprung, and if you're like me, you might find yourself staring out your window, wistfully looking at your garden and itching to go stick your hands in the dirt! Before you grab your floppy straw hat and frolic off into the spring sunshine, here are some tips to try out this year to make your garden more wildlife friendly. It's important to remember that our gardens are a part of the broader Rhode Island landscape. Nature doesn't just exist "out there." Our Wildlife Management Areas and other conservation lands protected by our friends at Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, and town land trusts are incredibly important, but they only account for a portion of our state's land area.

Continued on page 7

Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium*) Photo: M. Gannon



THE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MISSION STATEMENT

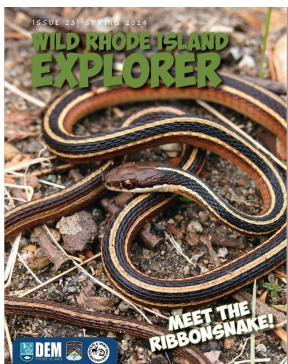
Our mission is to ensure that the freshwater, wildlife, and marine resources of the state of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.



Cedar waxwing (Bombycilla cedrorum). Photo: Peter J. Ryan

This Issue Features:

- WILD GARDENING IN YOUR BACKYARD.....1
PLANTING NATIVE PLANTS WITH A CONSERVATION FOCUS HELPS CREATE BEAUTIFUL YARDS AND GREAT WILDLIFE HABITAT.
FRESHWATER FISHING REGULATIONS GUIDE.....3
THE 2024-2025 FISHING REGULATIONS GUIDE IS AVAILABLE ONLINE, AND IN PRINT AT DFW AND BAIT & TACKLE SHOPS AROUND THE STATE.
REDUCING DEER DAMAGE IN YOUR YARD.....4
LEARN ABOUT PLANTS AND LANDSCAPING TECHNIQUES THAT CAN HELP PROTECT AGAINST DEER DAMAGE TO YARDS THIS SPRING.
CONNECT WITH DFW ON SOCIAL MEDIA.....10
RI FISH & WILDLIFE POSTS INFORMATION ON WILDLIFE AND FISH, PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND MORE!



CHECK OUT THE LATEST ISSUE OF WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER!



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

Abby Clark, WRI Editor Wildlife Outreach Technical Assistant

For a free subscription to Wild Rhode Island and/or Wild Rhode Island Explorer, please email Sarah.Riley@dem.ri.gov

This program receives federal funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin or ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in this program, activity, or facility operated by this recipient of federal assistance should write to: The Office for Equal Opportunity, U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary, Washington, D. C. 20240



THE 2024 FRESHWATER 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, 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



GET YOUR 2024-2025 FRESHWATER FISHING LICENSE TODAY AT RHODE ISLAND OUTDOORS

WWW.RIO.RI.GOV

For a list of fishing license vendors in Rhode Island, go to www.dem.ri.gov

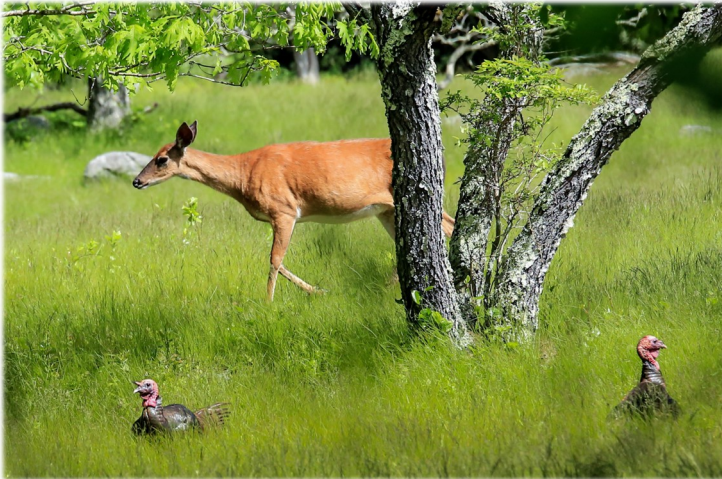
Email DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

or call 401-789-0281



Reducing Deer Damage to Yards & Gardens this Spring

From the DFW Publication *Reducing Deer Damage in Your Garden*



White-tailed deer doe and wild turkeys. Photo: D. Birch

In the early 1900's, the white-tailed deer population totaled less than 500,000 in the entire country. Today, the number of deer is growing, and there are close to 15 million deer in the United States. While it has been a great success story for white-tailed deer, this increased population has resulted in increased human interactions with deer. For many homeowners, gardeners, landscapers, and farmers, these conflicts often result in unsightly and costly damage to crops and decorative plants. This damage has become especially problematic in northeastern states, where prime deer habitat continues to grow with the development of suburban landscapes.

FEEDING HABITS.

The best way to protect your plants is to first become familiar with the feeding habits of deer in your area. Deer may eat more than 500 different species of plants, but tend to be more selective. Deer will expand their foraging area when their preferred food becomes scarce. They may also develop a preferred taste for your ornamentals. This usually occurs in late winter and early spring, when snow cover reduces the availability of their natural foods and

their fat reserves are depleted. Under these circumstances, deer will browse even the most resistant plants rather than starve. Since deer have small home ranges, they may become habituated and develop a preference for the fertilized gardens, flowers, shrubs, or trees on your property, rather than natural vegetation in the woods. Deer may also change their habits over time and may suddenly begin eating a plant that they avoided in the past.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS TO MANAGE DEER DAMAGE?

There are many different deer damage management options, which may be used individually or in any combination to control deer damage on your property. It will often require constant effort on your part and a variety of methods to achieve best results.

Learning to coexist with deer (and other wildlife) is part of life when choosing to live in rural and suburban Rhode Island. Remember, wild animals are just trying to survive in our human-dominated landscape. Gardens look like a welcome free buffet to a hungry critter!

You can minimize deer damage by using these methods:

- ◆ Avoid planting preferred food items of deer in landscaping
- ◆ Planting native plants
- ◆ Using repellents
- ◆ Constructing physical barriers (netting and fencing)
- ◆ Allowing hunting on your property

GENERAL TIPS FOR AVOIDING DEER DAMAGE.

Protect young plants and new plantings from deer:
If you are growing young plants or new plantings, take

extra steps to protect them with repellents, netting, or fencing. All young and new plants are at risk from deer damage. Tender young shoots are irresistible to deer and are less likely to grow back than shoots on mature plants. Even if the plant species is generally deer resistant, it may still be attractive to deer in its early stages or as new shoots appear.

Fertilizer makes plants attractive to deer: Heavy applications of nitrogen based fertilizers are known to make plants more palatable to deer. Try to limit fertilizer application to only what is necessary for plant health. Protect newly purchased plants with repellents, netting, and fencing.

Avoid planting “preferred” deer food items: These are species of trees and shrubs often eaten and damaged by deer. If you plant these species, be prepared to fence and protect them from deer damage.

When possible, use plants less preferred by deer: Deer can be deterred from gardens and landscaping by plants deer find unpalatable. This may be an inexpensive way to prevent significant damage to the beauty of your flowers and garden. Many native plants are naturally deer-resistant, and are an excellent choice for not only aesthetics, but also for their value to birds, pollinators, and other wildlife! In winter, woody plants may still be susceptible to damage and require protection.

HOMEMADE REPELLANTS.

GARLIC SPRAY - MAKES 1 QUART

- ◆ 4 eggs
 - ◆ 2 oz. red pepper sauce
 - ◆ 2 oz. chopped garlic
 - ◆ Add just under 1 quart of water
- Stir thoroughly and strain. 1 quart is enough for 16 bushes for one week

SOUR MILK REPELLENT - MAKES 1 GALLON

- ◆ 1 egg
- ◆ ½ cup milk
- ◆ Mix with 1 tsp. cooking oil
- ◆ 1 tbp. dish detergent

- ◆ 1 gallon of water
- Spray on plants, repeat after rain

HOT PEPPER SPRAY - MAKES 1 GALLON

- ◆ 2 tsp. hot pepper
- ◆ 1 tsp. liquid dish soap
- ◆ 1 tsp. garlic powder
- ◆ 1 gallon of water

Spray on plants, repeat after rain.

SOAP SACHET: Place a bar of soap made with tallow fatty acid in a nylon sock or cheesecloth and hang from targeted bushes and shrubs.

HAIR SACHET: Place unwashed cut hair (from a local barber) in a nylon sock or cheesecloth and hang from bushes, trees, etc.

DRYER SHEET: Dryer sheets can be sprayed with repellent and attached to stakes surrounding targeted plants.

COMMERCIAL REPELLANTS.

When you are selecting a commercial repellent, you may choose an odor or taste-based repellent. Choose an agent with a surfactant to ensure that the repellent sticks to your plants. Organic repellents with an active ingredient of urine, putrescent egg solids, dried blood or fish oil are effective. Other deer repellents have active ingredients such as milorganite.

Repellents may also be professionally applied. Professionals may apply organic, inorganic, or a variety of different types of repellents to your garden. Several pest management companies in Rhode Island offer this service, some with written guarantees. Repellents are generally used for plants which are not intended for human consumption. Fences may be more practical for protection of vegetable gardens or other food crops.

NOTE: If deer are faced with starvation, particularly in late winter, they will eat a plant with repellent applied rather than starve to death.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS.

Fences may be wire, plastic, or electric. Fences must be at least 8 feet high to keep deer out completely. The bottom of the fence must be close to or in contact with the ground, as deer prefer to crawl under fences rather than jump over them.

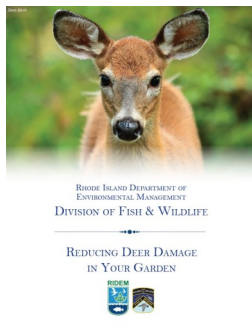
Other types of physical barriers include netting to cover individual plants. This method is inexpensive, but may be somewhat unsightly. Netting is most practical for ripening berry bushes and fruit-bearing trees and can be removed at other periods or time. The netting must be pulled taut and should not be touching the leaves of the plant. It should reach to 8 feet and encircle the plant. This method is relatively inexpensive and effective for protecting plants.

NOTE: Netting can pose a hazard to songbirds and other backyard wildlife if installed incorrectly. Mesh should be taut and be secured to the ground. Do not leave excess mesh gathered at the bottom of your plant enclosure. This poses an entanglement risk. Be sure that there are no gaps where smaller animals can enter.

Plastic 2” x 2” fencing is another popular option. It is virtually impact resistant, unobtrusive, and relatively inexpensive. These fences must be at least 8 feet tall and be in contact with the ground. They must be erected so that the fence is very taut – otherwise, deer will push through. This is a preferred option in vegetable gardens.

Another option for high value crops or ornamental plants is electric fencing. These fences are very good at repelling deer, although they are expensive. Few suburban homeowners decide to utilize electric fencing for their property.


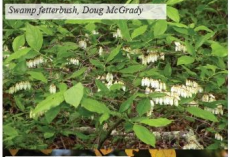


Fencing may be the only guaranteed solution to nuisance deer problems and is more often used for large areas where specific attention to individual plants is not a possibility.



MORE INFORMATION IN THE DFW GUIDE
REDUCING DEER DAMAGE IN GARDENS
 WHICH CAN BE FOUND ON
WWW.DEM.RI.GOV, EMAILED AS A PDF BY
CONTACTING DEM.DFW@DEM.RI.GOV
OR MAILED OUT BY CALLING 401-789-0281

DEER RESISTANT PLANTS




Shrubs	
Common Name	Scientific Name
* American andromeda	<i>Pieris floribunda</i>
+ American holly tree	<i>Ilex opaca</i>
+ Northern bayberry	<i>Morella pennsylvanica</i>
Rose of Sharon	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>
+ Sweet gale	<i>Myrica gale</i>
+ Meadowsweet	<i>Spiraea alba</i>
+ Steeplebush	<i>Spiraea tomentosa</i>
+ Swamp fetterbush	<i>Eubotrys racemosa</i>
+ Sweet pepperbush	<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>

Trees	
Common Name	Scientific Name
+ Box elder	<i>Acer negundo</i>
* Colorado blue spruce	<i>Picea pungens</i>
+ Eastern red cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>
+ Flowering dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>
Magnolia	<i>Magnolia spp.</i>
+ Sassafras	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>
+ Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>
+ Sweetgum	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>
* Washington hawthorn	<i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i>
* White spruce	<i>Picea glauca</i>

LIST OF PLANTS OFTEN DAMAGED BY DEER

Common Name	Scientific Name
American aborvitae	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>
Apples	<i>Malus spp.</i>
Atlantic white cedar	<i>Chamaecyparis thuyoides</i>
Balsam fir	<i>Abies balsamea</i>
Cherries	<i>Prunus spp.</i>
Crocus	<i>Crocus spp.</i>
Daylily	<i>Hemerocallis spp.</i>
Eastern redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>
English ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
European mountain ash	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Evergreen azaleas	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>
Fraser fir	<i>Abies fraseri</i>
Hardy geranium	<i>Geranium endressi</i>
Hollyhocks	<i>Alcea spp.</i>
Hosta	<i>Hosta spp.</i>
Hybrid tea rose	<i>Rosa x hybrid</i>
Impatiens	<i>Impatiens spp.</i>
Norway maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>
Plums	<i>Prunus spp.</i>
Rhododendrons	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>
Strawberries	<i>Fragaria spp.</i>
Tulips	<i>Tulipa spp.</i>
Winterreeper	<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>
Yews	<i>Euonymus fortunei</i>

Source: Resistance of Woody Ornamental Plants to Deer Damage, Cornell University

Wild Gardening, continued from page 1

Individual gardens have enormous potential to provide habitat connectivity in heavily fragmented urban and suburban areas. In short, YOUR garden, no matter the size, matters to wildlife! Let's dive into some easy steps you can take to enhance your garden's habitat value.

LET GO OF BEING A NEAT FREAK.

The slogan "Leave the leaves" has been on the scene for a while now. Lots of insects, including bumblebees, caterpillars, and fireflies, seek out a warm blanket of leaves to stay cozy all winter. To keep these little critters safe and warm, leave the leaves where they fall. Another option is to rake the leaves into an existing flowerbed, or to another area to create a new flowerbed. For the past few years, I've been raking leaves into a big pile along one side of our backyard fence, where they sit all winter and decompose. My goal is to eventually plant some perennial flowers in that nice, rich pile of leaf compost. It serves its purpose as a bug refuge, and I even caught an opossum snuffling around one night in search of slugs!

It's also a good idea to leave all the dead stems from your perennial flowers up over the winter. They serve as winter protection for insects, but additionally offer seeds all winter long for backyard bird favorites, like chickadees, sparrows, and juncos. Now that winter is over, and the seeds have all been eaten, it's ok to clean them up, right? Wrong! Every year, I practice patience, waiting until nighttime temperatures are above 50 degrees before I start tidying up my flower beds. The insects using the stems as shelter appreciate the extra protection until it's warm enough! Once we're in the clear (I usually aim for mid-May), it's safe to trim down the stems, leaving about 12-15 inches of standing stems behind. Many stems are hollow, perfect for our small, solitary bee species to use as nesting areas. As an added bonus, you can leave the scraps from the trimmed stems around your plants as mulch! While you're waiting for the right time to tidy up, you can walk around with your garden notebook to sketch some plans and daydream about new projects.

BE PICKY ABOUT YOUR PLANTS.

Looking to add some new plants to your garden this year? Be a picky plant buyer! Instead of adding the typical landscaping plants, search for species native to Rhode Island. Native species not only are beneficial to all wildlife and contribute to local biodiversity, they're also BEAUTIFUL and pretty much zero-maintenance. Native plants have deeper roots, making them drought tolerant. Aside from giving new plantings a drink for their first week in the ground, you can basically forget about native plants. Not sure which plants are native? The URI Master Gardeners have a helpful [RI Native Plant Guide](#) to spark inspiration.

Many native plants are also host plants for a variety of butterflies and moths. The most famous example is monarch butterflies and milkweed, but there are countless critter-host plant relationships. By planting native plants, you're providing food for hungry caterpillars, which in turn provide food for hungry baby birds. Supporting caterpillars is critical for birds. According to Doug Tallamy, entomology and wildlife ecology professor from the University of Delaware, chickadee parents need to find 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chicks. Backyard bird feeders are a fun way to watch the birds, but a backyard habitat with diverse native plants is a true powerhouse when it comes to getting birds the food they need.

Concerned that deer are going to munch down all your new plants? Good news! There are quite a few native plants that deer are less likely to eat. Note, *less likely*. Deer will readily eat up to 500 different plant species, but there are some that

they simply can't resist (like tulips) and others that they will leave alone (like Joe-Pye weed). For help coexisting with deer in the garden, and to see a list of deer-resistant plants, check out our recently revised ["Reducing Deer Damage in Your Garden"](#) packet.

It's important to note that some native plants can be toxic to pets and livestock. Be thoughtful about your planting location. For example, I have a bottomless pit of a Labrador, who spends all her free time vacuuming bunny poop and grazing grass like a goat in our fenced backyard. (If you have a Lab, you can relate.) To prevent any accidental ingestion of toxic plants when Zinnia isn't under my direct supervision, I planted my milkweed and cardinal flowers in the front yard.

WORK WITH NATURE, NOT AGAINST IT.

Many gardeners are now going the organic route, and forgoing chemical pesticides and herbicides, which is a big win for wildlife! By creating a healthy ecosystem in our gardens, we're letting nature do its thing. After just a couple of years of releasing our lawn from chemicals, I found two lovely native plants, St. John's wort and blue-eyed grass, growing in the lawn!

Every year, I find at least one chubby hornworm caterpillar lurking in my tomato plants. When I started gardening, I didn't know much about insects, but by using the [iNaturalist](#) app to ID bugs while I'm gardening, I've learned so much. I learned that those dreaded hornworms are really sphinx moth caterpillars! Predatory wasps lay their eggs on the caterpillars, acting as natural pest control in the garden, so I still get lots of tomatoes, and enjoy finding the adult moths in my yard. In turn, the moths get to pollinate the flowers, which produce seeds, which feed the birds. If chemicals were sprayed, this fascinating web of interactions wouldn't happen.

Every night, from May to October, our family delights in watching our tiny cohort of neighborhood bats joyfully soar over the garden, snapping up moths and mosquitos. Our yard is chock full of meadow voles which have on more than one occasion set up a winter residence in the compost bin. We've had rats scuttling up our cornstalks, and mice in our wood pile. Rather than putting out rodenticide, we do our best to remove or secure attractants, and let our resident great horned owls and red-tailed hawks handle lethal control. This balances out the rodents and keeps predators safe from secondary poisoning. Remember, gardens don't exist in a bubble, they're part of nature, and that's something to be celebrated!



One of the downspout rain gardens in August...You can barely see the downspout anymore!



An example of what a couple of short years of planting can look like: butterfly and common milkweed, lanceleaf coreopsis, little bluestem, and more!

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

You don't have to overhaul your entire garden or spend tons of money to be wildlife friendly. Start with small projects and baby steps. Here are some projects I've done in my own garden. Maybe they will inspire you!

◆ CREATE A MINI RAIN GARDEN NEAR A DOWNSPOUT:

My rain gardens are just a few square feet in area and did not require major landscaping. Simply dig a little trench at the downspout (try to pitch away from the house), fill with large pebbles, and plant species that like or tolerate their feet being a little wet on either side. Some species that have thrived at my sunny downspout include buttonbush, swamp milkweed, white turtlehead, mountain mint, blue vervain, smooth beardtongue, and soft rush. I've had jewelweed and evening primrose colonize the area on their own too. It's butterfly and hummingbird central in the summer!

◆ CREATE A LASAGNA BED: Don't go crazy ripping out turf to make a new flowerbed. It's exhausting and time consuming.

You will be miserable and may ask yourself why you got into gardening in the first place. Instead, get some free woodchips! [ChipDrop](#) is an online sign-up that connects you with local arborists who have wood chips they are willing to part with for free. Layer 6 inches of fresh, untreated woodchips where you want a new flowerbed, let it sit for 6 months or so, and you'll be ready to add some native plants! The woodchips and grass decompose over time, creating beautiful "lasagna" layers of soil. With all of that extra time on your hands, you can go make a real lasagna...Mangia!

◆ PLANT A FREE TREE: Each year, DEM partners with The

Arbor Day Foundation to offer [free trees](#) to Rhode Islanders to plant in their yards. The tree giveaways run in spring and fall, all you have to do is sign up. It takes less than 5 minutes, and you get to select a tree species from a list of options.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- ◆ RIDEM website: www.dem.ri.gov
- ◆ Check out our Wild Gardening series on YouTube!
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKn0NqCeG4NwF1IsCwzXBDQ>
- ◆ *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy

☺☺



The Gannon family, before and after the start of our garden habitat restoration. We're currently adding more mini-meadow flowerbeds, breaking up that front lawn and creating biodiversity!

Connect with us on social media!



@RI.fishandwildlife



@RIfishwildlife



@RhodeIslandDEM

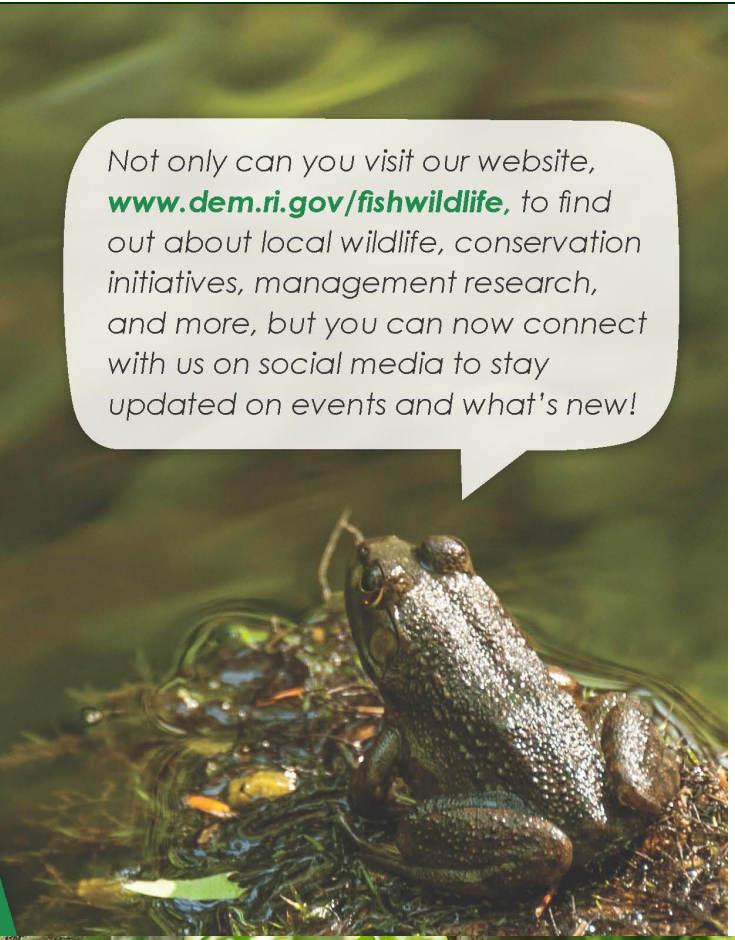


dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife



Photo by M. Stultz at Durfee Hill Wildlife Management Area, Gloucester, RI

Not only can you visit our website, www.dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife, to find out about local wildlife, conservation initiatives, management research, and more, but you can now connect with us on social media to stay updated on events and what's new!



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