

ISSUE 16 | SUMMER 2022

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER



**MEET THE
GREAT EGRET!**



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DID YOU KNOW?



We do a lot of work to protect, conserve, and learn about Rhode Island's wild creatures and the places they call home. None of this work would be possible without the help of people who hunt and fish in our state.

Hunters and anglers buy a license each year. This license means that they promise to follow all the rules of hunting and fishing in Rhode Island. These rules exist to protect our important natural resources and make sure that people can enjoy hunting and fishing in our state forever. Also, the money from these licenses goes towards important conservation work in Rhode Island.

There's another really cool way that hunters, anglers, and also target shooters (people who may not hunt, but practice their aim with firearms or archery at a range) help with conservation all across the United States. The businesses that make firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and fishing equipment pay a tax on these items. This raises millions of dollars, which is split up and given to each state by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

What do we do with all this money? We use it to help our state's fish and wildlife! This money helps to buy more land for our management areas, which means more habitats will be protected in our state forever. We also use the money to do important research to learn more about our fish and wildlife, and what we can do better to help them.

Much of our work wouldn't be possible without the help of our hunters, anglers, and target shooters. By participating in these types of outdoor activities in a responsible and safe way, you can help support fish and wildlife conservation in Rhode Island too!

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Want to learn even more
about RI's fish and wildlife?

Follow us on
YouTube and Instagram!



@RI.fishandwildlife

Rhode Island Department of
Environmental Management



The Wild Rhode Island Explorer | Summer 2022

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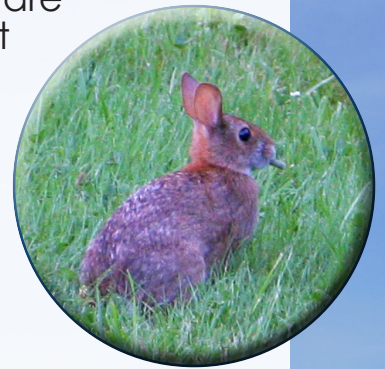
HABITAT CHAT

Beautiful Bay Islands

Rhode Island is called “The Ocean State” for good reason. Even though our state is very small, we have about 400 miles of coastline! In the Narragansett Bay, you can find sandy beaches, rocky shores, saltmarshes, and more than 40 islands.

Our bay islands are all different shapes and sizes. Some have trees and other plants growing on them, and others are just a big rock in the middle of the ocean. Some have people living on them, and others are protected as wildlife habitat. Many of the islands were important places throughout Rhode Island’s history.

The bay islands are important habitat for lots of different animals. On islands with plants and trees, you can hear songbirds, especially during spring and fall migration. Many birds migrate along the coast, so islands are a nice place to rest and grab a snack. Rock islands are great nesting places for gulls and other waterbirds that nest on the ground. These islands are safe from nest predators that prowl the beaches, like raccoons, coyotes, and skunks. One island in particular, Patience Island, has become a breeding colony for the threatened New England cottontail rabbit. The thick brush and brambles on Patience Island make it a perfect place for the DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife to release New England cottontails born at the Roger Williams Zoo. (Stay tuned for more information about this super cool project in a future Explorer issue!)



NEW ENGLAND
COTTONTAIL

How can you help the critters that live on the islands? Pick up litter on the beach! Also, try to shrink down how much you use throwaway plastic stuff like water bottles, straws, cups, and other items. Try to switch to things that can be used over and over again. A lot of times, plastic trash ends up in the ocean, and washes up on the islands. Trash can be harmful to our wildlife and pollutes our water. Let’s all work together to keep our Narragansett Bay and islands beautiful for both people and wildlife!



GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

WICKED WILD RECIPE

One of the coolest things about hunting is being connected to where our food comes from. Hunters get to see the whole circle of life, from out in nature to our kitchen tables. In this issue of "Maddie's Outdoor Adventures," we will be INDOORS getting creative in the kitchen! We will be cooking some pheasant I harvested over the winter.

What is a pheasant? A pheasant is an upland game bird in North America. The males have a white neck ring and shiny green and purple head with red wattles around the eyes. An upland game bird is a bird hunted for food that lives in forest and field habitats.

Speaking of FOOD, let's make some buffalo pheasant pizza! If you do not have access to pheasant, you can use chicken. It tastes the same! Make sure you have an adult with you when using the oven or any sharp utensils.

INGREDIENTS

- Shredded, cooked pheasant meat (or chicken)
- Buffalo sauce
- Pizza dough (homemade or store bought)
- Ranch or blue cheese dressing
- Mozzarella cheese

CRUST

With a parent or guardian, begin by preheating the oven to 500 degrees. Stretch the pizza dough into a 12-inch circle on a sheet of parchment paper lightly coated with cornmeal or flour. Set the parchment paper with dough on a pizza pan and begin to mix your toppings!

TOPPINGS

In a small bowl, toss the pheasant with the buffalo sauce. Spread the blue cheese (or Ranch) dressing over the pizza, then top with the shredded pheasant. Sprinkle the mozzarella cheese all over the top.

BAKE

Bake 9-11 minutes in the preheated oven, or until the crust is golden brown and the cheese is melted. Enjoy!



About the Author

Hi everyone! My name is Maddie; I am the administrative assistant at the Outdoor Education office. I have the best job ever because I encourage people to go explore the great outdoors! I love to practice archery, learn about wild game animals (turkeys are my favorite), go fishing, and cook up seafood with my family! I did not grow up in a hunting family, so I relied on RIDEM Hunter Education programs to learn and to connect me with awesome mentors who helped me get to where I am today. I am still learning and growing, and now I am here to help you do the same!

CRITTER CAM



Who's this sneaky little guy? It's a mink! Don't let that cute face fool you, minks are small but mighty predators in the weasel family.



"What's this funny looking box? Ahh! It clicked!" This curious coyote seems to be very interested in our trail camera...

About our trail camera study:

A trail camera is a small, waterproof camera that can be strapped to a tree. It takes photos when it senses something moving in front of the lens. In this issue, we'd like to highlight some photos of predators on Patience Island in Narragansett Bay. We've teamed up with biologists from the University of Rhode Island to study the population of New England cottontails on Patience Island. Keeping an eye out for predators helps us understand how well the rabbits are doing on the island.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Did you know that we have lots of events and classes where you can learn outdoor skills like archery, fishing, and first aid?

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram to check out more upcoming events!

Visit dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife for more info and to sign up!

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS LET'S GO QUAHOGGING!

WHAT IS A QUAHOG?

It's a hard-shell clam often served as an appetizer or as part of a meal and can be found off the Atlantic Coast of North America.



DID YOU KNOW?

The word quahog comes from the Algonquin language spoken by the Narragansett Tribe. The quahog is an important traditional food of the Narragansett people and the other tribal nations of Rhode Island. The colorful purple shells were traditionally made into beads (called wampum), used as tools, or crushed for fertilizer to use in the garden. Artists still create beautiful jewelry and crafts from this amazing shellfish!

WHERE IN RHODE ISLAND CAN I FIND THEM?

You can go to any saltwater location to search for quahogs. Some popular locations include Conimicut Point in Warwick, Colt State Park in Bristol and almost any coastal inlet. They are found offshore or along the shore near rocks. You should have your parents or guardian check to make sure that the area you want to go to is open to shellfishing, and not closed for environmental reasons first.



CAN I KEEP THEM IF I FIND THEM?

Yes, if you live in Rhode Island and find clams in the State's waters you can take a half bushel (which is almost four gallons) from non-shellfish management areas per day, and one peck, (about two gallons), from shellfish management areas per day. You can keep them or give them away, but you cannot sell them.

WHAT GEAR DO I NEED TO FIND AND COLLECT THEM?

- You will need a tool to dig with. This could be a clam rake, garden hoe, or small hand shovel. Dig into the sand until you hear scraping, it may be a quahog!
- Something to put them in that allows water to drain. If offshore, an inner tube with a basket in the middle to put them in, or a net bag with a loop to put around your wrist.
- A cooler with ice or cold saltwater to transport the quahogs. They should be kept cold until ready to cook.
- A clam gauge. This small metal measuring device will show you if the clam is big enough to keep or if it should be put back in the ocean.
- In addition to these quahog specific items, the following are also good ideas to have on hand: Some water shoes, sunglasses, sunscreen, towel, bathing suit, change of clothes/shoes, water, and snacks.



WANT TO HARVEST YOUR OWN QUAHOGS?

Join our Aquatic Resources Education team at one of our Come Clamming With Me events! Keep an eye on our online calendar for upcoming events: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/fish-wildlife/>



About the Author

My name is Dana, and I am the Technical Assistant at the Division of Fish and Wildlife Outdoor Education Office. I love fishing, mainly fly fishing, and fly tying. A big part of my job is helping people learn to fish. My favorite part is when someone catches a fish, especially if it's their first!

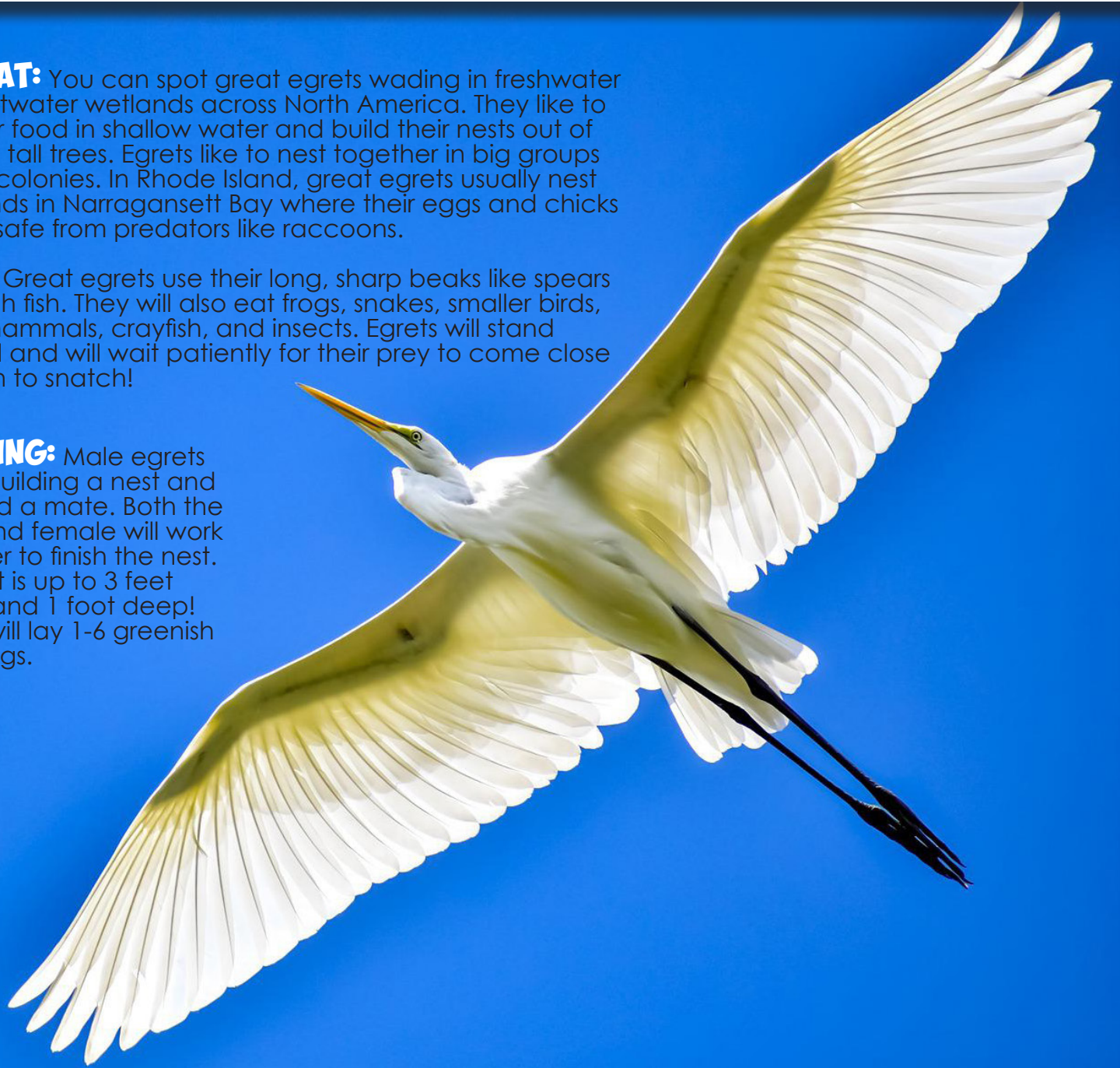
OUR WILD NEIGHBORS

GREAT EGRET

HABITAT: You can spot great egrets wading in freshwater and saltwater wetlands across North America. They like to hunt for food in shallow water and build their nests out of sticks in tall trees. Egrets like to nest together in big groups called colonies. In Rhode Island, great egrets usually nest on islands in Narragansett Bay where their eggs and chicks will be safe from predators like raccoons.

FOOD: Great egrets use their long, sharp beaks like spears to catch fish. They will also eat frogs, snakes, smaller birds, small mammals, crayfish, and insects. Egrets will stand very still and will wait patiently for their prey to come close enough to snatch!

BREEDING: Male egrets begin building a nest and then find a mate. Both the male and female will work together to finish the nest. The nest is up to 3 feet across and 1 foot deep! Egrets will lay 1-6 greenish blue eggs.



DID YOU KNOW?

Egrets grow long feathers on their backs, called plumes, during the breeding season. They raise up these special feathers and fan them out to show off and attract a mate. Over 100 years ago, egrets were hunted almost to extinction because people wanted to decorate their hats with these fancy feathers. Today, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and other laws continue to protect America's birds from this sad fate. Now, egrets have made a comeback! Turn the page to learn about the Division of Fish and Wildlife's yearly bay island bird count!



OUT IN THE FIELD

COUNTING BIRDS



Hi everybody! This summer, I'm out in the field with our non-game bird biologist, John Herbert. We're out on an island in the Narragansett Bay counting waterbirds. Why are we counting them, you ask? And what's a waterbird? Let's find out!

Mary: Hi John! Can you describe to our readers where we are standing right now?

John: We are standing on West Island near Little Compton. We will be zipping around to most of the islands in the Narragansett Bay this week..

Mary: The bay islands are so beautiful and unique! Can anyone come visit them?

John: During the spring and summer many islands are closed to visitors. That's because waterbirds use this unique habitat to nest and raise their young. Disturbance from people can easily stress these birds out and potentially cause harm to them, their nest, or their young. For instance, West Island is closed to the public from April 1- August 15. As biologists, we have special permission to be here to check on the birds. If you plan to visit an island during the summer, please check to see if that is allowed.

Mary: So, what exactly is a waterbird?

John: These are birds that primarily live on or near water. Waterbirds have adaptations that make them able to live in watery habitats for all or part of their life cycle. Some species include ducks, gulls, shorebirds, herons, egrets, and puffins. They usually have feet that help them swim, feathers that can repel water, and bills that can dig in the sand or grab a fish. Colonial nesting waterbirds

are species or multiple species that nest in close together. If you are in your backyard and you find an American robin nest, likely there is not another nest very close by. Many birds like to have a territory during the time they are nesting and do not like other birds around, but those nests are usually well hidden away from the eyes of predators.

Mary: Then how does nesting all together in big colonies help waterbirds?

John: Colonial nesting birds like to be close to one another because this protects them from predators that want to eat the young birds or eggs. Many eyes on the predator are better than just two. Avoiding predators is one main reason they like to nest on islands. It is much harder for a racoon to swim out here than it is on the mainland. One predator that colonial nesting birds have trouble avoiding is humans. Many of these species almost went extinct in the previous century. Hard work from many people in our past have given these birds a chance, it is our job now to continue that work.

Mary: Which bird species are you searching for today?

John: Great egret, snowy egret, glossy ibis, great blue heron, black-crowned night heron, herring gull, great black-backed gull, double-crested cormorant,

GLOSSY IBIS



GREAT BLUE HERON



HERRING GULL



COMMON TERN



DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT





and common tern, to name a few. We'll be keeping our eyes peeled for anything that might pop up. That is the exciting thing about birds, anything can show up at any time!

Mary: Why is it important to count these birds each year?

John: We count the birds to understand any changes in the total number that are in the state, what we call the state population. We need to know this information to see if the state population is shrinking, growing or staying the same. If we find that populations are getting smaller, we can come up with different ways to potentially help them. For instance, we have found that the common tern population has been decreasing in Rhode Island, so we are figuring out ways to help them out.

Mary: What are some things Rhode Islanders can do to help our coastal birds?

John: Get interested in them and learn about them! These are native and natural creatures that deserve our respect. You do not need to get up at 5am to go bird watching along the coast. But if you're on the beach walking and see a bird eating, look at it for a moment to appreciate it, then walk around to give it space. Give the birds space to nest while on the islands. Pick



up trash on the beach. That really does help! People who respect nature are so important for the conservation of our natural resources.

Mary: It's been so cool visiting the birds of Narragansett Bay! What is your favorite part about your job?

John: Working outside and in nature is very special and something I appreciate very much. I love nature, animals, and science, and I get to experience them all. The work we do really makes a difference for the natural resources of Rhode Island. My favorite part of my job is helping take care of Rhode Island's wildlife for future generations.

Mary: Before we hop back on the boat and head home, what is your favorite Rhode Island critter?

John: For me, it is always hard to say what is my favorite! Animals are so unique and special that they are easily taken for granted. Millions of years of evolution have given us dragonflies that zip around a marsh, bats flying around your yard, and birds that briefly stop in Rhode Island to rest and eat while they migrate hundreds, even thousands of miles. I often urge people to appreciate animals, even the most common ones you see every day. But for today, I'll go with an animal very special to me, the semipalmated sandpiper!

About John

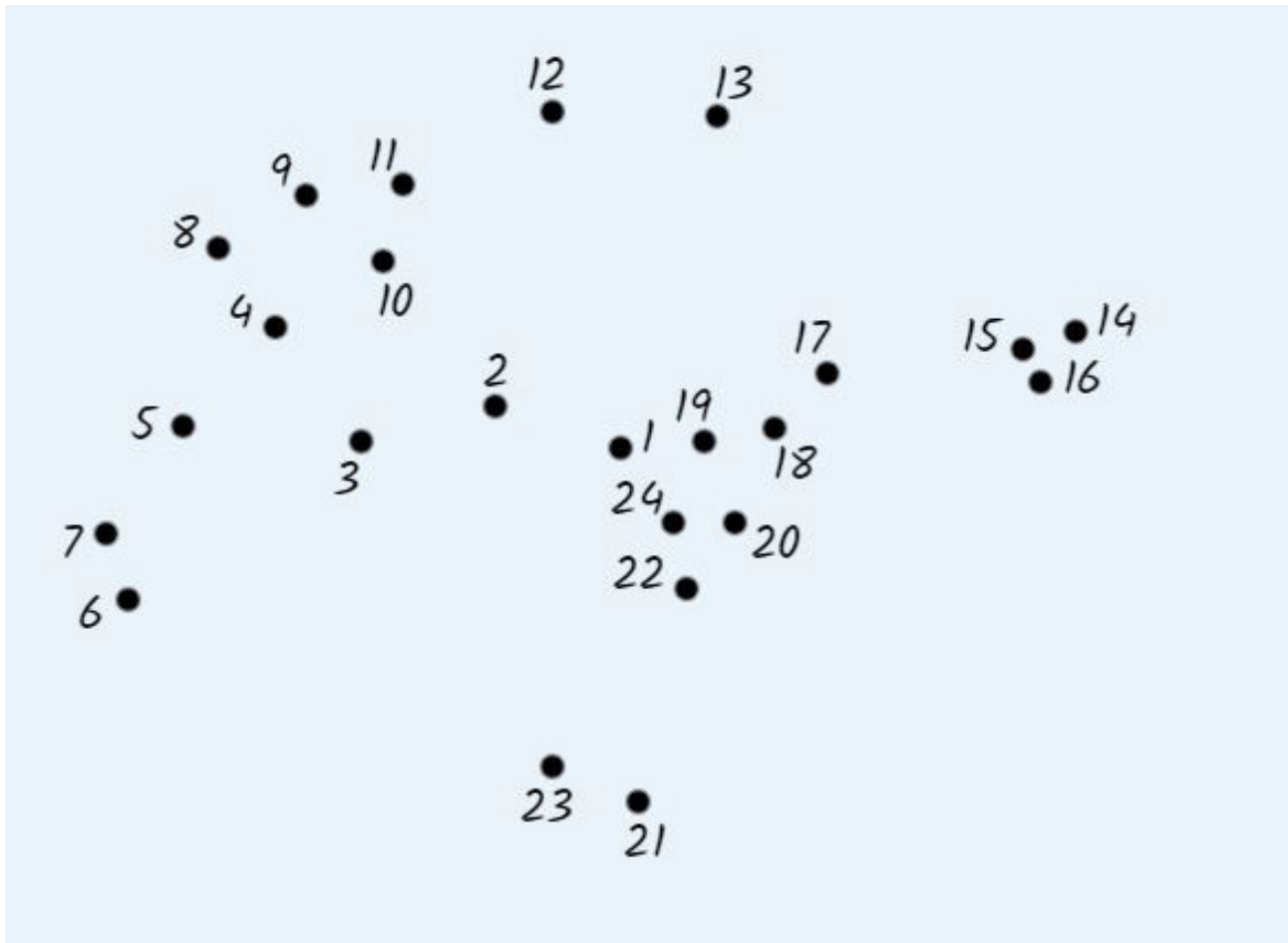
Originally from Pennsylvania, John has a PhD in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from Tulane University. He also studied biology at the University of Arkansas, and Virginia Tech. He has worked on birds and other environmental projects in Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington DC. He's also worked in Brazil, French Guiana, and Suriname. In addition to working as a biologist, he spent time in the U.S. Army as an Engineer Officer around the US and in Afghanistan.



WILD QUEST

CONNECT THE DOTS

Can you connect the dots to draw a glossy ibis?



CRITTER CARDS

Rhode Island is home to many different wild animals. Some are very common and easy to spot. Others are rare and hard to find. Some are doing great and have healthy populations, while other species are threatened or endangered. At the Division of Fish and Wildlife, we've created a list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Marked as SGCN on the cards). We focus a lot of our work on helping these species. We do this by studying their populations, protecting special habitats, and spreading the word about these cool critters.

Cut out and collect these Critter Cards to learn about Rhode Island's wildlife species!

Cut



Fold in half



INDIGO BUNTING (SGCN)



Kelly Colgan Azar

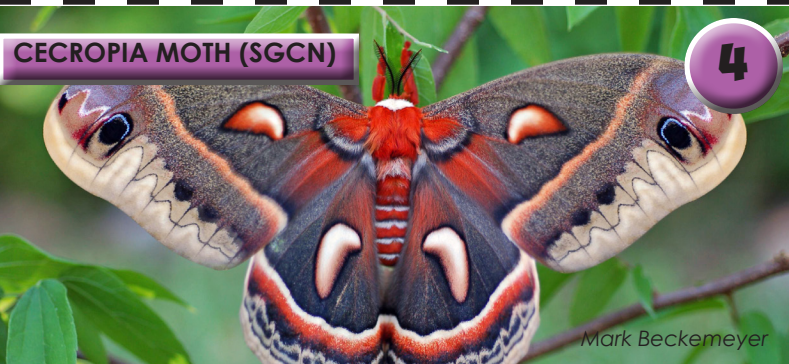
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I am an electric blue songbird with a chatty personality! In the spring, I will sing my cheerful morning song up to 60 times in one hour. I love shrubby and old field habitats. I like to eat seeds, fruits, and insects.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Planting native shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers will create habitat for me to find food and shelter. Protecting shrubland habitats like at the Great Swamp Wildlife Management Area and other conservation land will also help keep me on the map in Rhode Island.

CECROPIA MOTH (SGCN)



Mark Beckemeyer

4

I am a BIG moth that lives in forests. My wingspan is 5-6 inches! As a caterpillar, I am very chunky and bright lime green with red, yellow, and blue spiny bumps on my body. I only eat when I am a caterpillar. As an adult, I only live for a few weeks, hoping to find a mate.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Don't use yard chemicals or pesticides! Spraying chemicals to kill one type of insect accidentally kills lots of other insects like moths, butterflies, and bees. Planting native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees in your yard or community will help feed me and other wildlife. Pollinators are very important for our ecosystem. Please help us out!

GREAT EGRET (SGCN)



Gerald Krausse

7

I am a tall bird that can be seen wading in saltmarshes and wetlands. My long beak is great at catching fish! A long time ago, I almost disappeared because people hunted me to put my long, beautiful feathers on hats. Nowadays, I am protected from being hunted. I nest on the islands of Narragansett Bay.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Keep trash out of the ocean! A lot of trash washes up on the bay islands, and it can be very harmful to wildlife. Plastic trash is the worst! Think of ways you can use less plastic in your daily life. This will help keep our oceans clean and myself and other wildlife healthy.

SPOTTED TURTLE (SGCN)



Glenn Bartolotti

3

I am a shy turtle that lives in swamps and wetlands with shallow water. I really love wetlands with nice rushes and sedges to hide in, and logs to bask in the sun. You'll know who I am by my yellow polka dots! I'm pretty tiny (only 3-5 inches long) and also pretty cute.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

It's tough being this adorable! People like to kidnap me from the wild and take me home as a pet...or worse, ship me overseas to sell. Please leave me (and other turtles) in the wild where we belong. Also, you can help me cross the street if you spot me in the road. Just carry me to a safe place in the direction I was heading so I don't get lost or confused.



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