

ISSUE 20 | SUMMER 2023

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

**MEET THE
BLACK BEAR!**



DEM
RHODE ISLAND





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!

CONTACT US

RI DFW FIELD HEADQUARTERS
277 GREAT NECK ROAD, WEST KINGSTON, RI 02892
401-789-0281 | DEM.DFW@DEM.RI.GOV

RI DFW EDUCATION CENTER
1B CAMP E-HUN-TEE, EXETER, RI 02822
401-539-0019

DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
24HR VIOLATION LINE: (401) 222-3070

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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 2023

Writer/Editor: Mary Gannon

Cover photo: USFWS

Inside cover photo: Mike Stultz

Contributors: Madison Proulx, Dana Kopec, Morgan Lucot

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HABITAT CHAT

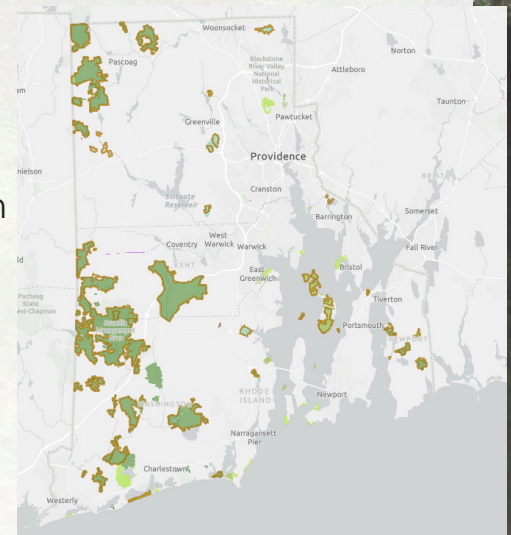
Connecting the Dots

Imagine you're a wild creature...Maybe you'd like to be a turtle, or a fox, or a butterfly. Pick your favorite wild Rhode Island animal. Got it? Ok! What kind of habitat would you need? What kind of food would you eat? Where would you get your water? Would you need to travel around to find all of the things you need to survive in your habitat? Probably! Wild animals are usually on the move. This might happen during a particular season, like spring and fall migration for bats and songbirds. It could also happen throughout the day, like when mom and dad coyotes are working hard to find food for their hungry puppies.

No matter how or when wildlife are moving, they need space to do so! Rhode Island is a very developed landscape, full of roads, neighborhoods, and businesses. It's almost impossible for critters to move around in the environment without bumping into an area that's been changed by human activities. This can cause problems for both animals and people! For the animals, it can get dangerous because they have to cross the busy roads and risk being hit by a car. They can lose food and shelter when their habitat is turned into a parking lot or a new neighborhood. For people, having more wildlife wandering through the area can make people nervous, especially when those animals are larger, like coyotes or bears.

Protecting habitat is so important for all wildlife, but we humans should make sure we are being thoughtful in how we do it. Thinking about how much animals need to move around, we need to do our best to connect patches of habitat. This creates a "corridor," or a passageway for animals to safely move from one larger patch of habitat to another.

When we protect habitat in our State Management Area system, we try our best to connect the dots and create corridors of habitat. That often involves working with other conservation groups, like the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy, and town land trusts. It's great that our tiny state has so many people who care about protecting habitat! You can help too by making your backyard or neighborhood wildlife-friendly by planting native plants as a natural, healthy food source for birds, bees, butterflies, and other critters. If we all work together, we can even transform our urban and suburban areas in Rhode Island into habitat corridors!



Here's a map of Rhode Island. All those big green patches are State Management Areas. Can you see how a lot of them are close together or connected? That's super important for the wildlife that live in these areas!

MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Wandering Wildlife



There are many fun things to do outside in the summer! One thing I like best is to take a walk in a park or along the beach. I usually get to see tons of ducks and geese and other wildlife while I am out there. I see a lot of people feeding and interacting with wildlife, but I know that is not allowed. I will kindly tell them we always want to respect the space of wildlife such as ducks and geese and never feed them. It is actually illegal to feed wildlife here in Rhode Island for many important reasons.

Feeding ducks bread is not good for them because it doesn't have much nutritional value. It fills the duck's stomach so that it doesn't forage for foods it would naturally eat, like aquatic plants. It can make the ducks sick, and their ducklings do not receive the right nutrition for proper growth and development. So, I sit from a distance and watch the awesome ducks through my binoculars. I also love taking photos of them with my camera!

Photo: Paul Topham



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

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 from our research partner Laken Ganoe.

Laken is a URI student studying Rhode Island's fisher population for her PhD project. She uses a trail camera to figure out where fishers are in the state. She also puts tracking collars on them to see what habitats they are using and how much they travel around. If you'd like to learn more about Laken's project and fishers, check out our Winter 2022 issue at www.dem.ri.gov/wildlifeoutreach.

Laken's cameras capture some pretty awesome photos of fishers and other critters too!



A family of fishers climbs over a stone wall in the woods. This is exactly the type of photo Laken was hoping to capture! This lets her know where mama fishers are raising their babies.



Two curious coyote pups sniff around the forest floor, waiting for mom and dad to return with a snack. It's common to see young wildlife out during the day in the spring and summer, as well as their parents who are working extra hard to find food for their hungry kiddos!



A mama wood duck leads her ducklings into the water for a swim. How many of these cute little fluffballs can you spot in the photo?



Hey there, bear! One of RI's wandering black bears is captured on camera!

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS

WHAT ARE FILTER FEEDERS?

Oceans are filled with particles of food and other types of matter floating around. Filter feeders help to clear the water of these various substances! These creatures take in small particles of nutritional value and filter out the rest.

There are different sea creatures that filter feed. Some swim around, like fish and whales. Others stay stationary, like clams, mussels, and oysters.

Filter feeders can filter different amounts of water per hour.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

QUAHOGS
1 GALLON PER HOUR

OYSTERS
1.3 GALLONS PER HOUR

MUSSELS
 $\frac{1}{2}$ GALLON PER HOUR



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

BLACK BEAR



HABITAT

Black bears can be found across Canada, the United States, and parts of northern Mexico. They like to live in forests but can adapt to other habitats...like suburban neighborhoods.

BREEDING

Black bears mate in the summer, and the cubs are born in January or February when mom is hibernating. Mama Bear will wake up from hibernation when the cubs are born, and will care for them in the den (snoozing in between). Most female bears have 2 cubs per season, but can have up to 6. The cubs are super tiny, and weigh only one pound at birth!

FOOD

Black bears are omnivores, which means they like to eat LOTS of things! They love to eat berries, plants, nuts, insects, small mammals, and fish. They also love to eat the things that we like to eat, so they are more than happy to dumpster dive or knock over trashcans for leftovers. They also are big fans of bird feeders. Seeds and suet contain lots of protein and fat, which is super delicious to a bear.

DID YOU KNOW?

Black bears were once common in Rhode Island, but then disappeared by the year 1800. This was because of habitat loss and overhunting by the European colonists. Now, the black bear is back on the Rhode Island landscape, and we're excited to see the return of this amazing critter! Turn the page to meet one of our biologists and learn more about how to live alongside our largest furry friend in Rhode Island.

OUT IN THE FIELD



Hi everyone, Mary here! If you watch the local news, you may have heard stories about bear sightings in Rhode Island. While bears are really beautiful and cool animals, you might be a little nervous if you spot one walking down the street in your neighborhood. To learn more about bears and how to live peacefully alongside them, let's talk to our furbearer biologist, Morgan Lucot!

Mary: Hi Morgan! First, can you explain to everyone what a furbearer is?

Morgan: Hi Mary! Well, a furbearer is a mammal, but more specifically a mammal traditionally harvested for their fur. In Rhode Island we have coyotes, beaver, muskrat, fisher, bobcats and of course bears! Among other animals.

Mary: Furbearers must be really cool to study, but I'm sure they might cause some problems for people. What are some conflicts that might arise between people and this group of critters?

Morgan: Because it is a diverse group, there can be a few ways that we may accidentally clash with them. The main conflicts we see are flooding from beaver activity, or conflict with carnivores who can be attracted to our yards by food sources or "attractants" as we call them. Bears, coyotes, and bobcat are the typical furbearing animals who cause the second kind of conflict. They will come to our yards to eat bird seed, garbage, cat food, and domestic animals kept outdoors.

Mary: Knowing all of that, should people be afraid of these critters, particularly bears?

Morgan: Definitely not! Even bears, which are the largest furbearer we may see in RI, don't pose a huge threat to humans. Despite their size, black bears are shy animals who prefer to run from threats rather than fight. They are big scaredy cats!

Mary: What are some things that people can do to make sure we don't have any issues with bears, and can live peacefully alongside them?

Morgan: Overall bears think with their stomachs. If you can identify what attractant is bringing them to your yard, then just remove it and the bear will move on. Bears are omnivores and scavenge much of their food, so think outside the box. They love bird seed, pet food, garbage, penned chickens, fruit trees....the list goes on. Removing or securing the food source will go a long way in living peacefully with bears.

Mary: Do we have a lot of bears in Rhode Island? Do you think their population will grow?



Morgan: We have just a few bears who pass through Rhode Island every year. These bears come from the populations in Massachusetts and Connecticut. I expect that as those states see a growth in their bear population, Rhode Island will see more and more bears as well.

Mary: Why are carnivores important to have in Rhode Island's ecosystem?

Morgan: Ecosystems are intricate and often delicate. Every species has a role to play, including carnivores. Carnivores affect what is called "top down population control." This means that they eat animals below them on the food chain, which then affects every level of that chain from the carnivore at the top of the food chain, all the way down to the plants at the bottom. Black bears, as omnivores, participate in their ecosystems in a

number of ways. They help control the population of the critters that they eat, they clean up the environment by consuming carrion (previously dead animals), and they disperse seeds for a large variety of plants in their scat.

Mary: What is your favorite thing about your job?

Morgan: I am so lucky to be able to work with a variety of animals! The diversity of Rhode Island furbearers makes my daily work so interesting.

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite Rhode Island critter?

Morgan: I could never pick! Although maybe it's the beaver because I love seeing their air bubbles in icy ponds. They are so funny! Ok, but bears are so interesting, and they have those cute round ears! Shoot....I can't choose!



ABOUT MORGAN

Morgan is a wildlife biologist working for Rhode Island Fish and Wildlife as our Furbearer Specialist. She grew up in Michigan and studied zoology at Michigan State University. Morgan has worked in Kenya, Belize, and the US to research and manage wildlife populations for conservation.



WILD QUEST

**CAN YOU FIND ALL THESE WILD WORDS FROM THIS
SUMMER'S MAGAZINE IN THE WORDSEARCH BELOW?**

J	A	X	L	T	I	P	T	R	O	U	T	T	D	G	Z	G	H
U	B	L	U	N	V	K	P	Z	I	Q	F	K	S	X	I	Q	T
C	O	N	S	E	R	V	A	T	I	O	N	I	E	S	R	C	D
T	F	V	V	Y	P	B	I	B	E	A	R	L	L	L	M	D	E
Q	J	W	R	R	H	F	F	T	C	M	Y	K	R	T	F	W	E
U	Q	J	C	U	S	E	Z	C	Z	O	J	B	A	A	E	I	R
A	R	H	C	O	R	R	I	D	O	R	N	O	R	F	P	R	N
H	T	J	U	C	C	E	G	C	X	V	N	N	K	S	H	E	F
O	F	D	N	E	D	R	I	I	Q	R	H	N	E	L	U	N	L
G	R	N	X	A	Z	Z	B	O	M	D	Z	N	W	C	W	O	T
G	H	B	D	N	Z	I	R	H	D	S	V	U	T	P	T	Z	E
Y	R	P	X	Z	V	Z	D	D	U	I	D	R	U	M	X	V	O

**BEAR
CORRIDOR
QUAHOG
FILTER
OCEAN**

**CONNECT
CONSERVATION
ELFIN
DEER
TROUT**

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

BROOK TROUT (SGCN)

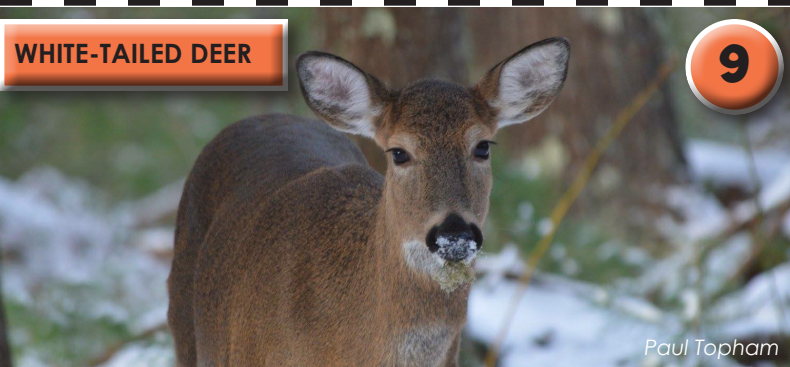


I am one of Rhode Island's most beautiful freshwater fish! I need clean and cold water to survive. I also need plenty of boulders and logs in the water to hide under.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

You can help me by keeping our state's rivers and streams clean of pollution by not using chemicals in your yard and by cleaning up trash when you're out fishing. Also, you can donate your real Christmas tree to the RIDEM's Trees for Trout program, where it will be recycled as habitat for trout along Rhode Island's rivers.

WHITE-TAILED DEER



I am one of RI's most common mammals. I can live in all sorts of habitats. You can find me in the forest, a meadow, or on some of the small islands in Narragansett Bay. I am a pretty good swimmer! I like to nibble on over 500 different types of plants...which could include some of the veggies in your garden!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

You can help me by not feeding me. A lot of people like to feed deer corn, but it's actually really bad for my stomach and can make me really sick. If you spot me as a baby (fawn), please leave me alone, unless I am in a dangerous place like a road. I am waiting for my mom to return and need to stay still to avoid predators.

BLACK BEAR (SGCN)



I am a large mammal with a big appetite! I will eat anything from berries to birdseed. I'm actually very shy and afraid of people, but can lose my fear if I start linking people to nice free snacks.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

You can help me by making sure your trashcans are secure, taking bird feeders down from April to November, and removing any other food sources. Oh, and please don't feed me on purpose! It's not good for me, and I need to remember to keep my distance from humans.

FROSTED ELFIN (SGCN)



I am a small, brown butterfly that likes to live in pitch pine barrens. I like to pollinate lots of plants, but I especially need wild lupine and wild indigo. These are the host plants where I lay my eggs!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

You can help me by planting native plants in your garden and by not spraying chemicals like pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. They can really harm me!



RI Department of Environmental Management
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
Great Swamp Field Headquarters
277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892