

ISSUE 24 | SUMMER 2024

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER



**MEET THE
MINK!**



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!

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RIDEM



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Rhode Island Department
of Environmental
Management

HABITAT CHAT

Beach Dunes



Rhode Island is called the Ocean State for a reason. Even though our state is very small, we have over 400 miles of coastline! At some of our beaches, you can see a very special habitat: dunes! **Coastal dunes** look like little hills of sand with very few plants growing on them. Not many plants can live in the hot, salty, sandy environment of the beach. Some plants you might find growing on Rhode Island's dunes are

SEASIDE GOLDENROD, American beach grass, bayberry, beach

plum...and poison ivy...which likes to grow everywhere! American beach grass is what helps form the dunes. It catches the sand as it blows around or washes up with the tide, kind of like a fence. The sand piles up around the grass to make a dune!

A bunch of different animals like to live in dunes. **PIPING PLOVERS** and American oystercatchers will lay their eggs on the sand. The eggs look like little beach pebbles, and the chicks blend in with the sand to stay safe. The Northeast beach tiger beetle only lives in this type of habitat. Predators like coyotes and mink will prowl the dunes in search of eggs and other things to eat.



NORTHERN DIAMONDBACK TERRAPINS may use dunes for digging holes to lay their eggs.



Dunes are very important for wildlife, but they also help protect the coast from storms. They act like a barrier to slow or stop flooding from big waves during storms. They need help though. We only have about 366 acres of dune habitat in Rhode Island. We've lost a lot of dune habitat because people have put buildings right on the beach and changed the habitat. As

our ocean warms, the sea level may rise too much and wash out our dunes. An **invasive** plant species called Japanese sand sedge has started growing in the dunes too. This little plant grows super fast and can take up too much space so that native beach plants can't grow. It also doesn't grow very tall, which makes the dunes shrink because not as much sand is trapped by the plants.

You can help protect dunes and the creatures that live there by being respectful of the habitat. Don't walk on dunes. This can harm the plants and move the sand around too much. This could also harm our shorebirds by disrupting or crushing their nests. You can also share what you've learned about dunes so that others can help too!



MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

TRICKY TICKS!

Summer in Rhode Island is the best. I love going swimming at our beaches, having cookouts, and exploring the woods! One thing I don't love, however, is ticks! Ticks are **arachnids**. They are actually related to spiders. Like a spider, ticks have eight legs. There are about 899 different species of ticks in the world. In Rhode Island, you can find a few different species like dog ticks, deer ticks, and Lone Star ticks.

Ticks are found throughout Rhode Island and can carry some diseases. You are most likely to be bitten by a tick in the spring, summer, or fall. Ticks can survive in the winter if temperatures are above freezing. If you are bitten by an infected tick, you could get sick. Ticks usually are found in tall grass and leafy areas and often attach themselves to you in your armpits, groin, waistline, or in your hair.

Here are some things I like to do before entering the woods to help prevent getting any tick-borne illnesses:

- I treat my clothing (not skin) with a spray called Permethrin. I spray my clothes and let them fully dry before I put them on.
- I spray my skin with bug spray.
- I wear long pants and tuck them into my socks so the ticks cannot climb onto my legs.
- I always check myself and my pets when I return home from being in the woods or grassy areas.
- I take a shower first thing when I get back inside to wash off any unattached ticks.

Stay safe this summer and watch out for those pesky ticks!

For more info on ticks, visit www.health.ri.gov/ticks.

Blacklegged (Deer) Tick

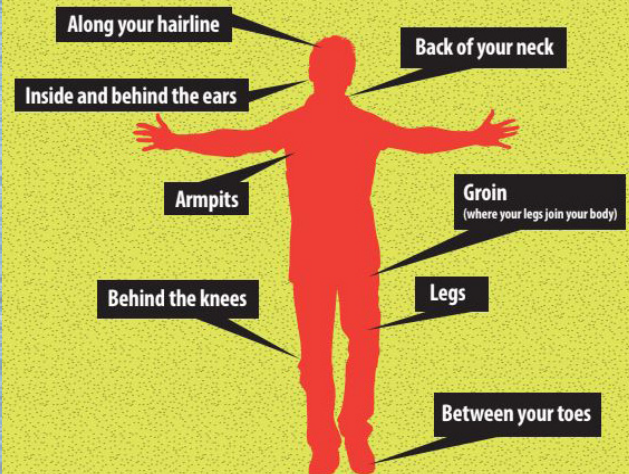


American Dog Tick



Do a tick check!

Here's where to look:



Tick information from RI Department of Health

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 Ganoë. Laken just graduated from URI with her PhD. Congratulations Laken! For part of her project, Laken used many trail cameras to figure out where fishers are in RI. She also put tracking collars on them to see what habitats they are using and how much they travel around. Laken's cameras captured some pretty awesome photos of fishers and other critters too!



A turkey vulture decided to hang out by the camera! Turkey vultures are part of nature's cleanup crew. They feed on carcasses of animals that have died. They can smell rotting meat a mile away!



Hello mink! This little guy looks like it was just poking around in a wetland looking for something to eat. That beautiful fur helps to keep mink warm and dry.



This fisher looks like it's having a great time rolling around in the scent lure Laken put in front of the camera. When biologists are studying mammals, they often squirt a stinky liquid near the trail cameras. The interesting smells lure in animals that are passing by, and they stop in front of the camera to get their picture taken.



Twins! Most of the time, white-tailed deer give birth to one fawn. But sometimes they have two, or even three! Remember, if you spot a fawn, give it plenty of space and leave it alone. Mama is not far away, and will come back to care for her baby when there's peace and quiet.

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS HAPPY HORSESHOE CRABS!

Horseshoe crabs are cool creatures that like to cruise along shallow bays, **estuaries**, and beaches from Maine to Florida. Even though they are called crabs, they are more closely related to spiders, ticks, and scorpions. They have a hard **exoskeleton**, called a **carapace**, which protects them. They have 12 little legs that help them travel along the seafloor. Horseshoe crabs also have 5 pairs of eyes! One pair is for detecting **primary light**, traveling, and finding mates. The other 4 pairs are used to detect **ultraviolet light** and moonlight to help them know the season and the lunar cycle. Most of the eyes used to detect light are lined along the tail. Even though they look a bit spiny, horseshoe crabs are harmless. They do not pinch or sting and are not venomous. Horseshoe crabs are often called "living fossils." Not much has changed about them in 445 million years!

Every spring and early summer, horseshoe crabs migrate from deep waters to beaches and tidal flats to lay their eggs. As they travel, they feed on marine worms, small clams, and algae. They only mate during full moons and new moons on high tides. Males make their way to the surf where they wait patiently for females to arrive. Once bonded, males will attach to the lower carapace and tail of female horseshoe crabs. The female digs a nest in the sand just past the water line. Each nest can contain up to 4,000 eggs! Females may create a bunch of nests during the breeding season. In two to four weeks, the eggs hatch and the baby horseshoe crabs return to the water to crawl along the ocean floor.



Want to see a horseshoe crab this summer? Check out Rhode Island's tidal estuaries, brackish ponds, shallow beaches, and sand bars. Areas like the Narrow River in the town of Narragansett and Point Judith Pond in Galilee are good spots to look. Remember to always enjoy watching nature from a safe distance and be respectful of wildlife!



Photos: RIDEM, USFWS



About the Author

My name is Harper, and I love fish! I was born in Rhode Island, but I have lived all over from Pennsylvania to Maine. Fishing has taken me many places, from the spruce highlands of Nova Scotia to the stunning peaks of the rolling Wasatch Mountains in Utah. My passion has led me to study marine science at the University of Maine, and upcoming fisheries and aquaculture at the University of Rhode Island. I love being able to connect with a world that I otherwise would not be able to see, and traveling has brought me many amazing experiences and memories.

OUR WILD NEIGHBORS

MINK

HABITAT

Mink like different types of wetland habitats. They can be found along streams and rivers, in freshwater and saltwater marshes, and along rocky coasts and beach dunes. They have thick underfur with an oily outer coat to keep them warm and dry. They also have a little bit of webbing between their toes to help them swim.

FOOD

Mink are amazing little predators and eat lots of different things. They will eat small fish, turtles, snakes, crayfish, birds, mice, rabbits, frogs, insects, and more!

BREEDING

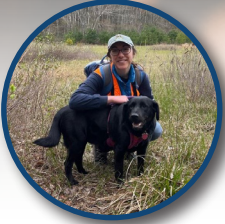
Female mink have 4-5 babies, called kits. They are born between April and June. They are born with their eyes closed and without fur. They drink milk from mom for about 5 weeks and then are ready to eat meat.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mink don't have many predators, but they can be harmed by the loss of their wetland habitats. Pollution is another problem for mink and other animals. Chemicals make their way into our rivers and streams from lots of different human activities. It's important to keep our wetlands clean for all wild creatures and people to stay healthy!



OUT IN THE FIELD



Hi everyone, Mary here! Today we're going on an adventure with Brad Murphy, who is one of our development operations technicians. Brad and the rest of our development crew do a lot of the behind-the-scenes work here at the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The work that we all do as a group would not be possible without the crew!

MARY: Hi Brad! Can you explain to everyone what the development crew does?

BRAD: Hi, Mary! The development crew does many things that ensure our management areas, fishing areas, and boating accesses across the state are available for people to use throughout the year. We do everything from fixing gravel roads and parking lots after heavy rainfall to removing fallen trees after storms, from snow plowing in winter to mowing and landscaping in summer. We also build and maintain RIDEM buildings, roads, guard rails, kiosks, and boat ramps. We hay and plant fields with rye and wildflowers to create wildlife habitat for a bunch of animals in the management areas. Sometimes we even work with our biologists to help with field research projects such as goose/duck banding, mammal trapping, and fish runs.

MARY: That's a lot of different responsibilities! What do you do as an operations technician?

BRAD: It is! I have many duties which keep me busy. I remove pesky beaver dams from blocking the flow of rivers and drains because they threaten to flood our roads and neighborhoods. I do maintenance on the building at the Great Swamp Headquarters office. Sometimes I change light bulbs, fix burst pipes, build shelves, and tables. I landscape in the summer around our fishing areas, which includes grass mowing and weed whacking. I always carry a bucket and trash grabber to keep our sites clean.

MARY: That's really cool that you get to do hands-on work to help keep Fish and Wildlife up and running! Where did you learn all the skills that you use each day at work?

BRAD: I worked in landscaping for a few summers when I was younger. I also worked as a koi fish breeder. These jobs provided me with background for the jobs I currently perform. Many of these skills I learned as an intern before I was hired for this full-time position.

MARY: Rhode Island is a small state, but we have 60,000 acres of State Management Areas to care for. What's a typical week like for you and the crew? I'm sure it's really busy!

BRAD: A week for us can be pretty hectic. One day I could be in Little Compton, at the Sakonnet Point boat ramp before heading to Eight Rod Farm Management Area in Tiverton. The next day, I might be at Durfee Hill Management Area in Glocester, or Camp Cronin fishing area in Narragansett. Some days are spent at the headquarters at the Great Swamp office in West Kingston doing general maintenance. There is never a shortage of jobs to keep us busy.

MARY: Your job takes you all over the state. Where's your favorite nature spot?

BRAD: It's hard to pick just one but I would have to say Beach Pond in Exeter. The pond is great for fishing as it's stocked by RIDEM with rainbow and brown trout. It's also stocked with walleye since it borders

Connecticut. Beautiful hiking trails circle the pond with wooded hills and valleys as well as rock ledges and cliffs. It has great stretches of shady hemlock woods along with deciduous and mixed woods teeming with wildlife and great bird habitat. It's home to breeding Worm-eating Warblers, Black-throated Green Warblers, Hooded Warblers, and Acadian Flycatchers to name a few bird species. Oh yeah, did I mention I'm a birdwatcher?

MARY: Have you always been interested in wildlife and nature?

BRAD: Yes, ever since I was young, I spent a lot of time in nature and showed special interest in reptiles and amphibians as well as birds. Since I grew up in a rural part of the state, nature was always nearby and all I had to do was step outside to be immersed in local wildlife. Growing up, I would always be outside climbing trees or up to my knees in mud catching frogs in the small pond at the end of my driveway or exploring the woods across the street. My grandpa was a birder and he was the one who got me interested in birds. Back then, we would hear the songs of the Whip-poor-wills from the woods outside my house at dusk and Bobwhites singing from the meadows that bordered our property and watch the various birds that visited our backyard feeders.

MARY: What's your favorite part of your job?

BRAD: Having a job that allows me to be outside is probably what I enjoy most. Also, because of my job, I've had the opportunity to help with goose and duck banding and these were experiences I wouldn't have otherwise. I've been able to be a volunteer with URI's timberdoodle research to track and monitor timberdoodles during their mating season. I'm volunteering this spring in a "shorebird blitz" to help understand shorebird populations in southern New England during migration. It's because of the connections I've made working here that I've had these opportunities, and I don't take them for granted.

MARY: And lastly, what's your favorite wild Rhode Island critter?

BRAD: If I had to pick one, I'd have to say Virginia Rails, also known as "marsh hens." They are secretive shore birds that live in fresh water and brackish marshes. If you're patient or lucky enough it's possible to catch a glimpse as they move through the reeds and marsh vegetation but usually you're more likely to hear them grunting or singing their loud "kick-ick" songs, often around dusk or sun up. I think it's their elusiveness I find really appealing and they're just really cool.



Photo: Sam Miller



ABOUT BRAD

Brad grew up in rural western Rhode Island. His childhood was spent exploring the woods around his neighborhood with friends, reading, watching movies, and listening to music when he wasn't playing year-round youth hockey. During and after high school, he pursued creative endeavors and played with a string of bands as guitarist and sometimes singer. For over a decade, he worked at his family run gas station business on Johnson Pond and worked odd jobs before joining the team at RIDEM Fish & Wildlife.

WILD QUEST

Which weasel is which?

Biologists have a special word for mammals in the weasel family:

MUSTELIDS

Members of the mustelid family can be found around the world. Some examples include otters, ferrets, badgers, martens, mink, weasels, and the wolverine.

Rhode Island is home to a few mustelids.

Can you figure out which weasel is which?

RIVER OTTER

MINK

FISHER

WEASEL

1



2



3



4



Answers: 1) Mink 2) Fisher 3) Weasel 4) River otter

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



MINK

12

I live close to riverbanks, wetlands and marshes. This is where I can find my favorite foods like fish and other animals that live in the water. I also dine on small mammals like rabbits and mice. While I can climb trees, I am an even better swimmer. I have a little bit of webbing between my toes that helps me to swim!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

By helping to preserve my wetland home, you can help to keep my habitat protected for years to come.



LEAST SANDPIPER (SGCN)

15

I like to spend my time in coastal saltmarshes of Rhode Island, but you might see me visit freshwater wetlands as well. I have a dark colored beak and greenish legs. I love to poke my bill into the soft mud for my favorite foods: crustaceans, insects and snails!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

During my migration please do not disturb me in the habitat I use as rest areas. When I am not disturbed I can rest, fuel up with food, and breed to complete my migration journey.



LINED SEAHORSE (SGCN)

7

You can find me along coastal Rhode Island in brackish water which is a mix of freshwater and saltwater. You might spot me among underwater plants like eelgrass, where I can hide easily. Two interesting facts about me: I am diurnal, so just like you I sleep when it is dark and I am active during the day. Also, male seahorses (instead of female seahorses) carry their young in a pouch until they are ready to hatch!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

You can help me by learning all you can about climate change. The eelgrass beds I call home can be impacted by sea-level rise. Also, please keep my habitat free of litter!



GRAY TREE FROG

7

You will most likely find me in forests, or even in your backyard pool, gutters, and sometimes under outdoor furniture! I have sticky toe pads, so I'm a great climber. Most of the time, I'm gray, but sometimes my skin might be shades of white or green as well.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Construction of new buildings and homes can cause break up my habitat. By keeping forested spaces free from new construction, you are helping to keep my home safe. Also, lawn chemicals and pesticides can pollute wetlands where I breed. Please try not to use chemicals!

Mary Gannon



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