Rhode Island Department
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Division of Fish and Wildlife

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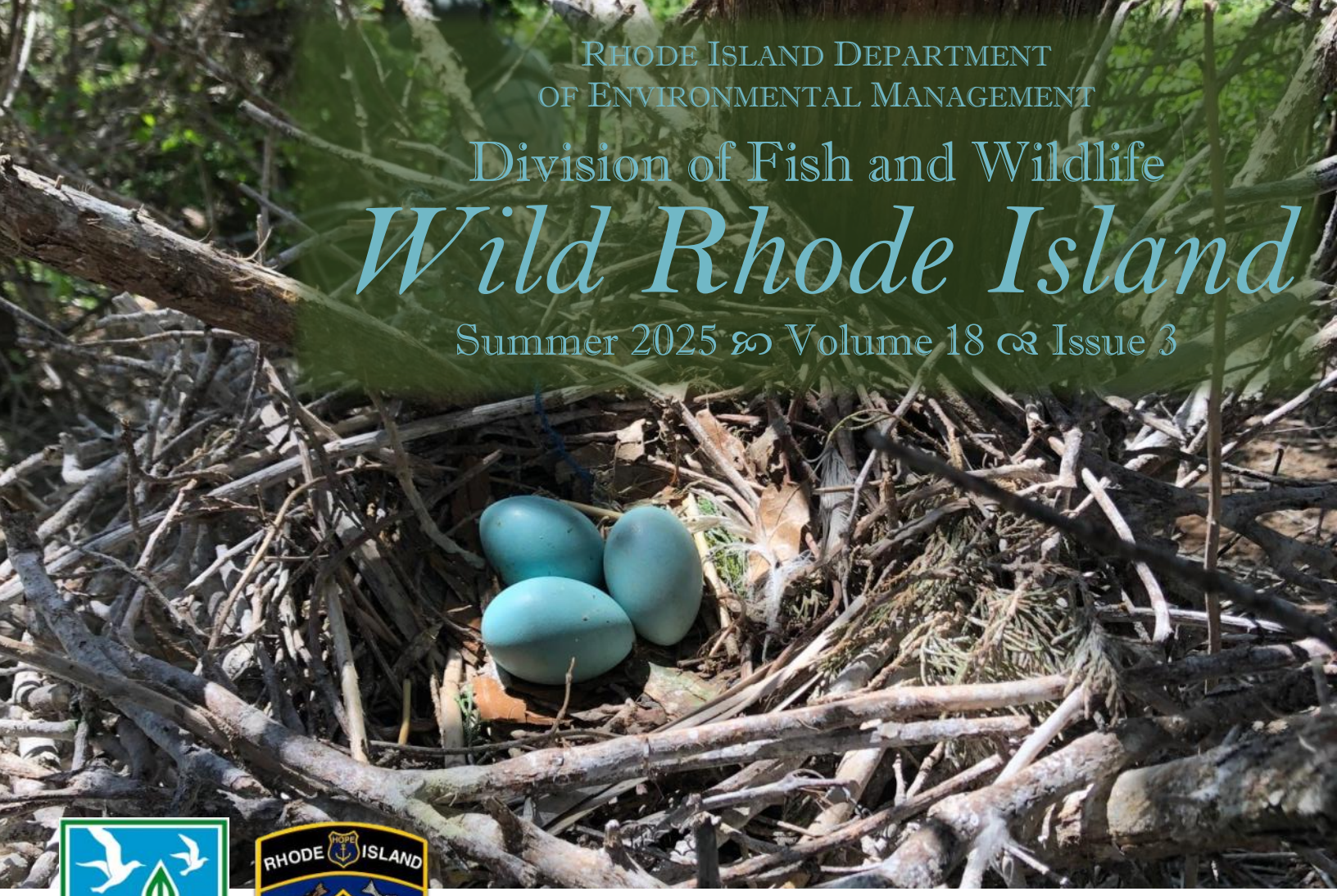

Inside This Issue:

Bridging the Gap Between Birdwatching and Bird Hunting: A Shared Love for Nature

By Maddie Proulx, Hunter Education Technical Assistant

One question I hear often is: *"How can you hunt animals if you say you care about them?"* It's a fair question, and one that doesn't always have a simple answer. But for many of us who spend time in the outdoors, hunting and caring deeply for wildlife aren't opposites. In fact, they often go hand in hand.

My interest in hunting started with a desire to live more sustainably. I wanted to know where my food came from and take part in that process in a meaningful way. Hunting allowed me to source meat in a way that felt more ethical, knowing the animal lived a free, natural life instead of being raised in crowded, industrial conditions. To me, that matters.

Photo left: Red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). Photo: M. Proulx

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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.

Beavertail State Park. Photo: S. Riley

This Issue Features:

Check out the latest issue of *Wild Rhode Island Explorer!*

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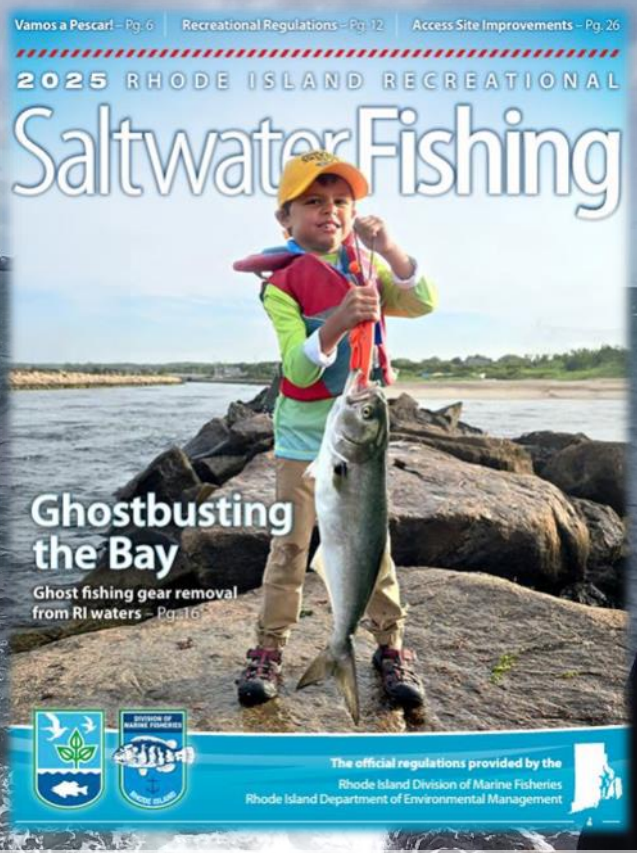
The 2025-2026 Freshwater and Saltwater Fishing Regulation Guides are available now

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



Freshwater Fishing Regulations Guide:
https://www.eregulations.com/rhodeisland/fishing/freshwater

Saltwater Fishing Regulations Guide:
https://www.eregulations.com/rhodeisland/fishing/saltwater

Bridging the Gap, continued from page 1

There's a big difference between a responsible hunter and someone who just wants to kill. For ethical hunters, the goal isn't simply the harvest. It's about understanding the animal, learning its habits, respecting its role in the ecosystem, and spending time outdoors in a thoughtful and intentional way. When a harvest does happen, we do everything we can to use the animal fully and respectfully. It's not about taking life lightly; it's about honoring it.

At the heart of all this is a deep respect for nature. Ethical hunters strive to make clean, humane shots, and they carry the emotional weight of what it means to take a life. I still remember taking my first big game animal, I cried for days. That experience didn't harden me; it made me more connected to the natural world and more committed to doing things the right way. I believe that if someone doesn't feel this way in a sense after harvesting an animal, they may want to reflect on their reasons for hunting. Within any community, there will always be bad apples, but it is important to communicate that the actions of a few do not represent the values of the broader hunting community.

Interestingly, my journey as a hunter has also turned me into a bird lover, maybe even a bit of a bird nerd! While out scouting or sitting in the woods, I found myself more and more fascinated by the birds around me. Hunting requires you to get into the woods before sunrise, before the world wakes up. I get to hear the songbirds start to sing, the owls start to hoot and try to identify all the songs and sounds and match them with the birds I see. I bought myself a camera and started taking photos, watching their behavior, and appreciating them in a whole new way. Even the game birds I am pursing while hunting, I sit and watch for a while and admire how amazing these creatures are. Observing and understanding these animals is essential to becoming a successful hunter as well. My personal favorites to watch are the wild turkey, hooded merganser and the red-winged black bird! Nature all around is so beautiful. When I am having a rough day, I know I can always count on finding a bird, game or non-game and its beauty to ground me and bring me a little joy. If I hadn't started hunting, I might never have discovered that passion.

What many people don't realize is that hunting also plays a major role in funding wildlife conservation. Through the purchase of hunting licenses, tags, and gear taxed under programs like the Pittman-Robertson Act. hunters contribute billions of dollars toward habitat restoration, wildlife research, and the protection of countless species. These funds support state wildlife agencies and help maintain public lands that everyone can enjoy, whether they hunt, hike, birdwatch, or simply love the outdoors. So, while the act of hunting might seem at odds with caring for animals, in practice, it's often hunters who are financially sustaining the very ecosystems we all depend on.

There's no denying this is a complex topic. But the idea that someone can both hunt and love animals isn't as contradictory as it might seem. In many ways, these experiences have deepened my appreciation for wildlife and made me a stronger advocate for conservation. I feel lucky to live this way, and I hope others can come to understand the perspective, even if it's different from their own.

Great Swamp Target Range

The Great Swamp Shooting Range is operated by the Division of Fish & Wildlife and offers public target shooting on a seasonal basis. A FREE permit is required prior to use. However, It is mandatory to obtain a range permit prior to using the Great Swamp shooting Range.

The shooting range is open 7 days per week from April 1 through November 30. Please check website for hours of operation. Hours may vary due to staffing, training activities, maintenance, and/or weather conditions.

Visit our website for more information on the permitting process, and to download a range permit application:

dem.ri.gov/greatswamprange

Contact: Information:

There is no direct phone line to the range. Call 401-575-6331 (M-F 8:30AM - 4:00PM) or email DEM.DFWHunterEducation@dem.ri.gov

Facilities include:

- Baffled rifle/pistol ranges, includes 16 covered shooting stations:
  - 8- 50 yard shooting lanes
  - 8- 100 yard shooting lanes
- Wheelchair accessible shooting stations
- 30yd. Archery Range: back stops are provided.
- 2 shotgun shooting stations with electric clay target throwers available.
- Pavilion with picnic tables
- Non-permitted visitors are allowed, but they may not handle firearms and are not allowed on the firing line.

User Pays, User Benefits

Funding for the Great Swamp Shooting Range was generated by manufacturer federal excise taxes collected on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. These monies are managed as a federal grant program to the states under the Wildlife Restoration Program by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a "User Pays-Public Benefits" program. This range was developed through a funding partnership with the state of RI and the USFWS's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

Send DFW Your Summer Wildlife Sightings and Observations!

Herp Observer (Year-round)

Report your sightings of frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes and turtles to the RIDEM's secure database. All observations provide information on distribution and abundance of reptiles and amphibians throughout the state.

http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/herp-observer-fs.pdf

Wild Turkey Brood Survey (July 1st–Aug 31st)

Report your summer wild turkey hens, toms and poults (chicks) observations to help provide data on the fecundity and health of Rhode Island's turkeys.

http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/wild-turkey-brood-packet.pdf

Summer Deer Survey (Aug 1st-Sept 30th)

Report your sightings of white-tailed deer seen during the late summer to help biologists study the distribution, density and reproductive success of deer

https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/9b5b29b86b1e4544a644b78d7d383906?open=menu

General Wildlife Observations (Year-round)

The Division of Fish and Wildlife also collects observations of: Bobcat, Bear and Coyote. Please include the town, date, address or nearest road, and observed behavior (crossing road, in yard, *etc.*) Send to DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

Pollinator Program Update

By: Toby Shaya, DFW Entomologist

With summer well underway, you may be taking to one of Rhode Island's wonderful beaches for swimming, verdant forests and wetlands for hiking and exploring, or waterways for fishing! In doing so, you may run into Fish and Wildlife staff doing our essential work in the field. While pollinators are out in force this time of year, with the Pollinator Program, I have been hard at work indoors. Why, might you ask? Last year, between myself and six volunteers, we surveyed 16 sites across the state for our Wild Bee Survey. From this survey, we collected an estimated multiple thousands of specimens, which I am currently pinning and processing. This methodology is essential for proper species identification, which is foundational to understanding Rhode Island's bee fauna.

In partnership with the Dr. Rachael Bonoan's Pollinator Lab at Providence College and Dr. Steven Alm's Bee Lab at the University of Rhode Island, as well as the Rhode Island Natural History Survey and US Fish and Wildlife Service, we are documenting which species are found in Rhode Island and where in the state they can be found. With the increased attention on pollinators, and more specifically bees, in the past 20 years and for both their conservation and agricultural impacts, Rhode Island has been working hard to fill in gaps in our knowledge of the bees in the state. In order to successfully do so, each specimen must be pinned and processed so each of the body segments and parts are readily visible under the microscope. Furthermore, the basic information associated with each bee must be typed out onto a label and pinned to the proper specimen – date, geographic coordinates, collection method, collector, and a unique identifying code. So far, we have pinned over 300 specimens (and counting!) and are simultaneously working on public outreach material stemming from our Rhode Island Bumblebee Survey. Much work lies ahead this summer and we cannot wait to share it with you. Be sure to get outside and find the flowers to see all of our pollinator friends hard at work!

Woody Hill Management Area

By Kim Justham, DFW Habitat Biologist

The 723-acre management area known as Woody Hill is nestled in Westerly, north of Route 1 and west of Watchaug Pond, just minutes from Misquamicut Beach, Burlingame and other south shore highlights. Isolated from the hustle and bustle of Westerly proper, the management area boasts opportunities for hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing. The property can be accessed from the parking area and trailhead at the end of Woody Hill Road, off Fallon Trail, on the southern side of the property. Several other trailheads enter the property through adjacent publicly accessible conservation easement parcels, however these lack dedicated parking areas.

Woody Hill is characterized by gently rolling, rocky topography that flows from dry ridgetops with oak overstory and blueberry/ huckleberry understory, to intermittently wet stream bottoms characterized by moist soils, red maple, pepperbush and skunk cabbage. Rock outcrops and historic stone walls abound. Interesting flora includes stands of larch, a species of deciduous, coniferous tree. Also known as tamarack, larch is related to other pines but is the only coniferous tree species on our landscape that drops its needles each fall and regrows them in spring. Several stands of these trees can be viewed from the western cart road.

A 20-acre impoundment lies at the heart of Woody Hill, providing important open water and emergent wetland habitats. A cooperative project with Ducks Unlimited in 2017 replaced a failing water control structure with a new one that allows DFW to manage water levels to encourage waterfowl breeding and migration stopover. By drawing down the water in spring, areas of shallower water can be drained to expose mudflats and allow emergent wetland vegetation to sprout and grow, creating cover and nesting habitat. The water level is raised back up in the fall, flooding the areas of emergent vegetation to provide feeding habitat and additional open water for migrating waterfowl. Beavers have also been known to inhabit the impoundment, as evidenced by several abandoned lodges and old bank dens with runs that are visible during periods of drawdown. Cooperative projects like this one have been successful at improving habitat value to wildlife while simultaneously creating more and higher quality hunting opportunities.

The management area was acquired by the State of Rhode Island in 1955 from the U.S. Forest Service. Prior to this, the Forest Service had acquired the property from several different landowners through the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937. A Federal Land Utilization Program under the Act authorized the purchase of lands from private landowners that were no longer suitable for farming. Woody Hill is managed as a public hunting area and game species within its boundaries aren't limited to waterfowl. The Management Area provides habitat for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, migratory game birds, coyote and several species of small game, presenting numerous hunting and trapping opportunities within the property.

RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife Welcomes New Staff

Kimberley Justham- Habitat Biologist

Please join us in welcoming Kimberley Justham as DFW's new habitat biologist. Kimberley received a B.S. in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from URI in 2005 and a M.S. in Environmental Science and Management in 2016. She is a Certified Ecologist and previously worked as a Conservation Biologist with the MassWildlife Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, an Environmental Scientist with RIDEM Office of Compliance and Inspection Wetlands Enforcement Program, as well as experience working as an ecologist in the private sector. Her work experiences have fostered the development of a diverse (and welcomed) skillset pertaining to habitat management and restoration, conservation planning, native and invasive plants, rare species management, as well as regulatory permitting and related processes. *Welcome Kim!*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Photos by Dean Birch


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