

ISSUE 10 | WINTER 2021

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

MEET THE WOOD FROG!



Also, get the scoop on climate change, hunting with a four-legged friend, Narragansett Bay's fishy visitors, and small actions we all can take to help wildlife!



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

IN THIS ISSUE

Habitat Chat
 A Changing Climate..... 3

Maddie's Outdoor Adventures
 Hunting with a Companion 4

Critter Cam 5

Smells Fishy News
 Tropical Tourists: Fish from Afar.... 6

Our Wild Neighbors
 Wood Frog 7

Out in the Field
 Taking Action for Wildlife 8

Wild Quest
 Word Search 10

15 Small Things That Make a Big Difference for Wildlife..... 11

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



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 Writer/Editor: Mary Gannon, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator
 Cover photo: Gabrielle DeMeillon
 Inside cover photo: Mary Gannon
 Contributors: Madison Proulx, Amanda Freitas Gabrielle DeMeillon, Dana Kopec

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HABITAT CHAT

A Changing Climate

The plants and animals that live in Rhode Island are built to live in the climate of southern New England. **Climate** is the pattern of weather over a long time. Think of climate as all of the clothes in your closet, but weather is your outfit for the day.

Right now, scientists are worried about climate change. Human activities (like driving cars, producing electricity and creating new materials) produce **carbon** dioxide (CO₂). Even though CO₂ can be found naturally on Earth, humans have started producing too much of it. This extra carbon dioxide is causing many different problems for humans and the environment.

In the future, our seasonal temperatures may go up. Those warmer temperatures are caused by extra CO₂ in the air. In the future, we might see less rainfall and have bigger storms. The level of the water in the Narragansett Bay may rise, meaning parts of our beaches and saltmarshes could be underwater in the future.

All of these changes aren't good for wildlife. Here in the Ocean State, many animals live along the coast, in salt marshes, and beaches. If those habitats are lost because of sea level rise, those animals will have a harder time finding habitat. With less rainfall, our forests will become drier, which means forest fires could happen more often. With warmer temperatures, pests like mosquitoes and ticks will have a longer season to be active. Yuck!

At the Division of Fish and Wildlife, we are thinking about all of these things! One of our biggest goals is to conserve as much habitat as possible. This will give our wildlife places of refuge if times get tough in the future. Trees and other plants take carbon dioxide out of the air to make their own food.

By protecting our forests, we are giving plants the chance to help remove some of the extra carbon dioxide from the air. The more habitat we can **conserve**, the better!



Willetts are salt marsh birds that could be in trouble because of sea level rise in RI.



MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Hunting with a Companion

There are many great types of hunting dogs, depending on what and where you plan to hunt. Today we are here with Gauge the Labrador Retriever and his owner Danny. Gauge is what you call a "gun dog" best suited for hunting waterfowl. Training a hunting dog takes a lot of time and patience.

I asked Danny some questions about his experience training his 4-legged friend.

Maddie: What is Gauge's role when hunting waterfowl?

Danny: Gauge's job is to **retrieve** birds safely. When hunting over a body of water with no boat, Gauge will swim to pick up the birds that were harvested out of the sky and land in the water. He is also trained to run and retrieve birds that have been harvested over a big field, like geese. Learning to retrieve birds takes lots of training, however!"



"Gauge is a young dog at just a year old with a long life ahead of him in hunting and competition. He currently has earned his AKC (American Kennel Club) Junior Hunter Title and is training to compete at the Senior level this upcoming spring."

Maddie: What types of training routines do you do with Gauge, and how often?

Danny: We typically train 5-6 days a week. We train much harder than what you would expect to see while out hunting, so there is no question that the dog will be ready when it is time for a hunt. We typically do marking drills (double, triple, even quad retrieves), handling drills for blind retrieves, breaking drills so the dog is not tempted to go fetch without being sent by the owner's command, and much more.

Maddie: What are your goals for Gauge?

Danny: The goals I have for Gauge are to eventually earn his AKC Master Hunter Title and to live a long, fun, happy life retrieving as many birds as possible.



Gauge also loves curling up on the couch or playing with his best bud Trigger, the yellow lab.

About the Author

Hi everyone! My name is Maddie; I am the secretary 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!

CAPTION THIS PIC!

Send your captions to mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov

CRITTER CAM



MOS10

42°F 5°C

12-28-2019 13:04:33

This bobcat looks pretty comfy! At the bottom of this photo, you can see all of the information that our trail cameras record: temperature, date, and time.

LAST ISSUE'S CAPTIONS

Anyone want to play Pictionary?

A curious fisher sniffs one of our camera "trap" stations.

Hi, yes, I'm here to take the survey please.

Class, everyone pay attention to the board.

Ok folks, for our next slide...

Thanks for coming to my TED Talk.

There's something fishy about this...

And...Action!



42 F TRAILCAM10

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. We've teamed up with wildlife biologists from the University of Rhode Island to learn more about our state's mammals with trail cameras. A whopping 248,743 photos were taken during our bobcat project! We will be starting some new projects soon studying fisher, river otters, and beavers.

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS

Tropical Tourists: Fish from Afar

If you were to go on a trip to Florida, you would find fish that you would not normally see here in Rhode Island. Florida's water is warmer, and because of that, tropical fish can be found living there. But, did you know that you may find some of these colorful fish in Rhode Island during late summer and into fall due to something called the Gulf Stream?

This strong ocean **current** brings warm water from the Gulf of Mexico, around the tip of Florida and up the East Coast. Some exotic organisms get caught in the current and float here while others actively swim here. The current is very powerful and moves quickly, 300 times faster than the Amazon River! It also moves more water than all the world's rivers combined.

In Rhode Island, these tropical fish usually begin showing up around Mid-July and stay through mid-September.

The types of tropical fish you may find include, but are not limited to, Dusky Squirrelfish, Honeycomb Cowfish, Scrawled Filefish, Bonnethead Shark, and Queen Triggerfish. These fish typically live in or around coral reefs, which we do not have in the Northeast, so they will find **shelter** here in submerged structures such as docks and boats instead.

If you head to the ocean this summer, keep a look-out for some brightly colored fish that traveled a great distance to visit!

Thank you to RI Division of Marine Fisheries Principal Marine Biologists Thomas Angell and Katherine Rodrigo for helping with this article!

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!

Dusky Squirrelfish



Honeycomb Cowfish



Scrawled Filefish



OUR WILD NEIGHBORS

WOOD FROG

Scientific name:
Lithobates silvaticus

Habitat: Wood frogs use vernal pools in the spring for mating and laying their eggs. Vernal pools are small ponds in the forest that are only filled with water in the late winter, spring, and early summer. Once it gets hot outside, the pools dry up! Wood frogs spend the summer hopping around forested swamps. In the winter, they tuck themselves under logs, leaf piles, or rocks on the forest floor to **hibernate**.

Food: Wood frogs eat insects, spiders, slugs, snails, and worms. Tadpoles mostly eat plants and algae in vernal pools.

Breeding: Wood frogs are the first frogs we hear in the spring. They can even be heard calling on a warm day in February! Only male frogs call. Wood frogs make a clucking sound. Female frogs hop to the vernal pools when they hear those clucking calls to mate and lay their eggs. The eggs look like a bunch of clear, jelly-like grapes. Often, a bunch of female wood frogs will lay their eggs together at one end of the pond. This helps keep the eggs warm in the chilly water! Tadpoles hatch in April, and turn into a **froglet** (a small frog) by June or mid-July, before the pool dries up. This change called **metamorphosis**.



Where in the world?

Wood frogs can be found across the eastern United States, Canada, and all the way to Alaska.

Map: Wikicommons, USGS

Cluck!
Cluck!
Cluck!

Did you know?

RI Division of Fish and Wildlife has a cool new app called HerpObserver! You can download the app for free and become a citizen scientist. If you see any frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes, or turtles, send us your observations! Learn more at dem.ri.gov/herpobserver.

Chris Raiihel

"Queen Triggerfish - Batistes velut", by zaspco is licensed with CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. "Honeycomb Cowfish" by affiney23 is licensed with CC BY-NC 2.0. "HWC_0141a Dusky Squirrelfish (Sargocentron ventriosum)" by Kevin Bryant, DVM is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. "Loose Key Scrawled Filefish" by Pfl's iPixel is licensed with CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

OUT IN THE FIELD

Taking Action for Wildlife



Hi everyone, I'm Mary! I'm the Wildlife Outreach Coordinator for the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife. My job is to teach Rhode Islanders about our state's wild animals and the work we're doing to help them. One really cool way we're helping our state's wildlife is by creating our own wildlife action plan. What's that, you ask? Let's find out by talking to Amanda Freitas, our Community Liaison for the Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan!

Mary: First of all, Amanda, can you tell us what a community liaison does? It sounds pretty fancy!

Amanda: I guess it does sound fancy, but a liaison is really just someone who connects people or organizations together for a purpose. In my case, I mostly connect people and organizations in RI to the amazing staff in the Division of Fish and Wildlife and their knowledge about how to help RI species. I do this to help cities and towns, conservation organizations, and really all citizens take action to help wildlife. I also connect with others in the Northeast so we can help each other see the big picture, since wild animals don't care about state boundaries.

Mary: Cool! So, what is the Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan?

Amanda: The Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan, or RI WAP, is my guide in everything I do! You can think of it as the ultimate roadmap to keep Rhode Island's species healthy and to restore those that are already hurting. The RI WAP identifies the species we're most concerned about, called Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), the key habitats those SGCN need to thrive, the threats our SGCN and habitats face, and the actions needed to address those threats. DFW had help from over 170 local experts, conservation professionals, and members of the public to make sure the Plan was the best it could be, and we need even more help from Rhode Islanders to put it into action!

Mary: How many species are listed in the Plan?

Amanda: The plan lists 454 wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 84 key habitats that support those species. This includes 123 birds, 21 mammals, 23 reptiles and amphibians, 45 fish, and 242 **invertebrates**. That last category is such a broad one, it includes species as different from one another as lobsters and bumblebees! Also, Rhode Island included 64 SGCN plants because of their importance in supporting wildlife.

Mary: Wow, that's a lot of species! Why are many of these animals listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need?

Amanda: There are a number of species, like our bats, that face very specific threats from things like disease wind energy projects that weren't designed with wildlife in mind. Sadly, they sometimes get hit by wind turbines. Snakes are another example; they face disease, too, but they're also harmed by humans out of fear. The largest threats, though, tend to impact Rhode Island's species almost across the board, and they are the biggest reason this list is so long. These threats include habitat loss and **fragmentation** from development, human disturbance and take (killing those poor snakes is an example of this one), **invasive** species, and pollution.



Mary: Can you explain to our readers what the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife is doing with all of this information?

Amanda: The Division works with partners to identify and protect important habitats and to manage the lands we own as best we can to make sure all of Rhode Island's native plant communities and wildlife are still here for future generations. The actions identified that can help the most species and habitats were land and water protection, stronger laws, and raising awareness. In addition to my work, the outreach you and Gabby do with the public, including this magazine, is a great example of what DFW is doing to build awareness!

Mary: What are some things we can all do at home to help wildlife?

Amanda: It's so hard to pick just a couple, but leaving no trace is a big one. This means taking care to neither add nor remove anything from natural areas, including leaving animals where you find them and being careful not to drop litter. Maybe the most important thing you can do is to keep learning and talk to your friends and family about what you've learned. Your voice for wildlife can be very powerful!

Mary: What is your favorite thing about your job?

Amanda: I have learned and continue to learn so much, and the people I get to work with and the work I get to do change all the time. I am also just so grateful that I get to help people help wildlife for a living!

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite wild animal in Rhode Island. This is a tough question, I know!

Amanda: It is tough! I really don't think I can pick just one, but I'll go with the spotted salamander because seeing them for the first time completely opened my eyes and was really almost magical. A coworker took me out on a rainy spring night to help amphibians cross a busy road, and I was blown away to see so many of this strange and beautiful, brightly spotted creature that I'd never seen before even though they'd been right in my own "backyard" my whole life!



About Amanda

As a suburban kid, Amanda loved the outdoors but didn't spend much time in the woods. An Environmental Science class her senior year at West Warwick High School fascinated her and sparked the idea that she might be able to turn her passion for being in nature and taking better care of the natural world into a career. So, she studied Environmental Science and Policy in college and began work as a wetland scientist, where she fell in love with tramping through the forests year-round. Amanda joined DFW in 2013. She's happiest exploring nature and camping with her partner, Ray, and their fun-loving pup, Jammer.





WILD QUEST



Take another look through the magazine to find all the underlined words. Can you find them all in this word search?

N G O S I K U Q J O L L S V S C R Y X A
 O H E F H N J Y E R X E Y P M U U Q O M
 F B K V A E W R I C T T L C W R L J I E
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15 SMALL THINGS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR WILDLIFE



There's lots of things we can do every day to help wildlife! Here are some things you can do right at home to show wildlife that you care!

- 1 SPREAD THE LOVE!** Share what you know about wildlife with your family and friends. The more knowledge people have, the more likely they are to care about nature.
- 2 CREATE HABITAT AT HOME.** Learn which plants and trees are native to RI. Try to plant some in your yard! If you don't have a lot of space, try growing some flowers for pollinators in pots. Every little bit helps!
- 3 SAY "NO" TO PESTICIDES.** These are chemicals that kill insects. When we kill insects, we take away food for a lot of different animals, like bats and birds. Insects are also important decomposers and pollinators. Sometimes pesticides used to get rid of one pesky type of insect end up killing lots of other ones too!
- 4 ASK LEADERS TO HELP.** Think about some ways your community or neighborhood leaders could get more people interested in helping!
- 5 CHECK THE INGREDIENTS!** Try to use cleaning supplies that don't have chemicals in them. These chemicals can end up in our waterways and harm fish and wildlife.
- 6 WALK YOUR DOG ON A LEASH.** When we let our dogs run loose while outdoors, they can chase or disturb wildlife.
- 7 KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS.** If you have a cat, you know that sometimes they bring home the critters they have hunted. Pet cats can be very harmful to birds and small mammals. It's also safer for your cat to stay inside!
- 8 LEARN ABOUT LOCAL CONSERVATION.** You're already doing this by reading the Explorer!
- 9 DON'T SET YOUR PETS FREE!** Letting your pet turtle go into the wild is not only bad for your pet, but also our native wildlife.
- 10 BE A WASTE WATCHER.** Recycling and picking up litter are great. But, shrinking the amount of trash we toss in the garbage can is even better!
- 11 LIGHTS OUT!** Turning off your outdoor lights and shutting your blinds at night can help with light pollution. Extra lights can confuse birds and bats as they migrate!
- 12 DON'T FEED WILDLIFE!** Animals know how to take care of themselves. Feeding them human food can often make them sick. It can also make wild animals unafraid of humans, which is not natural and can get dangerous for both people and animals.
- 13 EYES ON THE ROAD!** Many animals cross roads at night. Keep your eyes on the road and slow down!
- 14 BE RESPECTFUL!** Give animals their space and watch from a distance.
- 15 BE POSITIVE!** If you are scared of snakes or other "creepy" animals, try not to pass on your fear to others.



Yellow Warbler, Jay Osenkowski



Hey everyone! If you'd like to learn more about Rhode Island's wildlife, tell your teachers to check out our Rhody Critter Kits!



For more info, visit dem.ri.gov/wildlifeoutreach



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



TO: