



A Quarterly Publication from the Division of Fish and Wildlife, RI Department of Environmental Management

RI's Common Whales and Conservation Efforts *by April Valliere*

Minke, finback and humpback whales are all common seasonal visitors in RI near shore waters, and Northern right whales have been seen in increasing numbers over the last decade. All four species of these Cetaceans are identified in the taxonomic suborder as Mysticeti, or baleen whales, which have a divided blowhole. All other whales are in the suborder Odontoceti, or toothed whales, with a single blowhole. In addition to the humpback and Northern right whales, endangered whale species sighted in RI waters include finback, sei and sperm whales.

Temporal and spatial patterns in zooplankton concentrations have resulted in inter-annual variations of traditional high use areas by the whales. In 1998, large concentrations of right, humpback and fin whales appeared in the Rhode Island/Block Island Sound



Humpback whales feeding.

Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

area and remained in the area feeding on dense concentrations of copepods for three weeks. Since that time, large numbers of right whales have been sighted occasionally in the Sound area. The area of concern is heavily used seasonally by the fixed gear commercial fishing industry and Block Island ferries, and is a year-round major shipping channel. Due to the declining status of the right whale population, every effort to protect the whales should be ex-

pected if they venture into Rhode Island waters again.

Humpback whales are easily identified by their long white pectoral fins, fleshy knobs on the head and a distinctive black-and-white pattern on the underside. Right whales lack a dorsal fin and have mounds of "callosities" (wartlike growths on the head of the whale) and exhibit a v-shaped blow. Minke whales are the smallest

Continued on page 4

Inside this issue:

A New Alien Fish Species	2
Hunter Education Courses	3
ARE Fall Classes	6
Kid's Corner	7
TY Providence Rotary!	8

Cooperative Hunting Areas – New Opportunities for RI Hunters *by Brian C. Tefft*

Many new hunting area opportunities have been developed for RI hunters in the last few years as a result of new cooperative partnerships developed between DEM and private property owners. This is an important step in both providing new places to hunt, but more importantly, in providing deer management, where necessary, to help control the unrestrained growth of deer herds in restricted or poorly harvested regions. This is a win-win proposition both for the hunter and landowner. Hunters get the benefit of hunting access to new and exciting land parcels and the landowners take an impor-



Photo: B. Tefft

tant step to practice good stewardship of the land by recognizing the

Continued on page 5

THE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ensure that the Freshwater, Marine and Wildlife resources of the State of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.



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A New Nonnative Fish Species In RI by Alan Libby



A green sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*) was caught for the first time in Rhode Island's freshwaters during a routine survey of the Mill River in Woonsocket on July 31, 2012. The green sunfish is not native to New England, but is native to the Great Lakes and Mississippi basins from western New York to the Dakotas, and south to Mexico and Georgia. It has been widely introduced elsewhere and can be found in the neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Anglers have recently reported catching them in the Mill River. The Mill River flows 17 miles south from its source in Hopkinton, MA to the Blackstone River in Woonsocket, RI. In Woonsocket, much of the river has been channelized below the Harris Pond Dam (Soucy Falls) to the Blackstone River.

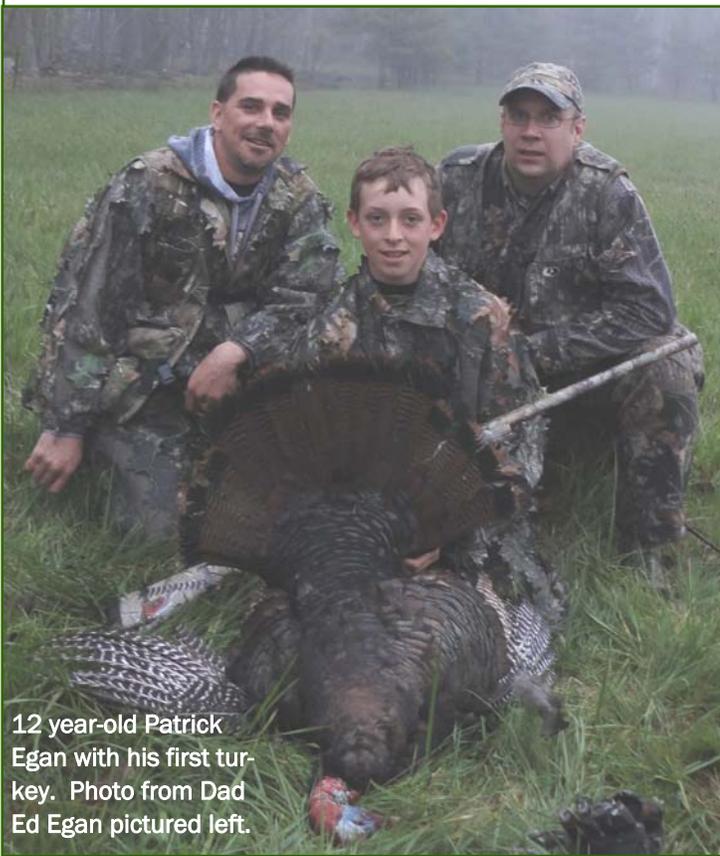
Green sunfish may reach 10 inches in length, but typically range in length from four to six inches. Their bodies are deep and laterally compressed. Pectoral fins are short and rounded, and when folded forward may not reach the eye. This colorful sunfish is dark green with blue longitudinal stripes on its sides. Blue spots and wavy lines occur on its head and operculum. Also characteristic are pale orange margins on dark, opercular

ear flaps and fins (dorsal, caudal, anal, and pelvic) with bright orange margins. A dark blotch can be found at the bases of the dorsal and anal fin rays.

Green sunfish are adaptable and can occupy a wide range of habitats that include small cool streams and large warm rivers. Their preferences, however, are the vegetated areas of ponds and lakes or the quiet waters of slow-moving streams.

Any fish released outside of its normal or native range has the potential to harm the environment by outcompeting and overrunning native populations. The green sunfish's relatively large mouth, in comparison to other species of sunfish in RI, makes them more efficient for preying on native fish species. They have been reported to suppress native fish populations in some waterbodies. The diet of green sunfish also includes a variety of aquatic invertebrates. Its present distribution in RI is unknown. Anyone who believes that they have caught a green sunfish in RI waters should refrigerate it and then call the Division of Fish & Wildlife at 789-0281 or take its picture and email it to alan.libby@dem.ri.gov for identification.

Interested in Hunter Education Classes? *by Karen Unsworth*



12 year-old Patrick Egan with his first turkey. Photo from Dad Ed Egan pictured left.



Youth Pheasant hunters Anton Dingus and Brennan Gannon with Chloe. Photo from Joe Rovinski.

The nights are cooler, the days are shorter, the season has changed. This is a great time to take a hunter education class. Hunter education training is just one of the many educational opportunities offered by the Division of Fish & Wildlife and is designed to prepare the first-time hunter to go safely afield. This program has traditionally been delivered by certified volunteer instructors through classroom instruction, mostly at sportsmen's clubs throughout the state. Beginning in September of 2012, Rhode Island will also offer hunter education certification through internet training. Please see our website <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/huntered/index.htm> for details and schedules or call the Hunter Education office (401)783-2304 for additional information.

What will you learn? In the basic hunter education course will prepare new hunters to hunt with a firearm. Whether you aspire to hunt deer with a muzzleloader or pheasants with a shotgun, this is the course for you. All aspects of hunting and firearms safety will be covered along with hunting and shooting skills, ethics and responsibility, survival skills and wildlife conservation. Also offered is the Bowhunter Education Course, which is mandatory in RI for new archery deer hunters. Students completing this course will learn what is required to become a safe and successful bowhunter, including proper equipment, methods of bowhunting, shot placement and recovery techniques, tree stand safety and outdoor preparedness. Both classes also cover all pertinent laws and regulations, often delivered by a visiting Environmental Police Officer.

After you complete your hunter education class you can sharpen your shooting and archery skills at the Great Swamp Shooting Range in West Kingston. This popular state-owned shooting range is open seasonally from April 1st thru September 30th and offers a 50 yard rifle/pistol range, a shotgun field for clay targets and a 30 yard archery lane. A free permit is required to use firearms at the range, while no permit is required for use of archery equipment. See our website for application and details: http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/huntered/h_ranges.htm#state

Ok ... you've completed your hunter education class ... you've practiced shooting ... you are ready to give hunting a try. You are lucky to live in Rhode Island where you will have great opportunity to hunt many species including deer, turkey, pheasant and waterfowl. One of the best things about hunting is that the experience is rich and vivid whether an animal is taken or not. You will have the opportunity to see and be a part of some of the most beautiful and remote places our small state has to offer. When you are lucky enough to harvest an animal, you will feel the pride and sense of accomplishment that goes along with the skills you have developed and the effort put forth. You will also know the gratification of preparing a healthy wild game meal for family and friends. If you've ever had an interest in hunting, please remember that hunters come in all shapes and sizes, male and female, young and old. Join us ... you can do it!

RI's Common Whales and Conservation Efforts *by April Valliere*

whales seen, and adults can reach 35 feet. Fin whales are the largest seen in our area, reaching up to 80 feet.

Whales are drawn by aggregations of food, feeding through baleen on either large concentrations of zooplankton (copepods) (right whales) or small schooling fish such as herring, mackerel, krill and sandlance (minke, fin, humpbacks). In 2012, there were an unusual number of Humpbacks observed "bubble feeding" off the Rhode Island coast, where a group of whales engage in a cooperative feeding frenzy by rising to the surface and encircling their prey, blowing bubbles thru the baleen to corral or disorient their target.

Populations of many whale species have increased since the implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972, which was enacted to protect all whales, dolphins and seals. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) followed in 1973 and specifically addressed right, humpback and fin whales, as well as endangered sea turtles. Whales face a series of threats including ship strikes, incidental entanglement in fishing gear, whale watch harassment, and habitat impacts, which prevent populations from recovering to historical numbers. The Northern right whale has suffered the greatest decline and that population is now estimated at fewer than 400 whales.

In 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) developed the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) to prepare a plan that would reduce incidental takes of whales. Targeted whales include humpback, fin and right whales, listed as endangered species under the ESA, and minke whales, which are protected under the MMPA. The ALWTRP was prepared in accordance with the MMPA, which requires NMFS to reduce the incidental serious injury or mortality of marine mammals from commercial fishing operations. Under the MMPA, NMFS is responsible for the development and implementation of a take reduction plan for strategic stocks that interact with Category I and II fisheries, fisheries that have frequent or occasional mortality or injury of marine mammals. Strategic stocks are marine mammals for which the level of direct human-caused mortality exceeds the potential biological removal level, a declining species either listed or is apt to be listed as an endangered species under the ESA or as a depleted species under the MMPA.

While ship strikes are recognized as one of the primary causes of right whale mortality, fishing gear entanglement by gillnet and trap pot fisheries has also been documented as a problem in the Northwest Atlantic from Canada to Florida.

Right
Whale



Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The New England multispecies sink gillnet fishery and the Gulf of Maine/Southern New England lobster pot/trap fisheries are identified as Category I fisheries, causing serious injury and incidental mortality to the endangered right whale, and are incorporated within the ALWTRP. Under this plan, NMFS looked toward the State of Rhode Island to assist in reducing the risk to right whales posed by these fisheries. Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife's (DFW) knowledge of its state licensed fishermen and of the lobster and gillnet fisheries within its waters is integral to large whale take reduction measures.

The MMPA required that the NMFS develop a plan to reduce the risk of serious injury or mortality of large whales, which was implemented in 1997. The ESA further required that NMFS ensure that any permitted fishing activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species. The ALWTRT primarily addresses right whales, but includes measures to reduce fishing impacts on endangered humpback and fin whales as well as minke whales.

A DFW biologist serves on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, along with two RI commercial fishermen. The Team is composed of state and federal officials, fishing industry representatives, marine mammal biologists and environmental groups from Maine to Florida. The Team continues to work on the ALWTRP, identifying measures that can reduce the risk of entanglements on whales, including gear modifications, marking requirements, and seasonal fishing restrictions. The regulations adopted under this plan apply to state waters, with Narragansett Bay and the south shore coastal ponds exempted. DFW is currently working with the agency on a vertical line model, overlaying known seasonal concentrations of whales with seasonal fixed gear locations in efforts to target the areas of highest risk of interactions.

The Rhode Island Large Whale Conservation Plan was developed to serve as a guide for a collaborative response network to the presence of cetaceans and sea turtles in state and near shore waters. DFW has partnered with industry, NMFS and the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) to provide outreach and first responder disentanglement training which has proven successful in a number of circumstances. Individuals observing live, dead or entangled mammals should contact DEM's Office of Law Enforcement at 222-3070 with a description of the whale, condition, and location. The Office of Law Enforcement will notify the appropriate parties and responders and a plan for response initiated depending upon the circumstances.

Cooperative Hunting Areas – New Opportunities for RI Hunters *by Brian C. Tefft*



Photo: B. Tefft

need to manage the deer population for the sake of the ecology of the forest, help curb the spread of Lyme disease and help to minimize property damage and nuisance complaints caused by deer.

Presently, DEM has approximately 9,000 acres of private lands in co-operative hunting programs, from a variety of private or non-governmental land owners. Most of the co-ops focus on deer hunting, since this is the area of most interest to hunters and landowners. The Northwest Co-operative in Glocester is one of the longest running landowner co-ops and currently made up of one large rural landowner. This 800-acre property, consisting largely of dense deciduous and evergreen forest, has been a favorite of deer hunters in northwest RI for 25 years. The Grills Preserve I and II are properties in Westerly and Hopkinton, located along the Pawcatuck River, that are managed by the Westerly and Hopkinton Land Trusts. These properties are open to both deer and turkey hunters and consist of a diversity of upland and wetland wildlife habitats. In 2010, the Providence Water Supply (PWS) established the PWS Co-op, which in its first year was limited to one parcel of 1,000 acres, but now has grown to include seven parcels covering 5,500 acres of forestland surrounding the Scituate Reservoir in central Rhode Island. The PWS Co-op contains rich deciduous forested upland habitats in the watershed of the reservoir, which provides drinking water to 60% of Rhode Island. PWS land managers are primarily concerned with the health of the watershed and the adverse impacts that too many deer can have on forest regeneration and health. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is another partner who has recently expanded its role in the co-op program by offering two new parcels for inclusion into the program. Initially, TNC opened the Carter Preserve in Richmond/Charlestown as an archery-only hunting area. The Carter property is an exquisite example of southern RI woodlands vegetated by dense thickets of pitch pine in combination with oak-dominated dry upland forests, forming ideal habitat for white-tailed deer. More recently, TNC enrolled two new pre-

serves located in West Greenwich and Exeter, the Cuttyhunk Preserve and the Queens River Preserve. Both are open for deer hunting, at Cuttyhunk by all methods and at Queens River by archery only.

These properties are a sampling of the various opportunities awaiting the RI hunter choosing to explore these areas. All of the co-ops follow the State DEM rules and regulations for deer hunting and, where allowed, other types of hunting. Recently RIDEM created a new hunting map atlas, with a web-based set of maps that describe these co-op hunting areas (<http://www.dem.ri.gov/maps/wma.htm>) and this is an excellent resource for hunters to follow.

There are also a variety of different rules and regulations that must be followed when hunting these areas. These rules are summarized in the RI Hunting Abstract (<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/huntabs.pdf>), which is the booklet used by hunters during the hunting season to make sure they stay legal. The hunting abstract is available online and in hard copy from DEM offices and hunting license vendors. The hunting rules are diverse and must be consulted before hunting. For instance, access to the PWS Co-op is by written application to DEM and a hunting lottery, whereby only a pre-determined number of hunters get selected to hunt. The PWS lottery for the 2012 season closed on August 15, 2012 and 200 new hunters were selected to participate for this season. The TNC Co-op on the other hand is open to all hunters, subject to the restrictions, without special permits. We strongly recommend that hunters consult the rules booklet before hunting these parcels.

Hunting success on these co-ops is variable and often depends on accurate reporting by hunters. We require hunters to keep a daily log of hunting activities in most areas, which allows us to generate results for reporting success rates. The table below shows some of the results from deer hunting during the 2011 hunting season.

Harvest for RI Cooperative Deer Hunting Areas 2011-2012							
Hunting Cooperative	#Permits	# Days	# Hours	#Seen	#Harvest	Success	Method
Northwest Coop	96	126	615	113	7	7%	bow/gun
Francis Carter	40	44	195.5	58	3	8%	bow only
Providence Water	150	785	3395.5	830	84	41%	bow/gun
Grills Preserve*	101	26	84.5	14	4	4%	bow/gun
Burlingame NorthCamp*	101	6	40	na	0	0%	bow/gun
Totals	488	987	4330.5	1015	98		
* under reported							

The DEM co-operative hunting programs provide a benefit for both the hunter and the private landowner. We hope that all hunters will respect this privilege so that we can maintain the positive wildlife management relationship between the private landowner and the sportsmen and sports women of the state.

DEM Aquatic Resource Education Program Announces Fall Fishing Programs



Photo: K. Sullivan

Rhode Island is known for its fall saltwater fishing, when the stripers and bluefish are making their way out of Narragansett Bay and onto the hooks of lucky saltwater anglers. Once again DEM Fish and Wildlife's Aquatic Resource Education program will be offering its popular fall fly-fishing and fly-tying programs to people of all ages. From beginning to advanced anglers, there is something here for you! For more information and registration details about the following programs, please contact Kimberly Sullivan at 401-539-7333 or kimberly.sullivan@dem.ri.gov.

Introduction to Saltwater Fly Fishing

Saturday, September 29, 2012 9AM-3PM

For people looking to learn how to fly-fish the saltwater ponds and estuaries of Rhode Island or for those who just need a refresher, this course is for you! The introductory class begins with a summary of what fly-fishing is, how it differs from spin-cast methods, what equipment you need, how to tie a saltwater fly and knots, and how to correctly cast a line. The workshop ends with applying what you learn at one of our premier Rhode Island fishing areas. Families with children 10 and older are encouraged to join us on this adventure. Just bring your lunch and waders on Saturday, September 29, 2012, from 9AM-3PM at the Kettle Pond Visitors Center in Charlestown, RI. **Fee: \$35.00/person, including all materials and equipment. Space limited, registration required.**

Answer key: 1. striped bass, 2. monarch butterflies, 3. robin, 4. hawks, 5. eagles, 6. Canada goose

The Fly Fishing Express

Saturday, October 27, 2012 9AM-3PM

Have you attended our classes? Or are you ready for a guided and more advanced saltwater fly-fishing experience? Join us on the Old Colony Train in Middletown, RI for a saltwater fly-fishing safari. Whether you are an advanced beginner or a professional fly-fishing angler, this train ride is your opportunity to fly-fish some of our more remote and scenic places around Aquidneck Island. Instructors will be on hand to help. Equipment and materials will be available for use; however, please remember your lunch and waders. **Fee: \$35.00/person. Space Limited, registration required.**

Fall Fly-Tying 2012

Mondays, October 22-December 17 7PM-9PM

As the fall fishing season draws to a close and we begin to brace ourselves for winter weather, the Aquatic Resource Education program will be offering our annual fall fly-tying classes. With plenty of instructors available, these workshops welcome beginning and intermediate fly-tiers. Six classes will be held at the North Kingstown Community Center: October 22 & 29, November 19 & 26, and December 3 & 17. Families with children 10 and over are welcome. Come to one, or come to all, enjoy the company of some of Rhode Islands fly-tying and fishing instructors. **Pre-register now and receive one class free of charge! Walk-ins are admitted. Fee: \$5.00/person per class or pre-register for six classes at a special rate of \$25.00.**



Photo: K. Sullivan

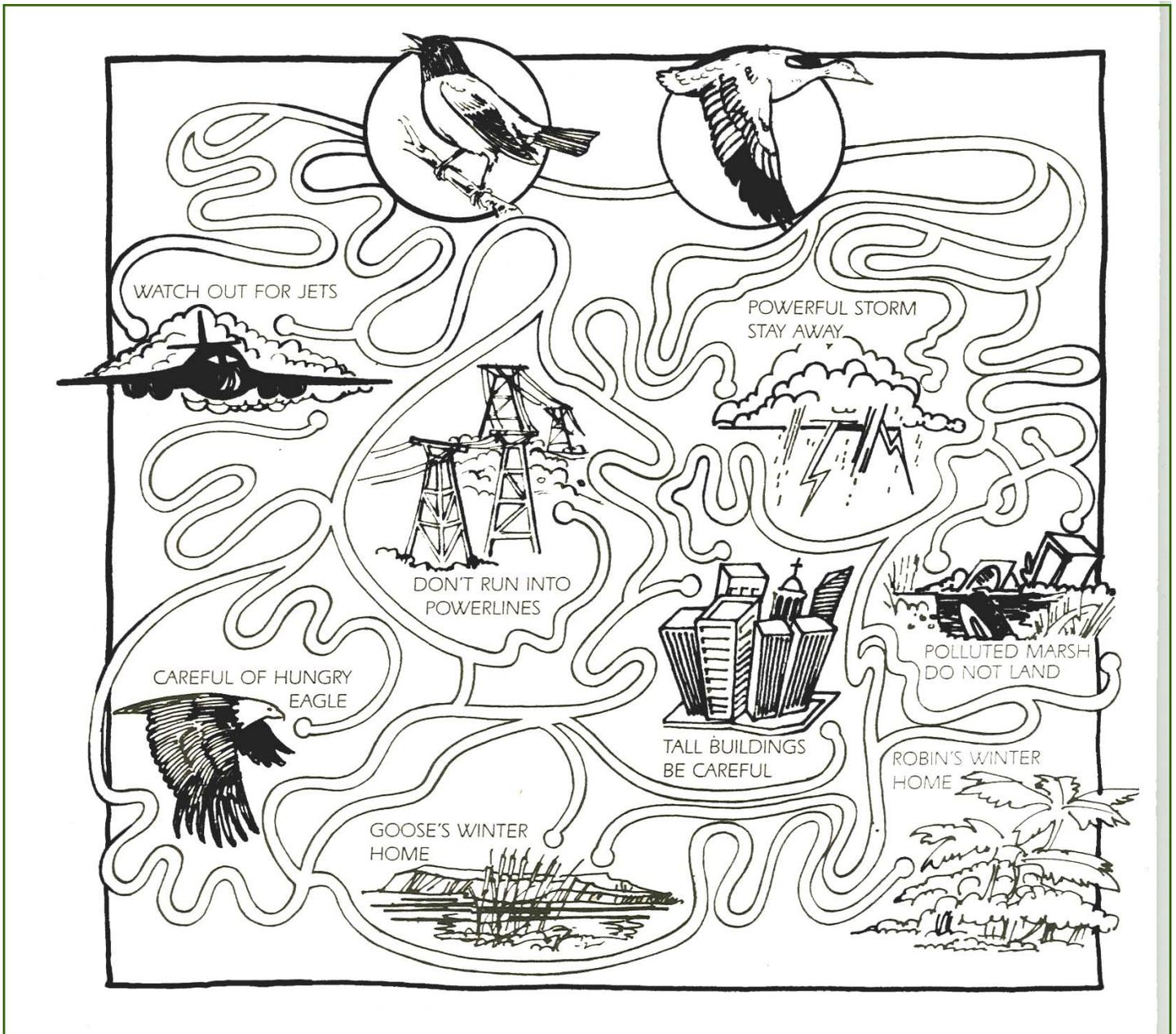
Kid's Corner! Presented by the Aquatic Resource Education Program

MIGRATION As we look forward to autumn corn mazes and apple picking, birds and other animals begin migrating south. They migrate to areas that have plenty of food and warmer climates. Unscramble the following letters to reveal some of the animals that start heading south once the weather cools off:

- 1. drtisep sabs _____
- 2. nromcha uftrslbteei _____
- 3. sobrnoi _____
- 4. khswa _____
- 5. glease _____
- 6. andaca osgoe _____

Answers on page 6

Below: Help the robin and the Canada goose find their way through the maze to their winter home.



Providence Rotary Club Donates Fishing Rods to ARE Program

A quiet pond lies nestled in the Carolina Trout Hatchery off of Route 112 in Richmond, RI. Surrounded by trees and trout raceways, this pond has become a place where groups, young and old, learn how to fish. After 15 years in operation, the pond boasts a wheelchair-accessible dock and two small sheds that house equipment and bait for the various fishing programs. The pond comes alive as children learn how to bait their hooks and cast their lines. Volunteers help teach these kids valuable lessons that are often lost in today's world filled with technology.

One such group that visits the Aquatic Resource Education pond every spring is the Providence Rotary Club. They load up their food, grills, all of their volunteers and bring children from San Miguel School to the shores

of the ARE pond. This year, not only did the ARE program receive a call to schedule the event, but another call was received inquiring about our fishing rod situation. Over the past 15 years, the ARE rods had begun to deteriorate with constant use. Broken reels became more and more frequent. The Rotary Club, recognizing this, wrote a grant to purchase new rods for the program. Despite the fact that this year's program was cancelled due to stormy weather, the Providence Rotary Club delivered 50 brand new rod and reel combination sets to the ARE program. We look forward to using the new rods with children from San Miguel School this spring! This generous donation is greatly appreciated and will be enjoyed by all in the years to come. Thank you, to all of the Providence Rotary Club members!

Photos: K. Sullivan



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