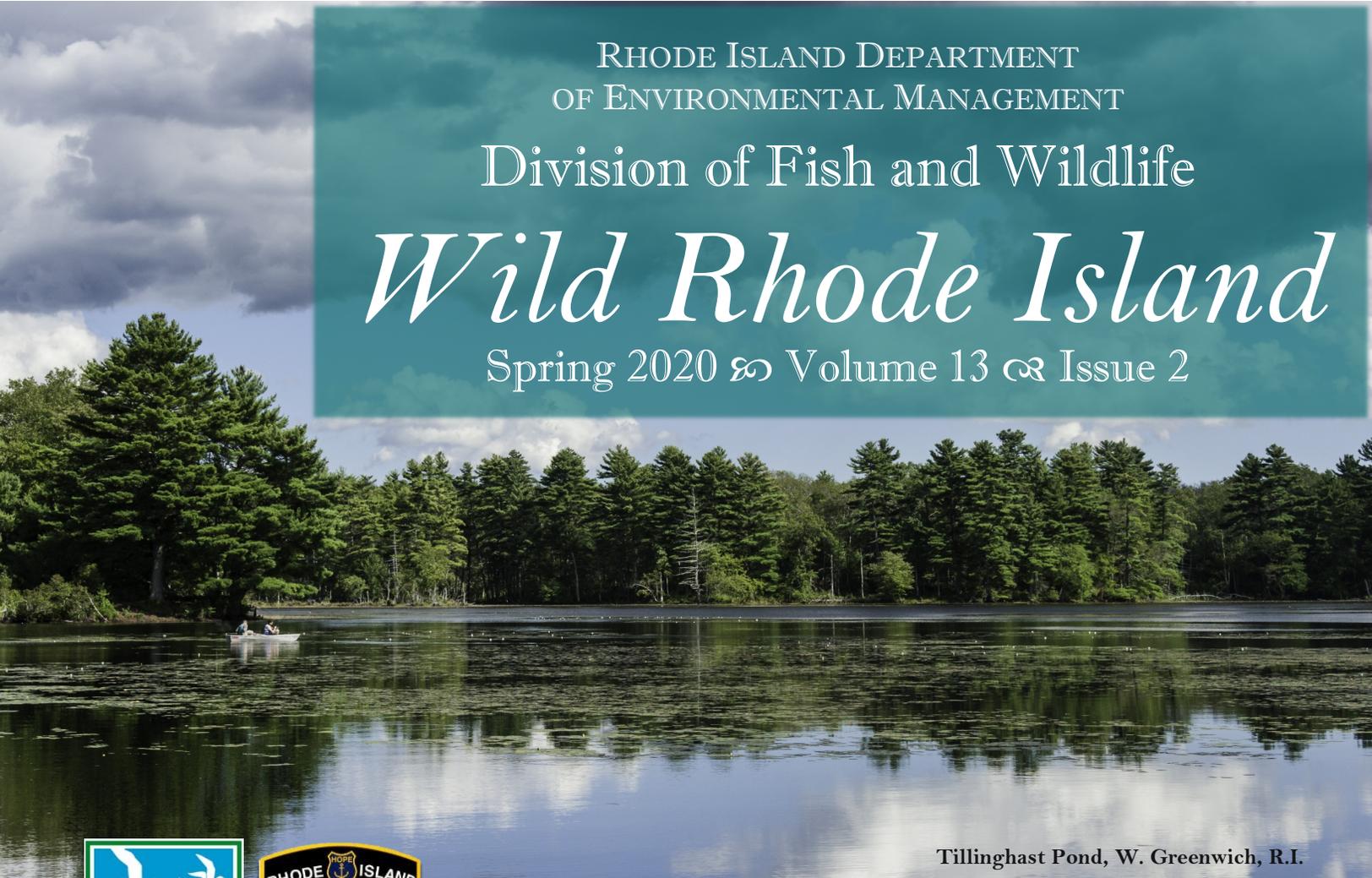
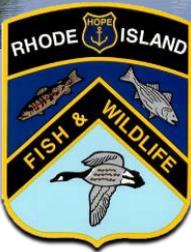


Wild Rhode Island

Spring 2020 ∞ Volume 13 ∞ Issue 2



Tillinghast Pond, W. Greenwich, R.I.



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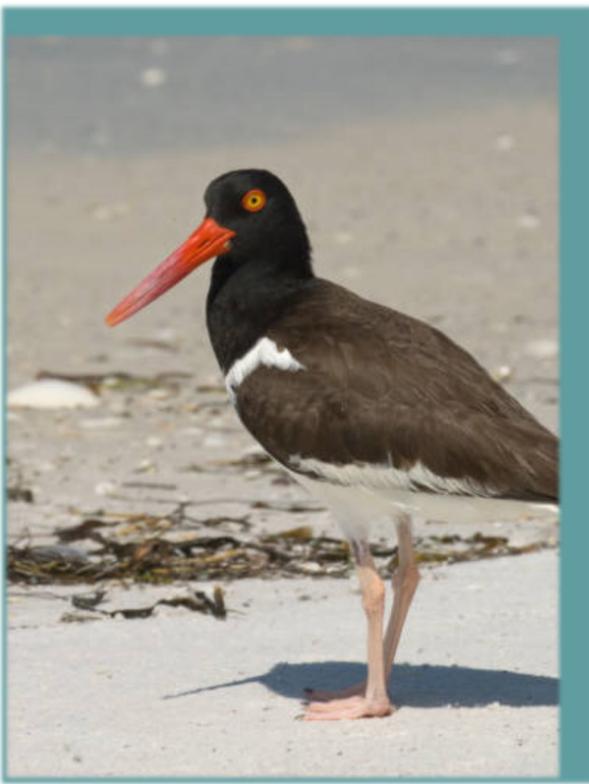
Return of the Shorebirds:

Spring Marks the Annual Arrival of R.I.'s Coastal Fauna

By: Shilo Felton, Principal Wildlife Biologist, Nongame Program, DFW

Each spring, as Rhode Islanders begin to thaw out, flock to the beach and prepare for the bustle of summer, others begin to arrive as well. These aren't tourists, they're beach-nesting birds. Piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*), American oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*), and least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) rely on some of our state's favorite beaches to lay their eggs and raise their families. Piping plovers survive the winters on islands in the Caribbean and least terns winter along the northern coast of South America. American oystercatchers from New England may take up winter residence as far North as New Jersey and as far south as Central America, but the majority head to Florida, like many other New England "snow birds." In the spring, American oystercatchers nest along the Atlantic Coast; from Nova Scotia south to Florida and the Gulf Coast. They also nest along the Baja peninsula in

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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.



Green snake. Photo by C. Raithel



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TILLINGHAST WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

DEM, TNC ADD 28 ACRES OF FORESTLAND TO TILLINGHAST POND MANAGEMENT AREA IN WEST GREENWICH

With funding provided through the US Fish & Wildlife Service Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program, and state Open Space Bonds, the \$265,000 acquisition will enhance recreational opportunities in southwest Rhode Island.

PROVIDENCE – The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) announce the permanent protection of 28 acres of forested land in West Greenwich for public recreational use, including hunting. The parcel abuts 2,370 acres of protected land in Tillinghast Pond Management Area and Wickaboxet Management Area. It is also near several other significant tracts of protected land including Nicholas Farm Management Area, Arcadia Management Area, and URI's W. Alton Jones Campus.

“I am delighted that we've been able to protect this priority habitat at Tillinghast Pond and enhance recreational opportunities for the public,” said DEM Director Janet Coit. “Preserving Rhode Island's natural assets enhances our quality of life and helps support sustainable communities. Tillinghast is one of the best spots for hiking, bird-watching, hunting, and just being outdoors enjoying nature. Kudos to The Nature Conservancy and our partners for helping to make this important acquisition in West Greenwich possible.”

“The lands around Tillinghast Pond are part of the largest coastal forest in the northeast and regionally important for

storing carbon, for wildlife, and for public recreation,” said John Torgan, State Director for The Nature Conservancy.

“Together with DEM and the people of West Greenwich, we've conserved more than 2,000 acres at Tillinghast, but we're not done yet. We still have more work to do.”

The acquisition of this property preserves the rural landscape near Tillinghast Pond Management Area, TNC's largest nature preserve in Rhode Island. Losing this tract to development would have meant the construction of two new homes within 800 feet of the main trailhead, changing the character of the preserve and diminishing the visitor experience. It also conserved the last unprotected tributary stream to Phillips Brook, which originates east of Tillinghast Pond and flows south toward the Wood River. An excellent hunting resource, Tillinghast Pond provides habitat for a wide variety of game wildlife including white-tailed deer and wild turkey.

The property will be incorporated into Tillinghast Pond Management Continued on page 4



YOU CAN HELP US COMBAT TURTLE POACHING!

Your passion for the outdoors brings you to some of the most important places for our native wildlife. You are advocates for the conservation of wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. The native turtle species of the Northeast are facing a new threat – poaching. Removing even individual turtles can have permanent consequences for populations already under tremendous pressure. It is against Rhode Island law to possess or remove any native amphibian or reptile from the wild. Here's how you can help:

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Individuals with bags poking around in fields, wetlands, or along streams, or flipping over logs and rocks.
- Unmarked traps set in wetlands. A trap set for research purposes will be clearly labeled.
- Cars parked near forested areas with collection equipment - like nets, containers, and pillowcases - visible inside.
- Unattended backpacks or bags left in the woods, along a trail, or near roads.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS:

- Maintain a safe distance and protect yourself.
- Note your exact location, and call the 24-hr RIDEM Law Enforcement hotline (401-222-3070) when it's safe to do so.
- If you are safe, try to take photographs that can corroborate your report. For example, the license plate of a car, or the serial number on a turtle trap.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also has an anonymous tip line: 1-844-FWS-TIPS (397-8477).



WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Do not confront suspicious persons, or try to stop a crime yourself. Leave that to law-enforcement professionals.



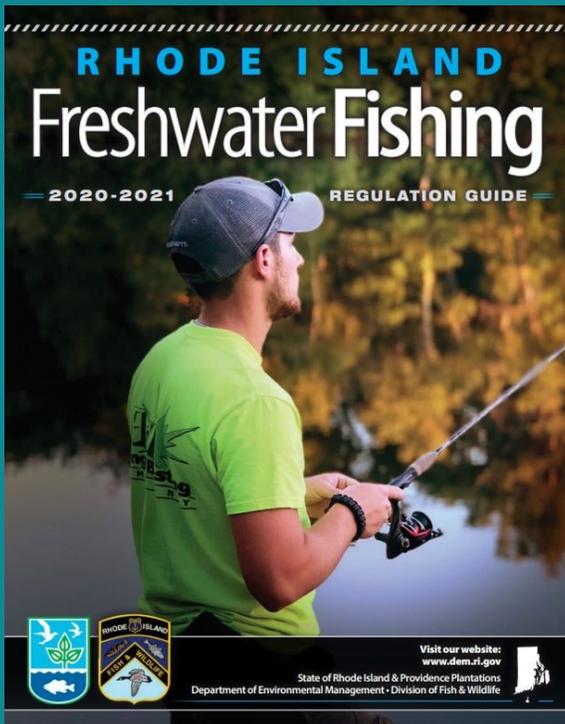
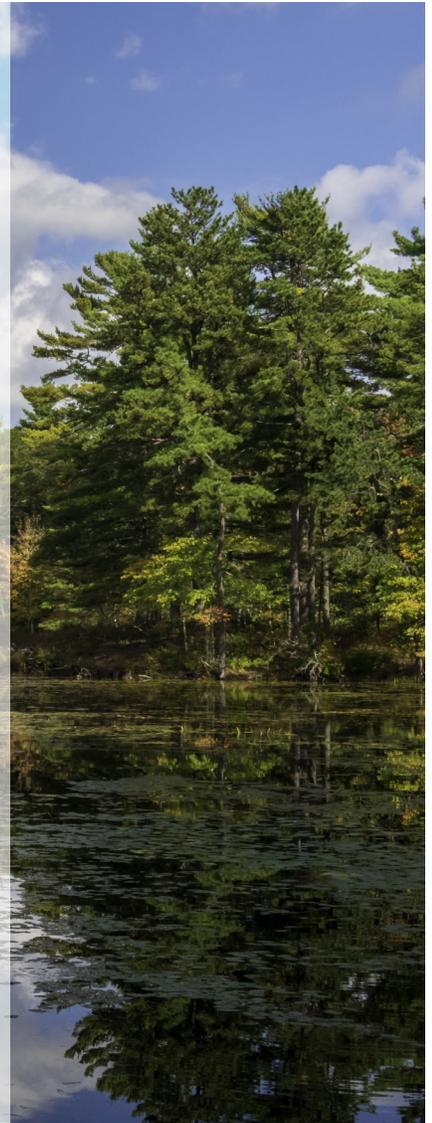
TILLINGHAST WMA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Area, which is owned by The Nature Conservancy and is managed in partnership with DEM and the Town of West Greenwich. Tillinghast Pond offers a 13-mile trail system, designed with guidance from the National Park Service and built with the help of dozens of volunteers, making it one of the most popular hiking areas in Rhode Island. The preserve also is actively managed to improve wildlife habitat. Under a 10-year forest stewardship plan, TNC hires Rhode Island loggers to create pockets of shrub and grassland habitat by removing areas of forest that have succumbed to invasive pests like gypsy moth caterpillars. These projects increase habitat diversity and are already benefitting hawks, bluebirds, and woodcocks.

TNC purchased the property for \$265,000. In exchange for a conservation easement over the property, DEM contributed \$206,000 towards the purchase price, including \$154,500 from the USFWS Wildlife Restoration Program and \$51,500 from state Open Space Bonds. The balance of funding was provided by the West Greenwich Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy through a bequest made by a long-time member.

Rhode Island's wealth of historic parks, bikeways, and green spaces provide for public enjoyment – along with improving the health of the environment, strengthening the state's climate resilience, and supporting the economy. Since 1985, over 10,000 acres of land have been protected.

For more information about DEM divisions and programs, visit www.dem.ri.gov. Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM or on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) for timely updates.



THE 2020-2021 FRESHWATER FISHING REGULATION GUIDE IS 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

GO FOR THE GOLD

Golden Rainbow Trout will be stocked at the Following Sites for Opening Day, April 11, 2020

Carbuncle Pond, Coventry

Frosty Hollow Pond, Exeter *

Lloyd Kenney Pond, Hopkinton*

Meadow Brook Pond, Richmond

Olney Pond - Lincoln Woods Park, Lincoln

Peck Pond, Burrillville

Shippee Saw Mill Pond, Foster

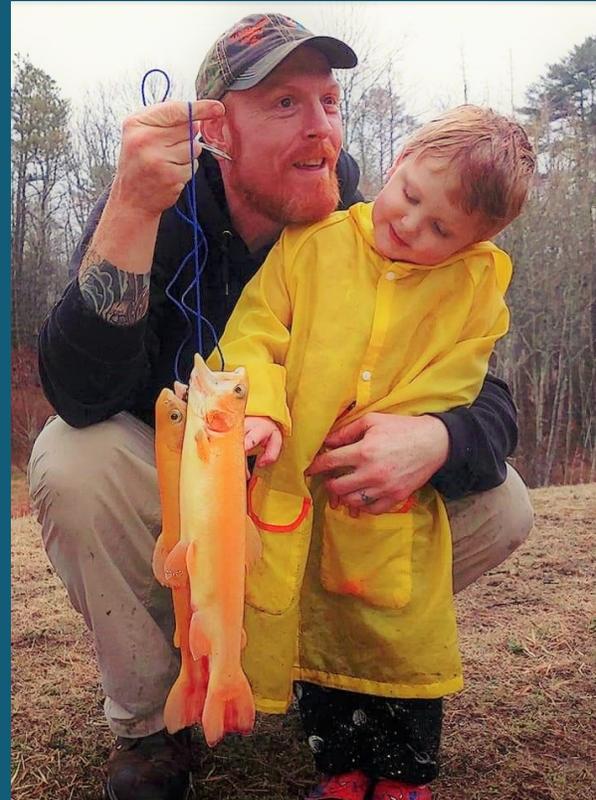
Silver Spring Lake, North Kingstown

Simmons Mill, Little Compton

Willett Pond, East Providence

*Kids-Only Pond. Minors fourteen (14) years of age and younger, only

Qualify for a Golden Trout Pin!



Golden Trout Pin Contest Rules

- Catch a Golden Rainbow Trout between April 11– April 29, 2020
- Upload your picture and email it to dem.fishri@dem.ri.gov
- Entries **MUST** include: name, complete mailing address, and pond where you caught the fish
- One pin per person. Photos submitted after April 29, 2020 will not be accepted.
- Anglers must adhere to all regulations.
- Don't have your fishing license? You can purchase at DEM.RI.GOV/HUNTFISH

For more information contact Kimberly Sullivan at 401-539-0037



From Field to Table:

DFW Teams Up with Local Business for the Annual Wild Game Cooking Class

By Madison Proulx, DFW Hunter Safety Office



Chef Andy teaches the class how to prepare meals using wild game for a unique twist on popular dishes.

In January, The RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife Hunter Education Office hosted their annual Wild Game Cooking Class, where participants learned how to process a harvested animal from field to table in a variety of unique and delicious culinary creations.

This class featured well-known chef Andy Lussier with *Culinary Connections*, a privately-owned food and beverage company located in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Chef Andy gave a presentation on how to create a variety of wild game dishes that can easily be made at home with a few ingredients. Participants learned how to make a total of twelve different dishes, and got to try samples of venison and bean soup, seared magret duck breast (duck breast sautéed in ginger, garlic and pepper), as well as upland game bird dishes, which included Buffalo pheasant pizza and Pheasant Romanesque (pheasant breast sautéed in marsala wine sauce garnished with spinach, roasted red peppers, and provolone cheese).

Although not everyone is accustomed to the taste of game meat – and may even think it only means liver and onions- the purpose of this class is to expose participants to the many enjoyable recipes made with wild game, and can include several different recipe options, depending on your taste.

To many, hunting provides an important source of local, untreated meat that is healthier and more environmentally sustainable than farm- or industry- raised meat, and offers the community an opportunity to harvest food for themselves and their families. The long-standing and proud tradition of hunting in Rhode Island helps the management and conservation of Rhode Island's wildlife by implementing sustainable harvest practices, and by supporting habitat and wildlife conservation within the state.

The Wild Game Cooking class is always eagerly awaited, and this year was no different. Registration filled up quickly, with a total of 34 participants in attendance. The DFW received great feedback once again from the participants, who were pleased to have learned so much from this mouthwatering class and, without a doubt, did not go home hungry!



Participants line up to try the pheasant Francaise: lemon-butter pheasant mixed with white wine cream sauce

If you are curious about hunting and cooking wild game, or a seasoned hunter who is planning the next great dish for the wild game you will harvest this season, make sure you attend our 2021 Wild Game Cooking Class. Dates and times will be announced in November/December 2020, so stay tuned!

Note: Registration for this class is required, and space is limited. When registration opens this fall, email the names and email addresses of those wishing to attend to Scott.Travers@dem.ri.gov, the cost to attend is usually \$35.00. More details to follow when the class date is announced.

To learn more about hunting regulations, becoming licensed and permitted to hunt in Rhode Island, or courses and classes offered by the DFW Hunter Education office, please call 401-539-0019 or email DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov.



Class attendees learned to cook a variety of dishes, including venison medallions with wild mushrooms and juniper, pictured above.

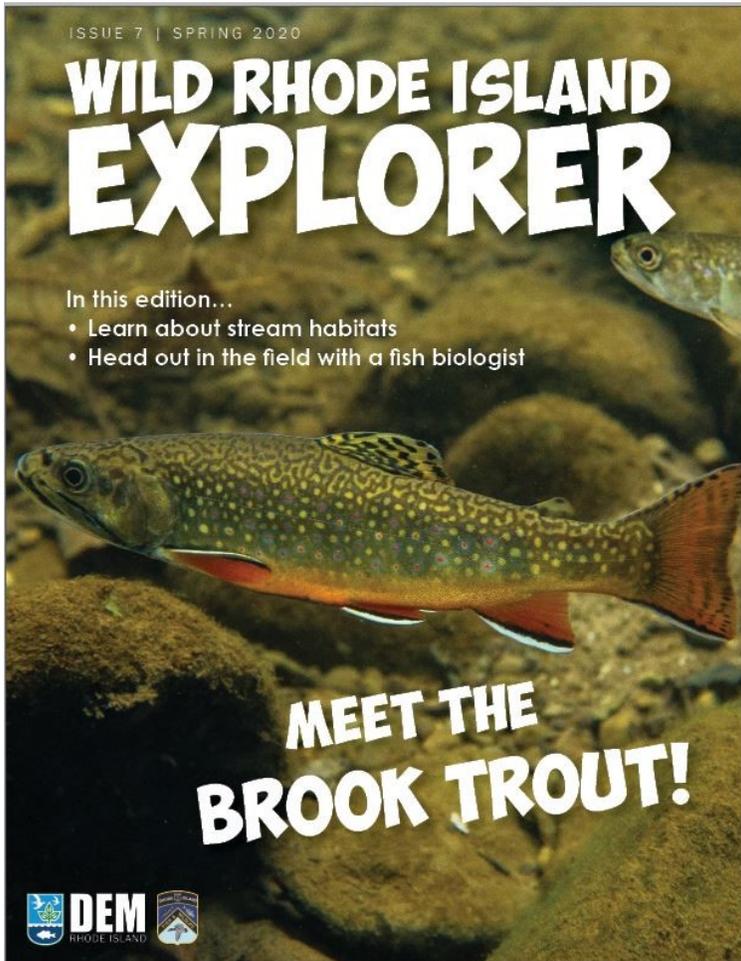


ISSUE 7 | SPRING 2020

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

In this edition...

- Learn about stream habitats
- Head out in the field with a fish biologist



MEET THE BROOK TROUT!



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by emailing the address above.

Rhode Island's Coastal-Nesting Birds continued from page 1

Mexico and along both coasts of South America. While they are wide-ranging, like piping plover and least tern, their populations continue to face challenges from human development, disturbance, and rising sea levels.

Much of what we know about the migratory patterns of these species comes from banding efforts. Individual birds receive small plastic and metal bands (or rings) around their legs, which can be reported by anyone who sees this bird later in its life's journey. American oystercatchers are banded in Rhode Island with a small metal band on one of their lower legs. This band contains what might be thought of as the "social security" number for each banded bird, in that it is an individual identifier. Additionally, they receive two yellow bands on their upper leg, with a code that can be more easily read from a distance. This allows casual birders and scientists, alike, to follow the bird without getting too close.



"Yellow 2M", the American oystercatcher, searches for food along the shoreline. Note the two visible yellow bands marked "M." Sandy Point has been her home since at least 2012.

Yellow-2M (so named because of her yellow leg bands engraved with the code "2M") has been nesting on Sandy Point Island since at least 2012, when she first received her leg "jewelry." Like most American oystercatchers, she returns to the same nesting location year after year. This likely helps her to successfully raise her chicks because she is familiar with the best areas for laying her eggs, feeding her chicks, and keeping her chicks safe from predators. She likely started visiting Sandy Point Island in the summers as a young adult, meeting other single oystercatchers and scouting for the best available beach-front real estate on which to raise a family. When she met the right partner and an appropriate property became available, she and her partner moved in and laid a nest in the sand.

This nest is simply a small indentation dug into the sand, often on the open beach or in the dunes. Picking the right nest site can be challenging. Nests on the open beach are more likely to get washed over by a high tide, but nests in the grass are more frequently visited by predators. She generally lays three eggs and shares incubation responsibilities with her partner until they hatch—27 days later, on average. During this time, if predators, people, vehicles, or dogs get too close, she will often protect herself and her eggs by quietly running



Piping plovers are an iconic Rhode Island bird. They return every spring to nest and raise their young before flying south for the winter.

away from the nest. If people scare her from the nest frequently, this coming and going may draw the attention of more predators, like gulls, cats, and foxes, lessening the chance the eggs will survive to hatch. Additionally, her eggs are very well camouflaged in the sand, but people may accidentally crush them if they enter nesting areas.

Once Yellow-2M's egg hatch, the chicks will feed on small invertebrates in the sand with their parents. Sometimes, Yellow-2M will bring oysters to her chicks and wedge the mollusks open so they can feed on the meat inside. During this time, the chicks cannot fly and rely solely on camouflage to stay alive. Laying still in the sand, they are very vulnerable to being hurt by predators, vehicles, and dogs. Chicks have feathers when they are first hatched, but they are still not capable of regulating their own heat. They rely on their parents to lead them to shade, or keep them warm on cool evenings. The chicks grow quickly, but it takes them 30-35 days before they are able to fly. They will often remain with their parents long after they fledge. The families eventually begin migrating south in September, though one parent will generally leave earlier than the other. The adults will return the following April to begin the process again, but the chicks will take at least a year to grow up before they return to New England to start scouting for breeding sites of their own.

Being an excellent parent, Yellow-2M and her partner successfully raised broods of chicks to fledge in 2016, 2017, and 2018, but was less successful last year. Given the many challenges faced by beach-nesting birds, like Yellow-2M, RIDEM DFW works with partner organizations, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), to reduce human-induced risks to these birds. Nesting areas are signed and closed to help beach-goers give eggs, chicks, and parents a safe distance. These areas are erected when the birds begin to arrive in April in order to give parents a chance to pick proper nesting sites. Biologists then visit the sites several times throughout the week to keep track of which families safely fledge chicks each season. This allows us to gauge how effective our management practices are and adjust if necessary. Populations of American oystercatchers, piping plover, and least tern along the Atlantic Coast have slowly increased since targeted conservation efforts began in the 1980s. But their continued success is highly dependent on the dedication of biologists, volunteers, and people like you! This summer, while you're

enjoying the beach, keep an eye out for beach-nesting birds. If you keep a watchful eye, respect the signage, and keep a distance of at least 50 feet, you may get to watch these birds and their chicks navigating the beach as well!

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SEE A BANDED BIRD?

Report banded birds to the following websites:

For Piping Plover: <https://www.fws.gov/northeast/pipingplover/>

For American Oystercatcher: <http://amoywg.org/banding-re-sighting/>

FIVE WAYS TO KEEP BEACH-NESTING BIRDS SAFE:

- ♦ Follow the rules about dogs on the beach—keep dogs leashed when they're allowed on beaches where nesting birds are present. Avoid walking dogs on beaches where they are not allowed.
- ♦ Give the birds space so they can nest and fuel up.
- ♦ Place all trash and food scraps in the trash bins or carry out.
- ♦ Kites and drones frighten birds—enjoy these only on beaches where nesting areas aren't present
- ♦ Don't feed birds like crows and gulls.

Contact the RI Division of Fish & Wildlife for more information about coastal birds and their habitats by emailing DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov, or by calling 401.789.0281

Is that algal bloom on my favorite pond harmful?



Photo: C. Kesson



RIDEM and RI Department of Health are working together to keep your fishing experience safe. During late summer and early fall, when the water levels are low and temperatures are high, scientists sample bodies of water for blue-green algae (also known as Cyanobacteria) toxins. If toxin levels are too high, warnings are issued and signs are posted to refrain from recreational activities on that particular body of water. Here is a little more information about Cyanobacteria:

WHAT IS CYANOBACTERIA?

Cyanobacteria is a blue-green algae that occurs naturally in freshwater systems. High temperatures and excess sunlight can lead to algal 'blooms' which have the potential to produce toxins that are harmful to both humans and animals. The toxins are released when the algae begin to die off or are ingested.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY A BLUE-GREEN ALGAL BLOOM?

Blooms generally occur in late summer or early fall when the water level is low and water temperature is high. There are no visual signs that a blue-green algae bloom is producing the harmful toxins; however, identifying an algae bloom may help you avoid the chance of exposure. Blue-green algae blooms are normally bright green or blue green in color, but can also be brown, red or purple. Water may appear cloudy and may produce an odor. The color of the algal bloom is a clue; however, confirmation of blue-green algae can only be identified using a microscope. Water samples should be tested for toxin presence.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS?

Humans who come in contact with the blue-green algae toxins can develop rashes, blisters, hives, and nose and eye irritation. If swallowed, humans may experience diarrhea, vomiting, or neurotoxicity (numb lips, tingling fingers and toes, dizziness). Pets or livestock that ingest the Cyanobacteria toxins can experience sickness, paralysis and even death. Neurotoxicity in animals is characterized by salivation, weakness, staggering, difficulty breathing, and convulsions.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO AVOID CYANOBACTERIA TOXINS?

Adhere to all posted signs. Do not drink, swim, or fish in affected water bodies. Avoid contact with water that is discolored or has scum on the surface. Do not drink untreated water, whether algae blooms are present or not.

WHAT DOES THE STATE DO TO REDUCE HUMAN/PET EXPOSURE TO THE CYANOBACTERIA TOXINS?

Not all species of blue-green algae produce toxins and the blue-green algae that can produce the toxins may not. Toxins can be detected through laboratory tests. Water testing is conducted throughout the summer and results are reported to RI Department of Health and RIDEM. If toxins are found, a press release is issued and signage is posted at the pond. RIDEM will not stock trout in affected ponds.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more information, visit <http://www.health.state.ri.us/health-risks/harmfulalgaeblooms/>.

AMPHIBIANS OF RHODE ISLAND

AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is proud to announce the publication of *Amphibians of Rhode Island*, an authoritative book spotlighting the 18 species of amphibians that are native to Rhode Island. Written by longtime DEM natural heritage biologist Christopher Raithel, the book provides meticulous accounts of the state's native frogs, toads, and salamanders and their respective habitats, and includes crisp, vivid photography depicting the amphibians' multiple life stages.

More than just a field guide, it combines an exhaustive search of the historical record and four decades of Raithel's intense personal study to present complete information on the statewide distribution, demography, seasonal movement, reproduction and development, research needs, and conservation status of each species. One chapter is devoted entirely to conservation, detailing the threats faced by amphibians and the actions needed to safeguard them.

"*Amphibians of Rhode Island* is an impressive and comprehensive account of our state's native amphibians that sets the stage for conservation for decades into the future," said DEM Director Janet Coit. "Chris Raithel is an expert across many species and his new book will be an enormous asset in Rhode Island and regionally."

Raithel enjoyed a distinguished, 40-year career in DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife before retiring in 2018. He began his work by finding and cataloging plant and animal diversity across Rhode Island and assessing the conservation status of less common species. While at DEM, he served as the state endangered species biologist, herpetologist, and non-game bird biologist. A major contributor to the state's first-ever RI Wildlife Action Plan and its 2015 update, Raithel prepared numerous species accounts for the more than 450 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. He has personally documented individual turtles and their movements and life history for over 30 years. He is a nationally recognized expert in the management and monitoring of the American burying beetle.



Photo by A. Penta

An outstanding resource for scientists, students, and nature lovers alike, the book would make an excellent addition to a school or home library. Published by DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife, *Amphibians of Rhode Island* is being sold for \$20 including tax. It may be purchased in person at the DEM Office of Boat Registration and Licensing in Providence by cash, check, money order, or credit card (credit card requires an extra fee) and at the Division of Fish and Wildlife Field Headquarters in West Kingston, by check or money order only. The book also may be purchased by mail using the order form found at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/bookorder>.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, State Wildlife Grants Program provided funding for the book. All revenue generated by its sale will be directed toward wildlife conservation via the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife.

For more information on DEM programs and services, visit www.dem.ri.gov. Follow DEM on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) or Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM

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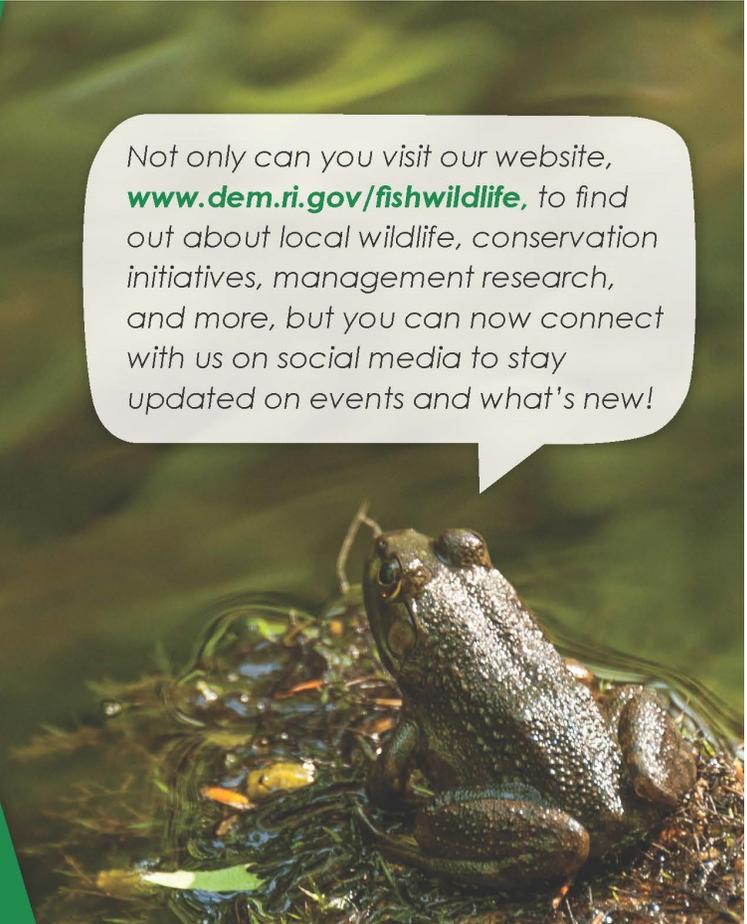


DEM
RHODE ISLAND



Photo by M. Stultz at Durfee Hill Wildlife Management Area, Gloucester, RI

Not only can you visit our website, www.dem.ri.gov/fishwildlife, to find out about local wildlife, conservation initiatives, management research, and more, but you can now connect with us on social media to stay updated on events and what's new!



WILD RHODE ISLAND
A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE
RI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
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