



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

Potter Hill Fish Ladder Restoration Helps R.I. River Herring

By Sarah Riley



The DFW staff work to install the new Potter Hill Dam fishway baffles. Photo courtesy of P. Edwards

DEM's Division of Fish & Wildlife partnered with The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association, private owners and others to make improvements to the Potter Hill fishway in Ashaway last fall. The denil fishway on the Pawcatuck River was built in the 1970s and is a concrete structure with a series of wooden baffle boards that allow anadromous fish to swim around and over Potter Hill Dam. Over time, natural conditions at the entrance of the fishway made it difficult for fish to locate the entrance channel. The improvements included digging out a new entrance channel and installation of new baffle boards that decrease water velocities within the fishway. Both improvements enhance the efficiency of fish passage and allow migrating fish access to over 32 miles of spawning and nursery habitat.

most of their adult lives in marine waters but migrate to their natal freshwater streams in the spring to spawn. After spawning, the spent adults migrate back to saltwater within a few weeks, but the juveniles utilize the freshwater nursery areas throughout the summer

Anadromous fish, river herring spend

and migrate to marine waters in the fall to continue the cycle.

The Division operates and maintains existing fishways throughout the state and works with many partners on new fish passage projects including the construction of traditional and natural fishways and dam removals. These habitat restoration projects allow anadromous fish access to habitat that was previously blocked or impeded. The Division plans to continue the fish passage program in an effort to protect and enhance this valuable natural resource. For more information on Rhode Island's anadromous fish or fishways email DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov



The new fishway baffles decrease water velocity and allow the fish to swim around the obstruction. Photo courtesy of P. Edwards

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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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Environmental Management

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Northern Pike Breeding And Stocking Makes For Great Ice Fishing In Rhode Island

By Phillip Edwards



Northern Pike eggs at Arcadia warm water hatchery. Photo courtesy of K. Fernstrom

fry were raised at the hatchery. Hatchery ponds and Burlingame Marsh were utilized as nursery areas as the fry developed into fingerlings (six to eight inches). During this time frame, fingerling pike were stocked annually into Chapman Pond, Johnson Pond, Waterman Reservoir, Worden Pond, and Stump Reservoir. The project ended in 1992. The pike program was revived in 2000 when the five previously stock ponds were reactivated and stocked annually with eight to 12-inch sub-adults from out-of-state sources. These stocking efforts were discontinued in 2007 due to the cost of raising sub-adult pike and transportation issues; therefore, the pike program remained dormant until 2014.

In 2014, for the first time since the USFWS program ended in 1992, the Division applied for a USFWS Sports Fish Restoration grant, titled Northern Pike Management. The objectives of the new pike project are to:

- 1) Maintain a northern pike fishery in selected R.I. ponds and lakes by developing a long-term annual stocking and monitoring program;
- 2) Evaluate stocking success and population sizes by monitoring stocked systems via electrofishing and net surveys, and through the implementation and analysis of angler survey cards.

Northern pike (*Esox lucius*) were first introduced to Rhode Island waters in the 1960s. Periodically since then, the Division has stocked selected lakes and ponds with northern pike at various life stages (fry, fingerlings, or sub-adults). Between 1980 and 1992, the Division partnered with USFWS Sports Fish Restoration Program and raised pike at the Arcadia Warm Water Hatchery for stocking into R.I. systems. Eggs were collected and



Fyke nets are used to catch stocked Northern pike. Photo courtesy of K. Fernstrom

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Northern Pike In R.I. continued from page 2

To accomplish the Northern Pike Management objectives, the project currently acquires eggs, fry and fingerlings from out-of-state sources as they become available, and collects adult broodstock pike from the previously stocked R.I. ponds. In early spring, fyke nets are set and checked daily. Once adult pike are collected and transported to Arcadia Hatchery, they are spawned and the eggs collected.

The spawned adults are measured and weighed, scales are sampled to determine age, and then the fish are released. The pike fry are fed brine shrimp and shiners and raised to fingerling size (six to eight inches) in the rearing ponds. Each fall the rearing ponds are drained and the juvenile pike are collected and stocked into selected R.I. systems.

Pike populations in the stocked systems are monitored by various methods including electrofishing and net surveys. Catch per unit effort (CPUE), age data and length-frequency distributions can be used to assess current pike stock sizes and to evaluate stocking success. In addition, the Division plans to implement the use of volunteer angler survey cards to obtain data on ice fishing catch and effort for northern pike.



Hatchery supervisor Tommy Thompson with pre-spawn broodstock Northern pike at Arcadia hatchery. Photo courtesy of K. Fernstrom

Northern pike are not believed to naturally spawn in Rhode Island waters but have become a popular freshwater fish species here, targeted year-round by anglers both through the ice and on open water. The use of ice fishing tilts and jigging rods with live bait is commonly used during the winter months while spoons, bright spinner baits, soft plastics and live baits are popular open water fishing techniques. Pike are large aggressive carnivores that feed on a variety of fish, small mammals and young waterfowl. Life expectancy in R.I. waters is thought to be around 15 years. Pike can be distinguished from chain pickerel by the lack of scales on the lower half of the gill cover. The chain pickerel's gill covers are fully scaled. The Rhode Island state record pike was 47-1/2 inches in length and weighed 35 pounds. Pike over 10 pounds are frequently reported from the five stocked ponds.



Northern pike caught by angler ice fishing in R.I. waters. Photo courtesy of P. Edwards

Fishing for northern pike in R.I. is open year round with a two-fish daily limit and 24- inch minimum size. The Division plans to continue stocking and monitoring pike in Chapman Pond, Johnson Pond, Waterman Reservoir, Worden Pond, and Stump Reservoir to enhance fishing and to provide anglers the opportunity to catch a trophy fish in Rhode Island.



Feeding Wildlife Does More Harm Than Good

By Sarah Riley

Most of us have fed wildlife at some point in time, whether it is putting out a bird feeder that squirrels can get to, not securing garbage cans properly, or even intentionally leaving out food for feral cats, skunks, raccoons or coyotes. What we may not think about is that feeding these animals often does more harm than good for wildlife, and may create a number of other problems for neighbors and ourselves.

When we provide food for wildlife, we draw them into our neighborhoods and expose them to dangerous situations, such as human dependence, trapping or an increased chance of being hit by a vehicle. The best way we can avoid human-wildlife conflicts and protect these animals from persecution is by leaving them alone and letting them thrive safely in their natural habitats.

Feeding wild animals can cause them to associate humans with a reliable source of food, and encourages them to approach a house or a person. Here at the Division, we often receive calls about someone feeding skunks or raccoons, which then begin to go after their neighbor's garbage or make a home under the neighbor's porch. Unknown to the well-meaning wildlife lover, in Rhode Island a landowner is legally allowed to trap and kill wildlife that is causing damage to their property or house (RIGL 20-16-2).



Four coyote pups explore a backyard in Warwick, R.I. Photo courtesy of G. Vigliotti

You may be asking why the person cannot just trap the nuisance animal and bring it to a forest down the road or a management area for release. Relocation of an animal can expose it to other life-threatening conditions. Animals that are taken from their "home" and relocated to another area may not be able to find shelter and can die of exposure. They can also be attacked by other animals already occupying the area. Additionally, once an animal becomes accustomed to people, or eating people-sourced food, they are unlikely to be behaviorally rehabilitated and will continue to be a nuisance for people near the relocation site.

Another reason wildlife relocation is illegal is potential disease spread, which can endanger the individual animal, the population, or another species- including humans. Wild animals often live with diseases and parasites as part of their natural life history. However, bringing a potentially diseased animal closer to humans, or introducing them to a different population, may spread disease or parasites and can cause unforeseen problems. For these reasons, and in the interest of protecting our wildlife and the public, relocation of wildlife is illegal in Rhode Island.

Ultimately, discontinuing or avoiding feeding wild animals is the best way to prevent human-wildlife conflicts and protect them from car strikes or trapping.



West Greenwich, R.I.: A black bear eats bird seed from the ground around feeder. They will sometimes knock or bend feeders over to get at the bird seed. Photo courtesy of R. Oliver



Raccoons are at a higher risk of car strikes when they wander into neighborhoods looking for food. By photographer Milla Herman

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Feeding Wildlife continued from page 4

These issues are not always ones that individuals can resolve wholly on their own; often times it is an entire neighborhood or community that creates these issues. For example, it may be a business that does not securely dispose of its products, or a neighbor who is putting out food for skunks, coyotes or raccoons. It takes a conscientious, diligent and collaborative effort to prevent unnecessary issues between people and wildlife.

What can we do to help our wildlife?

DO NOT FEED WILD OR FERAL ANIMALS

- It can endanger their lives (more likely to be hit by a car, trapped and killed, etc.)
- They do not need “people food.” They are highly adapted to survive in the wild and can find their own food sources, even in winter

SECURE YOUR GARBAGE CANS, COMPOST, SHEDS, BARN, COOPS, HUTCHES AND BEE HIVES

- Use garbage cans with securely-clasping lids that prevent the tops from being knocked off
- Lock sheds and barns if they contain feed
- Make chicken coops, rabbit hutches and bee hives predator-proof

COMMUNICATE WITH NEIGHBORS ABOUT WILDLIFE ISSUES

- Most of the time people do not know they are causing an issue. By talking about wildlife issues and working together on possible solutions, we can minimize the number of human-wildlife conflicts.



For more information about wildlife-proofing your home or property, or solving issues with wildlife in your area, visit: www.wildlifehelp.org, or contact the Division of Fish & Wildlife by emailing DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov or by calling 401-789-0281.



Photos of R.I. Wildlife and Fish Needed for Wild Rhode Island Newsletter!!



We are collecting photos of Rhode Island's native fish and wildlife to use in future editions of *Wild Rhode Island* and we need your help! Whether you are a seasoned nature photographer or just happened to capture a funny picture of an animal in your backyard, we would love to share your experience!

If you would like to help, please email pictures to Sarah.Riley@dem.ri.gov with your name and/or the photographer's name, the town, time and date the photo was taken (if you have it), and any other information you would like to share about the photo. Thank you for your participation!!

Restoration Project Underway At Sapowet Marsh Management Area By Marissa Sprouls



This photo of the shoreline at Sapowet marsh makes evident both the effects of erosion on this habitat and the need for habitat restoration in this area. Photo courtesy of T. Steeves

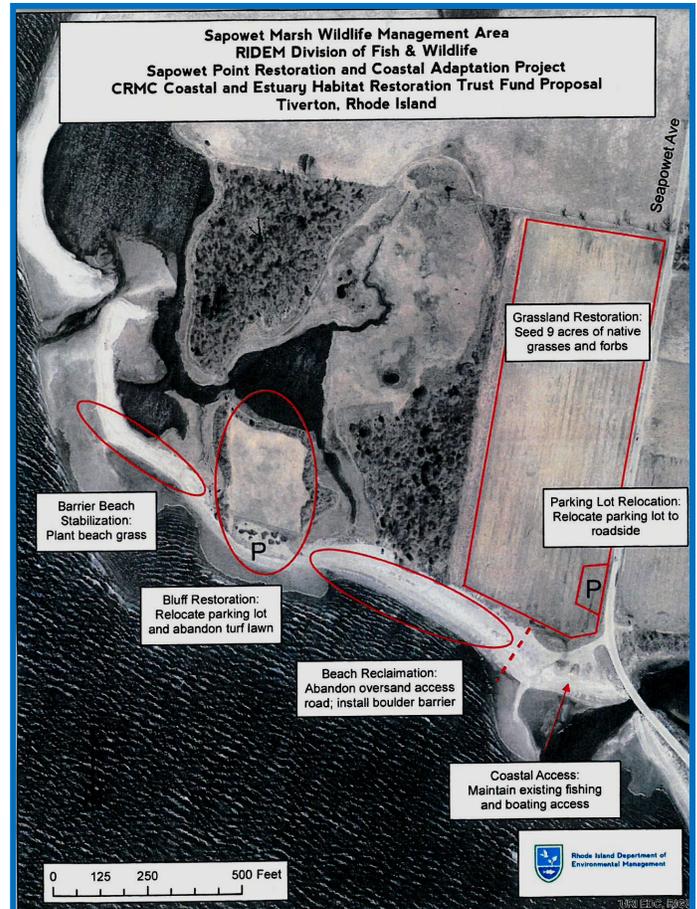
With sea levels rising, conservation groups across Rhode Island are taking action. Rising sea levels can result in shoreline erosion and loss of coastal habitats upon which many wildlife species of conservation concern rely. One area that has been affected is the Sapowet Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Tiverton, Rhode Island. This coastal site is comprised of more than 250 acres of beach, saltmarsh and grassland along the Narragansett Bay and is home to many species of fish, birds and mammals.

In the last 75 years, the coastal portion of the Sapowet Management Area has experienced more than 90 feet of shoreline erosion due to ecological changes and human use. The Division's Wildlife Habitat Program has initiated a project to enhance this unique coastal site with goals to reconfigure public access, restore degraded coastal habitat, enhance wildlife habitat, and improve

coastal resiliency. This project consists of restoring Sapowet Point to a more "natural" state by planting native coastal shrubs and beach grass, re-seeding warm-season grasses, controlling invasive plant species, and relocating the parking lot to lessen the effects of vehicle use on sensitive coastal habitats. These changes are intended to sustain and enhance wildlife habitat, prevent erosion and ultimately increase the coastal resiliency of this area in the face of sea level rise.

In addition to positive conservation outcomes, the project will: increase the amount of "natural" shoreline and beach space available to the public; reduce littering and dumping; improve vistas and scenery; improve parking amenities; and provide an enhanced educational experience with new signage. Shoreline access for lightcraft boat launching will continue to be available. Signs will be installed to provide visitors with an informative experience dedicated to shoreline habitat, beach restoration, coastal resiliency, and coastal wildlife species of conservation concern.

The restoration project is being conducted by the Division of Fish & Wildlife, with technical assistance from Save The Bay, and funding by the CRMC Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund and the USFWS Wildlife & Sportsfish Restoration program. Completion of this project is scheduled for spring 2017.



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

WINTER COATS

The winter chill makes us pull on our warm winter coats before we can go out and play in the snow. Many mammals are the same way: they shed their thinner summer coat and grow in a thicker, better insulated winter coat. Some animals are white all year round, like the Snowy Owl, but others are brown in the summer and grow in a coat that is pure white in the winter. This allows for better insulation from the cold and better camouflage in the snow. This change is triggered by the shorter daylight hours of winter (called "photoperiods") and colder temperatures. The animals below are animals that are native to Rhode Island that have their own "snow" coats!

Long-tailed weasels (*Mustela frenata*) are slender built with short legs and short ears. In the spring and summer their coats are brown on top and creamy white underneath with a black tip on their long tail. In the winter they are white except for the black tip on the tail. This is the weasel species more likely to be seen here.

Short-tailed weasels (*Mustela erminea*) are also known as "Ermine" (more used when it is in its white winter coat) or "Stoat" It looks very similar to the long-tailed weasel but it is smaller and has a shorter tail, as the name suggests. Short-tailed weasels used to be wide-spread in R.I. but are now considered more of a northern New England species.



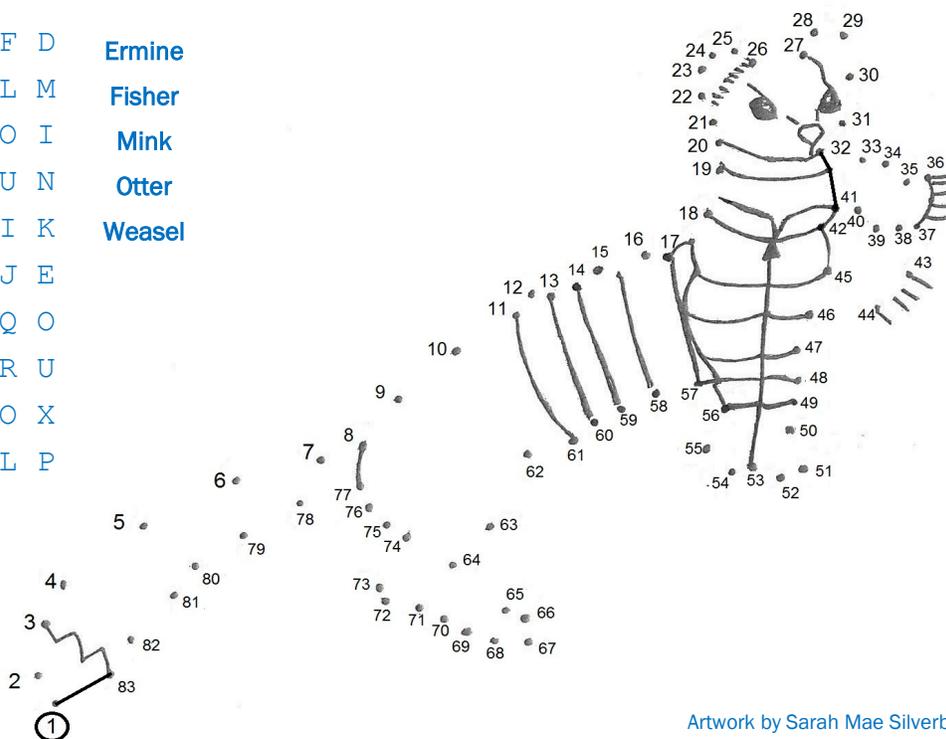
Weasels part of a family of animals called "Mustelids," also simply called the "weasel family." There are a few different species of mustelids found in Rhode Island.

Can you find them in this word search?

I P F A Q R S A F D	Ermine
Y H T W E A S E L M	Fisher
V M H H J P O Z O I	Mink
H X S F O E R C U N	Otter
O I I Y R N D H I K	Weasel
F T Z Z U I A P J E	
F W T A B M Q W Q O	
A G A E E R F U R U	
A U J P R E Y C O X	
N Z D P K Q M E L P	

Connect-The-Dots!

Starting from 1 (lower left), connect the dots to reveal a picture, then color it in any way you like!



Artwork by Sarah Mae Silverberg

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February

4th - 10th: Late Canada Goose Hunting Season. See R.I. hunting & trapping guide for further information

5th: Trapping class offered by the Division's Hunter Education Office. Space is limited and registration is required. Please email Jessica.Pena@dem.ri.gov for information and to sign up.

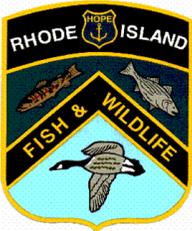
28th: Last day of Small Game Hunting Season. See R.I. hunting & trapping guide for further information

March

11th & 12th: Land Navigation course offered by the Division's Hunter Education Office. Learn about Map reading, terrain association, etc. Space is limited and registration is required. Please email Jessica.Pena@dem.ri.gov for information and to sign up.



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