

# Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources

## Monthly Highlights

### June, 2009

#### Issue Priorities:

#### Connect New Yorkers to Nature

**Habitat Stamp Grant Project Constructed by the Franklin County Federation of Fish and Game Clubs Dedicated** - On July 2, 2009, an event was held to dedicate the fishing access site constructed on the Salmon River in the City of Malone, New York. The site will provide recreational fishing for all citizens, with easy access for disabled and senior citizens. The project includes a paved parking lot, path, sign, and platform, and was built with funds from the sales of Habitat Stamps and supported with in-kind services by the Franklin County Board of Legislators and the Franklin County Federation of Fish and Game Clubs. In addition to creating fishing access to the Salmon River, the project helped to control two invasive plant species located on the site.



*Bureau of Fish & Wildlife Services*

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**Educational Invasive *Ludwigia* Signs Posted Along Peconic River** - On June 30, Region 1 and Peconic Estuary Program staff unveiled five educational interpretive signs at Peconic River Access sites. The interpretive signs are designed to educate anglers, boaters and the general public about the successful *Ludwigia* eradication effort, the ecological threat this invasive species poses, and the importance of maintaining the project's success. *Ludwigia peploides*, more commonly known as water primrose, is a South American species that was first detected in the Peconic River in 2003. This aquatic non-native plant grows primarily on the water's surface, spreads rapidly in warm weather months, and can often take over entire slow-flowing waterbodies. *Ludwigia* poses a

major threat because it is unsuitable fish habitat, out-competes native plants, reduces biodiversity, blocks sunlight to oxygen-producing submerged plants, and severely impedes recreational uses of the river. Since the initiation of the eradication effort in the spring of 2006, over 350 volunteers have spent over 1,500 hours hand-pulling over 126 cubic yards of *Ludwigia*. Although *Ludwigia*'s spread is currently contained in this water body, maintenance pulls and monitoring are still necessary to ensure the species does not resurge and once again spread throughout the river. Two Peconic River maintenance efforts are currently scheduled for summer 2009. Funding for this effort was provided by a DEC Aquatic Invasive Species Eradication Grant and a Corporate Wetland Restoration Partnership grant.

*Bureau of Marine Resources*

*Laura Stephenson*

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### [Promote a Toxic Free Future](#)

**Fish Tissue Monitoring Continues at Dewey Loeffel Landfill** - For the first time since post-remedial monitoring began at this inactive hazardous waste site in 2002, General Electric has taken on primary duties for collecting fish for PCB analysis from the Valatie Kill, Nassau Lake, and a small tributary at the landfill. Collections are being done by the same contract personnel who have assisted DEC staff in previous years. In June, DEC staff were on hand to observe the collection of fish from the Valatie Kill and near the landfill, and noted that all required fish were obtained according to the sampling protocol. Nassau Lake fish are scheduled to be collected in July.

*Bureau of Habitat*

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**Monitoring for Shellfish Biotoxins** - DEC's Bureau of Marine Resources implemented its annual biotoxin monitoring program in April to protect the health of consumers of NYS shellfish products. Monitoring was conducted at 11 sites around Long Island using mesh bags of blue mussels which are recollected and tested for the presence of naturally occurring marine biotoxins that can cause paralytic shellfish poisoning. In late May and early June, temporary emergency shellfish closures, totaling ~7400 acres, were implemented in the Huntington/Northport complex of bays and harbors in northwestern Suffolk County after biotoxins were detected at the monitoring stations in those areas. Subsequent monitoring determined that the biotoxin levels had dropped to non-detectable levels and the areas were re-opened on June 19. However, during the last week of June, biotoxins were detected in mussels at the monitoring station in Mattituck Creek for the first time. Monitoring will continue in that area on Long Island's north fork. However, no closures were implemented since Mattituck Creek is an uncertified area in which shellfish harvesting is already prohibited and because DEC is not aware of shellfish harvesting in the adjacent certified areas of Long Island Sound.

*Bureau of Marine Resources*

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## Safeguard New York's Unique Natural Assets

**United States Geological Survey (USGS)/DEC Salmon River Wild Chinook Seining Survey** -Crews from the USGS Tunison Laboratory of Aquatic Science and the Region 7 DEC Fisheries Unit completed the 2009 young of the year Chinook survey. Numbers of Chinook caught were lower than expected based upon the good flows we had last fall during the spawning season. High flow conditions during the peak of the emergence created difficult sampling conditions and most likely flushed many of the young Chinook out of the river faster than normal. Overall, the 2009 production of wild Chinook is probably a little below average to average.

Another crew from Tunison was concurrently evaluating fish diets to determine which species were eating these young Chinook. Their sampling efforts produced some very interesting and unexpected catches. The fish in the picture (55 mm = 2.2 inches) is a wild young of the year landlocked Atlantic salmon which is a native species for Lake Ontario.



This is one of only eight that they have caught to date. DEC stocks around 30,000 yearling landlocked Atlantic salmon in the Salmon River annually, primarily to provide a unique summer fishery in the river when the maturing fish return from the lake. What makes these catches surprising is that landlocked Atlantic salmon are highly vulnerable to reproductive failure caused by an alewife diet. The alewives contain an enzyme called thiaminase which breaks down Thiamine (Vitamin B) in the fish that consume them. As a result, different levels of reproductive failure result in the various species that eat alewife, and landlocked Atlantic salmon appear to be the most negatively affected of the trout and salmon species. This incidental catch suggest that some natural reproduction of these fish may be taking place.

*Bureau of Fisheries*

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### **Wild Brook Trout Monitoring in Allegany**

**Experimental Vegetation Planted To Stabilize Stream Banks** - An experimental planting of dwarf sand cherry along Chautauqua Creek was evaluated. The dwarf sand cherry were planted in April, 2008, in an effort to reestablish the plant in western New York and determine its effectiveness. The plant is used in stream bank stabilization and will tolerate inundation. The plants survived through a number of flood events and an ice-choked channel during the winter, and should provide riparian cover, stability, and aesthetic improvements.



*Dwarf sand cherry*

*Bureau of Fisheries*

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**2009 Lake Ontario Spring Preyfish Surveys** - Each spring, staff from the Cape Vincent Fisheries Station (R/V Seth Green) and the USGS Lake Ontario Biological Station (R/V Kaho) conduct bottom trawling to assess the status of alewife and rainbow smelt populations, the main forage for trout and salmon in Lake Ontario. Over 190 tows are conducted annually during the surveys in April/May (alewife) and May/June (smelt). Preliminary results for 2009 indicated an increase in the biomass of adult alewife and a relatively low yearling index. Rainbow smelt adult numbers continued to decline to all time lows, but fortunately it appears that they produced a moderately good year-class in 2008, the first since 2003.

Although each of the spring surveys targets one species of fish, catches of non-target fish are also useful for documenting the resurgence of native species like the deepwater sculpin (*Myoxocephalus thompsonii*) or tracking the increasing abundance of invasive species like the round goby (*Neogobius melanostomus*). The spring survey also caught over-thirty deepwater sculpin, continuing the trend of increasing catches of this species, once thought to be extirpated from Lake Ontario. Invasive round goby numbers and biomass declined significantly in 2009 after increasing exponentially since first being detected by the survey in 2003. This rise and fall pattern is typical for invasive populations, and declines may be due to predation, disease, or resource limitation.

*Bureau of Fisheries*

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**Lake Erie Lake Trout Spawning Habitat Project** - The Lake Erie Fisheries Unit partnered with Habitat Solutions, a private consulting firm, to begin a lake trout spawning habitat survey on Brocton Shoal, a historical Lake Erie lake trout spawning area west of Dunkirk. The project is a joint venture with Ohio Department of



Natural Resources, the United States Geological Survey, Environment Canada, and the Office of the Ministry of Natural Resources, and funded through a United States Fish and Wildlife Service Great Lakes Restoration Act grant. Data collection conducted in June involved towing a sidescan sonar over Brocton Shoal in a grid pattern, covering the main areas where prime spawning habitat (cobble-sized rocks in piles) is believed to exist. GPS technology was also used to pinpoint exact locations of the best habitat. Underwater cameras, and possibly a remotely operated vehicle, will later be used to look at the prime habitat and determine their quality for spawning lake trout. Initial results of the survey found several areas that appear to be suitable for spawning lake trout. More importantly, these areas were in waters that were not previously surveyed in earlier research conducted in the late 1980s. Additional work is scheduled to be completed later this year at Brocton Shoal and at similar reef areas in Ontario waters near Port Dover to aid in lake trout rehabilitation efforts. Identification of potential spawning areas aids managers in assessing the potential for natural reproduction and provides a roadmap for future sampling to ascertain actual spawning success.

*Bureau of Fisheries*

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**Ulster County Wetland Map Amendment Completed** - June 17, 2009 marked the completion of an amendment to combine two mapped wetlands by revising their boundaries and to upgrade the classification of the resulting wetland to Class 1, the highest class. This wetland is located on the Mohonk Lake Quadrangle, Map 24, of the Ulster County NYS Article 24 Regulatory Freshwater Wetland Maps. This remapping effort affects approximately 50 landowners and results in the addition of approximately 112 acres of previously unmapped wetland to the Wetland Maps. Wetland amendments are also under way in Chenango, Erie, Monroe, Saratoga, and Seneca counties.

*Bureau of Habitat*

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**New York Natural Heritage Program Completes Important Areas Map for Aquatic Animals** - Natural Heritage GIS staff and Zoologists have completed statewide mapping of important areas for over 100 aquatic and wetland Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The mapping resulted in the development of GIS datasets that define the lands and waters that support the continued presence and quality of known populations of SCGN. The important area polygons were created in GIS (ESRI Geodatabase) using 19 models automated with geoprocessing scripts. Methodologies for these models were developed by Heritage Zoologists, based on knowledge of the animal's habitat and life history. The Important Areas GIS datasets were provided to the Adirondack Nature Conservancy for use in a State Wildlife Grant-funded project to identify the stream reaches in New York that are most important for SCGN and where removal of specific culverts and dams would contribute the most to improving habitat for these species. The results of this SWG project will be provided to NYS DOT for integration into its planning for road construction and maintenance.

*Bureau of Habitat*

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**New York Natural Heritage Program Completes State Lands Assessment for Regions 3 and 4** - Natural Heritage biologists and GIS staff completed a report that provides a complete biodiversity summary for 44 DEC properties in Regions 3 and 4. On these State Forest and Forest Preserve lands, 212 locations of rare species and significant natural communities were updated or newly



*Pitch pine-oak-heath rocky summit  
in Roosa Gap State Forest, Sullivan County.  
Photo by Elizabeth A. Spencer, NYNHP*

documented. Program Botanists updated and/or added new records for Jacob's-ladder (listed by New York State as rare) and Nodding Pogonia (state endangered), and rediscovered a historical occurrence of Spongy Arrowhead (state threatened) that was last seen in 1936. Program Zoologists observed two fledgling peregrine falcons on the Palenville Cliffs at Kaaterskill Wild Forest. This is only the second time that fledging has been confirmed since this site became occupied in 2001.

The Heritage Program also completed a set of data layers depicting areas of predicted overlapping habitat for rare plants and animals in New York. This "predicted richness overlay" (PRO) combines the results of multiple species-specific habitat suitability

models (element distribution models). The data layers will eventually be served on the GIS data selector in two formats: polygon shapefiles clipped to DEC lands, and statewide raster datasets.

*Bureau of Habitat*

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**Class I Shrub Swamp Wetland in Montauk Protected** - On June 17, 2009, Commissioner Grannis upheld the denial of a freshwater wetlands permit in Suffolk County. DEC staff denied a permit application for the construction of a single-family dwelling, driveway, and sanitary system located entirely in the adjacent area to DEC Class I wetland MP-31. The major factor in the denial was the close proximity of the sanitary system to the wetland and the potential for effluent and other contaminants entering the wetland. DEC was represented by Kari Wilkinson (Assistant Regional Attorney) with testimony provided by Rob Marsh (Regional Manager, Bureau of Habitat). The full decision is available at DEC's website at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/hearings/55787.html>.

*Bureau of Habitat*

*Rob Marsh*

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**Peregrine Falcons Being Monitored Statewide** - Peregrine falcon nest boxes and nest sites at five locations were monitored regularly by Region 9 Wildlife staff. Four peregrine falcon chicks were banded at the University at Buffalo by Regional Wildlife Manager, Mark Kandel, and Wildlife Technician, Mike Koch. All of the birds were healthy and vigorous. The event received much attention from the local press, as it was the newest nest in the region. The nest is located on Mackay tower, requiring the banders to climb a ladder to reach the top.

The Statler Towers Peregrine pair had three chicks which were banded by Biologist Adams, and Technicians Koch and Lewis. Representatives of Buffalo Ornithological Society, Buffalo Audubon, Erie County SPCA, and Buffalo Niagara Riverkeepers were present to observe and participate in the banding.

Two Region 7 Wildlife staff helped to band the peregrine nestlings in Syracuse, and to answer questions from the local media.



*Region 9 staff banding nesting peregrines*

*Bureau of Wildlife*

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**Spruce Grouse Habitat Research in Progress** - The spruce grouse is endangered and declining in New York State. Recent studies by DEC and SUNY Potsdam have indicated that the species occupies mid-successional spruce-tamarack forests and that populations may be declining due to natural succession. Other boreal bird species are declining at alarming rates as well. Region 6 staff designed a study to test different habitat management techniques on the occurrence of spruce grouse and other boreal forest obligates. Two treatments and a control were established in nine one-hectare blocks in a transiently occupied spruce grouse site at the core of the species' distribution in the Adirondacks. A control site was also established as a persistently occupied site of similar size and character. Surveys and habitat measurements were conducted in 2008. Extensive surveys and radio telemetry data are available for both sites from 2002-2008 to represent pre-management conditions to aid in comparisons with post-management conditions. To date, one spruce grouse was observed in the treatment site within 10 meters of a treatment block and five spruce grouse were observed in the control site. Three birds have been radio-tagged in the control site and efforts to locate and radio-tag individuals in the treated site will begin June 25. No spruce grouse have yet been observed in a treatment block, however it is expected that nesting spruce grouse will be found in treatment blocks within five years, due to increased understory regeneration caused by new gaps in the canopy. Lack of spruce grouse observations in the treated site does not suggest that management has limited spruce grouse use of that site, but instead may reflect the pre-management condition of low spruce grouse numbers in the site and the limited-quality habitat already present. Point counts for other boreal forest bird obligates are ongoing and have not yet been analyzed.

Results of this study will help DEC determine which management techniques may be the most successful for spruce grouse and how these management techniques will affect other boreal forest bird species. Information such as this is necessary if we are to conserve persistent populations of the spruce grouse in New York State.



*Angie Ross with spruce grouse*

*Bureau of Wildlife*

*Angelena M. Ross*

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**Blanding's Turtle Recovery Planning Underway** - Region 6 staff initiated a Blanding's turtle literature review in mid-May. This review will serve as the basis for the draft of a recovery plan for this state-listed threatened species as part of a State Wildlife

Grant project. The background information is currently being incorporated into the plan and a meeting will be scheduled in late August or September to assemble a recovery team and draft the recovery actions necessary to maintain viable populations of the species in New York.

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**Landowner Incentive Program Grassland Protection and Management Open Application Period Begins** - The second open application period is now under way to help protect grassland birds in focus areas across the state. Private landowners owning 10 or more acres of contiguous grasslands are eligible to apply for technical and financial assistance. Selected landowners will help protect grassland nesting birds by leaving grasslands undisturbed during the summer nesting season and mowing a portion of the fields each fall to prevent succession into shrubs and trees. Landowners will be reimbursed at a rate of \$55 per acre each year for habitat management. Contacts will carry a term of five years. Twenty-two applications have been received so far. Further information and an application form can be found at:

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/33005.html>



*Grassland habitat is critical to many species of wildlife*

*Bureau of Wildlife*    *Marcelo del Puerto, Sandra Van Vranken*    *(518) 402-8910*

**Winter Flounder Fishery Curtailed** - A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries rule closed the commercial and recreational fisheries for winter flounder in federal waters off southern New England and the coasts of New York and New Jersey. This was done because a 2008 stock assessment showed the stocks in this area to be at historic low levels, too low to sustain a fishery. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission responded with a change to the interstate fishery management plan for winter flounder in state waters with a planned 50% reduction in fishing mortality, calling for states to severely curtail their commercial and recreational fisheries for winter flounder. New York must adopt regulations before January 2010 that reduce the recreational and commercial fishery for winter flounder to facilitate rebuilding of this fishery.

*Bureau of Marine Resources*

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**Horseshoe Crab Closed Areas** - On May 4, 2009, DEC closed the entire Fire Island National Seashore to commercial horseshoe crab harvesting. This closure was made at the request of the National Park Service pursuant to its authority to prohibit the taking of any wildlife from National Park lands. The closure extends 4000 feet into Great South Bay, 1000 feet into the Atlantic Ocean, and west from Robert Moses State Park to

midline of Moriches Inlet. There was concern there would be shifts in effort to other areas in response to the closure, but preliminary harvest data indicate little change in the proportion of spring landings in Great South Bay in 2009 (5%) compared to 2008 (3%). DEC also closed Cedar Beach Park, Mount Sinai to commercial horseshoe crab harvesting on June 17, 2009. This closure was made at the request of the Town of Brookhaven.

*Bureau of Marine Resources*

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## [Work for Environmental Justice](#)

**Wind Power Review** - Region 6 Wildlife and Fisheries staff continued their review of the many proposed windmill projects in the region. There are at least six projects that are in the active review process, i.e., scoping documents, DEIS, or supplemental DEIS that are being reviewed. Some of the concerns regarding these projects are the possible impacts to threatened and endangered species such as the Indiana bat, Blandings turtle, Henslow's sparrow and short-eared owl. Jefferson and Saint Lawrence Counties are within one of the grassland focus areas of the State that have been identified as important areas that support endangered and threatened grassland birds. Due to the species located within these projects areas and the location (coastal), regional staff have recommended expanded studies according to the "guidelines for conducting bird & bat studies at windmill projects" as recommended by DEC.

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## *Organizational Priorities:*

### [Partnerships and the Public](#)

**Trout Unlimited (TU) Volunteers Trained** - Rich Preall trained ten volunteers from the Lake Champlain TU Chapter on how to conduct surveys in support of the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture. This survey effort began in 2008 with TU members from two Albany area chapters who conducted 46 surveys on streams in Washington County. The TU teams collect biological, chemical and physical data from small streams that have never been surveyed by DEC, but may contain brook trout. Angling and visual observations are used to assess brook trout presence, along with interviewing landowners. The Lake Champlain Chapter will survey waters near Plattsburgh, New York, and along the Canadian border towards Fort Covington, New York. Almost 90 waters should be surveyed by the combined TU teams in 2009. The training stream for this exercise, Riely Brook near Point AuRoche, was reported by landowners to support brook trout until recent agricultural changes cleared all the riparian zone brush.

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