

Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources

Monthly Highlights

September, 2008

Issue Priorities:

Connect New Yorkers to Nature

12th Annual Montezuma Muckrace Supports Conservation - Birders participated in the 12th annual Montezuma Muckrace held at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex (MWC) in Cayuga, Wayne, and Seneca Counties. The Muckrace is organized by the Friends of the MWC and its partners NYSDEC, USFWS, and Audubon NY.

The 24-hour bird-a-thon raises money for bird conservation in the MWC. This year's fund-raising goal was \$11,000, and the Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex pledged to match dollar-for-dollar money raised by the three top fund-raising teams. These funds will be used to support a shorebird habitat restoration project and expand the opportunity for wetland education at the Montezuma Audubon Center in DEC's Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area.

The 20 teams tallied 186 species within the MWC during the 24-hour event, only two fewer than the record 188 species tallied in 2006. Overall, 19 species of waterfowl, 10 species of raptors, 23 species of shorebirds, 8 species of flycatchers, 7 species of thrushes, and 26 species of warblers were found. Some of the more memorable birds were: red knot, hooded warbler, American golden-plover, red-necked phalarope, pectoral sandpiper, and greater white-fronted goose.

The winner, with 130 species, was a team of Cornell University students sponsored by the Cayuga Bird Club. A youth team, also sponsored by the Cayuga Bird Club, identified 83 species. The Low-Carbon category, a special award included to make participants more aware of their carbon footprint, was won by a one-person team sponsored by the Cayuga Bird Club who tallied 103 species in 9 hours and 52 miles of biking. A team from Audubon NY finished second in the Low-Carbon category.



NYSDEC teams compete in 12th annual Montezuma Muckrace.

Four teams of DEC staff were entered in the competition. The DEC team with the highest total, and the winners of the 'DEC Muckrace Cup,' with a total of 118 species, was a team led by Seasonal Wildlife Technician Frank Morlock and SUNY Cobleskill interns Aaron Swartwood, Brad Lunkenheimer, and Justin Rejman. Other DEC participants were: Dave Odell, Mike Wasilco, Paul Novak, Mike Putnam, Jim Eckler, Bonnie Parton, Amy Mahar, Kathy Kirsch, Jenny Landry, Paul Lindenfelser, and Kim Merchant.

The event was sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited, NY State Ornithological Association, Nucor Steel, Terry Precision Cycling, and the Plantsmen Nursery. Prizes were donated by Avinet, Audubon NY, Bass Pro, Cayuga Lake Creamery, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Eagle Optics, Friends of MWC, Gimme Coffee, Montezuma Winery, Nice 'n' Easy, and Nikon. A team of a dozen volunteers also helped make the event a success.

Bureau of Wildlife

Mike Wasilco

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Open Space Stewardship Program - On September 19 and 20, Aquatic Biologist Heidi O'Riordan assisted in educating high school students with a quick seining and fish identification presentation in Sunken Meadow Creek. The Open Space Stewardship Program is a partnership of schools, communities and local government to encourage students to become stewards of public land. Partners in this program include the NYSDEC, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, NY Sea Grant and New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission. The 50 students from Hauppauge High School's A.P. Environmental Science are working to develop a long-term habitat monitoring program along Sunken Meadow Creek. Data collected by the students will be used as part of a proposed project that will increase tidal flow to the creek and restore anadromous fish runs. The creek currently has a limited exchange of seawater due to the two small pipes that serve as the only connection to Long Island Sound. Fish were collected with a seine and identified by species. The species collected included, pumpkinseed sunfish, four-spine stickle back, banded killifish, sheepshead minnow, northern pipefish, American eel, and a single alewife. An additional field trip to continue monitoring is scheduled for October 23 and 24.

Bureau of Fisheries

Heidi O'Riordan

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Felts Mills Creek Fisherman Parking Area - September 18, 2008 marked the completion of the first access project in Region 6 under the Habitat/Access Stamp Program. A 100 ft. by 100 ft. Fishermen's Parking Area and a 10 ft. wide by 1,478 foot-long raised and stoned Fishermen's Footpath were constructed to allow fishermen access to a Public Fishing Rights section of Felts Mills Creek in the Town of Champion, Jefferson County.

The Public Fishing Rights to this section of the Felts Mills Creek system were purchased in 1995 and the easement for access was acquired in 2003. Members of the Region 6 FWMB were instrumental in the Habitat/Access Stamp Application process, and we would not have received the grant without them. The Region 6 NYSDEC Operations Staff out of the Brownville Field Office performed the development and construction of this site. The opening of this parking area

allows access to the public on three equivalent miles of public fishing rights in the Felts Mills Creek system that were previously landlocked.

Bureau of Fisheries

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Promote a Toxic Free Future

Paddlefish and Sturgeons Tested for Chemical Contaminants at Hale Creek Field Station -

Among the approximately 700 fish samples analyzed so far this year at the Hale Creek Field Station, a few stand out as being more unusual than the rest. One of the more interesting was a liver sample from a paddlefish. Paddlefish, a species considered extirpated in New York, are being restored to the Allegheny River by the Bureau of Fisheries. The paddlefish was found dead in the Allegheny Reservoir and was sent to the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University for a pathology exam. To aid in their toxicological evaluation, Cornell requested that DFWMR's Analytical Services Unit analyze the liver tissue for mercury, PCBs and persistent organochlorine pesticides. The analysis confirmed that the liver contained detectable levels of mercury, PCBs and DDT.

Other equally interesting samples analyzed at Hale Creek were from four sturgeon, including lake and Atlantic sturgeon, species that are considered endangered or threatened in New York. The samples included a liver from a lake sturgeon from the Niagara River (also submitted by the College of Veterinary Medicine); tissues from an 85 lb Atlantic sturgeon from Rogers Point on the Hudson River; and tissues from two Atlantic sturgeon (weighing 7 lbs and 12 lbs) from Rockaway, New York (submitted by Environmental Monitoring Section Head Larry Skinner). The tissues of all of these fish contained detectable levels of mercury, PCBs, DDT and chlordane; hexachlorobenzene and mirex were also found in some of the fish. The maximum contaminant levels found in these analyses were PCB concentrations of 5.4 and 7.4 ppm in the testes of the Rockaway sturgeons. These analyses show that chemical contaminants are widespread in the waters of New York State and are accumulating in some of our rarest and endangered species of fish.

Bureau of Habitat

Tony Gudlewski

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Safeguard New York's Unique Natural Assets

Wetlands Receive Protection - Map amendments affecting 18 wetlands were officially initiated on September 24, 2008. This has resulted in over 700 acres of wetland being added to the wetland maps and therefore coming under the protection of New York's Freshwater Wetlands Act. The wetlands added to the map are located in the Monroe County towns of Chili, Brighton, Rush and Henrietta, and the City of Rochester. The amendments include one wetland created as mitigation to fulfill the requirements of a permit issued from the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). The background work and preparation of documentation is a result of the efforts of regional biologists Scott Jones and Steve Miller.

Bureau of Habitat

Steve Miller, Scott Jones and Judy Marth Stevens (585) 226-5442

PCB Track-down Efforts in the Grasse River, Massena - Based on elevated PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) levels in 2003 young-of-year fish from a supposed "clean zone" upstream of the Alcoa aluminum plant on the Grasse River in Massena, passive in-situ chemical extraction samplers (PISCES) were deployed at five sites in the Grasse River this past July in an attempt to locate a source. Analytical results showed PCB, particularly Aroclor 1242, at all five sites indicating that the unknown source was further upstream. A September sampling trip was recently completed to the Massena area to once again collect young-of-year fish. This trip included three additional upstream sites in hopes that the fish contaminant data will complement the PISCES data and eventually help to find the upstream source. These results show the importance of using multiple lines of evidence when tracking a contaminant source. Future sampling plans include more PISCES work during summer 2009.

Bureau of Habitat

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New York Natural Heritage Program completes State Lands Assessment for Regions 5 and 6.

Staff completed a report that provides a complete biodiversity summary for 118 DEC properties in Regions 5 and 6, marking the end of two years of work for Natural Heritage Program staff. On these State Forest and Forest Preserve lands, 445 locations of rare species and significant natural communities were updated or newly documented. Program Ecologists updated records for all summit and alpine communities in the High Peaks, including alpine krummholz, alpine meadow, alpine sliding fen, and spruce-fir rocky summit. Ecologists also updated sandstone pavement barrens records, a globally rare community with three exemplary sites on State Lands in New York. Program Botanists updated and/or added new records for 55 locations of state-listed endangered alpine plants. Additionally, botanists discovered six new occurrences



of cork elm, a state-threatened tree species that is susceptible to Dutch Elm Disease; this significantly increased the number of known locations for the species in New York state. Program Zoologists added 22 new and four updated Bicknell's Thrush records on 13 properties, more than doubling the known locations in New York for this montane bird. Program Zoologists also updated six records and added three new locations for timber rattlesnakes in Region 5. These findings highlight the importance of state land surveys in identifying and protecting rare and

endangered species.

(Photo by Tim Howard, Alpine meadow on Algonquin Peak.)

Bureau of Habitat

Aissa Feldmann

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Northern Montezuma DEC Staff Duck Banding in 2008 -



Duck Banding -

Northern Montezuma field office DEC staff, in conjunction with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff from the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, have been banding ducks throughout September. To date, nearly 1,200 mallards have been banded, mostly at the refuge, along with 115 wood ducks, mostly at sites within the Northern Montezuma WMA. Rounding out the banding effort so far were also 26 black ducks, 10 pintails,

and seven green-winged teals.

Duck banding is an essential tool in monitoring population levels and age structure, and ultimately controlling bag limits and harvest rates. With only a week left to band in 2008, hopes are for a strong finish to what has already been a very successful banding season.

Bureau of Wildlife

Mike Wasilco

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Herp Atlas SWG Project - Region 6 staff assisted an ongoing State Wildlife Grant Project in herpetofauna surveys for 11 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) throughout Region 6. The primary goals of the project are to (1) validate the Herpetofauna Atlas Project (Atlas) records for 11 target SGCN, and (2) expand our knowledge of these species' distributions in northern NY beyond what is indicated in the Atlas. For the most part, the preliminary data from this project show that the distributions of Blandings, spotted and musk turtles are accurately represented in the Atlas, however the common map turtle, eastern ribbon snake and the eastern rat snake have been found in areas not formerly known to support these species. The focus of surveys in 2009 will be on the Jefferson/blue-spotted salamander complex and the boreal chorus frog. Snake and salamander sampling cover boards were placed in approximately 20 areas on state lands and will allow for greater sampling efficiency in 2009.

Bureau of Wildlife

Angelena Ross

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Canadarago Lake Netting: The 2008 biannual netting of the 1,900 acre Canadarago Lake was completed in September. This sampling effort involves setting two 150 ft long monofilament gill nets overnight each month from June through September. The objective of this study is to monitor the abundance of walleye and yellow perch. Although the catch of 12.8 walleye/net indicates an abundant population, it represents a 41% decline from the record 21.6 fish/net recorded in 2003. The decline may be related to the growing alewife population in the lake. Since first discovered in the lake in 1999, the alewife catch has increased 5633% to the 16.9 alewife/net recorded this year and increased 282% since 2006. Additional data analysis will be required to determine if the growing alewife population is responsible for the decline in walleye abundance since 2003. If the alewife population continues to expand, it is expected that a walleye stocking program will need to be initiated to maintain the high quality walleye fishery in this lake. The catch of 99.3 yellow perch/net is the third highest catch on record for the 14 nettings conducted since 1983. The abundant population suggests that the 2008/09 winter ice fishery for this species should be excellent.

Bureau of Fisheries

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Susquehanna River Fisheries Survey: Region 7 Fisheries personnel sampled the Susquehanna River at two locations to determine relative abundance of smallmouth bass compared to previous years. Sampling was conducted after frequent reports of poor fishing and information from PA Fish and Boat Commission which indicated significant declines in smallmouth bass numbers had occurred in parts of the river in PA. Sampling was conducted at sites sampled in the 1990's under similar sampling conditions. In all cases flow, temperature, and calendar date of the sampling events were similar. Sampling conducted this year in the City of Binghamton turned up more bass than were collected in 2006 and 2007. The number of adult bass collected fell between the high levels seen in 1993 and the modest levels observed in 2006. No adult bass were collected at this site in 2007. The level of turbidity has varied between sampling events at the Binghamton site, and the low catch of bass in 2007 may have been caused by extremely clear water conditions. Sampling conducted around the Nanticoke Creek mouth in Endicott provided catches of adult and juvenile smallmouth bass which were similar to what was collected during a 1993 sampling event. These findings indicate that river smallmouth bass populations have likely not declined dramatically as have been documented in parts of Pennsylvania. Intermittent reports by NY anglers of poor bass fishing in the river are likely a result of seasonal fishing variation rather than an indication of low bass numbers. Some area anglers who had reported extended periods of poor bass fishing over the past few summers have also indicated that fishing for all sizes of bass had been good, at times, during the fall of 2006 and 2007.

In addition to smallmouth bass, staff were also able to capture three young-of-year pure strain muskellunge in Endicott as well as one at a site on the Chenango River in Binghamton. The Susquehanna River tiger muskellunge stocking policy was discontinued in 2008 after 25+ years of annual stocking based on the preponderance of pure strain muskellunge and the scarcity of hybrids in the catch of local anglers. Capture of these wild juvenile muskellunge is the final proof that they are successfully reproducing in the area rivers. This has long been assumed and

was the primary justification for eliminating the tiger musky stocking policy. However, until this survey, no juveniles had ever been caught or observed during previous sampling events.

Bureau of Fisheries

David Lemon

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Work for Environmental Justice

Nothing to report

Combat Climate Change

Incorporating Climate Change Considerations into Fish and Wildlife Conservation- State fish and wildlife agencies have a long history of managing natural resources for the “public trust,” and must continue to do so in the face of climate change. Climate trends, such as warming temperatures, sea level rise, and increased frequency of extreme precipitation events, exacerbate other long standing impacts to fish and wildlife resources (e.g. habitat fragmentation, pollution, invasive species, etc.). DFWMR Conservation Coordinator Tracey Tomajer and Division Director Patricia Riexinger participated on the climate change sub-committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in the development of a climate change summary of key issues, messages, and recommended actions that states will need to take as they incorporate climate change into resource management programs. The recommended approach provides agency leaders a framework that can be tailored to individual circumstances, help focus landscape-level conservation opportunities, and form innovative partnerships in the challenge of uncertain future conditions.

Bureau of Habitat

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Foster Green and Healthy Communities

Nothing to report

Organizational Priorities:

Fair and Effective Enforcement

Nothing to report

Partnerships and the Public

Nothing to report

Workforce, Science and Technology

Chemical Immobilization Refresher and Firearm Training Completed in Region 6 - Members of Region 6 Bureau of Wildlife (13), Bureau of Fisheries (2) and the Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) (5) teamed up recently for a chemical immobilization refresher, followed by a firearms training session for Wildlife staff. The goal of the morning session was to serve as a chemical immobilization refresher for previously trained Wildlife and DLE Chemical Immobilization Team staff, and to introduce others to immobilization techniques in the event

they are called on to assist at an incident. Record-keeping, drug dosages, handling and loading darts, and using the projectors were covered.

In the afternoon session, DLE's Senior Firearm Instructor Lt. Henry provided firearm training to regional Wildlife staff. The training followed the guidelines described in DFWMR SOP 24 for "basic" firearm training. Firearm design, ballistics, safety, and proper use/selection were covered in the classroom portion, followed by a range session with live firing. Participants used rimfire and center-fire rifles as well as shotguns to ensure familiarity with all of the various firearms used in the course of wildlife collection in the field.

Bureau of Wildlife

Jim Farquhar

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Sustainability of DEC's Own Operations

Nothing to report