

Wildlines

New Hampshire Fish and Game's quarterly newsletter of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program



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A Turtle's Place

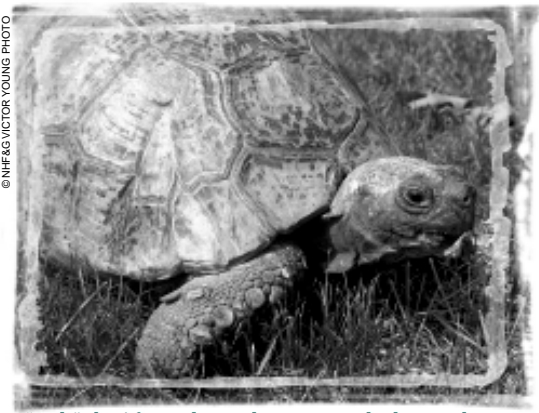
A peculiar call came into Fish and Game about a year ago. A man in New Ipswich had found a very large turtle wandering along the side of a road. He didn't know what kind of turtle it was, but he did know it weighed 33 pounds.

His call resulted in Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program biologist Kim Tuttle adopting what she later learned was an African leopard tortoise. The tortoise, a species native to Africa, was headed for certain death when it was found, either eventually from winter weather or more immediately

by being hit by a car.

Though the tortoise may have escaped from a pen, it's likely that its former owner intentionally released it into the wild. Unfortunately, setting turtles and tortoises "free" is all too common for owners who have tired of their pets. From a humane and ecological standpoint, this is tragic, because most pet turtles aren't capable of surviving in the wild in New Hampshire.

It's even worse, however, to release species that can survive in the wild.
TURTLES continued on page 2



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"Indi" the African leopard tortoise is a little over thirty years old and weighs in at 35 pounds. She loves to graze on dandelion greens.

Explore the Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes

An Important Bird Area



The next time you're looking for a place to enjoy nature, especially birds, try the Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes Important Bird Area (IBA).

This area is more than 4,500 acres of a very special coastal habitat heavily used by a host of bird species, from the federally threatened and state endangered piping plover to the state endangered common tern, to shorebirds like sandpipers and short-billed dowitchers, to nine different species of herons. In all, more than 40 bird species use this area at various times of the year, and you're sure to see many of them if you visit the access areas listed below.

The Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes was recognized as an Important Bird Area last year as part of a national and international effort to identify critical bird habitats. The goal? To build public awareness of how crucial these areas are for wildlife and to foster protection efforts. In New Hampshire, the IBA program is a partnership between New Hampshire Audubon; New

Hampshire Fish and Game; and the University of New Hampshire, Cooperative Extension.

The Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes is one of 14 IBAs recognized so far. It was chosen for several reasons:

The dunes at Hampton Beach State Park and Seabrook town beach are the only known breeding sites for federally threatened and state endangered piping plovers in New Hampshire. The Hampton marshes provide breeding habitat for state endangered common terns, as well as feeding and roosting sites for common terns and the federally endangered roseate terns. Osprey, northern harriers, Arctic terns and least terns are other protected species that are known to use this area.

Many birds identified by biologists as "species of concern" use the area as well. In the salt marshes, you might find willets, saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows, Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows, seaside sparrows and

EXPLORE continued on page 3


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Eastern painted turtle

TURTLES continued from page 1

because they may adversely affect native turtle species.

“Releasing these turtles can have an effect on the larger ecosystem. If they were ever to become established as a population, they could compete with native turtles,” said Mike Marchand, a biologist with the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. “Another problem with introducing a captive turtle into the wild is that you could potentially introduce diseases to the wild population.”

One species capable of surviving the winter is the red-eared slider, a common turtle sold in pet stores that is native to the Mississippi River. Because of widespread releases of these turtles, they are now found all over the world, including a few isolated individuals in New Hampshire, Marchand said.

Impulse Buying

There are many reasons pet owners decide to release a turtle into the wild.

“People buy turtles, especially tortoises, but they don’t realize that they’re extremely long-lived and can grow to be quite large,” Marchand said. Some turtles can live to be over 100 years old and grow to be over 100 pounds. Sulcata tortoises have even been recorded weighing in excess of 200 pounds.

Chris Andrews, co-manager of New England Reptile Distributors in Plaistow, said people often buy turtles or tortoises on impulse, without thinking about the long

term. The three most common species bought, the red-eared slider, yellowbelly and map turtle, sell for only \$25 each, so they’re very affordable.

“They’re also really cute when they’re young and small. No one wants an adult turtle. Everyone wants to raise a baby turtle,” said Andrews. “Young turtles are more colorful, but as they mature, the turtles get darker and people don’t think they’re so beautiful anymore and sometimes want to get rid of them.”

Caring for an adult turtle can also be more demanding than people expect. Depending on the species, raising a turtle or tortoise takes special equipment like heat lamps for basking, large tubs of water for some species, adequate space, veterinary care and the right foods. Kim Tuttle’s adopted tortoise, for example, lives in an outside pen during the summer and an inside pen during the winter. To give it the basking it requires, she has amassed a collection of radiant heat panels, a heated mat and UVA/UVB lights required by many reptiles.

Keep Wild Turtles Wild

While releasing pet turtles into the wild can have many negative impacts on wild turtle populations, capturing wild turtles to keep as pets can be even more detrimental. Taking even one turtle out of the wild can adversely affect the population. One reason is turtle longevity — some species don’t even start to reproduce until they’re 20 years old.

“Turtles depend on very high adult survival rates. The loss of just one, or a few, individual turtles per year can result in population crashes over several decades, which is not that long when you’re talking about turtles,” said Marchand. “Taking young turtles out of the wild is also harmful to the population, because it eliminates the potential reproductive contribution of that

Because the male Blanding’s turtle does not mature until twelve years of age, the loss of one or two individuals in a given area could trigger a local population crash.

Dealing With Unwanted Turtles

The only humane way to deal with a pet turtle or tortoise that is no longer wanted is to find someone willing to adopt it. Some places to try: animal rescues, wildlife rehabilitators (listed at www.wildlife.state.nh.us), wildlife education centers and, of course, friends and relatives. If a local adoption isn’t possible, try Turtle Homes Rescue, Inc., a Rhode Island rescue dedicated to finding homes for unwanted turtles, at www.turtlehomes.org.

individual to the population.”

People often don’t know how to properly care for a turtle plucked from the wild, and the turtle often ends up becoming sick, or worse, dying. As a wildlife rehabilitator who has taken in many sick and injured wild turtles, Chris Bogard often sees the results of improper care. Painted turtles, a common species found in New Hampshire, require opportunities to bask in the sun. If they aren’t allowed to bask, their scutes, or top shell layers, don’t shed properly and the shells can begin to rot.

Wild turtles can also develop respiratory infections. “By the time they get to me, they’re in varying degrees of respiratory distress,” Bogard said. “Usually by the time a caretaker notices there’s a problem, it’s very advanced.”

Bogard said she’s able to nurse some wild turtles back to health, but sadly, others don’t make it. While observing turtles in the wild is fun and exciting — always leave them where you found them. 🐢



A Winning Partnership

The Shoals Marine Lab Helps
Tern Restoration Project



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Common tern

Ever since the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program and New Hampshire Audubon began restoring common terns to the Isles of Shoals, the Shoals Marine Lab has worked as a critical partner.


The lab is a marine field station run by Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire on Appledore Island. It provides boat transportation for tern project team members and equipment back and forth from the restoration sites on Seavey and White islands to the mainland, as well as between Appledore Island and the other islands. This and other logistical support has greatly strengthened the project.

“We were thrilled about the project and wanted to support it, and this was an easy way to do that,” said Christine

Bogdanowicz, program manager at the lab.

In return, the Nongame Program and Audubon have provided academic enrichment to the lab’s programs by welcoming groups and students on the island and providing naturalists to give presentations. Personnel from the lab have also volunteered as tern monitors.

“There’s been a lot of sharing of personnel going on,” Bogdanowicz said. “That’s worked out really well.”

In New Hampshire, great conservation requires great partnerships, and the Shoals Marine Lab has proved a valuable partner in a successful effort to restore the state endangered common tern. For more information about Shoals Marine Lab visit www.sml.cornell.edu. 


EXPLORE *continued from page 1*

American black ducks. In the remnant dune system, you might find horned larks as well as piping plovers.


Perhaps the most obvious role the Hampton-Seabrook IBA plays, and the most exciting to bird watchers, is that of a resting and feeding destination for many shorebirds during their spring and fall migrations. It is the primary shorebird stopover area in the state, said Pam Hunt, who coordinates the IBA program in New Hampshire as a senior wildlife biologist with the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.


“They are breeding in the Arctic and wintering in the Caribbean or southward, and they usually stop two to three times to refuel. So they’ll land here and spend a week or two feeding before they take off on the next leg of their journey,” Hunt said.


Only about 9 percent of the Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes IBA is public land. The rest is currently either already developed or susceptible to development. Many of the salt marshes have already been ditched, dredged and drained over the years, and much of the sand dune habitat has also been destroyed or degraded.


By recognizing the area as an IBA, conservation partners hope to help conserve what remains of this special habitat. 

Here are a few access points for viewing birds at the Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes IBA. Grab your binoculars and enjoy!

 **The parking lot by Yankee Fishermen’s Co-op in Seabrook.** The site is off Route 1A, south of the bridge. Go at low tide, when crustaceans, worms and other invertebrates are exposed. You can look out over the mud flats or walk out onto them (just remember to watch for the tide coming back in!)

 **Route 286 in Seabrook.** From the road, you can see salt pannes on the north side of the highway. This is a good place to see least terns.


 **Hampton Beach State Park.** In the off-season, between October and May, the beach and dunes offer opportunities to see wintering birds.


 **Depot Road, off Route 1, in Hampton Falls.** This site offers a boat launch, so it’s a great spot to put in a kayak or canoe and explore the tidal channels.



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Green heron

 **Landing Road in Hampton, south off Route 101.** Landing Road is a dead-end road with a small salt panne at the end. You can park along the side of the road. Go at high tide to see egrets and shorebirds.

 **Route 101 just west of the Hampton Beach strip.** Look for a big water tower and church. In-between is a parking area that looks north into the marsh.

Wild Profiles

Status: Endangered in New Hampshire.

Description: New Hampshire's adult timber rattlesnakes are uniformly black on top and yellowish below. Immature snakes are lighter with crossbands. Tails are blunt with a rattle or an obvious button.

Habitat: Rocky areas and ledges.

Range: Historically, found throughout the bottom half of the state up through some areas of the White Mountains. Today, only one known den site exists with fewer than 30 individuals.

Diet: Mainly small, warm-blooded mammals, such as chipmunks, mice and birds.

Annual cycle: Active only for a few months, from early May to the end of September. In winter, they hibernate together in the den site.

Reproduction: Typically give birth to 7-10 live young in the fall. Females may not start reproducing until they are about 8 years old and don't reproduce every year.

Threats: Human persecution and habitat loss because of development are the greatest threats.

Life Span: Up to 30 years, but usually less.

Danger to humans: Minimal. Generally only dangerous if stepped on or harassed into striking.



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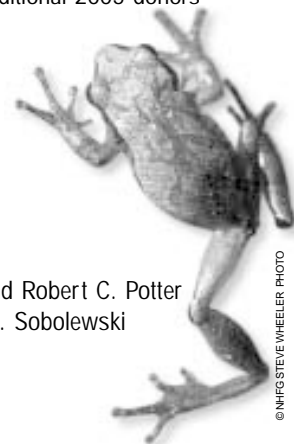
Timber Rattlesnake
(*Crotalus horridus*)

Thanks For Your Support!

Thank you to all who supported the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program by giving to the 2005 Annual Fund Campaign. Your renewed commitment - and help from new supporters - will allow us to meet and even exceed the goal of \$50,000 we need to receive State matching dollars.

If you meant to contribute, but didn't make the June deadline, it's not too late! By contributing now, you can help us get off to a great start for 2006. Again, thanks to each and every one of you for your continued support for New Hampshire's diversity of wildlife and habitats. Additional 2005 donors include:

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SUMMER Wildlife Almanac

JULY

- Female eastern hognose snakes lay up to 60 eggs (typically around 20), which will hatch in August or September.

AUGUST

- Spotted turtle eggs hatch this month and next. The inch-long young may stay in the nest for the winter.

SEPTEMBER

- In rural areas, keep an eye out for gray tree frogs hiding near houses, where they can find moisture.

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