**BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT**

**MONTHLY REPORT**
**February 2022**

**Carole Stanko, Chief**

**NEW JERSEY WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT**
**GRANT NO. W-68-R**

**STUDY PLAN I. WHITE-TAILED DEER**

Jodi Powers, Senior Wildlife Biologist
Megan Mills, Biologist Trainee (Northern Region)
Megan McCafferty, Biologist Trainee (Southern Region)

## Annual Deer Harvest (Job I-A)

Project staff continues to return inquiries from hunters who experienced errors or needed assistance with their deer harvest reporting during multiple deer hunting seasons, which concluded February 19th. The majority of the reporting issues were from hunters using the wrong harvest tags, not having the appropriate purchased tags, or having multiple profiles.

Project staff continued to correct user deer reporting errors within AHRS.

Upon season closure, J. Powers downloaded the complete 2021-22 deer harvest data, and staff began to make edits and corrections in preparation for year-end analyses.

J. Powers met with B. Stoff to discuss deer harvest report writing in the Insights system.

## Game Code

M. McCafferty and M. Mills compiled and reviewed current and historic deer harvest data and forwarded to J. Powers for analysis in preparation for a meeting to discuss proposals for changes to the 2023 Game Code.

J. Powers and M. McCafferty met with J. Leskie to discuss a few southern region deer management zones and possible changes to regulations.

## Special Areas

Project staff contacted Special Areas regarding the upcoming Hunting and Trapping Digest and consultation for proposed Game Code amendments.

## Other Activities

M. McCafferty and M. Mills began attending a Conservation and Hunting in America course offered online by Purdue University.

Project staff continues to collect ages to be added to the deer harvest database.

Project staff continues to work on the detailed process of looking up links from the current website in preparation for streamlining links for the new website.

Project staff attended a virtual Division meeting on February 16, 2022.

J. Powers met with C. Stanko, AD Kopkash, AD Barno and B. Stoff to discuss adding Farmer Depredation Permits and mortality reporting to the Automated Harvest Report Sysytem.

J. Powers attended a meeting to discuss the current ELS and changes for a new RFP.

## STUDY PLAN III. UPLAND WILDLIFE AND FURBEARERS

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist
Andrew W Burnett, Principal Biologist
James Sloan, Senior Biologist
Joseph R. Garris, Wildlife Technician I
Alexandrea Nickel, Seasonal Technician

**<u>Objective 1</u> – Conduct annual or periodic monitoring programs of the upland game and furbearer resource, their users, and the habitats on which they depend.**

*Hunter and Trapper Harvests*
**Hunter and Trapper Harvest, Recreational and Economic Surveys (Job III-B)**

A total of 182 coyotes and 6 gray foxes harvest mortalities were recorded via the Aspira (AHRS) reporting system and coyote reports reported directly to field offices for the segment. A chart showing method of harvest/mortality for the segment, including vehicle mortalities is below.

Archers could harvest coyotes and gray foxes beginning October 2. Shotgun hunters could legally harvest coyotes or gray foxes incidentally to small game hunting on November 6.

Trappers using a cable restraint or a cage trap could harvest coyotes beginning on November 15. Deer hunters could harvest coyotes during the muzzleloading rifle and shotgun deer season incidentally to deer hunting. For the 2021-22 coyote seasons there have been a total of 373 coyotes harvests reported (as of 2/15/22) and a total of 36 gray foxes.

The Special Permit Coyote season began on January 1, 2022. For the segment, 10 of the coyotes and 5 gray fox in the chart (below) were taken by shotgun at night during that permit season. Three coyotes and 1 gray fox were taken during daylight hours by modern rifle during that special permit season. The remainder of the gray foxes listed in the chart below were taken incidental to deer hunting or by cable restraint.

| Method | Coyote | Gray Fox |
|---|---|---|
| Archery | 6 | 4 |
| Trapping | 128 | 8 |
| Muzzleloading Rifle | 3 | 0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Modern Rifle | 16 | 3 |
| Shotgun | 28 | 5 |
| **Totals** | **181** | **20** |

The 2021-22 Trapper Harvest Survey envelopes were printed (mailing and return address envelopes). Stamps were affixed to the return address envelopes and the return address envelopes were placed in the mailing envelopes in preparation for the 2021-22 Trapper Harvest Survey form itself to be included.

*Beaver and River Otter*
**Beaver and River Otter Distribution and Population Trends (Job III-C)**

Beaver bridge surveys by zone are underway during the segment. Data entry of nearly all of the data forms state-wide was completed.

Beaver and river otter trapping season ended on February 9, 2022. The query structure that was set up within Insights so that the 2021-22 beaver and otter harvest data could be monitored daily shows that a total of 188 beavers and 23 river otters statewide were recorded as harvested via Aspira. The reporting via AHRS is not mandatory.

Two river otters were caught incidentally during the 2021-22 beaver and river otter season. Both otters were surrendered to the Division.

*Wild Turkey*
J. Sloan met with Pat Woerner and Molly VanWieren, Office of Fish and Wildlife Information Systems, to discuss this year's Turkey Brood Survey on February 3rd. The online brood reporting system is in its final stages and is currently being tested before its May 15th release.

**<u>Objective 2</u> – To participate in business, meetings, and monitoring programs of the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC), Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC), Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee (NEUGBTC), and Short-leaf Pine Initiative (SPI).**

*National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC)*
J. Sloan met with John Morgan, Director of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, on February 9th to discuss his upcoming visit to New Jersey. Discussions included his business plan presentation and logistics.

**<u>Objective 4</u> – To provide technical guidance to landowners interested in providing wildlife habitat on their lands.**

J. Sloan met with Tyler Kinney and Dan Baker of the Bureau of Land Management on February 1st to discuss spring 2022 habitat management work to be completed on Dix Wildlife Management Area.

**<u>Objective 5</u> – To disseminate accurate and appropriate information on upland game and furbearer programs to sportsmen, public, state, and local agencies, and other organizations.**

J. Sloan met with Christina Jones, NJ NWTF, to discuss details regarding Landis Sewerage Authority and information on current/past habitat management.

J. Sloan attended the Fish and Game Council's Game Committee meeting on February 22nd to discuss proposed amendments to the 2024 Game Code.

**Other Activities**

J. Sloan worked with Jessica McGuire and Kent Adams, Quail Forever, and Elizabeth McShane, NRCS, to review applications for the job announcement for a Farm Bill Biologist in Columbus, NJ with Pheasants and Quail Forever. This Farm Bill Biologist will coordinate and implement wildlife-related conservation programs and provide technical assistant to landowners in NJ. This announcement closed January 21, 2022, and interviews are being scheduled for the next reporting period.

A substantial amount of time was spent reviewing the current Federal Aid narrative and discussing research details with Pennsylvania Game Commission employees.

J. Garris assisted the waterfowl project in the capture of Atlantic Brant in Belmar.

## WATERFOWL - STUDY PLAN IV

Ted Nichols, Supervising Biologist
Lisa Clark, Assistant Biologist
Austin Damminger, Biologist Trainee

**Objective 2 – Atlantic Flyway Council and Joint Ventures**

Program biologists participated in the 2022 Winter Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section (AFCTS) meeting which was held in a hybrid fashion in Newport, Rhode Island.

T. Nichols participated in a virtual meeting of the Federal Regulations Working Group. Nichols serves as an AFC representative to the working group whose goal is to devise options to get the annual migratory bird hunting season federal register process published and promulgated on time. Having the annual migratory bird regulations published on time has not happened since the change to the federal regulations process in 2016.

**Objectives 3 and 4 – Research studies**

*American Black Duck Research*
Program staff collaborated with 7 other Atlantic Flyway states, the USFWS, and Mitch Weegman (University of Saskatchewan; lead investigator) on a study funded by the Black Duck Joint Venture entitled: *Quantifying the influence of environmental conditions and American black duck behavior and movements throughout the full annual cycle on subsequent productivity using state-of-the-art tracking devices.* This study will use backpack transmitters on black ducks captured on the wintering grounds for 3 years. Winter 2022 was the first operational year and NJ was assigned 25 telemetry units to instrument on females. Program staff operated several banding stations and began putting out telemetry units on study birds on 22 January.

*Identifying Limiting Factors of Eastern Mallards*.
Program staff captured and implemented mallards with GSM transmitters for this study. This study will use backpack transmitters on mallards captured on the wintering grounds for the next 3 years. Winter 2022 was

the first operational year and NJ was assigned 15 telemetry units to instrument on females. Program staff operated several banding stations and began putting out telemetry units on study birds on 30 January.

***Atlantic Brant Ecology Study and Atlantic Brant Migration and Breeding Ecology Study (2BRANTXX)***
Program staff completed the 2022 trapping and marking phase in collaboration with New York DEC, Canadian Wildlife Service, and University of Saskatchewan on 2 interrelated studies. Objectives are:

1. Determine if the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey is representative of the wintering population
2. Determine fidelity of brant to wintering and breeding areas
3. Determine breeding propensity and variables related to age and body condition to breeding success
4. Determine key spring and fall migration staging areas
5. Compare breeding propensity estimates from geolocators with recruitment estimates from color-banded birds associating with young to develop a more complete measure of annual productivity.

From 26 January – 11 February, 132 Atlantic brant were captured and fitted with various markers at 4 locations spanning over 125 miles of coastline from Cape May to Raritan Bay. 10 adult (ASY) males and 20 adult females were outfitted with Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) backpack transmitter units which communicate through cellular networks. 5 of the transmitters were one (n=2) or two-year (n=3) old units reused from birds harvested or found dead during the past year. 28 of the GSM-marked birds also wore a uniquely-coded, red or blue tarsal band combination on each leg; the remaining two specimens only received federal bands. 101 (36 ASY-F; 34 ASY-M; 19 juvenile [SY] females; 12 SY-M) birds were outfitted with a uniquely-coded, red or blue tarsal band combination on each leg. Juveniles comprised 24% of birds captured. Birds were captured with rocket nets using decoys and an electronic calling device to lure birds to capture nets.

Thirteen previously marked brant were recaptured. One of the recaptured brant was marked with a GSM unit (8YWW). Two recaptured birds carried geolocators (H63 and E32) where data was downloaded in the field and birds released wearing their geolocators. Both were marked in NJ, H63 at Shark River in 2019 and E32 at Cape May in 2018.

Staff continued to collect geolocators and transmitters from brant shot by hunters. Data from geolocators was downloaded. To date, collaborators received 15 geolocators shot during the 2021 hunting season. Approximately 90 geolocators obtained since 2018 are being analyzed by staff at the University of Manitoba. All banding and recapture data were entered into computer files and sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory for processing.

**Other**

An article outlining the NJ Waterfowl Stamp Program, particularly in light of the fee increase that is set to begin this coming hunting season, was prepared for the Hunting Issue of the Digest.

T. Nichols developed an agenda for the Waterfowl Stamp Committee which will meet in early March.

**2022-23 Migratory Bird Season Regulations**

T. Nichols developed an agenda and second draft of season dates for the Migratory Bird Season Selection Committee which will meet in early March.

**WILDLIFE SERVICES SECTION**

Anthony McBride, Supervising Wildlife Biologist
Mike Madonia, Principal Wildlife Biologist
Joe Burke, Wildlife Technician I
Amy DeCheser, Wildlife Technician I
Emilia Topp, Biologist Trainee
Michael Patrick, Wildlife Technician II
Peter Stark, Biologist Trainee

## Bear Control: Lethal and Non-Lethal

The black bear unit received a total of 17 bear calls from January 20, 2022 to February 21, 2022; this compares with 5 calls from the same time period in 2021.

The black bear unit received 0 Category I calls, 11 Category II calls and 6 Category III calls for the time period January 20, 2022 to February 21, 2022; this compares to 0 Category I calls, 0 Category II calls and 5 Category III calls for the same time period in 2021.

The black bear unit received a total of 38 bear calls from January 1, 2022 to February 21, 2022; this compares with 18 calls from the same time period in 2021.

The black bear unit received 4 Category I calls, 19 Category II calls, and 15 Category III calls for the time period January 1, 2022 to February 21, 2022; this compares to 1 Category I calls, 2 Category II calls and 15 Category III calls for the same time period in 2021.

As of February 21, 2022, the total number of calls received by the Division increased 111.1 percent from the same time period in 2021. Category I incidents increased 300.0 percent, Category II calls increased 850.0 percent and Category III calls had a 0.0 percent change from 2021. This data does not include calls made to local police departments.

## Research

Project personnel continue to edit and input research data into the bear database.

## Damage/Nuisance Control

Project personnel continue to provide technical advice for damage complaint incidents and set traps for Category 1 behavior.

## Cooperative Research

Project personnel continue to work on cooperative research projects with East Stroudsburg University.

## Beaver calls and Complaints

Unit staff continued matching beaver trappers to complaint sites for the recreational beaver trapping season.

One Beaver Damage Control Permit was issued for flooding damage in Burlington County.

## Other Activities

Unit employees continued conducting statewide beaver/otter zone point surveys.

Unit staff attended several internal meetings on wireframe construction and content inclusion for the Division's new website.

A. McBride and P. Stark attended a Game Committee meeting on proposed amendments to the 2024 Game Code.

**Wildlife Nuisance Complaints/ Technical Guidance (Federal Aid Project)**

**BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SPECIES**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bat | 2 | Mountain Lion | 1 |
| Bear | 17 | Muskrat | 1 |
| Beaver | 6 | Opossum | 1 |
| Bird | 4 | Otter | 1 |
| Bobcat | 2 | Owl | 1 |
| Coyote | 28 | Raccoon | 9 |
| Deer | 37 | Skunk | 2 |
| Duck | 1 | Squirrel | 2 |
| Fox | 32 | Turkey | 10 |
| Goose | 2 | Unknown | 3 |
| Hawk | 5 | Vulture | 4 |

**154 calls for the Federal Aid Project.**
**Total calls: 171 (*black bear calls are not included in this project)**