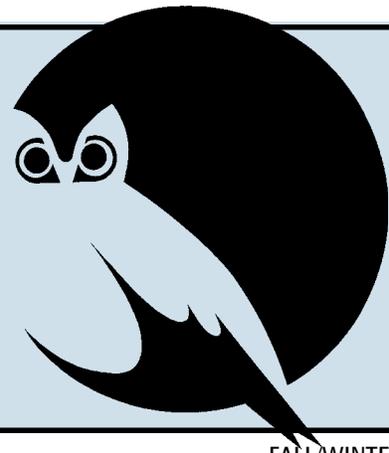


WV Wildlife Diversity NEWS



Bob Wise, Governor

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 2

FALL/WINTER 2003

Looking Back On Twenty Years of Newsletters

We are all familiar with the old line: "do you want to hear the good news or the bad news first?" In this case, it is more like, would you like to hear the good news or the better news? The Wildlife Diversity Program's newsletter, the "West Virginia Wildlife Diversity News," will no longer exist as a stand-alone publication. Instead, it will now appear as an insert in the spring and fall issues of the newly created free, full color *West*

In 1983...

John D. Rockefeller, IV was governor.

for the magazine incorporated subscribers to the "WV Wildlife Diversity News," you should all be receiving the magazine. If this is not the case, contact us at dhale@dnr.state.wv.us or log on to www.wvdnr.gov, look up the *West Virginia Wildlife* magazine and subscribe.

The insert will continue to bring you news about the

Wildlife Diversity Program's projects and events, information on the incredible variety of our state's lesser known animals and plants, the annual winter backyard bird survey and updates on national issues.

When planning the content for this fall/winter newsletter, our last

in this format, we were surprised to realize that our very first issue, then called the "West Virginia Nongame News," was published exactly twenty years ago, in the fall of 1983. Reading this first issue of the newsletter brought back many pleasant memories, and the realization that the program has come a long way in the intervening years.

Our first issue introduced our subscribers (then, a mere 250 people—our subscription rate has since grown to over 7,000!) to the newly created Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Program. At that time we had three full time employees, working on nongame issues, federal endangered species, and the Natural Heritage Program, and were given advice and direction by a ten member Citizens Advisory Council. We have now grown to eighteen full and part-time biologists, and the Advisory Council continues to aid the program.

Twenty years ago the Wildlife Diversity Program (WDP) was funded mainly through a state income tax check-off, bringing in ap-

proximately \$170,000 the first year. Now, thanks to a group of dedicated conservationists who toiled many years to increase funding for the state's nongame wildlife, the WDP's annual budget is about \$700,000 and is being used to

match federal funds through the State Wildlife Grants Program (see update). Although the first issue focused on the WDP and a few of our first

projects, the ensuing years' issues introduced new features for educators (Children's Book Reviews and Kid Krafts), interactive activities (Who Wants to be a Biologist? and the Winter Backyard Bird Count), and regular informational articles (Rare Species at a Glance, Notes From the Field and Backyard Landscaping for Wildlife).

But the real measure of success is how much more we know today about our state's nongame wildlife and plants than we did twenty years ago, and the many new projects, programs and educational materials available to the citizens of West Virginia. To read about these in detail, see our updated website www.wvdnr.gov.

Although the newsletter format is changing, you, our readers, are still very important to us. Please keep in touch, and do not hesitate to contact us with

your questions and concerns. With your help, we are looking forward to the many exciting years ahead conserving our state's unique wildlife and botanical resources.

--Kathy Leo

In 1983...

The first Breeding Bird Atlas was just getting underway.

In 1983...

The Allegheny Front Migration Observatory had a banner year.

In 1983...

The cooperative research project grant program begins.

WV Natural History Museum Editorial Elicits Response

There was considerable response to the editorial on the desire for a WV Natural History Museum. Many of the responses were calls to Brian McDonald, the author of the editorial. The general tone was in support of the idea.

Several responses were sent in writing. Ralph Kelly, of the Nicholas County Development Authority, was interested and inquired as to whether the Wildlife Diversity Program could meet with him on the idea. Since this is not an official DNR program, we were not able to accommodate the request. He and Wilma Richardson are working with the Nicholas County Historical Society and the Old Main Heritage Museum Committee to develop a museum in concert with the Nicholas Old Main Foundation.

Mike Beck wrote in from

Huntington, where he is the Director of the tropical plant conservatory at the Huntington



Museum of Art. He was interested in the project and wanted to know how he could help. He

indicated that his interest in nature was nurtured at the Dayton Museum of Natural History in Ohio and he wished the youth of WV could have a similar opportunity.

Bob Baker suggested that the old Weston State Hospital and grounds would be an ideal location for such a museum and the grounds there would be a plus. He mentioned that this location is currently the home of a state bluegrass festival and would be

perfect for such an endeavor.

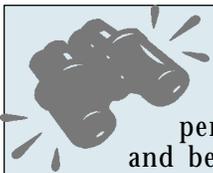
Jon Weems, caretaker of WVU's Core Arboretum, particularly agreed with the idea of a native plant showcase and how these species can be used for landscaping. He pointed out that the West Virginia Botanic Garden, a private non-profit effort, is developing an 82-acre site in Monongalia County. He stated, "central to the Botanic Garden's mission is the idea of inspiring attractive landscaping in the state and region by providing illustrations of native and non-invasive exotic plants in landscape settings." Work is currently underway by a landscape architecture firm to develop a master plan for the Botanic Garden.

Unfortunately there is no group working on the concept of a natural history museum that I am aware of. For such a project to move forward, a small group of people with diverse backgrounds in natural history, education, and business would have to put together a public/private partnership to push the concept.

There is a strong possibility that WV will lose significant plant and animal collections because of a lack of perceived importance. These collections form the basis for our understanding of the state's natural history and are irreplaceable.

Hopefully, some type of master plan can be developed through a consensus of college, private and university personnel to keep these collections from being lost and make them available for study by future generations. The scientific, educational and conservation values of these collections are immeasurable. Maybe I can pursue this project when I retire, if it's not too late!

--Brian McDonald



Time For The Winter Bird Count!

Time to grab a pencil and binoculars and begin the 15th annual Winter Bird Count. The tally sheets are on pages 4-5 of this newsletter. This count gives us information on the distribution of wintering birds in West Virginia. The count will again be twelve weeks long to allow us to record some early spring arrivals.

Remember to count the highest number of each species that appears around your feeder at any **one time** during the entire weekend. For example, if you observe nine house finches at the feeder while you're having breakfast on Saturday, and seven are there during halftime of the game on Sunday, simply put down "9" for the weekend, **do not add them.**

If you get a very large number of birds--estimate their numbers.

We cannot use descriptive words such as "many" or "few."

Some birds, such as crows and robins, may feed away from your feeders. You can count birds such as these as long as you're consistent. When a species doesn't appear, leave its box blank, don't enter a "0." Please do not substitute another day if you missed a designated day; if you're not home one weekend, simply draw a line through that row.

We welcome any information on bird health, unusual sightings and other interesting happenings in your area. Thanks for the photos and notes that you've sent in the past! Please try to return your tally sheets by May 1, 2004.

Questions? Phone (304) 637-0245 or email: rtallman@dnr.state.wv.us.

For more forms visit www.wvdnr.gov.

Rare Species at a Glance

Star-nosed mole

Scientific name: *Condylura cristata*

State status: Appears uncommon in West Virginia, although moles are reclusive and difficult to locate.

Global status: Secure throughout most of its range.

General description: This dark brown to black mole attains a length of 4-8 inches. Its most distinguishing characteristic is a circle of large fleshy appendages at the tip of its nose which create its "star-nose." Its eyes and ears are very small, but visible.

Habitat: The star-nosed mole is rarely found far from bodies of water. It prefers wet soils in bottomlands, swamps, meadows and other openings near water; however, it will sometimes occur in leaf mold on forest floors.

Total range: Labrador, Quebec and Nova Scotia west to eastern North Dakota and southeastern Manitoba, and south to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio; south in the Appalachians to the Great Smoky Mountains and along the Atlantic coast to Florida.



Photo by Kenneth Catania/Vanderbilt U.

State range: This species is currently known from eight counties, but may be more widespread: Greenbrier, Jefferson, Monongalia, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph and Roane.

Threats to the species: Other than loss of habitat due to development or agricultural practices, there seems to be little threat to this species.

Best time to look: Look for the star-nosed mole all year; it has been observed in streams under the ice in the winter.

Source: Wildlife Diversity Program files.

American yew

Scientific name: *Taxus canadensis*

State status: Uncommon in West Virginia, with 27 occurrences. Nineteen of these occurrences are considered historical.

Global status: Secure globally.

General description: American yew is a low, straggly, evergreen shrub which rarely grows to over five feet in height. The flat leaves are green on both sides, just under an inch long, and narrow into a sharp point. The fruit is comprised of a hard seed with a red fleshy covering (aril) that is open on one end.

Habitat: Yew is found mostly in the higher elevations in cool shady areas, coniferous forests and bogs.

Total range: Newfoundland, Labrador and

Quebec west to Manitoba, and south to North Carolina, Tennessee and Iowa.

State range: American yew has been recorded from fourteen counties in West Virginia: Grant, Greenbrier, Hancock, Mercer, Mineral, Pendleton, Pleasants, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Summers, Tucker, Wetzel and Wyoming. Some of these records may represent transplanted or cultivated plants and not the native species.

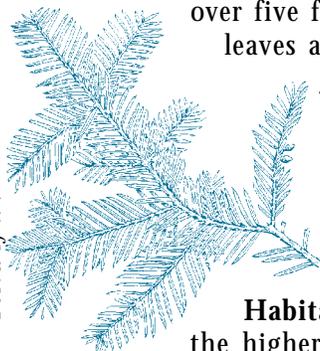
Threats to the species: The greatest threat to American yew appears to be grazing by herbivores.

Best time to look: Look for American yew all year, but it may be easier to spot when the fruits are set in late summer.

Sources: Gleason, H. and A. Cronquist. 1963. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*; Strausbaugh, P.D. and E.L. Core. 1970. *Flora of West Virginia*. Wildlife Diversity Program files.

--Barbara Sargent

Flora of WV



Keep In Touch!

If you didn't receive the West Virginia Wildlife Magazine recently, send us your address to add to the mailing list or log on www.wvdnr.gov



Redesigned DNR Website Includes More Information, Cleaner Look

The official WVDNR website now has a new look and address after undertaking an extensive redesign project. The new address is www.wvdnr.gov.

The redesign project objectives were to make the site more user friendly, expand the content and improve the look.

Several new features have been developed for the site. Along with hunting and fishing regulations that are easier to search, young outdoor enthusiasts will find new information in the Kid Zone which includes *Creature Features*, *Try It!* activities and *Kid Krafts*.

Information on rare, threatened and endangered species is now easier to track as well as educational materials related to the DNR's Wild Yards and Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS) programs. There are also more pages related to gardening, nuisance wildlife, birding and eco-

logical communities.

Members of the Wildlife Diversity staff expanded sections on the state's flora and fauna and more information will continue to be added so that the pages are constantly being upgraded. Teachers will find the redesigned website a helpful way to get outdoor activity ideas, as well as information on Project WILD and other educational tools.

One planned feature will in-

clude listings on how citizens can help with various projects, whether it be monitoring amphibians or participating in bird counts.

"The Internet is an important medium for conveying information to the public about our programs and services," said Ed Hamrick, DNR Director. "We know the Internet is an effective method of getting our message out, not only to the hunters and anglers, but to kids and teachers," he said.

State Wildlife Grants Moving Through the Hill

In the final week of September, the full Senate voted on their version of the Interior Appropriations Bill including approval for \$75 million for State Wildlife Grants (SWG). Both the Senate and House of Representatives have appropriated \$75 million for SWG for 2004, marking a significant milestone for state wildlife diversity programs nationwide. This represents an

increase of \$10 million over last year, and \$15 million more than the President's request. The next step will be the conference committee. Since there is no difference between the Senate and House request, there shouldn't be much discussion. However, given the current budget climate, nothing is certain.

Once again it is time to contact your Congressional representatives to let them know that the entire \$75 million is necessary for programs to conserve wildlife diversity in West Virginia. A much needed addition in the fiscal year 2004 SWG appropriation as currently written allows for up to 10% of each state's share be spent on educational projects that directly benefit species in greatest need. WV's share for 2004 will be \$679,000, with \$67,900 for possible educational projects.

WDP staff has been hard at work designing a plan for our SWG funding. The Wildlife Resources Section will be creating a 10-year strategic plan, yearly operational plans, and a State Wildlife Comprehensive Plan that

(Continued to page 8)



Who Wants To Be A Biologist?

Congratulations to our contest winner, *Jane VanOoyen* of *Clarksburg* whose name was

picked at random from all the received correct entries. Jane correctly answered last issue's question: What is the only marsupial found in West Virginia? The answer is the Virginia opossum. An interesting fact about the opossum is that it is immune to the venom from rattlesnake or copperhead snakebites.

Jane will receive a 2004 WV Wildlife Calendar. Other correct

answers were submitted by: *Anita Deck*, Crab Orchard; *Kay Kish*, Clendenin; *Ernie Adkins*, Cool Ridge; *Loren Primm*, Hundred; *Frank Smarr*, Weston; *Jodi Fortney*, Fairmont; *Robert Samuel Dilley*, Beckley; *Deborah Williamson*, Sophia; *Marshall and Layla Newbrough*, Buckhannon; *Brenda Adkins*, *Susan Gurson*, Berkeley Springs; *Katie Kilby*, Chloe; *Brenda Swecker*, Huttonsville; *Hollie Sims*, Ballengee; *Jerry Grady*, Cottageville; *Dave Pyle*, Finksburg, MD; and *Ron Murrin*, Easton. Thank you all for playing this final installment of trivia! Stay in touch, another version may return!

Endangered Species Update



The one recurring theme to field work in 2003 was bad weather. Some studies sites were difficult to get to and conditions for conducting surveys were often poor.

Bat Surveys

Winter bat surveys were conducted in January and February 2003 to monitor populations of endangered bats during their hibernation period. Many of the State's most important bat caves were to be surveyed, but several surveys were cancelled due to heavy snows and ice storms making it difficult or dangerous to enter some of the caves.

Winter bat surveys were completed at 14 caves. Compared with surveys conducted two years earlier, the number of Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalis*) appears to be stable and the number of Virginia big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*) showed an increase of 22%. However, Hellhole, the state's most important bat cave, was not surveyed due to the dangers posed by deep snow and ice in the sinkhole where the cave entrance is located.

Virginia big-eared summer colonies were censused in June 2003 by using night vision equipment to count the bats as they exited their caves to feed. A total of 5,945 bats in ten colonies was tallied. This is an increase of 0.8% over the summer 2002 counts.

During summer 2003, bat mist net surveys were conducted by WVDNR biologists at several sites to obtain data on the summer distribution of bats in West Virginia. Surveys were conducted at Burnsville, Elk River and Hillcrest Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Tomlinson Run State Park, and the Sugar Grove

Naval Base. Bats of six species were captured: eastern pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), northern long-eared bat (*M. septentrionalis*), red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*) and hoary bat (*L. cinereus*). No endangered bats were netted. In mist net surveys conducted by other researchers, male Indiana bats were captured in Randolph and Raleigh counties and two post-lactating female Indiana bats were captured in Boone County. Virginia big-eared bats were netted in Pendleton County.

Several bats killed at wind tower sites in Tucker County were identified to species. To date, no endangered bats have been found. The three most abundant species were red bats, hoary bats and eastern pipistrelles.

Bald Eagle Nest Sites

The long, hard winter and cold, wet spring we experienced this year were probably the cause of the low bald eagle nesting success observed in West Virginia. Two new eagle nests were discovered this year. These nests and the 11 nests that were active in 2002 were monitored during the nesting season. The nests fledged nine eaglets in 2003; 22 eaglets were fledged in 2002. Peregrine falcons did not fare well in 2003 either. The female of the pair nesting on North Fork Mountain returned to the site early in the year, but she remained alone at the site for several weeks and then left. No other potential breeding birds were seen at any of the cliff sites monitored.

Freshwater Mussel Research

Poor water conditions made it very difficult to conduct freshwater

mussel surveys in 2003. Surveys had to be re-scheduled several times, and some streams were unworkable the entire summer. The Greenbrier River was one of the few streams with good flow conditions this year, and the upper portion of the river was surveyed specifically to look for the rare green floater mussel (*Lasmigona subviridis*). This species has declined throughout most of its range and the Greenbrier River supports one of the best populations still remaining. Areas of potential habitat for this species were identified and many were examined this summer. Several new sites for this mussel were found.

Additional surveys will be conducted in 2004, and detailed habitat data will also be collected next summer. On the Cacapon River, a long-term mussel monitoring site is being established to look at population trends. Baseline data were collected for part of this site in September 2003, and this work will continue in 2004.

Snail Habitat Delineation

Delineation of potential habitat for the federally threatened flat-spined three-toothed land snail continued on Coopers Rock State Forest and Snakehill WMA. This spring and summer, eleven new sites for this snail were discovered on Snakehill WMA. A second Recovery Land Acquisition Grant was awarded to the WVDNR to help purchase a 1,110 acre tract of land adjacent to Snakehill WMA. This tract, located in Cheat Gorge, provides habitat for this snail and other rare species such as the Allegheny woodrat (*Neotoma magister*).

--Craig Stihler

New Allegheny Trail Guide Highlights Wildlife Diversity



A new series on the Allegheny Trail, a 290-mile foot trail that traverses the Allegheny Highlands of West Virginia and Virginia, has just been published by the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association (WVSTA). The three booklet set includes a wildlife viewing guide, trail map booklet and hiking guide with trail descriptions and costs only \$27 plus \$3 shipping and handling. This is comparably priced with other trail guides, even though the high quality of printing (thanks to CompuPress in Fairmont, WV), the great detail in the maps and text, and the wildlife viewing booklet make this set superior to most other guidebooks. For each guidebook sold, a contribution is made to the WV Wildlife Diversity Program in recognition of its work to benefit wildlife and native plants.

To order a set, send a check or money order to: WVSTA Hiking Guide, P.O. Box 4042, Charleston, WV 25364.

--Doug Wood

State Funding, Continued From Page 6

all states are required to complete by October 2005.

Look in future issues of the **West Virginia Wildlife** magazine for updates on the many new State Wildlife Grant funded projects including: public surveys to identify and prioritize wildlife conservation issues of concern to residents of the state; and survey and monitoring activities on species deemed of greatest conservation need, such as the WV

Partners in Flight priority bird species, small-footed, Rafinesque's and hoary bats, Cow Knob, Midland mud and green salamanders, wood and spotted turtles, Allegheny woodrats, cave invertebrates, butterflies and dragonflies to name only a few. These will be in addition to the many projects and programs already undertaken by the WV Wildlife Diversity Program.

--Kathy Leo

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
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WV Wildlife Diversity NEWS



is a free biannual newsletter published by the WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF NATURAL RESOURCES (WVDNR) Wildlife Resources Section's Wildlife Diversity Program. This program is dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the state's non-game wildlife and botanical resources.

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