

New Legislation to Improve DEP's Ability to Manage Wildlife

Written by Dale May, DEP Wildlife Division Director

The 2003 Connecticut General Assembly passed important legislation that will significantly improve the Department's ability to manage Connecticut's wildlife. Public Act 03-192 is comprised of twelve sections that affect a wide variety of wildlife management activities.

Several of the sections provide the DEP Commissioner with additional tools for managing overabundant species of wildlife. In some locations, particularly heavily populated areas, traditional hunting methods are no longer practical for controlling burgeoning populations of wildlife, such as deer and Canada geese. The additional tools will allow the DEP to work with communities and landowners to maintain healthy populations of wildlife at levels compatible with human tolerances. In short, they will allow us to maintain wildlife resources as public assets rather than liabilities. Other sections of this Act provide increased protection for rare species and their habitats.

Some of the highlights of P.A. 03-192 are summarized below. (Note that these summaries do not reflect the actual or complete language in the Act.)

- Improves protection for bald eagles by establishing fines of up to \$1,000 and/or up to 30 days in prison for disturbance of any active eagle nest;
- Holds owners financially responsible for all costs associated with the confiscation, care, maintenance and disposal of any illegally possessed, potentially dangerous animal;
- Includes invertebrates as the types of wildlife whose importation, transport and possession are regulated by the Department;

- Requires persons to obtain a permit from the DEP Commissioner prior to administering any chemical or biological substance or making any physical alteration or affixing any device to any free-ranging wildlife;

- Allows the DEP Commissioner to designate areas where attractants can be used for deer hunting;

- Allows municipalities, homeowners associations or nonprofit landholding organizations to take deer or Canada geese at any time, place or method consistent with professional wildlife management principles when a severe nuisance or ecological damage can be demonstrated. As part of the approval process, municipalities, homeowners associations or nonprofit landholding organizations are required to submit a plan describing the problems and the methods being proposed;

- Authorizes the DEP to allow compositions of nontoxic shot for waterfowl hunting as fixed by the regulations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;

- Removes protection from crows, monk parakeets, rock doves and brown-headed cowbirds when those species are in the act of depredating on crops, wildlife, livestock or when concentrated in such numbers to constitute a public health or public safety hazard;

- Includes farms classified as limited liability corporations as being eligible for free landowner deer permits.

- Allows the DEP Commissioner to take any wildlife, using methods consistent with professional wildlife management principles to protect public health or safety, natural or agricultural ecosystems, listed species or their essential habitat, or when such wildlife

is causing severe property damage; and,

Another bill passed by the Legislature (Public Act 03-265) creates tremendous opportunities for wildlife diversity funding. A section of this Act establishes a wildlife conservation commemorative license plate with a purchase fee of \$50. A total of \$35 from the sale of each plate is to be deposited in a wildlife conservation account that will be used to benefit those wildlife species in the greatest need of conservation. These plates will also have an additional \$15 renewal fee. Ten dollars of this fee will be deposited in the wildlife conservation account. Connecticut thus becomes one of many states to use license plates as a way for the public to voluntarily contribute to wildlife conservation. The wildlife conservation account will create a state funding source to match federal grants, such as the State Wildlife Grants program, enabling Connecticut to take better advantage of federal nongame funds.

Public Act 03-192 was proposed by the DEP and had a broad base of support, including conservation organizations, sportsmen, farmers, public health and safety officials, municipalities and land trusts. Public Act 03-265 was initiated by the National Audubon Society and also enjoyed a broad range of support from the conservation and sportsmen communities. The DEP Wildlife Division thanks those who supported these bills, including the legislators who passed them. The management capabilities and funding enhancements created by the 2003 Legislature will benefit Connecticut's wildlife for many years into the future.

Snake ID Made Easy!

Hundreds of snakes are needlessly killed each year because of mistaken identity, fear and misunderstanding. Very often when a snake is found near a home, people panic and may even assume that the snake is dangerous or venomous. Few Connecticut residents realize that they are unlikely to encounter a venomous snake around their home.

All of the snake species found in Connecticut are not aggressive and will only bite if threatened or handled. If left alone, snakes pose no threat to people.

To help educate people about snakes, the DEP Wildlife Division has developed a snake identification guide that includes color photographs. The Division hopes that once people are able

to properly identify the snakes that live around their homes, they will be more understanding and tolerant of these beneficial animals.

To obtain a copy of the "Snakes of Connecticut" guide, contact the Wildlife Diversity Unit at either the Franklin or Sessions Woods offices (address information is on page 2).