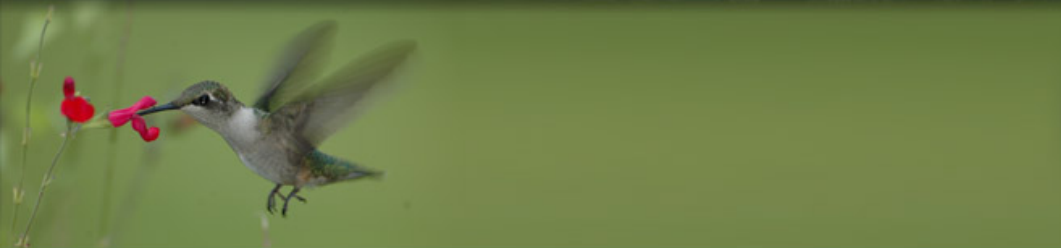




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Conserving Nongame Wildlife: 2010

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Details of the Nongame Conservation Section's work in fiscal year 2010, which ended June 30, 2010, are available in the sections listed on the right-hand side of this page: [Conservation Efforts](#), [Education & Outreach](#), [Land Acquisition & Conservation Planning](#), and [Funding & Administration](#).

Among other highlights recorded in this online report, you'll learn that Nongame Conservation staff, often working with partner groups and volunteers:

- Completed habitat maps in an 11-county coastal habitat assessment aimed at balancing the region's growth with conservation of natural communities and rare species.
- Discovered rare amber and freckled darters in the Coosawattee, part of a long-term initiative to document species and develop conservation plans for Georgia's declining aquatic fauna.
- Conducted the first coast-wide beach and shell rake survey of American oystercatchers and Wilson's plovers in 10 years.
- Continued rare plant inventories that turned up many priority species in places not documented before, including new sites for Tennessee yellow-eyed grass in Bartow and Floyd counties.
- Staffed prescribed burns on 25,660 acres, and led other habitat restoration such as planting longleaf pines at Chickasawhatchee WMA and native grasses at Panola Mountain State Park.
- Captured, sampled and released 21 bog turtles, nearly 40 percent of all known Georgia bog turtles in the wild, as part of research to help preserve mountain bogs and their unique species.
- Acquired key conservation tracts, such as 7,180 acres on Townsend Wildlife Management Area that feature old-growth cypress forest and riverine sandhills along the Altamaha River.
- Surveyed WMAs and other public lands for bats, creating plans to monitor key habitats as the threat of white-nose syndrome grows.
- Reached about 48,000 students with hands-on conservation education at six regional education centers.



The 2010 report is only available online.

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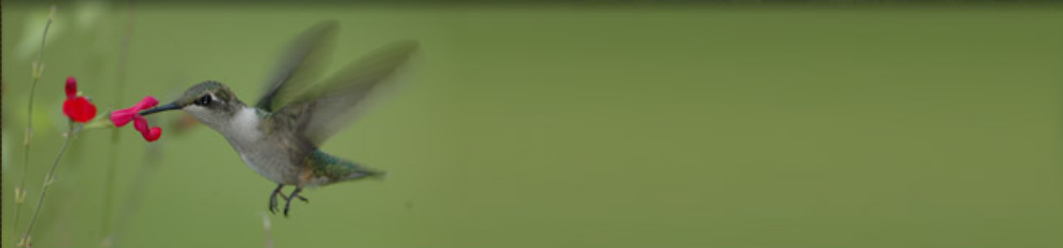




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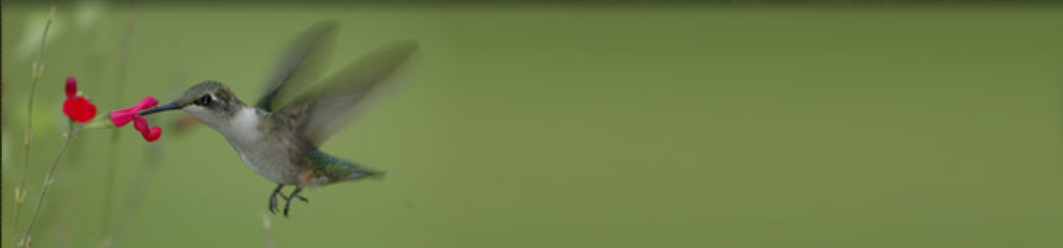
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Sea Turtle Conservation and Research

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The loggerhead sea turtle is found in Georgia's coastal waters year-round and nests on barrier island beaches. In accordance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Marine Fisheries Service recovery plan for loggerheads, Georgia DNR management efforts focus on surveying and protecting loggerhead nests and managing nesting beach habitat. DNR coordinates the Georgia Sea Turtle Cooperative, a group of volunteers, researchers and government employees that conducts nest protection and management activities on Georgia beaches.

Nest management strategies such as nest relocation, installation of protective screens and removal of predators help ensure high nesting success. Since comprehensive surveys began in 1989, loggerhead nesting has been highly variable, with an average of approximately 1,000 nests per year. In 2010, 1,761 loggerhead nests were documented on Georgia beaches. According to the federal recovery plan, loggerheads may be considered recovered if the population shows a 2 percent annual increase for 50 years resulting in a statewide total of 2,800 nests annually. Cooperators found 1,646 nests in 2008 and 997 in 2009.



To develop a comprehensive understanding of the number and relatedness of loggerheads nesting on Georgia beaches, DNR and the University of Georgia have developed a catalog of unique genetic profiles for Georgia's nesting female turtles. A UGA graduate student working with DNR has identified more than 1,000 loggerhead females using the Georgia coast for nesting. One of the many discoveries of this study is that there are at least 20 mother/daughter pairs nesting on our barrier beaches. Because it takes at least 30 years for a loggerhead to begin nesting, that means no fewer than 20 of our turtles are at least 60 years old, nesting alongside their 30-year-old daughters.

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North Atlantic Right Whale Conservation

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The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world, with a population of approximately 400 individuals. Commercial whaling in the late 1800s decimated the whales. Since whaling was banned in 1935, mortality from ship collisions and entanglement in commercial fishing gear has limited the population's recovery.

Each winter, right whales migrate from waters off the northeastern U.S. and Canada to calving grounds along the coast of Georgia and northeastern Florida. An average of 24 calves has been documented each year since 2001, compared with 11 calves per year from 1980-2000. A record 39 calves were documented in the winter of 2008-2009. While the population is increasing at an annual rate of 2 percent, there are still fewer than 100 breeding females in the population.



For more than two decades, DNR has collaborated with various federal, state and private organizations to conserve North Atlantic right whales. Management actions have focused on reducing human-related mortality and protecting right whale habitat. Each December through March, the Nongame Conservation Section and EcoHealth Alliance (formerly Wildlife Trust) conduct extensive aerial surveys to document calf production and warn ships about whale locations. The Nongame Conservation Section participates in various on-the-water management and research efforts, including whale disentanglement, photo-identification studies, genetics sampling, whale tagging studies and injury/mortality investigations

Since 2004, Nongame staff have helped disentangle eight right whales and participated in five injury/mortality investigations. The 2008-2009 season proved particularly busy when five entangled right whales were documented and disentangled. Most of the fishing gear removed from right whales in the Southeast U.S. appears to be from trap/pot fisheries in the northeast U.S. and Canada.



Nongame staff also works to protect right whales and their habitat through involvement in the Right Whale Southeast Implementation Team and the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium. The section receives considerable support from the DNR Coastal Resources Division and Wildlife Resources Division's Law Enforcement Section in education and outreach, policy efforts, and enforcement of federal right whale protections.

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Bottlenose Dolphin Contaminants Project

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The bottlenose dolphin is Georgia's only year-round resident marine mammal, inhabiting estuaries and near-shore ocean waters. Bottlenose dolphins are ideal sentinels for coastal ecosystem health because they are top predators that are long-lived and tend to accumulate persistent environmental contaminants in their lipid-rich blubber. In 2006, the Nongame Conservation Section began cooperating with NOAA Fisheries, the National Ocean Service and other organizations to measure contaminants in bottlenose dolphins in the Brunswick and Sapelo areas.

Findings indicated that concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, in Brunswick dolphins were 10 times higher than any location previously documented. PCBs in the Brunswick and Sapelo dolphins were consistent with a unique PCB mixture, known as Aroclor 1268, that was used at a contaminated industrial site in Brunswick.



Nongame staff helped with a mark-recapture photo-identification study in the Brunswick and Sapelo areas during 2008 and 2009 to estimate dolphin abundance and residence patterns. The study indicated that many of the dolphins in each area are residents, raising questions

about dolphin health and contaminant transport in the environment. This project culminated in a two-week dolphin capture and health assessment during summer 2009. Twenty-nine dolphins were captured, given a thorough veterinary examination (samples were collected for contaminant analysis) and tagged with VHF transmitters to track post-capture habitat use and distribution.

Many of the dolphins had high PCBs levels consistent with Aroclor 1268 exposure. Those with high PCB levels had low thyroid hormone levels, several dolphins were smaller than expected for their age and 26 percent were anemic. The Nongame Conservation Section and the National Ocean Service will resume photo-identification monitoring in the Brunswick and Sapelo areas in 2011 with the goal of estimating dolphin calf survival. DNR's Coastal Resources Division and Wildlife Resources' Law Enforcement Section have provided extensive logistical support throughout the project.

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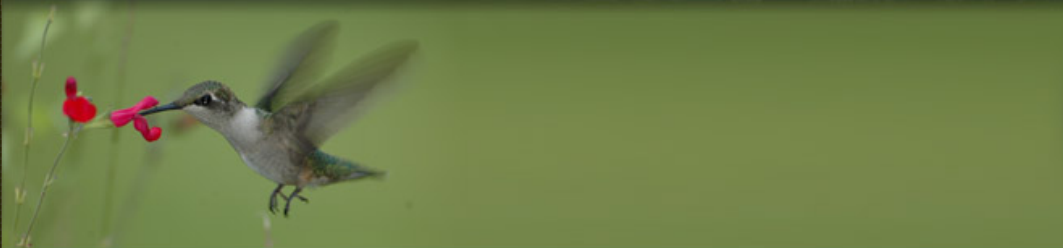
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Marine Turtle Stranding Network and At-Sea Recovery

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Five marine turtle species are found in Georgia's coastal waters – the loggerhead, green, Kemp's ridley, leatherback and hawksbill. All are listed as federally endangered or threatened. With support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, DNR monitors marine turtle mortality through the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network. Systematic patrols of barrier island beaches provide information on the number and species of dead turtles that wash up on Georgia beaches. When possible, necropsies are done to evaluate causes of mortality. Periodic aerial surveys are flown to determine distribution and abundance of marine turtles during migration.

Sea turtle strandings are the primary index for threats to sea turtles in coastal waters. *Updates below.*

Georgia
Reported Sea Turtle
Strandings

53

Year To Date
updated 16 hours ago
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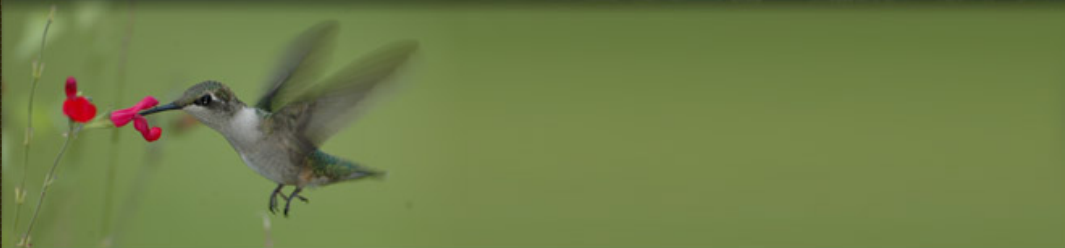
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Georgia Marine Mammal Stranding Network

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The Georgia Marine Mammal Stranding Network was created in 1989 to coordinate marine mammal stranding response in Georgia. DNR's Nongame Conservation Section coordinates the network with help from NOAA Fisheries and other federal, state and private organizations. Network goals are to improve the understanding of marine mammal biology, investigate human impacts on marine mammals, monitor population health, provide rapid, humane response to live stranded marine mammals, as well as educate the public about marine mammal issues.

From 2001-2012, the network documented 365 marine mammal strandings, ranging from 13 to 46 a year. Bottlenose dolphins are the most common species stranded in Georgia, making up 75 percent of strandings, followed by pygmy and dwarf sperm whales (15 percent). Other species documented include Stenella dolphins, rough-toothed dolphins, Risso's dolphins, pygmy killer whales, false killer whales, short-finned pilot whales, humpbacks, North Atlantic right whales and beaked whales.

To report a stranding, call (800) 2-SAVE-ME (1-800-272-8363).

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Florida Manatee Conservation

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Endangered Florida manatees inhabit tidal rivers, estuaries and near-shore ocean waters throughout coastal Georgia during the warm months of the year. The Florida manatee population numbers at least 5,000 individuals, with approximately half of the population found along Florida's Gulf Coast and the remainder along the Atlantic coast. Each spring an undetermined number of manatees migrate into Georgia and return to Florida in the fall as the water temperature cools.

The Nongame Conservation Section cooperates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Navy and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to conserve manatees in Georgia. Management actions focus on reducing human-related mortality and protecting manatee habitat. Specific recovery tasks include documenting causes of manatee mortality and injury, rescuing injured and out-of-habitat manatees, monitoring manatee distribution and habitat use (e.g., collecting public sightings and photo-identification photos), reviewing permits and policies that have the potential to impact manatees and their habitat, and educating boaters about watercraft impacts.



Watercraft collisions are the leading anthropogenic cause of manatee mortality. Other impacts include attraction to industrial warm-water effluents and entanglement in fishing gear. Nongame staff documented 44 manatee mortalities in Georgia since 2000. Thirty-four percent died from watercraft collisions. The cause of death was undetermined in about half of the cases. Five manatees died of cold stress, one drowned in a shrimp trawl and one died by gunshot.

Since 2007, the Nongame Conservation Section has conducted aerial surveys to estimate manatee abundance and habitat use in waters surrounding Cumberland Sound and the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, with funding from the U.S. Navy.

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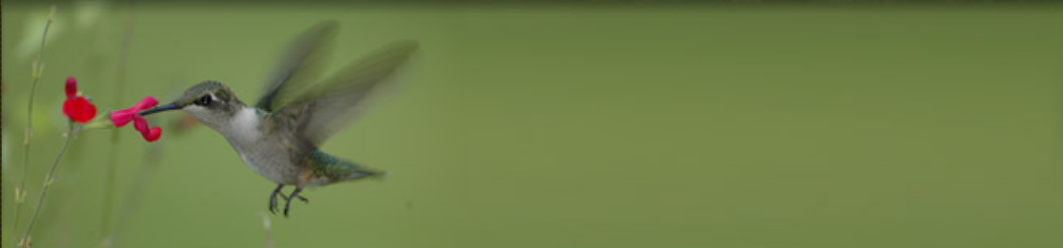
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Waterbird Conservation Initiative

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Georgia's barrier island beaches, coastal salt marshes and freshwater wetlands support 86 species of seabirds, shorebirds and wading birds, collectively known as waterbirds. The Waterbird Conservation Initiative includes:

- Protection of important colonial waterbird nesting habitats.
- Surveys to determine status habitat needs of other resident, migratory and wintering waterbirds.
- Identification of habitats important for these species.
- Creation of government, private and citizen partnerships for long-term conservation of wetland-dependent bird species.

Conservation efforts include protection and management of five sand islands specifically for beach-nesting and migratory birds. While this effort is especially valuable for seabirds, resident and migratory shorebirds also benefit from the protection of critical nesting and resting areas free from disturbances. One of the areas, Little Egg Island Bar, supports one of the largest colonies of nesting seabirds on the South Atlantic coast.



A dredge-spoil island near the Brunswick shipping channel created by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in 2007 and owned by the state has become an important nesting site for Georgia's waterbirds. The island supported a very large royal tern colony as well as smaller numbers of black skimmers, gull-billed terns, brown pelicans and laughing gulls in 2010. Least terns started nesting on the dredge island, but abandoned it and nested on Andrews Island instead.

Surveys on migrant and wintering shorebirds documented the continued importance of staging areas for red knots in the late summer and fall; spring staging of whimbrels that may include a significant portion of the Atlantic flyway population; the single largest concentration of wintering semipalmated plovers in the U.S.; and, an important Atlantic coast concentration of wintering piping plovers from all three breeding populations.

Cooperative research projects involving two large-bodied shorebirds, the American oystercatcher and marbled godwit linked Georgia's conservation efforts for these Wildlife Action Plan priority species with the biological richness of at least 10 other states. Georgia's wintering marbled godwits spend nine months in Georgia every year and breed in North and South Dakota, while Georgia's wintering oystercatchers have been recorded nesting from South Carolina to Massachusetts.

A number of northbound whimbrels were fitted with radio and satellite telemetry backpacks. The radio-tagged birds were tracked on the Georgia coast before migrating, and the satellite-tracked birds were followed to their breeding grounds in Canada's Northwest Territory. One was tracked all the way south to Suriname.

A beach and shell rake survey of the entire Georgia coast was conducted to count territorial pairs of American oystercatchers and Wilson's plovers. Numbers of both birds have increased significantly since DNR's last survey 10 years ago. The more recent effort documented 116 pairs of American oystercatchers and 359 pairs of Wilson's plovers. Areas with high numbers of birds and potential for human disturbance were marked with

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signs.

During fall 2010, Nongame biologists also trapped and banded more than 90 American oystercatchers in the mouth of the Altamaha River.

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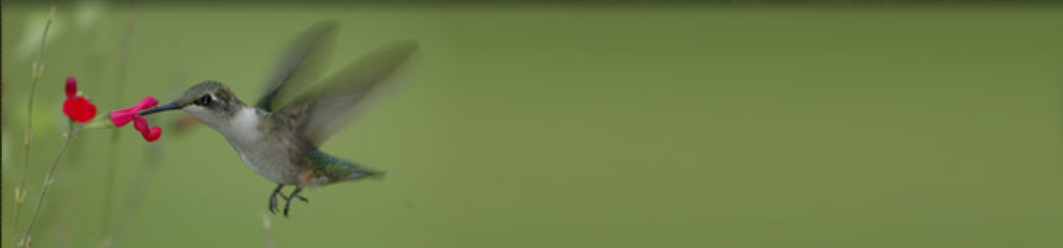




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Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery

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The red-cockaded woodpecker is the only woodpecker in the U.S. that excavates cavities in living pines. The drastic loss of mature pine forests over the past 200 years has been the primary cause of this species' decline. Habitat for these woodpeckers now occurs primarily on military bases, national forests and other public lands, although populations remain on a number of private properties.

In 1999, Georgia DNR developed the nation's first statewide Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Conservation Plan to provide management options for private landowners. The plan includes options for mitigated take and Safe Harbor. Safe Harbor is targeted at landowners in southwest Georgia, where plantations managed for the northern bobwhite also support a significant population of red-cockaded woodpeckers. Safe Harbor involves a landowner's commitment to

beneficially manage habitat for the baseline number of woodpecker family groups on a property at the initiation of the agreement. In exchange, the landowner's responsibility will not increase if the woodpecker population increases.

In Georgia, 156,997 acres are enrolled in Safe Harbor management agreements covering 105 baseline groups of woodpeckers and supporting 32 surplus groups. Most of these properties are in the Red Hills Region near Thomasville, an area that supports the largest population of red-cockaded woodpeckers on private lands. Since the inception of Safe Harbor in 2000, the Red Hills population has grown from about 175 family groups to more than 190. In cooperation with the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center, a successful effort is underway to restore the red-cockaded woodpecker population at Ichauway Plantation in Baker County. This 29,000-acre property supported a single male in 1999. Through the translocation of 64 young birds, the property now supports 22 family groups.



In 2008, the acquisition of 8,432-acre Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area near Bainbridge became the first state-owned property supporting this species. The tract contains extensive stands of mature longleaf pine habitat where today 21 red-cockaded woodpecker family groups are found. Through the more frequent use of controlled burning, installation of recruitment clusters and careful forest management, the tract can eventually sustain about 50 family groups.

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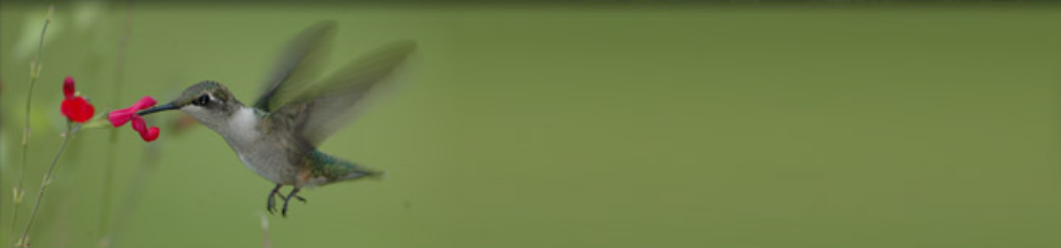
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Wood Stork Nest Surveys

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Wood storks were listed as endangered in 1984 following dramatic declines in breeding colonies in southern Florida. Wood stork nests were first documented in Georgia in 1965, and by the 1980s wood storks began nesting in increasing numbers in the state. Georgia now supports about 20 percent of the U.S. nesting population, which is about 10,000 breeding pairs. The recovery plan for the wood stork in Georgia includes monitoring reproductive success of nesting colonies and identifying potential threats.

The Nongame Conservation Section conducts aerial surveys each spring to identify and monitor nesting colonies. Stork nesting effort – the number of pairs that attempt to reproduce – fluctuates annually. However, 2010 was a record year for wood storks in Georgia, with a total of 2,696 nest starts in 28 colonies. These colonies were documented from the air, with the exception of Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge, which is monitored from the ground.

A wet winter provided the water in a number of colonies that had been inactive in 2009. Two new colonies were also located in 2010. Nongame staff, with partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, St. Catherines Island and the Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites Division monitored 11 colonies for productivity. Several small colonies failed completely but the larger colonies had a good year with high rates of productivity.

With more than 75 percent of all stork rookeries located on private land, the success of conservation efforts for this species will depend on landowners' willingness to ensure the protection of viable freshwater wetland nesting sites.

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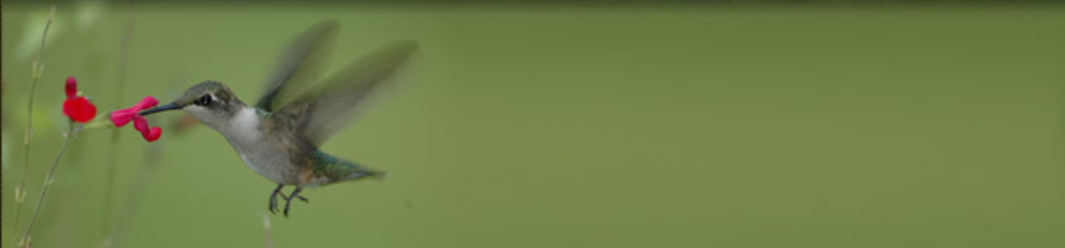
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Bald Eagle Nest Surveys

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The bald eagle, once fairly common in Georgia, was no longer nesting in the state by the early 1970s. A ban on the use of DDT in the U.S. in 1972, habitat improvements following enactment of the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act, protection through the Endangered Species Act, increased public awareness, and the restoration of local populations through release programs all helped bald eagle populations rebound here and elsewhere. Georgia's ongoing conservation efforts include monitoring all known eagle nests and working with landowners to protect nest sites from disturbance.

During the 2010 nesting season, DNR documented 139 occupied nesting territories. Of these, 122 were successful, fledging 194 eaglets. In comparison, there were 55 known nesting territories in the year 2000, nine in 1990 and only one in 1980. Following federal de-listing in 2007, primary legal protection for nesting eagles comes under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Nongame Conservation Section biologists continue to monitor nesting activity and work with landowners to manage nest sites.

(Photo: Bald eagles on their nest/Curtis Compton/The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

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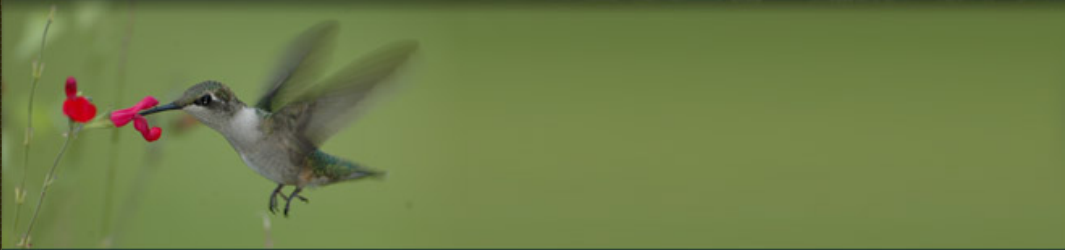
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Swallow-tailed Kite Nest and Roosting Surveys

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The swallow-tailed kite has suffered a significant range reduction since the 1880s when it bred in 21 states. These elegant raptors are now found in seven Southeastern states, where they nest in bottomland forests along some of the large southern rivers. Most nests in Georgia are on private land, particularly industrial timberlands. DNR conservation efforts include finding and monitoring nests, protecting nests from predators where possible, working with private landowners to assure habitat viability, and searching for previously radio-tagged kites.

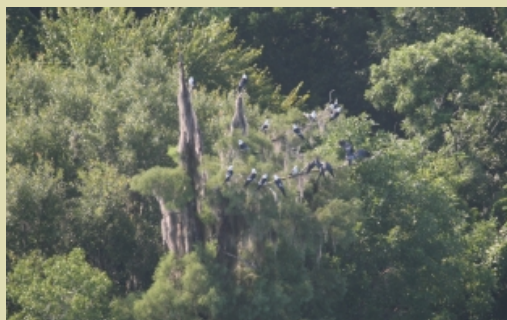
In 2009, 22 active nests were found and monitored. Due to high water and limited ground access, most nests were located and checked from the air. Half failed in 2009, with 11 nests producing a total of 15 fledglings. The failures seemed to result from heavy rains in late May that produced wet and cold conditions. Four radio-tagged kites were relocated, from among 58 tagged in 2005-2006.



Lower-water levels in 2010 allowed more survey work on foot. Forty nests were found and monitored. A high failure rate of close to 50 percent was similar to nesting results in 2009. The nests on the Altamaha River seem to have better nest success than those on the Satilla River. Predator shields were placed around the base of many nest trees.

Two kites that were fitted with radio telemetry harnesses in 2005 and 2006 were relocated in 2010 in Georgia. One of these birds was confirmed nesting, which proved that the transmitter survived for five years, longer than the predicted 4.5-year life span.

A first-ever range-wide roost survey was coordinated in 2009 with South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas and Florida. Georgia biologists flew two days in late July, counting 155 kites on one flight and 49 on the other.



This survey was followed up in 2010 with increased effort. The Satilla, Altamaha, Ogeechee and Savannah rivers were surveyed, with two aircraft used on each of four survey days. The extra effort was rewarded with much higher roost counts, including 459 kites on these rivers on July 28.

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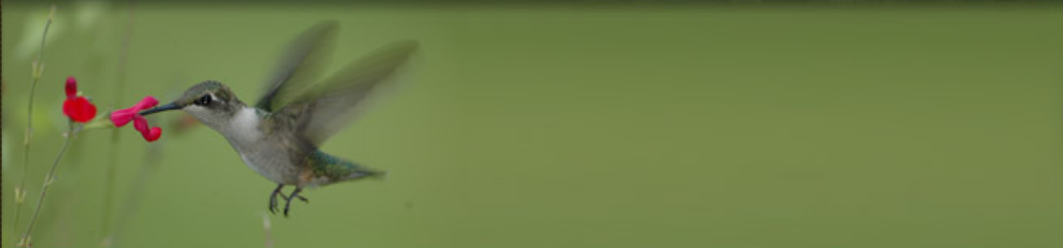
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Painted Bunting Surveys

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The painted bunting is one of the most charismatic birds of the coastal region and has been identified as a species of conservation concern. From 2007 through 2009, DNR participated in a range-wide survey of breeding painted bunting along the coast and interior Coastal Plain. The survey was coordinated by the



Eastern Painted Bunting Working Group, a group consisting of state agency staff in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff and university researchers. A targeted survey effort was warranted due to the relative paucity of Breeding Bird Survey routes in prime painted bunting habitat. Georgia DNR staff and contractors set up survey routes throughout the range of eastern painted bunting in Georgia, and coordinated monitoring during the 2007, 2008 and 2009 field seasons. The routes were run by volunteers, contractors and DNR staff.

Thirty sampling blocks were randomly selected within Georgia, and a randomly placed transect was established in each block. Each transect consisted of 12 monitoring points spaced at least 500 meters apart. Fixed radius 5-minute point counts were conducted at each point three times in a season. Georgia housed interior and coastal routes, and contributed significantly to the overall survey effort. DNR staff checked and entered all data from Georgia surveys in

the online project database, and participated in the Eastern Painted Bunting Working Group meeting in fall 2009.

Study results indicate that painted bunting numbers are higher than estimated before and that the majority of the population is found in the interior portions of the Coastal Plain rather than along the coast, as previously thought. Project findings are being developed into a manuscript for publication.

(Painted bunting photo by Roy Brown.)

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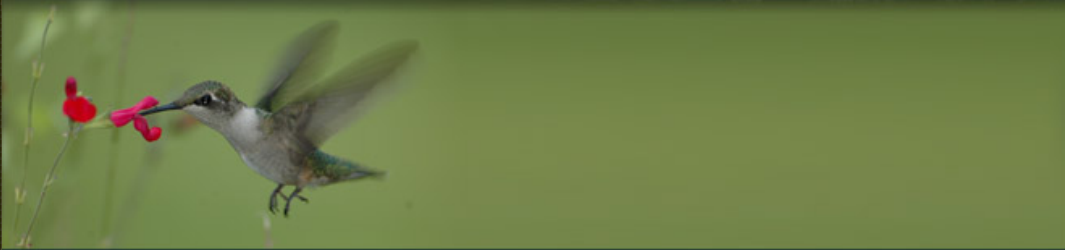
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Partners in Flight

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In Georgia, Partners in Flight continued to focus on the 33 priority bird species identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan. Stakeholder meetings in 2008 identified research and survey questions and conservation needs for the species. The information was condensed into a series of programs for landbird conservation funded by a State Wildlife Grant.

Survey work for secretive marsh birds – rails and bitterns – began in 2010. Initial results indicate that these birds may be abundant on some state properties in suitable habitats. Differences in occupancy rates may be due to differing management regimes on otherwise similar sites. Surveys for another secretive and little known bird, the Henslow's sparrow, will begin in winter 2010-2011. DNR is partnering with researchers from Tall Timbers Research Station to conduct surveys. DNR will focus survey efforts on one habitat type -- utility rights of way -- while Tall Timbers will focus on pine savanna habitats. The effort is designed to assess the importance of Georgia for wintering Henslow's sparrows. Surveys will estimate the number of Henslow's sparrows at each site, and findings will be extrapolated to estimate the larger statewide population. Surveys will also better document the habitat used by this species.



Work on southeastern American kestrels continued during the summer of 2010 and included the first comprehensive population estimate of kestrels in the state. All known populations were surveyed by ground and air. The total population was estimated at about 120 breeding pairs. Intensive work for kestrels on state lands in Taylor and Talbot counties also was continued; however, only 13 nesting attempts were documented, down almost 50 percent from the previous year. A partnership is being initiated between stakeholders in Georgia and Florida to better coordinate management for kestrels and to share information and resources.

DNR formalized the already strong partnership with the Audubon Important Bird Area, entering into a two-year contract with the Georgia IBA coordinator to help with a variety of work on state lands, including native grass restoration and monitoring, loggerhead shrike telemetry, a barn owl box program, and other projects.



Native grass restoration at Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area and Panola Mountain State Park has proven very successful. Work by DNR and the Georgia IBA, with funding from the Georgia Ornithological Society, is reducing invasive exotic plants and restoring native grasses. In June 2010, the first loggerhead shrike was captured on the restoration site at Joe Kurz WMA. Many other declining grassland birds have since been documented on the restoration sites, species including sedge wren, bobolink, sandhill crane, black rail, eastern meadowlark,

northern bobwhite, red-headed woodpecker and Lincoln's sparrow.

Habitat is also being restored for the only remaining population of golden-winged warblers in Georgia. When completed, the Brawley Mountain project on the Chattahoochee National Forest in Fannin County will provide almost 300 acres of early succession habitat. This controversial project has been in the planning process for

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more than 10 years. During that time, Georgia's golden-winged warblers dwindled from five populations to one. DNR and the U.S. Forest Service Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest sponsored and designed the project and will be conducting follow-up surveys in coming years. Adjoining states and national forests are watching the effort with interest, and several have initiated similar projects.

Other 2010 highlights and projects included conducting point counts on sandhill restoration sites across the state, conducting bird surveys in canebrake restoration sites, publication of two peer-reviewed papers, conducting a record number of Breeding Bird surveys, and initiating nightjar surveys.

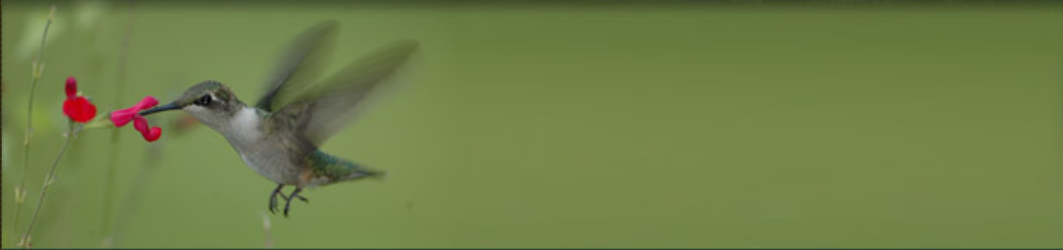
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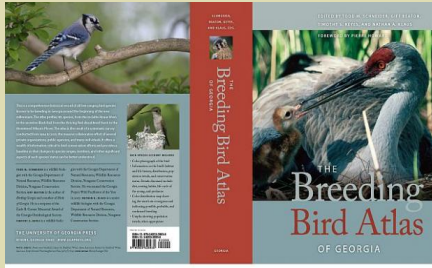


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Breeding Bird Atlas

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From 1994-2001, the Breeding Bird Atlas project initiated by DNR's Wildlife Resources Division collected more than 150,000 records to document the range of 182 species that breed in Georgia. This effort provided a baseline to gauge future changes in distribution. The data collected are critical to conservation planning and provide a starting point for many monitoring efforts.

The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia, a book that documents and archives results of the project, was

completed in late 2009 and is available from the University of Georgia Press (www.ugapress.org). More than 500 copies have been sold. The atlas features species accounts, photographs and range maps for each breeding bird species found during the project. The lead editor and two of the other three editors are Nongame Conservation Section wildlife biologists.

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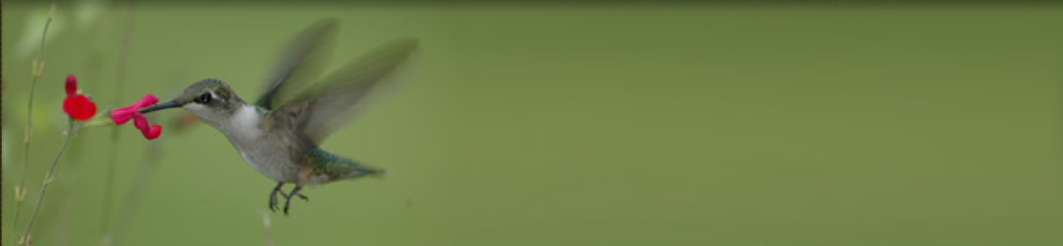
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Gopher Frog Restoration

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2010 marked a banner year for a multi-year project aimed at establishing a self-sustaining breeding population of gopher frogs at Williams Bluffs Preserve in Early County. State-listed as rare, gopher frogs depend on intact sandhill habitats where adults survive within the burrows of their namesake host, the gopher tortoise. However, these frogs also require nearby fishless wetlands where they breed and their tadpoles develop. Because of widespread upland and wetland habitat alteration throughout their range, gopher frogs are now limited to fewer than 10 sites in Georgia.

In 2007, DNR's Nongame Conservation Section began a project involving the collection of gopher frog eggs from two healthy populations, rearing these to late-stage tadpoles or post-metamorphic froglets, and releasing them at an unoccupied but high quality and protected site within their historical range. This past year, in partnership with Atlanta Botanical Garden, University of Georgia, The Nature Conservancy and the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center, 1,518 juvenile gopher frogs were released, far more than had been released in any of the three previous years. Gopher frogs reach breeding maturity in two to three years. Next season should give biologists the first opportunity to document successful breeding at a repatriated site, which would be a range-wide first for this imperiled amphibian.



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Aquatic Conservation Initiative

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Georgia is one of the richest states in aquatic biodiversity, ranking among the top five in the number of native species of snails, mussels, fishes and crayfishes. Unfortunately, Georgia is also ranked among the top states in aquatic fauna at risk. More than two-thirds of the state's freshwater mussels are extinct, endangered, threatened or considered species of special concern. Approximately 30 percent of Georgia's freshwater fishes and crayfishes fall under similar categories. While no comprehensive assessment exists for the state's freshwater snails, many species

have already disappeared from Georgia waters.

The Nongame Conservation Section launched the Aquatic Conservation Initiative in 1998 to determine the status of Georgia's aquatic fauna and develop conservation plans for declining species. Primary objectives were to identify important populations of rare aquatic species through surveys and research, incorporate this information into the DNR database, and assist with conservation planning for rare aquatic species.

Since 2007, the Nongame Conservation Section has completed hundreds of surveys around the state, documenting or monitoring important populations of high-priority species such as the Altamaha spiny mussel, Savannah lilliput, wounded darter and sicklefin redbreast. The most recent fish survey efforts have focused on the Coosawattee River system, where many new occurrences of the federally threatened goldline darter were documented during 2009-2010. Unexpectedly, researchers also documented the first occurrences of the federally endangered amber darter and the state endangered freckled darter in the Coosawattee River. Prior to the survey, these two species were only known from the Conasauga and Etowah river systems, a discovery that raises prospects for the fishes' eventual recovery.

Data from these survey and monitoring efforts are entered into the Biotics Database Data. Partnerships are also maintained with the Georgia Museum of Natural History and the Stream Survey Team of WRD's Fisheries Section, greatly expanding the amount of data available for environmental review and conservation planning. The database now contains about 2,100 distribution records representing important populations of 186 rare aquatic species from around the state.

The Nongame Conservation Section collaborates with conservation partners to meet critical research and conservation needs for rare aquatic species from around the state. Staff is working with the Conasauga River Alliance and the Tennessee Aquarium to remove sediment from a spring inhabited by the state endangered coldwater darter. In collaboration with WRD's Game Management Section, Georgia Power and The Nature Conservancy, the Nongame Section is monitoring populations of Etowah and Cherokee darters in sections of Raccoon Creek targeted for stream restoration activities.

As part of a project to assess the impact of extreme drought conditions on mussel populations, staff led sampling efforts in drought-impacted waters in Georgia and Florida. The section also provided technical assistance to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in drafting a drought contingency plan for the conservation of rare and endangered mussels throughout the southeastern U.S.



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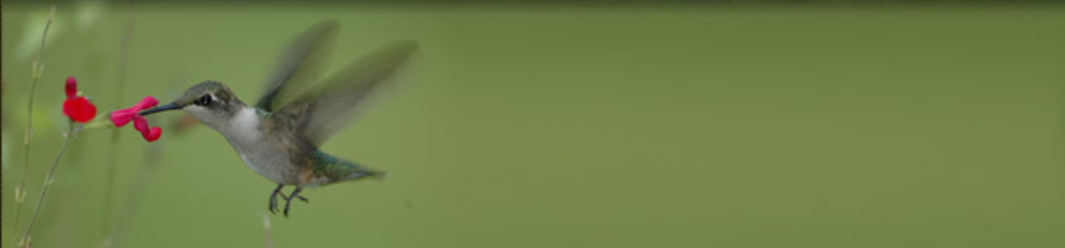
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Fishes of Georgia Atlas

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Until 2009, there was no comprehensive and up-to-date information available on Georgia's exceptionally rich fish fauna. To fill that void, The Fishes of Georgia Atlas went online in March 2009 at <http://fishesofgeorgia.dnr.ga.gov>. The site features range maps and color photographs for 337 coastal and freshwater fish species that are known from Georgia waters.

Developing this site required combining large amounts of data from various sources, including databases maintained by the Nongame Conservation Section, the DNR Stream Survey Team and the Georgia Museum of Natural History. For each species, distribution maps were checked for accuracy and museum specimens re-examined or re-identified when necessary.

This website is dynamic, with new information added as it becomes available. The goal: Provide updated distributional information on Georgia's fishes to anglers, scientists, conservationists, educators and others.

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Robust Redhorse Conservation

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The robust redhorse is a rare sucker with wild populations occurring in limited reaches of the Ocmulgee, Oconee and Savannah rivers in Georgia and the Pee Dee River in North and South Carolina. Prior to its identification in 1991 by DNR Wildlife Resources Division fisheries biologists sampling below Lake Sinclair, this species had not been collected for more than 100 years. Listed as endangered in Georgia, intensive efforts to recover this species in Georgia and the Carolinas have been undertaken since the early 1990s by a team of state, federal and industry biologists organized under the Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee.

A major component of the effort has been the capture and spawning of wild fish from the Oconee and Savannah rivers and production of young in hatcheries for restoration of stocks in rivers within the former range. In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Power and the University of Georgia, the Wildlife Resources Division helped develop a hatchery program in 1993. About 115,000 hatchery-reared robust redhorse have been stocked into the Broad, Ocmulgee, Oconee and Ogeechee rivers in Georgia. South Carolina DNR has stocked 54,000 fingerlings in the Broad and Wateree rivers.

Biologists documented healthy growth and survival rates in all stocked rivers in Georgia and South Carolina, and observed spawning behavior in fish stocked in the Ocmulgee and Broad Rivers. Researchers are trying to document survival of wild-spawned fish in stocked populations and their recruitment into the juvenile and adult population. Establishment of additional self-sustaining populations will represent a major step toward recovery.

Other recent recovery activities include a major gravel augmentation project on the Oconee River and radio telemetry studies on the Ogeechee and Broad Rivers. The gravel augmentation is aimed at improving the abundance and quality of spawning habitat. The telemetry studies are tracking the movement of adult fish in

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hopes of identifying unknown spawning areas.

Recovering the Robust Redhorse



Video can be found at <https://youtu.be/t97ufE9bTHc>

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Bat Conservation

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A State Wildlife Grant project focused on bat conservation and initiated in 2008 provided funding for field surveys, research projects, and planning and implementation of management efforts to benefit Georgia's bat species. DNR hired biologists to complete emergence counts at caves containing summer roosts for gray bats (*Myotis grisescens*) and southeastern myotis (*Myotis austroriparius*). The information will help Nongame Conservation Section biologists determine the best methods for surveys and establish a baseline for population monitoring at these sites.



Surveys are being completed on numerous WMAs throughout Georgia. Two interns were hired during summer 2010 and worked on several projects across the state. One new project included using radio-telemetry to track the yellow bat (*Lasiurus intermedius*), a state species of concern found in the southeastern Coastal Plain. The interns assisted a University of Georgia undergraduate (and former DNR intern) on a senior

thesis project identifying yellow bat roosts on Sapelo Island. Four bats were tracked to roosts during the summer and important information was collected on yellow bat habitat.

Together with the U.S. Forest Service, the Nongame Conservation Section organized the Southeastern Bat Diversity Network Bat Blitz held at Fort Mountain State Park in July 2010. The blitz provided an opportunity for Georgia agencies to educate the public about bat conservation and receive assistance from bat researchers across the Southeast in a rapid survey of the area for bats. During three nights of sampling, the volunteers surveyed 34 sites and captured 292 bats representing nine species. These included 89 northern long-eared bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*), 41 big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), 73 red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*), nine little brown bats (*M. lucifugus*), 65 tri-colored bats (*Perimyotis subflavus*), seven evening bats (*Nycticeius humeralis*), one hoary bat (*L. cinereus*), five small-footed myotis (*M. leibii*, a state species of concern) and two gray bats (*M. grisescens*; federally endangered). This capture of gray bats represented a new county record for this species in Georgia.

Genetics samples were taken from 146 bats for the American Museum of Natural History and fecal samples were collected for dietary analysis. Occurrence data will be used to make informed management decisions and provide baseline data in the face of white-nose syndrome.

Much of the current focus of bat conservation in Georgia is preparation for the possible arrival of white-nose syndrome, or WNS, in the state. This devastating disease is killing bats as far south as Tennessee and has been found on bats as far west as Oklahoma. WNS is expected to move farther south during the winter of 2010-2011. Nongame Conservation Section biologists have set up a WNS page on the Wildlife Resources Division website with information on



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how citizens can help collect information on WNS during this winter. DNR will continue to monitor sites this winter for the possible arrival of WNS.

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Habitat Improvement on State lands: Interagency Burn Team

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Prescribed fire remains the most effective tool in conserving and restoring habitats for species of concern across the state. Working with Interagency Burn Team partners, the Nongame Conservation Section applied prescribed fire to key habitats on state, federal and private lands. Section staff led or assisted prescribed burns on 25,660 acres in 2010. This work also involved other WRD staff, state Parks and Historic Sites Division staff, and volunteers trained to federal standards.



The Nature Conservancy was key in training and management. In addition to funding from the State Wildlife Grants Program, funds from the Wildlife Conservation Society allowed the Nongame Conservation Section to hire a seasonal fire crew through the Student Conservation Association. This crew proved extremely productive thanks to their mobile nature and dedication to conservation. The crew works statewide on short notice.

Other land management techniques applied statewide on natural areas as well as wildlife management areas and state parks. These habitat improvements varied from planting acres of native groundcover – including 100,000 wiregrass plugs on Elmodel WMA – to thinning upland forests and planting more than 500 acres of longleaf pine, with sites including Chickasawhatchee WMA, Fall Line Sandhills Natural Area and Black Creek Natural Area. Additional activities included removal of invasive exotic plants such as kudzu, sand pine, chinaberry, Bermuda grass, Johnson grass, and Chinese privet from Joe Kurz WMA and other restoration sites, as well as harvesting wiregrass seed.



Nongame Conservation Section staff monitored several sites to ensure that adaptive management is as effective as possible. This effort varied from photo-monitoring in burn units to taking more sophisticated measurements in longleaf pine restoration areas.

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Biotics Database Development

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The Nongame Conservation Section manages the NatureServe Biotics database, the state's most comprehensive database of occurrences of rare species and natural communities. Data in Biotics are used for many purposes: environmental site reviews, conservation planning, scientific research, habitat restoration and management plan development. The database contains more than 10,000 occurrence records for rare species and provides Web access to information on occurrences of special concern species and significant natural communities.

During fiscal year 2010, staff added 885 records and edited 941.

One focus is updating and adding records of species of concern from the 11-county coastal region of Georgia. This information will be used to develop a conservation planning tool to help better direct conservation efforts and plan development along the coast (see "[Coastal Habitat Assessment](#)" section).

Lists of rare and protected plants and animals, a digital version of the book "Protected Plants of Georgia" and a downloadable archive of ArcView GIS extensions useful for conservation are online at www.georgiawildlife.com.

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Rare Plant Surveys on Public and Private Lands

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Although public lands and selected private preserves and holdings protect the habitat of many rare plant populations, numerous sites have not received adequate surveys. Inventories are important to locate new populations so their habitats can be protected. Surveys also are needed to ensure that proposed development projects such as roads, trails or buildings on public lands do not inadvertently harm rare species.

Nongame Conservation Section botanists continue to explore state lands, with a focus on newly acquired properties. Surveys are conducted throughout the state to identify and inventory locations of rare plants and provide guidance on appropriate management activities



Staff partnered with the Atlanta Botanical Garden in a project to locate populations of the rarer native terrestrial orchids. New sites for purple-fringed orchids and the rediscovery of a robust population of the Appalachian small spreading pogonia were verified on Chattahoochee National Forest. Seeds were collected and placed in tissue culture to perfect propagation techniques.

Several other orchids are being studied, including species representing significant new discoveries from private lands. Chapman's orange-fringed orchid and smooth-lipped Eulophia were found in Camden County, and small white-fringed orchid was

documented from Marion County. Three-birds orchid was verified at Pickett's Mill Battlefield Historic Site. A large stand of fringeless purple orchids was documented on Conasauga River Natural Area.

Working with volunteers from the Georgia Botanical Society, Nongame Conservation Section staff documented some 450 vascular plants from Pickett's Mill. Insight on management of historic old-field sites with remnant savanna or prairie-like vegetation is another result of intensive plant surveys. Additional examples of montane longleaf pine forest and piedmont granite outcrops were verified from Chattahoochee Bend State Park.

Several discoveries of populations of federally listed plants were made during 2008-2009. Pond spicebush was found on Mayhaw WMA in Miller County. Relict trillium was found on private property in Wilkinson County. Additional sites for Tennessee yellow-eyed grass (*above, left*) were found in Bartow and Floyd counties. Remarkably, 47 sites representing nine population centers of American chaffseed were documented in a detailed survey throughout Georgia's wiregrass country. At least 40 of these sites were discoveries linked to increased use of prescribed burning on large quail plantations and DNR lands, particularly Doerun Pitcherplant Bog Natural Area in Colquitt County. Visits to all occurrences of Canby's dropwort were completed to confirm that 11 of 22 known occurrences are extant, with seven in stable or vigorous condition.

Safeguarding efforts for Georgia's rarest flora included planting Carolina hemlocks at Tallulah Gorge, augmenting the Kentucky lady's slipper population near the Oconee River in central Georgia, planting additional Georgia rockcress near Goat Rock Dam, and establishing two sites for relict trillium rescued from a construction site on Fort Benning.

Plant species new to Georgia continue to be documented. Florida milkvine was observed in a pristine, beech-magnolia-spruce pine forest in Thomas County. Bartram's rose gentian was observed in Charlton County. Swamp post oak was collected in Camden and Charlton counties in a unique willow oak wetland discovered during the ongoing coastal vegetation survey. A globally rare grass, the Cumberland sandreed, was verified on a boulder gravel bar on the Lula Lake Preserve atop Lookout Mountain. Another state record found in

2010 was grassleaf yellow loosestrife from the Coosa Valley prairies.

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Monitoring of rare plants in response to management is another important focus. Trial habitat improvements for Canby's dropwort habitat at Big Dukes Pond Natural Area were completed and a monitoring protocol implemented to track changes in the plant population and its habitat. Monitoring of the flowering and fruiting of Georgia plume (*below*), for which lack of reproduction is a threat to the species survival, was implemented at Big Hammock Natural Area in burned and unburned habitats.

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Restoration of Mountain and Coastal Plain Bogs

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Mountain bogs are one of the most critically endangered habitats of the Southern Appalachians. They typically are small (from a half-acre to 5 acres) and usually associated with seeps, springs and small creeks. These are early successional habitats that support a variety of unique and imperiled flora and fauna, including the federally threatened bog turtle and swamp pink, possibly the state's rarest reptile and plant species, respectively. Other exceptionally rare and state-protected mountain bog plants include the montane purple pitcher plant, Carolina bog laurel, Canadian burnet and Cuthbert's turtlehead.



For 18 years, the Nongame Conservation Section, working independently and as a member of the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance, has been engaged in mountain bog restoration that includes:

- locating mountain bogs with restoration potential;
- restoration at eight of these bog sites;
- rearing and outplanting rare mountain bog plants; and,
- creating a "Bog Turtle Headstart" and population establishment program that involves the Chattahoochee Nature Center and the Tennessee Aquarium. (Seventeen captive-reared bog turtles have been released in restored mountain bogs.)

Natural disturbance factors needed to maintain mountain bog habitats is now largely missing from the landscape, and the few remaining bog habitats must be maintained by mimicking these natural effects using techniques such as manual clearing and prescribed fire. A significant development in the last three years was the initiation of a robust field experiment designed to test various restoration protocols, with final research plots established in 2010. The goal is maximizing effectiveness and efficiency, thus saving the Wildlife Resources Division and its partners time and expense in maintaining mountain bogs.



On the Coastal Plain, cooperative work with landowners for management and conservation continues at a complex of privately owned bogs near Claxton. These bogs include the only known occurrence of the Coastal Plain purple pitcher plant, in addition to eight other tracked plants. The bogs are contiguous to diverse sandhill habitat, with occurrences of gopher tortoises. Efforts are focused on restoring prescribed fire, raising awareness of the site and preventing destruction caused by off-road vehicles.

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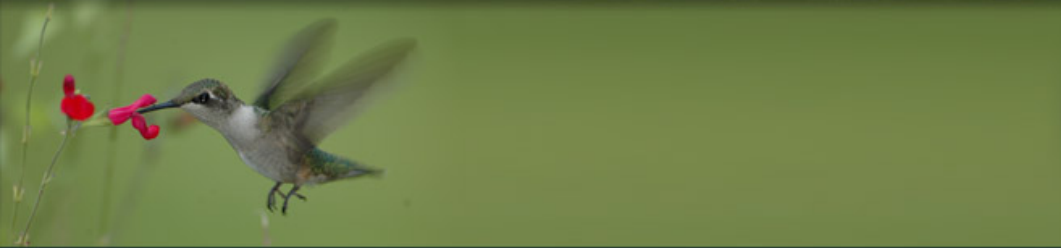
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Bog Turtle Conservation

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Nongame Conservation Section staff (including bog turtle conservation interns) and Atlanta Botanical Garden staff, in cooperation with the Orianna Society, deployed a total of 200 traps within 15 different sites in five known bog turtle sites. The effort, totaling at least 11,000 trap nights, resulted in 21 different bog turtles trapped at five sites, or nearly 40 percent of all known Georgia bog turtles in the wild. The 21 included seven turtles that had not been captured before, one of which represented a newly discovered population.

Genetic tissue samples were collected from the 21 turtles for inclusion in the Georgia Museum of Natural History genetic archive collection and for the U.S. Geological Survey.

Three of the female turtles captured in 2010 were confirmed by radiograph to be gravid. As part of the Bog Turtle Headstart program, all three laid their eggs at the Chattahoochee Nature Center in June. Six of the eggs appeared viable, and four hatchlings survived. They will be "head-started" for two years before being released into restored habitat on the Chattahoochee National Forest.



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Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance

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The [Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance](#), or GPCA, is an innovative network of 20 public gardens, government agencies, academic institutions and environmental organizations committed to preserving Georgia's endangered flora. Formed in 1995 with the Nongame Conservation Section as a charter member, GPCA initiates and coordinates efforts to protect natural habitats and endangered species through biodiversity management, rare plant propagation and outplanting (i.e., safeguarding), and public education.

From research, habitat restoration and management to hands-on stewardship projects with elementary schools, the resources, expertise and outreach strategies of GPCA members provide powerful tools for plant conservation.

A key example is the restoration and management of oak/pine mafic woodlands in the northern Piedmont. This fire-dependent and globally imperiled habitat supports rare flora such as the federally endangered smooth coneflower, state-protected Georgia aster and Fraser's loosestrife, and the rare curlyheads.



GPCA has helped the U.S. Forest Service and the Nongame Conservation Section restore six woodland sites by clearing woody vegetation and outplanting nearly a thousand rare plants. The association also developed a cadre of wildland firefighters who assist the Forest Service with prescribed fire, burning nearly 3,000 acres of oak/pine woodland during the last four years.

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Sandhills Conservation

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In 2006, the Nongame Conservation Section began a project to inventory sandhill habitats in the state. These habitats include longleaf pine-turkey oak ecosystems along the fall line and along larger streams in southern Georgia, as well as similar habitats associated with former barrier islands in inland coastal Georgia. The areas harbor a number of rare species including the southeastern pocket gopher, gopher tortoise, indigo snake, gopher frog, Bachman's sparrow and striped newt.



The sandhills inventory had several objectives. The first was a map of sandhills and sandhills-associated habitats throughout the state. The second was a field-based assessment of ecological condition, rare (and other) species present, and potential for restoration. The third objective was an estimate of gopher tortoise populations on selected sites. All phases of the project are complete, although gopher tortoise population estimates are still being refined.

In all, nearly 100 public and private sandhills sites representing more than 12,000 acres of habitat were visited. Approximately two-thirds of these sites had active gopher tortoise populations accounting for approximately 2,600 tortoise burrows. Additionally, tortoise population estimates were obtained for 20 mainly state-owned conservation properties through a contract with the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center at Ichauway.



In 2009, DNR was awarded a \$1 million competitive State Wildlife Grant to work with Alabama, Florida and South Carolina on a regional sandhill restoration effort. Using these federal funds, the project partners will assist with prescribed burning and other restoration efforts at high-priority sandhills sites throughout the four states. In Georgia, this effort should result in restoration on 15,000 acres of sandhill habitat.

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Coastal Habitat Assessment

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The Coastal Habitat Assessment project encompasses the 11 first- and second-tier coastal Georgia counties and is part of the greater Coastal Georgia Land Conservation Initiative, a collaboration between Georgia Conservancy, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia and DNR. When completed, the habitat assessment and the larger initiative will be used by county governments, municipalities and conservation organizations to maximize the conservation of critical and imperiled natural communities and wildlife habitat, while balancing development concerns and growth on the coast.



The habitat assessment entails aerial photo interpretation of ecological community types based on the U.S. National Vegetation Classification System and accompanied by field data collection. Work began in December 2007 with the hiring of two natural resources biologists. Over the last three years, this team, with assistance from other Nongame Conservation Section staff, has completed habitat maps for the 11 coastal counties.

Significant findings include the discovery of seven previously undescribed natural communities and the discovery of bottomland post oak (*Quercus similis*), a species not previously recorded in Georgia. Indicating its rarity in Georgia, the bottomland post oak will likely be listed as an S2 species, or imperiled within a region. More than half of the associations from the habitat assessment fall in the G3-G1 categories, ranging from globally vulnerable to extinction to critically imperiled.



In the past three years, the Nongame Conservation Section has coordinated with private landowners, conservation organizations, soil scientists, other state employees, and experts in botany and community ecology; enlisted the help of volunteers; and given talks to conservation groups, forestry professionals and college classes. The habitat assessment maps have been used widely by local planners and conservation groups. Data from this regional

assessment are being used to develop decision-support tools to facilitate land-use planning that will help conserve the region's significant ecological resources.

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Law Enforcement for Nongame

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During 2010, Wildlife Resources Division officers made approximately 47 checks on commercial vessels on the water for compliance with turtle excluder device regulations. (These checks did not include dockside inspections.) Enforcement of the TED regulations is one possible explanation for a decline in marine turtle strandings since 2003.

Officers also investigated violations involving nongame wildlife, including three involving hawks held without the required licenses or permits.

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Community Wildlife Project

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The Community Wildlife Project, an initiative of the Nongame Conservation Section and the Garden Club of Georgia, seeks to:

- Enhance native nongame animal and plant populations and their habitats in urban, suburban and rural communities throughout the state.
- Foster wildlife conservation stewardship and education in Georgia communities.
- Promote respect and appreciation of wildlife in combination with community beautification.
- Improve the quality of life for Georgians living in these communities.



The project also helps the Nongame Conservation Section build constituency through the 9,000-member Garden Club of Georgia via backyard habitat informational programs at the state, regional and local levels. Participants do not have to be a member of the Garden Club.

More than 750 communities have been awarded full certification, with more than 600 in various stages of completing certification standards. Since 2005, the Backyard Wildlife Certification survey has added about 2,500 certified backyards, 500 of which were certified with two or more adjoining neighbor's backyards to attain a Neighborhood Backyard Certification.

In summer 2013, the Hummingbird Haven Certification was created to focus on providing food sources for hummingbirds in yards.

[Application forms and more details.](#)

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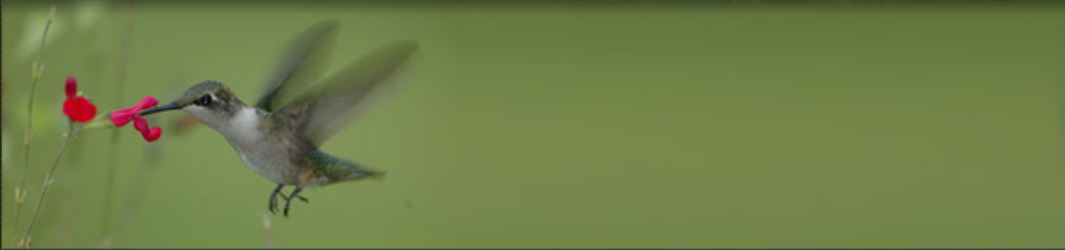
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Conserving Nongame Wildlife: 2010

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Education & Outreach

Regional Education Centers

The Wildlife Resources Division is charged with promoting the conservation and wise use of Georgia's natural resources. The division's educational mission involves cultivating an appreciation and understanding of wildlife resources, fostering wise stewardship of these resources, and promoting safe and ethical natural resource-based recreation. Through its history, Wildlife Resources has educated the state's youth and families to increase awareness, engagement and stewardship regarding Georgia's habitats, wildlife and natural resources. As growth and development increasingly require stewardship and conservation, the need for wildlife education is paramount.



Wildlife Resources operates six regional education centers in partnership with local school systems, Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), and other state and federal agencies to deliver wildlife-based education to students, adults and families. The centers include Charlie Elliott in Mansfield, Smithgall Woods in Helen, McDuffie in Dearing, Arrowhead in Rome, Grand Bay in Valdosta and Sapelo Island. About 48,000 students visited the centers in 2010, learning about conservation and wise use of natural and cultural resources through hands-on experiences. In addition, the Go Fish Education Center in Perry was prepped for a grand opening in October 2010.

Also during 2010, the Nongame Conservation Section provided more than \$127,000 for staff salaries and programming at Smithgall Woods, McDuffie, Arrowhead and Grand Bay. Local cooperators also provided financial assistance to these centers.

Youth Birding Competition



In its fifth year, the annual Youth Birding Competition drew another enthusiastic crowd. The 24-hour birding event features teams of pre-k through 12-grade birders representing schools, Scout troops, science clubs and other groups compete with teams their age to identify as many bird species as they can in Georgia.

The 2010 competition attracted more than 130 participants ages 6 to 18. These young birders cataloged 184 species and raised about \$2,300 for conservation projects throughout the state. The top team overall counted 148 bird species! The maximum number in Georgia at this time of year is about 200.

In addition, 90 young artists contributed paintings or drawings to the T-shirt art contest.

Find more on the contest [here](#).

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Social Media

The popularity of the Wildlife Resources Division's social media sites – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#) – continued to increase during 2010, spreading awareness of conservation and the division's work. As one example, the division's Facebook page registered more than 72,700 views during fiscal 2010 and averaged 1,910 user interactions a month.

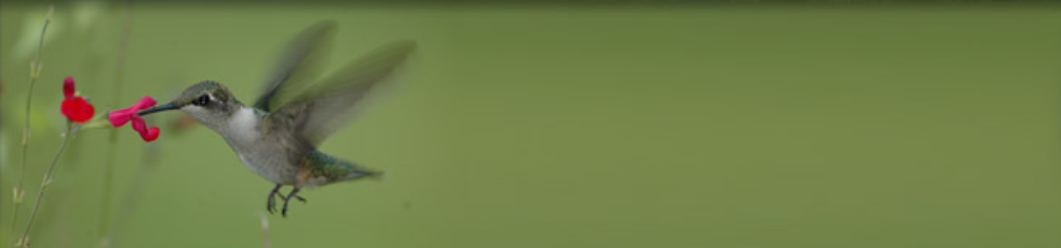
Another outreach, the nongame e-newsletter, [Georgia Wild](#), added 500 subscribers during the year. The online ventures and the e-newsletter broadened the reach of the Nongame Conservation Section's communications efforts, while also enhancing interactivity and customer service.



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Conserving Nongame Wildlife: 2010

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Land Acquisition & Conservation Planning

The Nongame Conservation Section facilitated three land conservation projects during fiscal year 2010, resulting in the acquisition of 7,988 acres of priority wildlife habitat. Each project -- described below -- involved significant collaboration with partners including The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others.

All of the projects conserved priority habitat identified in Georgia's [State Wildlife Action Plan](#). *(Details on Wildlife Action Plan update below.)*

Penholoway Flatwoods Easement

This project protected the habitat for the best population of the endangered hairy rattleweed (*Baptisia arachnifera*). Hairy rattleweed is a Georgia endemic, occurring only in Wayne and Brantley counties. The species occurs on areas of sandy soils north of the Satilla River, historically in open-canopied longleaf/slash pine savannas or flatwoods. Prior to this project, no populations of hairy rattleweed occurred on protected lands. The species requires open pine forest and regular prescribed fire for optimum habitat.

In cooperation with DNR, The Nature Conservancy, or TNC, bought the tract from Paul Lewis in December 2008. DNR then purchased a conservation easement in December 2009, using a combination of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Land Acquisition Grant and nongame funds.

DNR and TNC developed a management plan to conserve and improved the habitat for hairy rattleweed through the use of prescribed fire. In addition to rare plants, this site also provides habitat for gopher tortoises and offers one of the best examples of pine flatwoods in southeast Georgia.

Rayonier Murff Tract phase I

Phase 1 featured the acquisition of 7,180 acres along the Altamaha River in McIntosh and Long counties. This project conserved impressive old-growth cypress forest, mixed bottomland hardwood forest and riverine sandhills. Priority species benefitting from the acquisition include the eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise and swallow-tailed kite, as well as numerous neotropical migrant shorebirds.

The property will also provide outstanding opportunities for hunting, fishing, birding and hiking.

Partners included The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through a North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grant and a Coastal Wetlands Grant, the Georgia Land Conservation Program, and the state's Nongame Conservation Fund.

From 2006 to 2010, DNR partnered with The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, Georgia Land Conservation Program, Georgia Wetlands Trust Fund, U.S. Marine Corps, Ducks Unlimited, National Wildlife Turkey Federation and the Woodruff Foundation to acquire 29,090 acres of priority habitat in the lower Altamaha area. Many of these parcels are adjacent to the Murff Tract. Together, the acquisitions provide a significant wildlife conservation area for species that require large tracts of habitat.

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The Forestar Tract

This project resulted in the acquisition of a key parcel along Amicalola Creek in Dawson County. The 469-acre Forestar Tract connects state-owned lands in Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. Amicalola Creek is a priority stream for the Etowah darter and Cherokee darter and an important headwater for the Etowah River. This acquisition protects Amicalola Creek and helps preserve the high-quality aquatic habitat in this priority stream.

The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Land Conservation Program, Dobbs Foundation, Mountain Conservation Trust and Woodruff Foundation provided funding for this project. DNR now protects more than 20 miles of riparian habitat along Amicalola Creek, providing excellent outdoor recreational opportunities and maintaining high quality habitat for rare fish.

Conservation Planning

The State Wildlife Action Plan, completed in August 2005, is due for an update. Like all state wildlife agencies, DNR made a commitment to review and revise its Wildlife Action Plan, better known as SWAP, within 10 years. The revision process began in 2010 and will be completed by 2015.

The process will include a reassessment of priority species, habitats and conservation actions, as well as more detailed mapping of priority conservation areas. It will also include an evaluation of potential impacts of climate change on priority species and habitats and identification of climate-change adaptation strategies. Further assessment of monitoring needs and performance measures for comprehensive wildlife conservation in Georgia will be part of the work.

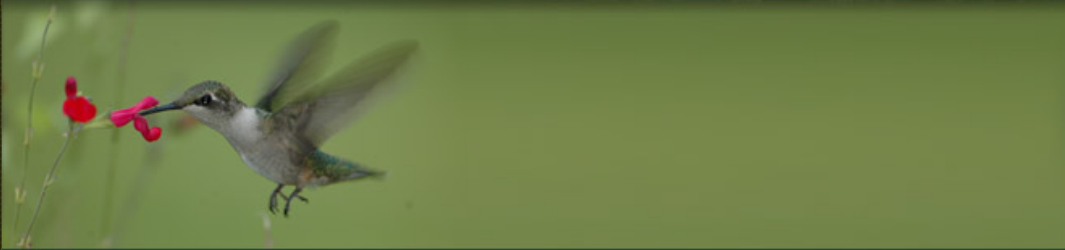
Nongame Conservation Section staff will coordinate the SWAP revision process with help from other DNR staff and representatives of a wide variety of government agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, landowner groups and private corporations. The product of this effort will be a strategic plan that reflects the most current information about wildlife conservation needs and opportunities in the state.



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Funding & Administration

The Nongame Conservation Section receives no state appropriations, depending instead on grants, fundraising and donations to conserve Georgia's nongame wildlife, rare native plants and natural habitats. With fundraising a necessity, the section has three primary avenues: Weekend for Wildlife, the Give Wildlife a Chance state income tax checkoff and the nongame wildlife license plates. All contributions go into the Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund.

Nongame's friends group, The Environmental Resources Network, or TERN, also provides significant support.



Weekend for Wildlife

Weekend for Wildlife is one of the country's most successful fundraisers for conservation, grossing more than \$7 million since its start in 1989. The annual event draws 300-400 guests to the prestigious Cloister at Sea Island for a weekend of outdoor trips, auctions and dining. The 2010 celebration grossed slightly more than \$608,000.

Give Wildlife a Chance State Income Tax Checkoff

The state income tax checkoff offers Georgians a convenient way to contribute to the Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund. Since the checkoff's creation in 1989, net contributions have averaged more than \$300,000, with a high of \$510,910 collected in 1991 and a low of \$184,065 in 1994. The revenue for 2010 reached \$205,339. Contributions have declined annually since fiscal year 2005.

The Give Wildlife a Chance checkoff is line 26 on the long state income tax form (Form 500) or line 10 of the short form (Form 500-EZ).



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Nongame License Plates

The bald eagle and ruby-throated hummingbird automobile tags remain the Nongame Conservation Section's largest funding source, raising \$885,236 in fiscal year 2010. That total marked an upturn from the previous fiscal year, but it also was only the second year since fiscal 2004 for total sales of less than \$1 million. The eagle plate continues to outsell the hummingbird plate.



State lawmakers changed the fee and revenue-sharing structure for Georgia specialty plates in 2010, reducing the share of the purchase that goes to sponsor

groups and adding an annual renewal fee. These changes were not fully implemented until the start of fiscal year 2011. Early indications pointed to a decline in renewal rates and sales, but an increase in revenue because of the new renewal fee.

TERN

The Environmental Resources Network, a nonprofit advocacy group, funded nearly \$66,000 in nongame projects in 2010. The work varied from developing a web-based guide to Georgia's crayfishes to providing transponder tags to help mark bog turtles, sponsoring an outstanding teacher award, and funding equipment for rare plant data collection and species identification. TERN, online at <http://tern.homestead.com> and on [Facebook](#), raises money through membership fees, donations, and the sale of raffle tickets, gifts and silent and verbal auctions at Weekend for Wildlife.



Federal and Other Funding

The Nongame Conservation Section received \$6.24 million in federal and other grants during fiscal 2010. Georgia is sharing \$1 million from the State Wildlife Grants Competitive Program with Alabama, Florida and South Carolina for a multi-year project to increase the quality, quantity and connectivity of prime sandhill habitat.