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MassWildlife Monthly April 2015

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Take Down Your Birdfeeders- Black Bears are Emerging from Winter Dens

Black bears are now active and seeking food. If you live in northern Middlesex County, Worcester County, western MA, or other areas where bears have been spotted, it's time to take down your bird feeders. Bears will often ignore natural foods such as skunk cabbage and head to a bird feeder for an easy meal. To avoid this problem, MassWildlife is asking property owners to be proactive by removing bird feeders and other potential food sources promptly. Once a bear gets food from a bird feeder, garbage can, or open compost, it will revisit the site and look for similar foods in other yards.

There are at least 4,000 Black Bears in Massachusetts and their range is expanding eastward. Take action by removing bird feeders and access to trash and pet food to help prevent conflicts with bears that can lead to hazards to people and bears. Do your part and keep bears wild!

[Learn more and watch MassWildlife's new Black Bear video!](#)

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2015 Spring Trout Stocking Has Begun

Close to 500,000 brook, brown, rainbow and tiger trout will be stocked this spring from MassWildlife's five hatcheries located in Sandwich, Palmer, Belchertown, Sunderland, and Montague. It has been a challenging year for the hatcheries given the extremely cold, icy, and snowy conditions that have prevailed this winter. Nevertheless, the close to 500,000 fish being stocked this spring, coupled with the more than 67,000 12+ inch trout stocked last fall should provide some excellent fishing in the coming months. Due to the delayed spring thaw, trout stocking may not begin in most areas of the state until the first week in April.

Anglers are encouraged to check the trout stocking schedule for the district near you, or contact individual [district offices](#) for the latest stocking information. [Trout stocking](#) schedules will be updated at noon every Friday between the end of March and Memorial Day in May.

2015 spring trout stocking stats:

- 45% of the fish average over 14 inches
- 72% of the fish average over 12 inches
- 218,000 rainbows will average over 14 inches
- 46,500 rainbows will average over 12 inches
- 10,000 rainbows will average between 9 and 12 inches
- 750 brown trout will be over 18 inches
- 46,600 brown trout will average over 12 inches
- 79,400 brown trout average between 9 and 12 inches
- 1,350 brook trout will average over 15 inches
- 37,600 brook trout will average over 12 inches
- 47,000 brook trout between 9 and 12 inches
- 2,500 tiger trout that will average over 14 inches

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Spring Turkey Hunting Reminders and Tips

The spring turkey hunting season opens in Massachusetts on April 27, 2015. [Read more about turkey hunting regulations.](#) Licenses and permits are available online using the [MassFishHunt](#) system, or at [license vendors](#) or [MassWildlife offices](#).

Remember, only bearded birds may be harvested during the spring season. Successful hunters must either report their harvest online via the [MassFishHunt](#) system or at a traditional check station within 48 hours of harvest and **before** the bird is processed for food or for taxidermy. Find a check station near you at [mass.gov/dfw/checkstation](#). [Click here for a complete guide to online wild turkey harvest reporting.](#)

Young Adult Turkey Hunt Reminder– Permits for the Young Adult Turkey Hunt (April 25, 2015) are NOT automatically issued through MassFishHunt. To obtain a permit/certificate, past participants must fill out and return the past participant form at: [mass.gov/dfw/pastparticipantapp](#). Those who harvest a turkey on the Young Adult Turkey Hunt date (April 25, 2015) must report their turkey either online at [MassFishHunt](#) or at a [traditional game check station](#) within 48 hours of harvest.

Turkey Hunting Safety– Be sure of your target and what is beyond it. This reduces the chance of a hunting accident and reduces the number of hens mistakenly killed during the spring season. Follow these hunting safety practices to ensure a safe, enjoyable outdoor experience:

- Don't stalk birds; sit or stand and call the turkeys to you.
- Don't wear any red, white, blue, or black as these are colors seen on wild turkeys.
- Don't hide in a place where your view is obstructed.

[Click here to find more wild turkey hunting safety tips from MassWildlife and the National Wild Turkey Federation.](#)

Turkey Hunting Tips – To increase your chances of a successful hunt, review these scouting and hunting tips provided by MassWildlife's Wild Turkey Biologist, David Scarpitti.

- Invest most of your time identifying active gobblers in the week or so before the season. There is a lot of flock movement several weeks prior to the opening of the season, so the birds you saw displaying or heard gobbling in early April may have moved to a different location by late April.
- If you're itching to get out and scout early, focus your efforts on identifying new parcels to hunt by securing permission from the landowner if necessary, identifying parking/access locations, and checking local bylaws relative to hunting or private property access.
- Some locations will consistently hold turkeys during the hunting season year after year, but others are less predictable, so it pays to put your time in as close to the beginning of the season as possible to determine which locales are holding turkeys THIS year.
- Minimize/avoid calling to turkeys during the pre-season to locate gobblers; instead look for scat, feathers, scratching in the leaf litter, strut marks or dusting areas, or other signs of turkey activity.
- Be patient, often gobblers will be silent or unresponsive to your calls in the early morning when they are tied up with hens, but those same birds can become very active and callable in the late morning.
- Don't disregard the late season. Typically turkey hunter effort falls dramatically after the first week of the season. Although breeding activity is declining, there are still a lot of active gobblers around – and best of all, there will be less competition from your fellow hunters!
- Hunt in the rain. Many turkey hunters don't like hunting in the rain, but turkeys may be active rain or shine. During rainy days, focus your efforts in open hay fields or agricultural areas, as turkeys seem to prefer these openings when it's wet.

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Report Winter Fish Kills

Thick ice and heavy snow cover have resulted in low dissolved oxygen levels in a number of Massachusetts ponds this winter. Ice and snow can limit light penetration through the water column, altering the processes of photosynthesis and decomposition of organic matter, which can in turn decrease the amount of oxygen available to fish. These conditions may result in winter fish kills; ponds that are shallow (less than 15 feet) and weedy are particularly vulnerable.

As a result of lingering thick ice and snow pack on ponds, we expect to see higher numbers of winter fish kills than usual. If you observe dead fish on the bottom of a pond or floating on the surface, alert MassWildlife. To report a fish kill Monday through Friday between 8:00 A.M -4:30 P.M., contact Richard Hartley at (508) 389-6330. To report after normal business hours, on holidays or weekends, contact the Environmental Law Enforcement's 24-hour radio room at (800) 632-8075.

Ice anglers may encounter signs of a low oxygen environment when they drill through the ice and notice a rotten egg odor or observe sluggish or dying shiners. The odor is hydrogen sulfide gas which is a natural by-product that occurs in ponds with low dissolved oxygen and is likely not the result of pollution. Oxygen levels will be restored shortly after the ice melts in the spring.

[Learn more about fish kills.](#)

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Reservoir Fishing Season Delays

Due to ice conditions that persist on the Wachusett and Sudbury Reservoirs, the opening day of fishing will be delayed. Fishing is generally allowed beginning the first Saturday of April, so long as there is no ice on the Reservoirs. Given the persistent winter conditions, the Department of Conservation and Recreation is **delaying the opening until at least Saturday April 11, 2015.**

If a further delay is needed, additional information will be [posted on DCR's website](#). The fishing season for DCR's West Lake Waushacum, "The Quag" and Muddy Pond in Sterling is the same as Wachusett Reservoir and is similarly delayed.

At Wachusett and Sudbury Reservoirs, fishing is allowed from shore over more than two-thirds of the Reservoir with access through Gates 6-35 and the Thomas Basin area. Access is allowed from dawn to dusk and the season extends until November 30th. At Sudbury Reservoir, shoreline fishing is allowed everywhere except some areas close to the Dam, which are posted.

For further information on fishing at the Reservoirs, [please visit the DCR website](#). For additional information, you can also contact the Wachusett\Sudbury Ranger office at (978) 365-3800.

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Get Involved in Citizen Science this Spring

Help with Spring Bald Eagle Count

MassWildlife is preparing for its Spring Eagle Count, scheduled for April 10. In the case of bad weather, the backup survey date is April 17. The goal of the survey is to document active eagle nests and to identify banded birds throughout the state. This will be done by checking known nest sites and searching for new nests in areas where recent eagle activity has been reported or where the habitat seems especially good for breeding eagles. When eagles are observed, remember to look for any leg bands. Banded eagles will have a color band with a unique letter/number code that is often readable either using binoculars or high resolution photography. If you would like to participate in this count, please contact Andrew Vitz at (508) 389- 6394 or Andrew.vitz@state.ma.us

Report Rusty Blackbird Sightings During Spring Migration

MassWildlife needs your help documenting Rusty Blackbirds during spring migration! The Rusty Blackbird has undergone one of the most precipitous declines documented for any species in North America. Since the mid 1900s, the population is thought to have declined by 85%, and the cause largely remains a mystery. Very little is known about the migratory habits of this species, and the goal of the Rusty Blackbird Migration Blitz is to gain a better understanding of the species requirements during migration. To report your Rusty Blackbird sighting, learn more about the project, and review identification tips visit the [International Rusty Blackbird Working Group's website](#). If you are interested in participating and have questions, contact MassWildlife Ornithologist Andrew Vitz at Andrew.vitz@state.ma.us or (508) 389-6394.

Report Rare Species and Vernal Pools

Although many parts of the state are still covered in patchy snow and experiencing cold days, spring amphibian season is just around the corner. When we experience rainy nights with temperatures above 40 degrees, Spotted Salamanders, Jefferson Salamanders, Blue-spotted Salamanders, and Wood Frogs will begin emerging from their forest retreats and piling into vernal pools to mate and deposit their eggs. Spring Peepers, Pickerel Frogs, and Leopard Frogs will be chorusing in large, open wetlands. Other frogs and salamanders will become active, moving about the landscape in preparation for their respective breeding periods that come a bit later in the spring. You may observe many of these animals as they cross fields, yards, and roadways to reach their destinations.

If you believe you have found a [vernal pool](#) which could become certified or a [rare amphibian](#), report your observations via the [Vernal Pool and Rare Species Information System](#) (VPRS). Data collected through VPRS is used by MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program to better understand densities and distributions of species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA). If you want to learn more about vernal pools and the specialized wildlife that rely on this habitat type, get *A Field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools*. [Learn more about all NHESP publications and how to purchase them.](#)

Report Roadkill on Linking Landscapes Site

MassWildlife and Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and the University of Massachusetts have launched [Linking Landscapes for Massachusetts Wildlife](#), a long-term and multifaceted volunteer based monitoring program and planning collaboration. LLMW aims to 1.) reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve public safety, 2.) enhance, protect, and restore habitats impacted by roads, 3.) incorporate conservation priorities into transportation planning, and 4.) implement wildlife transportation and research. As a citizen, you can help by contributing data or volunteering to survey road segments. You can document your observations of roadkilled wildlife [using this form](#). Roadkill reports help inform our wildlife mitigation and transportation safety decision making.

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Upcoming Meetings and Events

April 1: Fire as a Management Tool in Land Restoration, Concord – Tim Simmons, MassWildlife Restoration Ecologist will present in the Theater Building at Middlesex School, 1400 Lowell Road in Concord at 7:30 P.M. This talk is part of a series of lectures sponsored by the Conservation Consortium, a cooperative venture of Concord's three high schools. This event is free and open to the public.

April 9: Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Meeting, Westborough – The meeting will take place at the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters Office located at 1 Rabbit Hill Road in Westborough from 1:30- 4:30 P.M. in the Southwest Meeting Room, Room #103 Please note: If you have a disability or medical condition and would like to request special accommodations, please contact Susan Sacco at 508-389-6342.

April 10: Spring Eagle Count, Statewide – MassWildlife is preparing for its Spring Eagle Count, scheduled for April 10. In the case of bad weather, the backup survey date is April 17. The goal for the survey is to document active eagle nests and identify any banded birds throughout the state. This will be done by checking nests that have been used in previous years and searching for new nests in areas where recent eagle activity has been reported or where the habitat seems especially good for breeding eagles. When eagles are observed, remember to look for any bands on the legs. Banded eagles will have a coded color-band (states use different colors) that is often readable either using binoculars or high resolution photography. If you would like to participate in this count, please contact Andrew Vitz at (508) 389- 6394 or Andrew.vitz@state.ma.us

April 15: Bald Eagle Restoration, Concord – Drew Vitz, MassWildlife State Ornithologist will give a presentation in the Ransome Room at Concord Academy, 166 Main Street in Concord at 7:30 P.M. This talk is part of a series of lectures sponsored by the Conservation Consortium, a cooperative venture of Concord's three high schools. This event is free and open to the public.

April 25: Fisheries and Wildlife Board Meeting, Westborough – The April meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2015, at 10:00 A.M., at the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's Field Headquarters, Richard Cronin Building, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, off North Drive, Westborough, Massachusetts. Please note: If you have a disability or medical condition and would like to request special accommodations, please contact Susan Sacco at 508-389-6342.

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