



Salamander Successes

Endangered tiger salamanders have a new lease on life thanks to a habitat restoration project completed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey. Every winter at The Conservancy's Hand's Landing preserve in Cape May, tiger salamanders emerge from hibernation to trek to nearby vernal pools to spawn. In 2010, the condition of the vernal pools had deteriorated so badly that they became too shallow to sustain the salamander eggs through their life cycle. The three organizations successfully deepened the pools, and tiger salamander egg masses and hatchlings returned to the site. "Cape May County is one of the remaining strongholds for tiger salamanders in our state and along the East Coast," says Bob Allen, director of conservation for TNC in New Jersey. "We are really pleased to see their population stabilizing and growing."

Elsewhere in the state, spotted salamanders get very important amphibian treatment for their vernal pool journeys. Since 2002, Conserve Wildlife volunteers have personally escorted spotted salamanders across roads, literally hand-carrying them to safety in northern counties. In central New Jersey, East Brunswick township has been closing one of its roads to vehicular traffic at migration time for the past 10 years to allow salamanders to cross to breeding sites. Dave Moskowitz and The Friends of the East Brunswick Environmental Commission lead the efforts, holding an annual vigil for the appearance of the spotted salamanders and educating locals about the unique role of vernal pools within the community. "We are seeing greater numbers of young salamanders and egg masses than ever," says Moskowitz. "And the closures have raised environmental awareness about the issue of amphibians and roads."

Above: Tiger Salamander © BRIAN GRATWICKE

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The Buzz on Pollinators

TNC's New Jersey conservation scientists are busy as, well, bees, assessing pollinator habitat and its associated agricultural benefits through a study co-funded by the William Penn Foundation and the federal government's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The team has evaluated statewide land patterns to make recommendations for effective integration of pollinator strips—linear tracts planted with a mix of native plants and flowers that bloom at different times—on farms to maximize crop yield, filter agricultural runoff into freshwater sources and help sustain wild bee colonies. NRCS will use the findings to determine where to apply U.S. Farm Bill funding for improvements to indigenous pollinator habitat.

Staff conservation experts have also completed an economic analysis that provides farmers with estimates of how much pollinator habitat can improve production and profitability for nine different types of crop. A related component of the project includes surveying the farming community about challenges they may face in making habitat improvements to support wild bees; lessons learned from these surveys will be used for education and outreach addressing ways to overcome those challenges, including a better understanding of financial benefits.

"Working with individual farmers on pollinator habitat in the past led us to realize we needed to find ways to scale up this beneficial practice," says Ellen Creveling, freshwater programs director. "In TNC's spirit of innovation, we are now trying to quantify and communicate the value of native pollinators to a larger agricultural constituency. The benefits will be measurable for food producers, consumers and, of course, for the bees themselves."

Above: Wild pollinators can help increase crop yields. © MATTHEW STRAUBMULLER

ON THE WEB » Learn how to make a pollinator habitat in your own backyard at nature.org/diversify-your-yard.