Virtual Snapshot Series

New Jersey State Symbols
State Symbols

New Jersey has 18 state symbols. From animals to objects, our state symbols represent special elements that are important to our history, environment, and culture.

Official state symbols can only be created through laws. The legislative branch of government develops ideas for laws called bills. If both the Legislature and the governor like a bill, it can become a law through a course of action called the legislative process.
The eastern goldfinch became the New Jersey State Bird in 1935. Alert birdwatchers can catch a glimpse of a male eastern goldfinch’s bright yellow feathers as he visits the backyards of New Jersey. He also has a snappy black cap, wings, and tail. If you want eastern goldfinches to visit, try putting out sunflower seeds—that’s their favorite treat.

Fun Facts!

The New Jersey Audubon Society once featured the eastern goldfinch on their stationary and campaign buttons to advocate for the kind treatment of birds.

Red acorns are a favorite food for a variety of animals including blue jays, turkeys, squirrels, deer, raccoons, and black bears.

Red Oak

In 1950, the majestic red oak became New Jersey’s State Tree. The red oak is a hardwood tree that you can recognize by its pointy-lobed leaves with prickly tips. It produces many acorns, was an important food for the pre-colonial Native Americans. In autumn, the leaves turn a vibrant red, adding bursts of color to our rural landscapes.
A.J. Meerwald

The A.J. Meerwald, a Delaware Bay oyster schooner launched in 1928, is the State Tall Ship, having been so designated by Chapter 168 of the Laws of 2017. The Ship, constructed of oak planks laid over oak frames, is 115 feet long and has a beam height of 22 feet, 3 inches. From its homeport in Commercial Township, the A.J. Meerwald is operated by the Delaware Bay Schooner Project as a floating classroom, promoting ecological and historical awareness of the Bay and the waters of New Jersey.

Fun Facts!

To harvest oysters from the Delaware Bay, the A.J. Meerwald used a contraption called a dredge, a large metal rake and basket.

When the USS New Jersey was launched in 1942, New Jersey First Lady Carolyn Edison christened the ship by breaking a bottle of champagne over the ship's bow for good luck.

USS New Jersey

The USS New Jersey earned more battle stars than any ship in its class. It served 21 years and received a Navy Unit Commendation and 19 battle and campaign stars for combat during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Lebanese Civil War, and service in the Persian Gulf. Named as the official State Ship in 2017, it is now docked in the Port of Camden. The USS New Jersey is open for public tours.
**Violet**

Legislation to name the Common Meadow Violet as the New Jersey State Flower originated in 1913. But it wasn’t until 1971, at the urging of garden clubs, that the *Viola sororia* became an official symbol. Even though violets are often considered “shy,” they are hardy enough to grow in New Jersey fields, lawns, and anywhere they can find warm spring sunshine.

**Fun Facts!**

Not only is this five-petaled flower pretty — it’s edible! Violets are a great source of vitamins A and C.

Thank the honeybee for your dinner! Researchers believe that honeybees are responsible for the growth of up to 80 percent of our farm crops.

**Honeybee**

Our State Bug, the honeybee, serves all of us very well. It makes honey for sweetening our meals and beeswax for candles and polish. Honeybees also pollinate our flowers, fruit trees, and vegetable blossoms. A group of New Jersey school children persuaded the Legislature to designate the honeybee as the State Bug. Then they all watched as the Governor signed the bill into law in 1974. Now isn’t that a sweet tale?
Fun Facts!

There are an estimated 9.2 million horses in the United States. At that number, each of New Jersey’s 9 million residents could have their own horse!

On May 19, 1983, dancers from across the state arrived in Trenton for a square dance party in the streets. Even Governor Thomas Kean joined the fun in celebration of our new State American Folk Dance.
Brook Trout

The State Freshwater Fish is the brook trout, which joined the other state symbols in 1992. This native New Jersey fish received its name from the Pilgrims. The brook trout is very sensitive to pollution and other changes in the environment, so its presence assures good water quality.

Fun Facts!

Brook trout are crepuscular (krup-pus-skyuh-Ir) fish, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk — something to remember when you plan your next fishing trip!

Striped Bass

Also known as the rockfish or striper, the striped bass is a large predatory fish. It has dark stripes running across its metallic sides. On average, adult striped bass grow two to three feet in length and weigh between 10 to 30 pounds, although they can be as big as six feet and weigh as much as 125 pounds! On the Atlantic coast, striped bass range from Canada to Florida. The striped bass became an official state symbol in 2017.
Blueberries were first cultivated for commercial production in New Jersey, and the town of Hammonton is widely recognized as the blueberry capital of the nation. The highbush blueberry (Vaccinium corymbosum) also known as the “New Jersey blueberry” is the ideal symbol of delicious and nutritious fruit. Inspired by elementary school children, the blueberry was designated as the official New Jersey State Fruit on January 12, 2004.

The “Blueberry Queen” of New Jersey was Elizabeth White. She was the first person to successfully farm blueberries in large quantities from her farm, Whitesbog.

It’s blue—it’s a boy! Think again. The female black swallowtail has distinctive bright blue spots on its hindwings, but the male does not.

The black swallowtail butterfly (Papilio polyxenes) became the official State Butterfly of New Jersey on January 11, 2016. It is a common visitor to open fields and farmlands, and frequently seen in urban landscapes too. A female will lay between 30-50 eggs per day! Depending on the temperature and food source, it will take 35-65 days for a butterfly to develop from a caterpillar, but then it lives for only for 6-14 days. Its favorite foods include carrots and celery.
**Hadrosaurus foulkii**

During the Cretaceous Period (70 to 100 million years ago) duck-billed dinosaurs roamed the swampland that would later become New Jersey. The first mostly complete, fossilized skeleton of one of these dinosaurs was discovered by William Parker Foulke in Haddonfield in 1858. It was named *Hadrosaurus foulkii*. In 1991, the *Hadrosaurus foulkii* became New Jersey’s State Dinosaur.

**Fun Facts!**

The word *Hadrosaurus* translates to “heavy lizard” or “bulky lizard.” Scientists believe the 25-foot long dinosaur walked in a forward-leaning position with its tail held out for balance.

The shell of a knobbed whelk is formed when the snail inside secretes calcium carbonate around a vertical line in a turning motion, resulting in the shell’s signature spiral shape.

**Knobbed Whelk**

New Jersey’s State Shell, the knobbed whelk, can be found along our beaches and bays. Its scientific name is *Busycon carica gmelin*. This large marine snail with a spiral shell is harvested and canned for food. It is also known by its Italian name, *scungilli*. The knobbed whelk became the State Shell in 1995.
Fun Facts!

The New Jersey State House’s General Assembly Chamber includes a 1,240-pound chandelier installed by the Thomas Edison Lighting Company.

**Streptomyces griseus** was first discovered in a heavily manured field. Nine years later, it would start to save millions of lives.

*Streptomyces griseus*, a microorganism that played a role in treating tuberculosis, became New Jersey’s official State Microbe in 2019. In 1943, researchers from Rutgers University used the microbe to create the antibiotic streptomycin. New Jerseyan Selman Waksman received the Nobel Prize for his research of the microbe.
The Seeing Eye® Dog

On January 21, 2020, a special group of New Jersey "humanitarians" became the newest addition to our State Symbols, when the Seeing Eye® dog was named the official State Dog. These talented canines are graduates of The Seeing Eye®, the oldest dog guide school in the world. More than 17,000 dogs have been paired with blind individuals, increasing their independence and improving their quality of life.

Fun Facts!

The first seeing eye dogs were trained to assist soldiers who had been blinded in action during World War I.

The bog turtle hibernates underwater during the winter by burying itself under a foot or more of mud. They emerge from hibernation in late March to April.

Bog Turtle

The bog turtle (Clemmys muhlenbergii) was designated the official State Reptile of New Jersey on June 18, 2018. It is one of the smallest turtle species in North America, growing to only about four inches long. It has suffered from habitat loss, pollution, and illegal collecting, all of which have contributed to the declining population of this rare reptile.
Honoring the First Four

The first four state symbols signed into law were the eastern goldfinch (1935); red oak tree (1950); violet (1971); and honeybee (1974).

In the State House, these symbols are memorialized in a sculpture created by the Boehm Porcelain Company of Trenton. *The Glory of New Jersey* was installed in 1991 after twelve artists molded and painted 326 individual parts by hand. It is nearly three feet high and weighs over 75 pounds.
The Symbols in Stained Glass

In the State House Annex, the state symbols are depicted in stained glass. Visitors can see artistic interpretations of the *Hadrosaurus foulkii*, violet, eastern goldfinch, red oak, horse, and honeybee.

The artist who created the windows, J. Kenneth Leap, stated: “It is my hope that the viewer will gain a fresh perspective and a sense of civic pride.” That, after all, is what state symbols are meant to do!