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### NEW JERSEY: MORE WILD THAN YOU KNOW

Even though New Jersey is a small state in size, it is very diverse with many different types of habitats and animals. My family and I moved from Pennington, New Jersey, to Franklin Township, in 2022. That year, I learned just how diverse this great state really is. In Pennington, we lived in a townhouse and the most common animal we encountered was a dog being walked by its owner. Soon after we moved to Franklin, I saw lots of new animals right on our new property. We are surrounded by farms and have lots of domesticated animals close by like sheep, horses, and pigs. But wild animals are some of my favorite – especially foxes, groundhogs and even fish!

In our first year at our new house, we had a family of nine foxes living under our barn. One baby fox let us get very close to it and I was even able to touch it. Later, I learned that sometimes it is better not to get so close to some wildlife, but the baby foxes were so cute! At the end of the spring, the baby foxes grew older, and we started to see fewer and fewer of them. Every spring, we see new families of foxes, but that family of nine will always be most special to me.

Like foxes, groundhogs are cute. I also learned that they create many problems. I loved having a family of groundhogs living in my backyard until I saw that they were digging holes and tunnels under our barn. We needed to come up with a plan to keep both the barn and the family of groundhogs safe. We decided to safely move the groundhogs to a new area where they would no longer damage the barn and could also live safely with one another. It took a few days and lots of cantaloupes, but we were able to do it!

Fish are not as cute and cuddly as many other animals, but my family and I love spending time exploring and enjoying the Raritan River near our house where these fish live. Minnows, sunnies, bluegills, bass and trout all live in this fun creek. In the summer, we walk through the river with our fishing poles trying to catch fish, while also looking for crayfish, hellgrammites and even snakes! We always say that we are very lucky to have such a special place so close by!

Most people do not think of New Jersey as a state where you see lots of exciting wildlife like foxes, groundhogs and different types of fish. My family and I quickly learned that Franklin Township is a great place to experience all this beautiful wildlife and more. What New Jersey lacks in size, it makes up for in animal diversity. Any animal lover would be lucky to spend time in New Jersey – like me!