

# Friends Like Us

*By Richard O. Danley, Jr.*

*PGC Southcentral Region Law Enforcement Supervisor*

THE 2010 firearms deer season in Huntingdon County was typical of most years; there was a lot of activity requiring a WCO's attention and only so many officers to go around. It's this time of the year when Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officers, as well as fellow conservation officers from the Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) become integral in providing extra coverage in a district WCO's patrol area.

The first day of the season found PFBC Captain Corey Britcher and Deputy Lanny Cornelius patrolling together in southern Huntingdon County, while WCO Cadet Jason Kelley and I were patrolling the remainder of the district.

Officers Britcher and Cornelius were patrolling SGL 251 in Tell Township when they noticed a hunter standing next to a parked pickup along the Game Lands road. The officers checked the hunter and found that his rifle leaning against the truck was loaded. After requesting the hunter's driver's license and hunting license, the officers determined they were speaking to Donnie Miner. While informing Donnie of the violation, the officers noticed what appeared to be fresh blood in the bed of the pickup. There was also deer hair mixed in with the blood. Being that the season had just opened, the officers asked Donnie if he had harvested a deer.

Donnie became nervous and had a difficult time answering simple questions and claimed he didn't know where the blood came from. Suspicious, the officers continued questioning Donnie, and he eventually admitted that a Wayne Jeffries had been out the previous night and shot the deer using a spotlight. Donnie said that he was staying at Wayne's camp, and that Wayne was currently in the woods hunting. Donnie had returned to the truck to warm up and was waiting on Wayne when the officers came upon him.

Donnie told officers Britcher and Cornelius that the deer was taken back to the hunting camp and was in the garage. At this point, as often happens, the officers needed some help. They contacted Cadet Kelley and me on the radio and asked if we could help. We agreed to meet them at their location on the Game Lands.

When we arrived I spoke with Donnie about the incident, and he repeated his story of Wayne having gone out the previous night and killing the deer. Donnie said he was not along, and that when Wayne returned to the camp he brought in a deer he had just shot. Donnie said the deer was a small buck; he couldn't remember how many points it had, but guessed five or six. At my request, Donnie wrote his story on a witness statement form.

After some discussion we decided that officers Britcher and Cornelius would wait for Wayne to return to the truck. Cadet Kelley and I would take Donnie back to the hunting camp to recover the deer. The only problem was, Donnie didn't really know where the camp was. This was his first trip to the area and Wayne had driven. He gave me a general location of where the camp was, and having a decent idea, we left to find it.

After about a 15-minute drive we arrived at the "camp." Except this wasn't a camp but, rather, a home, and not just any home, but one I had been to the previous year for a suspected poaching violation. The home was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Clueless. Mrs. Clueless came to the door and I asked her if she knew a Wayne Jeffries. Mrs. Clueless said Wayne was her son. I asked if he was home, and she said he was out hunting. I then told Mrs. Clueless that we had reason to believe there was an illegal deer in the garage and asked for her permission to look for it. She said there wasn't any deer in her garage or she would know about it, but that we could go ahead and look anyway. I asked her to sign a consent to search form, but Mrs. Clueless refused, telling us that she said we could look, so look.

I asked Donnie if the deer was in the garage behind the house, and he said the last time he saw it, it was in that garage. Cadet Kelly, Donnie, Mrs. Clueless and I all entered the garage. Inside we found a completely finished living space with furniture, a bar, pool table and all the makings of a recreational room. There was a man sleeping on one of the couches. Cadet Kelley went to the man on the couch and identified himself. He asked for the man's identification, suspecting he might be Wayne Jeffries. He wasn't. Cadet Kelley asked the man if he had any firearms in his possession. The man responded that he had a

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loaded pistol on his belt. Cadet Kelley secured the firearm and checked two rifles lying on the pool table; both were loaded.

As soon as we walked in Mrs. Clueless said, "See I told you there wasn't any deer in here." At that point I noticed a door leading to another room off the finished recreational room. I asked Mrs. Clueless where that door led, and she said to the other garage. I asked her if I could look behind the door. She said it was okay, but stated, "I don't know why you want to look in there; I already told you there isn't any deer in here." I stepped into the garage and hanging from the ceiling was a nice 8-point buck. I pointed to the animal and answered her question with my own, "What about this deer?"

Mrs. Clueless said she had no idea where the deer had come from. The deer had been field-dressed and was hanging from its rear legs over a blue barrel. The trophy deer (one of the largest we had seen so far that season) had no tag attached, and a clear bullet wound to the neck, just as Donnie said we would find it, only it was quite a bit larger than the 5- or 6-point he had described.

About this time Mr. Clueless entered the garage and wanted to know what was going on. Cadet Kelley informed him that I was speaking with his wife in the adjacent garage, and in a huff Mr. Clueless joined the conversation.

I explained to Mr. and Mrs. Clueless that being they were the homeowners, they were in possession of an unlawful deer and would be held responsible. We gave them a way out, though. I told them that we did not think either of them had shot the deer. I told the couple that we believed Wayne Jeffries shot the buck at night as Donnie had said, but unless Wayne contacted me and admitted to the killing, I would have no choice but to file citations on them based on our investigation. I strongly encouraged them to have Wayne contact us when he came home. I left a business card with the couple and loaded the deer onto my rack. We then returned to meet up with officers Britcher and Cornelius and see if Wayne had shown up.

When Cadet Kelley and I pulled up we were informed that Wayne had not returned. Because several hours had elapsed since Corey and Lanny discovered Donnie standing along the road, we all had a sneaking suspicion that Wayne had noticed the officers by his vehicle and had either walked home or gotten a ride from someone.

We were discussing our next move when a hunter stepped out of the trees. I identified myself and asked him to do the same. He said he was Wayne Jeffries. I asked him if he had harvested any deer. He said he hadn't, that he hadn't even seen a deer all day. I pointed out the blood in the bed of his truck and he immediately began a story about a deer he had struck with his vehicle a few days prior. I stopped him in the middle of his story and told him we had already spoken with Donnie, and that before he continued he might want to think about what we already knew. Wayne shook his head and again stated the blood was from a roadkill. I again stopped him and asked him to walk with me to the rear of my truck. He followed me around the truck to the buck taken from his mother's house. All the color drained from his face, his eyes got as large as dinner plates, and his head slumped to look at his feet. I explained that the deer was in possession of his parents, and while I explained this, Wayne's head was shaking back and forth from shoulder to shoulder.

As I continued explaining to him that his parents were going to be held responsible for the illegal deer, and be facing heavy fines (the new enhanced penalties had just gone into effect.) for something that both he and I knew they didn't do, his head began to nod. I told him that I would hold only him responsible for the violation if he admitted to what he had done. His head dropped and, looking at his feet, he said, "I did it. What do you want me to do?" I asked him to make a written statement telling the whole story, those involved, where the buck was killed and who was with him. He agreed and began to write down his story.

It turned out that Donnie hadn't been as truthful with us as we thought. Wayne explained that Donnie and he had been drinking at a local establishment and were returning home around 2:45 a.m. They were spotlighting on the ride home, and in a field not far from his parents' house they noticed the large buck and went home, got a .30-06 rifle and returned to the field. Wayne shot the deer from the driver side window while Donnie held the spotlight on it.

We thanked Wayne for his honesty and told him we would be in touch after we sorted out the charges we would be filing. We also explained to him that Donnie's story did not match his, and that we would have to speak to Donnie again to confirm what he had told us.

A few days later Cadet Kelley called Donnie and told him the differences in Wayne's account of the incident. Donnie explained that Wayne's story was the truthful one. Donnie admitted to holding the light and helping Wayne retrieve the deer and bring it back to the Clueless home. Donnie apologized and said that he was scared when officers Britcher and Cornelius had approached him and didn't know what to say, so he lied.

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Wayne had five charges filed against him. He pled guilty to all counts and was sentenced to pay \$1,610. Donnie, because he lied on a written statement, and for the initial violation of the loaded rifle on Wayne's truck, had seven charges filed against him. He also pled guilty to all counts and was sentenced to pay \$1,850. Both men lost their hunting and furtaking privileges for several years.

The deer was scored by WCO Jeff Mock, a certified Boone and Crocket Club scorer, and had a green score of 122-5/8, a trophy in any hunter's book.

This case is a great example of conservation officers, whether they be waterways, wildlife or deputy WCOs, working together to be in the right place at the right time. Had officers Britcher and Cornelius not volunteered to patrol that portion of the district, Wayne and Donnie might have gotten away with their theft of a trophy from the sportsmen and women of the commonwealth.