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## Incident on Briar Ridge

WHEN CLEM CALHOUN stepped out of the thicket, I'm not sure which one of us was more surprised. But if I had to guess, I'd say it was Clem, and I don't think it was because I had almost run right over him. The sight of two conservation officers sitting in their patrol vehicle mere inches away had a paralyzing effect on Clem.

Working from an anonymous tip, Deputy Gene Gaydos and I had been creeping along that narrow dirt road, hoping to catch a glimpse of Clem hunting from his baited treestand just 25 yards uphill from where he'd walked right out in front of us. Thing is, we didn't want him to know that we knew about his baited treestand now that he wasn't in it.

It was the first day of deer season, and Clem didn't even have a gun with him and, well, the conversation, or lack thereof, went something like this: "Howdy," I said rolling down my window. Clem stood at the side of the road, frozen in his tracks. His jaw opened but nothing came out. "Hear much shooting today?"

Clem leaned forward slightly and just stared at me with wide, owlish eyes.

"Were you hunting today?" I pressed.

Clem swallowed hard. "No. I . . . I've just been out walking," he croaked.

"Okay. Well, have a good day." And with that, I eased my patrol car down the road.

I turned at the first intersection and continued around the bend until I was parallel with Clem's treestand, which was now 300 yards away. Gene and I had a perfect view of the area Clem had just come from. His treestand, a large wooden structure, loomed high above the ground. Most of the trees and brush surrounding it had been cut and piled into huge brush piles that dotted the landscape. Clem obviously didn't want to blunder into us, and we hoped that whatever he was trying to hide would become clear if we waited. I focused my binoculars on Clem's treestand, but it was too far to see evidence of any bait. As I pulled my eyes away from the binoculars I noticed a pickup traveling along the road bordering Clem's treestand.

"That's Clem's truck," Gene exclaimed. "Looks like he's in a hurry."

"I guess we blew it," I sighed. "Just our luck to be spotted."

Suddenly, though, a subtle flash of orange caught my eye. It came from the dense brush lining the road where Clem had been driving. A mere swatch of color. What was it? I squinted into my binoculars again. A patch of orange appeared and then disappeared. A survey flag perhaps? The rustling wind and low light from the setting sun, made it almost impossible to zero in on the object. My eyes strained through the glasses until I located it once again. It was bigger this time, and moving in a jerking fashion close to the ground. A hat. It was an orange hat, and I realized that the person wearing it was hunkered down on his knees, apparently working on a deer.

In a matter of minutes we were with the hunter. He stood slowly and faced us. A young and pleasant looking man, in his late 20s, he was of medium height and lanky. His hair was thick and jet-black, and he had a neatly trimmed beard. A hook-bladed knife protruded from his right hand. He was bloodied to his elbows, and we could see almost immediately that the deer was not legal. A 4-point, the buck had been neatly quartered in the brush.

"Put down your knife," said Deputy Gaydos.

"I just found this deer," he blurted while letting go of his knife. "I didn't want to see it go to waste; I don't even have a gun."

Gene kept an eye on the man while I walked a few yards away and checked Clem's treestand for guns and bait. I found nothing out of the ordinary. No bait, no firearms stashed, not a thing that would indicate that the treestand had even been used. Suddenly Gene called out, "Bill, look behind you!" I turned and saw someone watching us from behind a tree. Crouched and dressed in orange, he was 50 yards away when he began moving hastily up the mountain. He had a rifle.

"Halt!" I commanded. "Pennsylvania Game Commission." He began moving faster, though, and running to the foot of the mountain I again shouted to him to stop, but he was gaining ground quickly. I had to follow.

My winter uniform, boots, leather holster and portable radio added considerable weight, and the slope was covered with leaves, which made travel even more precarious. I pushed myself, digging into the soft ground with each step, heart pounding from the exertion.

Blood. The ground was covered in crimson under my pounding boots. To my right, two gut piles. Now I knew why he was running, why I was running. I could see him ahead of me, his pace slower now. Hunched forward he labored onward, and then suddenly he was gone. I stopped for a moment, breathing heavily. My eyes strained to pick up any sign of movement, but there was none.

I was certain he'd removed his orange coat. Certain, too, that he'd stopped running and was now hiding. I wondered if he was pointing his rifle at me, waiting for the right moment to squeeze the trigger.

Cautiously, I moved forward. I kept my gun holstered, not wanting to draw it for fear of slipping on the unstable ground and fouling the barrel, but palmed its grip, ready to draw and fire if necessary. The woods had opened up, and I had no cover. My mind began playing cruel tricks on me. I could just imagine my chest being ripped apart by some magnum slug as I picked my way up the mountain, but I was compelled to move forward. In 30 years of chasing armed poachers, I'd always come out unscathed. And this would be no exception my mind shouted soberly.

Suddenly I was upon him. My brows narrowed sharply as we faced each other. He was crouched low, but there was no danger here, only fear. His orange coat and his rifle lay out of reach. He was just a boy. And he was shaking with fear.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Four . . . four . . . teen, sir," he mumbled anxiously.

My gaze softened. I picked up his rifle. It was empty. "Put your coat on, son," I said sweeping it off the ground and handing it to him. "You'll catch cold for sure." We started down the mountain. "Do you know anything about the man with the deer alongside the road?"

"Yes."

"Did he shoot that deer?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know that?"

"I watched him shoot it. I watched him shoot a bunch of deer."

When we reached the base of the mountain, Deputy Gaydos had some surprising news. He'd located two plastic garbage bags loaded with deer parts that had been stored near a huge brushpile. In some thick foliage he had also retrieved two dead does, each with their hindquarters and backstraps removed. Gene continued to look through the brush and eventually discovered two rifles hidden there as well. The bearded man was standing nearby. His hands were stuffed in his pockets while he studied his boots. I began questioning him.

His name was Johnnie Ray, and he claimed to be a distant cousin to the boy. He told me that one of the rifles belonged to him and the other to Clem Calhoun. He also claimed that he had shot all three deer. He said that Clem had put on a drive when a small band of deer ran under his treestand. Ray emptied his rifle, killing all three. To make matters worse, he didn't even have a hunting license.

"Is that it?" I said. "No more deer hidden anywhere?"

"That's it," he said.

I asked Gene to gather the guns, carcasses and deer parts, while I checked several more brushpiles. Ray seemed all too happy to admit to killing three deer, which had me thinking there might be more carcasses lying about. It was growing darker by the second, as my flashlight scanned the first of three brushpiles. The jumble of branches in each pile could have filled a 2-car garage, but a dead deer, with its brown coat and telltale white belly, should stand out rather easily.

Within a short time I located two more carcasses. Each had been tossed into separate brushpiles. Ray stiffened when he saw me dragging the two additional carcasses. "Who killed these?" I asked.

"I killed one and Clem killed one."

"Where is Clem now?" I said.

Johnnie shook his head. "I have no idea. He was supposed to come back and get me hours ago but he never showed up."

Just then a pickup came roaring up the road in front of us. It was Deputy Jeff Pierce. Gaydos had called him to assist us while I was searching the brushpiles. We needed his truck to secure the more than 600 pounds of illegal deer parts we had collected. Then, as we began loading the deer into his truck, we saw the headlights of a slowly moving vehicle coming up the road. It was a truck, but not the one Clem Calhoun had been driving earlier, so I let it pass. It continued to bounce on up the rough dirt road as we loaded the last carcass on to the burgeoning pile in Jeff's truck. Minutes later, however, the pickup returned, and I wondered if Clem had switched vehicles. As the headlights drew closer I moved my patrol car into the road and signaled the truck to stop. Stepping out, I approached cautiously and trained my flashlight into the cab. Clem Calhoun was sitting in the passenger seat, with an older man behind the wheel. "Clem, we found some deer," I told him. "We know you were involved. Why don't you and your friend continue on down the road and head over to the state police barracks? We'll be right behind you." Clem nodded somberly, and as the old pickup inched forward my deputies and I took Ray and the boy into custody and followed them.

Both men signed written confessions admitting to the unlawful killing of five deer. Turns out that Clem had just stepped out of the woods on his way to his truck when Gaydos and I almost ran over him. And that's why he was at a loss for words. He couldn't believe his bad luck. Instead of picking up Johnnie and the deer parts, Clem hightailed it out of there until curiosity got the best of him and he decided to return.

The boy was not prosecuted. He was, however, turned over to his mother - which turned out to be all the punishment he could handle. Clem Calhoun and Johnnie Ray both pleaded guilty to the unlawful killing of five deer and were sentenced to pay a combined \$5,000 in fines plus court costs. They also face revocation of their hunting and trapping privileges for years to come.

- *William Wasserman, Wyoming County WCO*

## Buck Survival in Pennsylvania

THE GAME COMMISSION and Penn State University have been conducting white-tailed deer research for the past 5 years. Currently, we are investigating effects of dispersal and survival of yearling bucks in WMUs 2D and 4D. Preliminary findings regarding dispersal and capture were published in the September and October Game News. In this article, we're looking at buck survival in relation to the antler restriction regulations initiated in 2002.

Thanks to modern radio transmitters, we can simultaneously monitor radio-collared bucks for movement and mortality. This is due to a sensor in the transmitter that changes the pulse (beeps per minute) of the transmitter after the collar has remained motionless for more than 4 hours. Upon hearing a signal with a "mortality" pulse, we locate the transmitter (still on the buck, we hope), and examine the deer. Examinations may be a simple physical exam for obvious injuries, or it may require a more complete necropsy at the Penn State Diagnostic Laboratory. After examination, we can often determine cause of death. The amount of time the collar has been motionless is also measured internally by the collar, which is translated to us with a series of beeps. This allows us to determine when death occurred.

The current buck study picks up where the fawn study left off. Over the past three winters, we placed transmitters on every buck we captured. For the study, best were button bucks 6 to 8 months old at capture. However, we also captured some yearling and even some 2-year-old bucks, which allowed us to monitor three age classes of bucks. Equipping them with radio transmitters allowed us to locate each buck, and determine whether he was dead or alive. Even though we could not see them with our eyes, we could "see" them with telemetry equipment.

The use of radio collars to measure survival rates is called a "known fate" study, because we - usually - can determine whether or not the animal is alive at a given point in time.

We deployed two full time capture teams in each study area to catch and radio-mark deer during the winter months after deer seasons have ended. (See September 2004 Game News for details describing the study areas, and the methods used to catch deer.) We captured 2,023 deer in the 3-year period. Of those, 551 were bucks.

Using radio telemetry, we can answer several questions about buck survival in conjunction with antler restrictions. Do antler restrictions protect yearling bucks during the hunting season, and what are the survival rates? Of those bucks that die during the hunting season, when do they die, and what do they die from? Do bucks that survive hunting season then survive to the following hunting season? We are now in the third year of the study, and we would like to share some of what we learned in the first two years.

The first crucial data provided by our radio-marked yearling bucks is the period between capture and the beginning of the fall deer season, generally the first weekend in October. More than 80 percent of males caught as button bucks survived to enter the fall archery season. Roadkills and winter stress were the main causes of mortality during this time. Fawns are normally the most vulnerable age class during winter, because they are small, and have lower fat reserves than older deer. However, if they survive the winter, odds of survival during the summer months are much greater. For adult bucks 18 months of age or older, survival rates were even better. More than 90 percent of adult bucks survived the winter and summer period before archery season.

The second piece of crucial data to our study is recorded during the hunting season. We were particularly interested in determining whether or not hunters were indiscriminately shooting bucks without first seeing whether or not they were legal. About 50 percent of the yearlings available at the beginning of the hunting season were alive when the late deer season closed in January. Bucks two years old or older were usually not protected by antler point restriction regulations. As a consequence, only about 20 percent of the older bucks survived the hunting seasons. However, under the previous buck hunting regulations, only about 20 percent of all antlered deer in the state

survived the hunting season.

About 10 percent of yearling bucks were lost to illegal harvest. This means they were either shot by mistake and left in the woods, or they were shot by mistake, and reported by the hunter to the PGC as a mistake kill. There were no adult bucks illegally harvested thus far in the study.

Of the bucks available at the beginning of the archery season, about 18 percent of yearling bucks and 63 percent of adult bucks were legally harvested before the last hunting season closed in January. It is important to remember that the legal harvest of yearling bucks includes those that made the minimum requirements as defined by the antler restrictions, and those shot by juniors, hunters with disabled permits and resident hunters serving on active military duty.

The percentages listed in Figures 1 and 2 include what we call censored bucks. Censored bucks are bucks that were "lost," meaning we could no longer find them with our telemetry equipment. This does not necessarily mean they were dead. They could have been struck by a car and the collar was damaged, the collar could have malfunctioned, or the buck could have left the area or simply found a location where we could not pick up a signal. In this case we do not know the "fate" of the buck. It may be alive, or it could be dead, but we have no way of knowing for sure, so we do not consider it as either.

Management regulations and environmental conditions can vary significantly from year to year. This is one reason we do not conduct a 1-year study in wildlife research. Although we have tried to keep hunting regulations stable, the definition of a legal point for the brow tine changed from the first year to the second. The result of this would be greater protection of yearling bucks with current antler restriction regulations. We have no control over environmental conditions, such as fall mast production and winter severity. These conditions can modify winter survival by increasing or decreasing fat reserves and allowing or hampering movement in the winter months. These conditions also affect the following year's antler development.

Based on the first two years of this study, antler restriction regulations are allowing about 50 percent of yearling bucks to survive their first year as antlered deer. Just as important, Pennsylvania hunters appear to be adjusting well to the current antler restriction regulations. Although some illegal harvest does occur, it doesn't appear to be a valid explanation for antler restriction failure.

Based on our research, antler point restrictions are doing what they were designed to do, that being to protect at least some of the yearling bucks from harvest to allow them to enter their second year of life, and grow their second set of antlers. However, we will be collecting additional harvest data from the third year this fall, which will give a substantial boost to the sample sizes of yearling and adult age classes. About one of three bucks caught this past winter were already yearlings or older, so the adult age class will be well represented in the third year. After the 2004-05 hunting season, we will be analyzing all three years of data to look at the overall effect of antler restrictions on our buck population. Final data collection will occur during the 2005-06 hunting season, when the surviving yearlings from the 2004-05 hunting season become available for harvest as 2 year olds.

Critics of antler restriction regulations often tell us they do not work. They even tell us why they don't work, even though they have little if any data to support their claims. Results of this research will allow us to address these issues, and provide a comprehensive evaluation of antler restriction regulations on deer management.

- Eric Long, PSU Graduate Student; Dr. Chris Rosenberry, PGC Wildlife Biometrician; Bret Wallingford, PGC Deer Biologist

## Vengeance of the Bear

**"Revenge is a kind of wild justice."**

- *Roger Bacon*

CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR, especially poaching wildlife, can be expensive. For example, if a poacher "jacklights" a deer, the fines can easily exceed \$1,400 or more. And like other crimes, there's often a hidden cost, which is beyond the control of courts and law enforcement officers. Let me tell you about a poacher who paid not a penny in fines, but whose life was ruined by poaching.

One summer we received general information that a certain person, we'll call him Bluto, had, with a crossbow, poached a bear near his home in northern Dauphin County. Bluto had a reputation as a violent individual, so many people were afraid to come forward with detailed information. The report indicated that he had cut off the paws and left the rest of the animal to rot. With nothing concrete, I decided to pay a visit to Bluto and simply ask him if he had poached a bear. Sometimes such a direct approach works.

Bluto had a criminal record; among other things, he tried to kill a state trooper a few years previously, firing a rifle bullet through the windshield of the officer's patrol car. He spent some time in prison for that, but he still made it known around the county that he would kill a law enforcement officer if he had the chance. With prudence the better part of valor, I asked Waterways Conservation Officer Mark Sweppenheiser to accompany me when I went to visit Bluto one July afternoon.

Mark and I drove up to Bluto's small house on the outskirts of the Weiser State Forest. The yard was cluttered with junk and trash, and Bluto's truck, a Volkswagen pickup, was parked out front. We walked up to the door and knocked, but no one answered. I knew that Bluto also drove a motorcycle, and no bike was evident, so I guessed he must be elsewhere. While waiting, we noticed a crossbow and bolts in the truck. Also, in plain view on the front windowsill beside the front door where Mark and I stood were several boxes of ammunition. I was concerned about them, because Bluto, being a convicted felon, was prohibited from possessing or using firearms. There was also an archery target and a treestand about 30 yards away.

I decided that although we had no evidence of a bear being killed, we had seen evidence that Bluto was in possession of firearms. After a few more days of investigation, I began writing up a search warrant application, asking a judge to allow us to seize any firearms at Bluto's house.

Contrary to popular belief, conservation officers do not have more power than state police or any other law enforcement officer. In the eyes of the courts, all police officers are equal, no matter if they're a local municipal officer or an FBI agent. When applying for a search warrant, conservation officers have to go through the same rigorous process as any other police officer. Events, however, would soon outpace the grinding wheels of paperwork.

While I was working to obtain a search warrant, Bluto evidently got word that we were investigating the poaching of a bear and decided he had some work to do.

Unknown to us, a rotting bear carcass - minus the paws - was stashed in the woods about 50 yards from Bluto's house. He backed his truck up to the spot, loaded the stinking, maggot-covered carcass into his truck, drove a mile or two up the road and dumped the carcass in the state forest.

Just before he moved the dead bear, though, Bluto had wrecked on his motorcycle, receiving an open wound on his forearm. Hygiene wasn't high on Bluto's list of priorities, and probably as a result of handling this decaying bear he developed a serious staph infection. A few days after Bluto moved the bear, his neighbors found him face down in the front door of his house, flies buzzing around his body. They called the police, who summoned an ambulance, and Bluto was rushed to the hospital, where he was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.

A few days later, I decided to have a chat with Bluto in the hospital, once his condition was stabilized

and his doctor approved my visit.

"Look, I'm not here to ruin your life over a bear," I told him. "Just tell me what happened. If you're straight with me, I'll be straight with you."

Bluto looked at me briefly and then his eyes locked on my holstered sidearm. His right arm lifted from the bed, fingers flexing. "Don't know nothing about no bear, sir," he said, his voice lisping though his missing front teeth, as he continued to focus on my sidearm.

I knew that every year a significant number of police officers are killed with their own sidearms, and I had no intention of adding to that statistic, despite Bluto being bedridden. After all, he had tried to kill a trooper, and boasted that he would kill an officer if he had the chance.

I made sure my gun was out of reach and continued chatting. I told him I knew he had bigger problems than a fine from the Game Commission, and that I could respect a man who made a mistake and admitted it. "Work with me and I'll work with you," I said.

"Don't know nothing 'bout no bear," was all he said, looking at my gun and clenching his fists in the air.

The interview was pointless, either because the staph infection had affected his thinking or because he thought he could get away with it. I wished him good luck and left.

I went back to Plan A and asked for a search warrant for Bluto's house. The judge approved the warrant, and WCO Jason DeCoskey and I went to serve the warrant at Bluto's house.

Because Bluto was laid up with a staph infection, Jason and I made sure we had surgical masks and gloves when we went to Bluto's house.

As it turned out, there were other reasons why the masks and gloves were needed. The stench inside Bluto's house was awful. Rotting food and garbage was everywhere. A carton of eggs was under the sofa. Maggots and sowbugs crawled and scurried away when we opened cabinets and moved bags of trash and piles of dirty laundry. An unexpected and disturbing discovery was several women's purses.

Jason and I took frequent breaks for air, lifting our masks and gulping down fresh air before plunging back into the dark, filthy house. The crossbow had vanished, and no guns were evident, although ammunition for several different types of firearms was found. More importantly, we found evidence of turkeys, bears and deer killed unlawfully. There were several bloody knives and bloody flashlights. The inside of Bluto's truck was filled with fresh deer hair and bloodstains. Bones and feathers littered the yard. A short distance from the house we found a large stain on the ground, ringed with bear hair. It was clear that we had come upon a major poacher in northern Dauphin County.

While we were searching the house several people driving by stopped to look at the crime scene tape stretched across the yard. Nearly all of them expressed approval and appreciation for what we were doing, even giving us thumbs-up signs. "It's about time that guy finally got caught," one passerby said.

We seized the bloody knives and flashlights, ammunition, bones and feathers, and took samples of blood from the truck. We locked up the house and left a copy of the warrant and receipt for seized property taped to the front door. I went home, threw my uniform in the laundry and scrubbed my boots with disinfectant. I packaged up the evidence for lab analysis and typed up citations for killing a bear, deer and turkeys out of season, without a license, and in safety zones. I brought them down to the local district justice and began preparing for a trial.

Meanwhile, Bluto was having additional problems. Driving by his house a few days later I noticed another document taped to the door beside my search warrant - a delinquent tax notice from the county. While Bluto was recuperating in the hospital, the county auctioned off his house and the new

owners subsequently bulldozed it.

Shortly thereafter, I found an envelope from the local court in my mailbox. Expecting to find that a trial date had been set for Bluto's poaching offenses, the envelope instead contained each citation I had filed against Bluto, with the words "Charges dismissed due to indigency" written across them.

I was stunned. Charges dismissed? Was there to be no reckoning? The word around the county was that Bluto would spend the rest of his life in a state hospital, unable to care for himself. Bluto is back now, however, wandering around the county, living in his truck, or in borrowed and temporary housing. He's in bad shape, walking with a severe limp, his limbs twisted as a result of his staph infection. People still call me up and give me information about him in hesitant and frightened voices, telling me he's poaching with a pistol over here, using a crossbow over there, and so on. "Why didn't you do anything about that bear? Why did you let him get away with it?" they ask.

"It's a long story," I say. I wonder if he really did get away with it, though, with his house gone and his health destroyed as a result of his crime. Maybe there is another reckoning besides the legal system. Maybe there's a justice beyond our clumsy efforts, and the bear had its own vengeance.

Have you ever been tempted to bend or break the law? Most of us have; after all, we're all human and it's not wrong to be tempted. The line between right and wrong is a secret that lies deep in every hunter's soul. You sense it when you're out there in the woods all alone. Nobody is watching. But is the payoff really worth it? When you cross that line and walk that forbidden path, you don't know where it will eventually lead. Bluto thought he knew.

- By Mike Doherty, Dauphin County WCO

## Trackin' Cats

*Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, 'Wow, What a Ride!'*

THERE'S A LOT of places I never thought I'd be. Head first in a dead log, for example, the only part sticking out being my legs from mid-calf down. One arm under me, and one stretched out ahead of me, groping in the darkness for a tiny ball of fur. Another unlikely spot is crawling on my hands and knees under the low-arcing branches of a sea of autumn olive bushes, imagining I'm the elusive creature that would make her den here. And I certainly never thought I'd be busting through seemingly impenetrable walls of multiflora rose, trying in vain to avoid its millions of biting thorns, searching under fallen trees for the slightest depression that could indicate the presence of our quarry.

Most people have never been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a bobcat, Pennsylvania's only wild feline predator. If you ever see one, you will never forget it. I have an extremely vivid memory of a December deer drive where I turned to see a bobcat 20 feet up the mountain, eyeing me intently. In my mind, the animal seemed as large as a German shepherd, and was most certainly going to pounce on me at any moment. After about two minutes of what felt like hours of an intimidating staring contest, the cat calmly turned away and stalked silently up the rocks and out of sight. I know now that the bobcat wasn't very big - they average 36 inches long, and the largest weigh only 35 pounds -but at the time, the cat seemed enormous and to be just waiting to make me its lunch. It certainly made an impression on me, just like any time I'd hear one screaming in the woods, the sound like a bawling baby screeching through the trees, making every hair on my arms and neck stand on end.

Those experiences have caused me to be intrigued by bobcats, so I was more than eager to help out with our latest research project involving the nocturnal hunters. While studies have been done since the 1980s to determine bobcat density and distribution, those projects focused on adult cats. In 2002, a research project was started to investigate reproductive characteristics, including den site selection, juvenile survival, and dispersal of kittens.

Each year, 10 to 15 adult females, equipped with radio collars, were intensively monitored during late April and early May, allowing biologists to locate den sites. Approximately 14 days after the kittens are born, the den areas are approached and, when all goes as planned, the kittens are removed, weighed and immobilized, preparing them for a new method of tracking. Unfortunately, nothing is ever as simple as it sounds.

The female bobcats never sit still for very long. They spend a large amount of time hunting, and periodically move their litters. All of this running around makes it difficult to pinpoint a den location. Long days are spent monitoring the females before an attempt is made to go in and search for the kittens. Timing is critical - a failed search will often result in the female moving her litter, further complicating the search effort.

The first year of the project, I tagged along on the first den approach. The area was fairly clear, and we surrounded the site and began walking in from all sides. As we got closer, someone saw the female flee from a large hollow log, and that's where we found the kittens - four of them, huddled together far back in the dead tree.

The three closest to the front were removed without much trouble, but the fourth managed to squirm its way back, out of reach of the researchers' hands. All involved decided that the only solution was to send in someone who could fit farther up into the log. As it happens, I was the smallest. Now I'm not one to readily put myself in situations where I can't see, can't move around, have one arm pinned under me and rely on other people to get me out. Throw in a hissing furball that looks like it wants to buzz right through my approaching face, and it becomes even less appealing. But, in the

name of science, I decided I could give it a shot.

Sliding head-first into a decomposing log was not how I had pictured this day in the field. I had to have one arm under me to keep my shoulders angled, for if they were squared, I wouldn't be able to fit into the narrow end of the log. Bits of sawdust, as well as leaves and twigs that had been drug into the den, were finding their way into my shirt and pants, and I felt like I had bugs all over me. It was darker than I imagined, and the only way to find the kitten was to feel around - and follow the hissing. Those outside the log were pushing me farther in till I was up to my calves, and once I was able to get hold of the ball of fur, I kicked for them to pull me out.

In the sunlight, I no longer cared that I was covered in debris. I just held the kitten and took in all of its features. It didn't look that much different than the cats that inhabit our barn, and now seemed a lot more willing to be held than those wild-eyed barn kittens. Its eyes were a beautiful shade of blue, the belly fur pure white with dark circles, and its sharp canine teeth, though tiny, still evoked a little fear. I could already see in its fur the dark spots and bars that are distinct to bobcats in Pennsylvania, and realized how lucky I was to be holding this wild creature that few people ever get to see. All four kittens weighed around a pound, and it was determined that they were probably about 10 days old. Then, the new, break-through procedure began.

Traditionally, the tracking of animals is accomplished by outfitting the subject with a radio transmitter, usually on a collar, a backpack, or even glued on the animal. But for this study, the transmitters were surgically implanted inside the animals' abdomens.

In a clearing just next to the log den, one of the kittens was injected with a combination of drugs to immobilize it, allowing wildlife veterinarian Jay Tischendorf, brought in from Montana for the project, to begin surgery in the field. The kitten was placed on its back on a board, and its legs were secured to keep its belly exposed. A thin tube was inserted into its nose to administer oxygen, eye gel was used to protect the corneas, and a pulse oximeter was attached to its tongue to monitor pulse and arterial oxygen saturation. The vet shaved and sterilized the kitten's belly, preparing it for surgery.

I was struck by how a sterile environment was created in the middle of the woods. All of the surgical instruments were either new or had been sterilized, and were kept in sealed containers or bags. Everyone involved in the surgery wore hairnets, facemasks and latex gloves.

A tiny incision, less than an inch long, was made, and once I saw the size of the object being inserted, I could hardly believe it. The transmitter was only about three inches long, and maybe a half-inch in diameter, but when compared to the size of the kitten, it seemed huge. The vet slowly maneuvered the transmitter into the small opening, and before I knew it, it was gone. He felt around to make sure it was placed properly, and began to stitch up the opening. I had many questions about how the kitten would be able to function with such a large object inside of it. Wouldn't the transmitter squish its organs? How would it be able to curl up when the tube seemed to take up its entire middle? I was assured that the transmitter would fit, even with all the organs, and that the kitten would be comfortable, because it grows so rapidly in the first few weeks of life that soon the transmitter would seem small compared to the kitten.

At that site, it was determined that they should wait a few days before performing the surgery on the rest of the kittens, due to concerns about the body mass relative to the transmitter weight, so they were all returned to the log den. One week later, the mother had moved the litter to a stump in a brush pile, but only three of the four kittens were in the den. It's not known what happened to the fourth kitten, but the one that had been implanted had completely healed and was doing just fine. Surgery was performed on the two remaining kittens, and they were returned to the den.

During the next two weeks, two more litters were found in a brushpile and a rock crevice. Four female and two male kittens received implants, and to everyone's surprise, only one male was killed by a predator - probably a fox - 10 days after it was tagged. All of the other kittens survived.

In 2003, two litters were found in rock crevices, and three in brushpiles. Seven male and four female

juveniles were equipped with the transmitter implants, and one day after surgery, one of the kittens died, apparently of hypothermia. During July, three of the remaining 10 were killed by predators, and in November one of the kittens was killed on a road.

The next year, I came to realize just how intense and difficult the den location process can be. As it turns out, we had been extremely fortunate that first day in 2002. I joined the crew on the last day of tagging in 2004, and was told that they hadn't been having much luck. In the previous two weeks, they had implanted 10 kittens in only three dens, and it was becoming ever more apparent that the juveniles become mobile earlier than anyone ever thought. It seems that the kittens become highly mobile at three to four weeks of age, making it even more difficult to pin down a litter.

The day I tagged along, we began by lining up and walking through a small wooded area on Armenia Mountain, Tioga County, where the female had been transmitting a radio signal the night before. After about 45 minutes, we figured we had covered every inch of the patch, and could find no evidence of a den, so we moved on to the next site.

Glancing up at the hillside in Middlebury Center, Tioga County, I wasn't too concerned. But once we got up there, it was apparent that this wasn't going to be easy. We lined up facing a thick line of autumn olive bushes, and I wasn't sure how I was supposed to get through it. I soon figured that out, as I dropped to my hands and knees and wiggled my way under the branches of the shrubs, often lying on my belly to get through. After six trips up and down the small ridge, we figured the den wasn't there. It was speculated that this area was a favorite hunting grounds, and that's why the female spent so much time there.

Later that afternoon we moved on to Montoursville, which is where the real fun began, in an area that normally wouldn't take much more than five minutes to hike across. In this case however, the entire area was thick with multiflora rose. We all started trying to break our way through the thorny plants, getting snagged on its briars with every move. There were plenty of fallen trees, creating shelters under the canopy of thorns - perfect spots for a den. But after about two hours of painful searching, everyone was exhausted and we decided to call it quits for the year, with 10 kittens equipped with transmitters.

The kittens are monitored daily by field technicians, and at the end of August, all of the kittens were alive and well, still traveling with their mothers. Depending on the terrain, the signal can be picked up from a half-mile away. The previous two years of the study yielded several interesting findings about den site selection, juvenile survival, and dispersal of kittens. Most of the original den sites were located in either rock crevices or brushpiles. Within two days of our disturbance, all the females moved the litters to other sites, all of which had dense understories, primarily blackberry and multiflora rose.

As early as August, the kittens begin to strike out on their own, sometimes hunting as many as four miles from the mother for a day or so. By late fall, however, they have left the mother completely. The males have traveled more than 100 miles from their mothers, while the females travel less. Sometimes, the females may stay in their mother's home range for a few years.

Before this study, juvenile bobcat survival rates were estimated to be as low as 33 percent some years. While this has been a relatively small study, it has shown survival rates to be in excess of 70 percent. Most bobcat mortalities have traditionally been believed to be human related, but in this case, only one kitten was killed by a vehicle, while four were killed by predators. None were taken during the bobcat hunting or trapping seasons.

The transmitters used the first two years of the study emitted a signal into late November or early December before the batteries died. In 2004, however, new transmitters were used that shut themselves off from midnight until 6 a.m. to save battery power. These are expected to last into late January.

The study will wrap up when the transmitters expire in January, with three years of data to be

analyzed. The amount of new information gained about juvenile survival and dispersal will be used for years to come, and the hours of hard work and sweat will be well worth it.

- *By Larissa Rose, PGC Educational Specialist*

## The eMail

THE E-MAIL simply read, "You will find an illegal stand and feeder at the following GPS coordinates. This e-mail had been sent anonymously to the Game Commission's webpage, and then forwarded to me. I plotted the coordinates on a map, and then handed out copies of the map to my deputies at a meeting that same night. I assigned Deputy Dave Stubber to check on the stand on Saturday, the first day of the 2003 fall turkey season.

On Saturday evening I met with Dave, and he said that he thought he had found the stand, but that he didn't get too close, because many hunters were in the area and he didn't want to be seen - not knowing at the time that he had been seen.

Still not sure what made the stand illegal, I decided to take a look myself. On Monday, I put the coordinates in my GPS unit, and along with the map I left the vehicle to find the stand. When I arrived I noticed a commercial type feeder within 30 feet of a platform treestand. Between the feeder and the stand was a small sac hanging from a tree branch. The sac was filled with some sort of scent, a commercial deer attractant, I figured. The feeder was filled with corn, and while all the corn on the ground was gone, evidence of deer frequenting the area could be seen.

The stand was located along the edge of a field surrounded on three sides by woods. Looking south from the stand I noticed an old strip mine about a half mile away. Having just been issued a spotting scope, I wondered if I could use it to watch the stand from the strip mine.

When I got back to my truck I noticed a vehicle parked at a camp near the stand. I ran the license plate and learned that it belonged to Bob Baiter, who lived nearby. I then drove over to the strip mine, and once there, I could clearly see the field where the stand was located. I mounted the scope to my window and quickly located the stand, which was still empty, but due to the terrain of the field, I couldn't see the feeder or the scent sac.

At first I was concerned about being seen by the person from the stand, but quickly realized that there were lots of vehicles in the strip mine, as this is was one of our pheasant stocking areas. I wasn't there for even an hour before a pheasant hunter stopped by.

"What are you looking for?" he asked. I told him I was trying to locate elk. With the elk season just a week away, I told him I was checking to see if any elk had moved into the area. With my cover still intact, I stayed there until dark.

Tuesday was my day off, but as the afternoon approached I found myself wondering if anyone was in the stand. Finally, I put on my uniform and went to the strip mine. Again, no hunter, but the same vehicle was parked at the camp. I started wondering if maybe there were other baited stands on the property.

Wednesday came, and like all other days in the hunting season, I got busy doing other things, and before I knew it, it was 3 o'clock. I dropped what I was doing and returned to the strip mine. Again, no hunter - but the same vehicle was parked at the camp. As the afternoon began to wane, I was entertained by several flocks of swans migrating south. I had never watched swans with a spotting scope, and this provided an up close look at the majestic birds. I stayed till dark, but the hunter never showed up.

Thursday was another day off, but again at 3 o'clock I was sitting in my usual spot at the strip mine, but again, no hunter. Now I was really starting to wonder if maybe I had been seen going into the stand on Monday, or if Dave had been seen on Saturday. I looked over to the camp, and the vehicle was there again, and I was really starting to think that maybe this stand wasn't going to be used again this archery season.

On Friday, as we had planned earlier in the week, I met Dave around 2 o'clock, and we set up a turkey decoy operation. Dave was in the woods, watching the decoys, and I was in my vehicle, ready

to stop any roadhunters who shot at them. I couldn't concentrate on the decoy operation, though. All I could think about was the archery stand, and if anyone was in it. At 4 o'clock I radioed Dave and told him to pick up the decoys, because we were heading to the strip mine.

When I arrived I noticed that the vehicle was not parked at the camp. I mounted the scope to my window and this time I saw a camouflaged form standing in the treestand. He was facing away from me and looking into the woods. I wanted to get to the stand, but I was concerned about him seeing us once we left the vehicle on foot. I radioed Dick Bodenhorn and asked if he could assist. Dick was nearby, and he came up and took the scope while Dave and I left for the stand. As we got close we spooked a deer that ran right toward the stand. I remember thinking that I hoped the hunter wouldn't get a shot at the deer. When I arrived at the stand, the first thing I noticed was a dead deer lying in the field on the other side of the feeder from the stand. I approached the hunter, who wasn't wearing any fluorescent orange, as he should have been, I asked him to lower his bow and to come down so I could talk to him.

When the hunter got down I learned it was Bob Baiter, the owner of the vehicle that had been parked at the camp all week.

"I guess I really screwed up this time," Bob said.

"Yea," I replied, "I guess you did." I then asked when he had last hunted from the stand, and he said the week before. I asked him if he had been in the stand at all this week and he said that he hadn't, that he had been turkey hunting in New York all week. I then asked him when he shot the deer, and he replied about 10 to 20 minutes before I showed up. I asked if he had seen any deer within the last few minutes, and he said that one had run up by the stand right before we arrived, but he didn't get a good look at it.

Dave was collecting evidence and taking photographs when we noticed a bloody arrow still sticking in the ground by the pile of corn. It was obvious that this was the arrow that had killed the deer lying in the field, and it was also obvious that the deer had been feeding on the corn from the feeder when it was shot.

I noticed a radio on Bob's belt and I asked him what it was for. When he said that he was carrying it just in case his sister wanted to call him, I figured he was bluffing and I asked him again.

"My son is hunting on the next hill, and I use it to keep in touch with him."

"How old is your son?" I asked.

"Fourteen."

"Is anyone with him?" I asked.

"No."

I got on the portable radio and asked Dick to come over and look for the boy. Within a few minutes Dick had rounded up Bob's son. He was hunting unaccompanied, not wearing any orange, wasn't wearing any license, and 15 minutes after quitting time, still had an arrow nocked in his bow. I radioed back to Dick that Dave and I had all the evidence collected at the scene and that we would meet him and the son back at their house. Once back at the house, the son was able to produce his hunting license; in a haste to get to the woods after school he had forgotten to put his license on his hunting coat.

After we had gathered all the information we needed, I asked Bob Baiter and his son if they had any questions.

"What's this going to cost me?" Bob asked.

I told Bob that I needed to discuss it with Dave and Dick, and that I would have a decision within a few days. Then the man's son asked Dave, "Is that why you walked past me on Saturday to look down into the field?" This was the first time we knew that Dave had been spotted by anyone on Saturday.

A few days later I filed three citations against Bob Baiter. One for unlawful taking or possession of game or wildlife, \$500; one for not wearing the required amount of fluorescent orange material, \$100; and one for allowing his son to hunt unaccompanied under the age of 16, \$100. His son was issued three warnings for failure to display his hunting license, hunting after hours, and not wearing the required amount of fluorescent orange material.

In January of 2004 Bob Baiter pled guilty to the unlawful taking or possession of game or wildlife, and the fluorescent orange citations. The citation for allowing his son to hunt unaccompanied was withdrawn. Bob paid \$600 in fines plus court costs, and could lose his privilege to hunt or trap in the state for two years.

I don't know who e-mailed the information to us, but it just goes to show, that any information can be helpful. This case was possible because one concerned person got involved, and they remained anonymous. I would like to say to the concerned sportsman, "Thank you."

- *By Doty A. McDowell, Elk County WCO*

## Game Care: Butchering and Storing

SO HERE YOU ARE. You made out just fine with field-dressing and getting your deer home or to camp and skinned. But now what?

Last month we covered the basics of [field-dressing and skinning](#). This month we'll go over how to age, cut, package and store the meat, all to help you get the most from your deer.

Before aging, you should remove the most tender cut on the deer - the tenderloins. To remove them, use your fingers as much or more than your knife, as these muscles, being so tender, can tear easily. With your knife and fingers, gradually and carefully work each tenderloin away from the backbone. Wipe off all blood and other debris, and then wrap and refrigerate right away. Otherwise, they will quickly dry out.

For aging the entire carcass, or just certain cuts, there are certain guidelines that must be adhered to. Otherwise, you run the risk of contamination, which can lead to food-borne illnesses, or the need to discard all of the meat.

Many people are curious about aging. What is it? Why do it? Aging is the process of holding the carcass (or individual cuts) under low, controlled temperature and humidity for several days. This helps tenderize the meat and enhance the flavor. Tenderizing is particularly important with wild game, because the relatively high levels of activity and low-energy diets cause the meat from wild game to be less tender than that from domestic animals.

Meat that will be ground, cured or made into sausage or bologna, however, does not need to be aged, because the processing tenderizes it enough. Also, cuts that will be roasted, stewed or braised will be tenderized by those moist-heat cooking processes, so those cuts don't need to be aged, either, but that needs to be known beforehand.

### Temperature

It's important to store the carcass in a cool, clean, well-ventilated area with no odor, because the meat can absorb odors such as paint or gas. The meat can be aged from as little as two days to as many as two weeks, though five to seven days should be more than enough to improve tenderness without risking spoilage. However, it is extremely important to keep the carcass under 40 degrees.

The closer the meat remains near freezing, the longer it may be aged. Or, the closer to 40 degrees, the less time it should be allowed to age. Any warmer and the meat will spoil. During cold weather, aging can be accomplished by hanging the carcass in a cold garage. During warm weather, the carcass should be quartered and aged in a refrigerator.

After the meat has been aged, it's time to store it for future use. Start by cutting the carcass into manageable pieces. It's important to have a clean, roomy, well-ventilated place to work; clean, sharp knives, as well as something to sharpen them when they get dull; and a clean table and cutting surface. If freezing the meat, have your wrapping materials and an indelible marker on hand.

With the carcass hanging by the hind legs, remove the front legs at the shoulder. On a deer, removing the shoulders is fairly easy, because there is no socket joint connecting the front legs to the chest. Therefore, the shoulder can be removed simply by pulling it away from the body and cutting down along the ribcage and under the shoulder blade. Remove both shoulders and set aside where they will remain cool and clean.

Next to remove are the backstraps, or loins. These are the two long thick muscles that lie along each side of the backbone, from the deer's hips to its shoulders. Start by making short, shallow cuts to begin separating the muscle from the spine. Start right at the base of the tail and work all the way down to where the shoulder was attached. After cutting along the spine, only a quarter-inch or so deep, begin to cut the muscle away from around the ribcage. Continue until the muscle is free. The

backstrap tapers from being about three inches thick back by the hind quarter to only an inch or so down near the shoulder. As you separate it from the ribcage, you'll see where it begins and ends, and that's where to cut it free from the carcass. Take your time removing these two muscles. After the tenderloins, they're the most tender meat on the deer: You don't want to mess them up.

The hind legs can be cut up next. They contain three groups of muscles, which are very tender, semi-tender and tough. First you need to remove the tailbone, hipbone, shank bone and kneecap. Then you can use your hand to feel the seams between the different muscles, then cut the seams. The top round, near the hip, is a tender cut. The secondary shank and upper shank and bottom round are best suited for stew meat. The egg-shape bottom butt and the triangle end of the tenderloin are also good for stew. The top butt, however, is very tender - on beef this is referred to as top sirloin. This is the most tender cut of the hind leg and makes good steaks. The bottom round is a semi-tender piece that is best suited for roasting rare to medium rare. There is a small roll along the side of the bottom round that is known as the eye of the round. This cut can be sliced into medallions and cooked as steaks.

Next, remove the flanks by cutting down along the spine to the ribs. At this point the carcass should look pretty clean, consisting of only the backbone and ribcage. Trim off any remaining meat and hold for use as stew meat or to be ground.

Next you can cut up the front legs. First you must remove the leg bones and shoulder blade. The thickest part of the front leg is the chuck. This cut and the other thick part are good for pot roast. The rest of the meat, which is full of sinews, makes good stew or burger. Remove the largest sinews and any fat you can see. If the deer has been rifle-shot, most of the damage will likely be in this area. Be sure to remove all damaged meat, bone fragments, hair and dirt.

The neck meat is also good for stews or grinding. To remove the bone, cut from the top center of the neck. The neck muscle is the toughest part of the entire deer and will take the longest to cook - a good three hours to get tender. If you haven't already done so, discard the esophagus and wind pipe as you're cutting the neck meat from the bone.

Finally, all the meat can be removed from in between the ribs and salvaged for stews or grinding. This is the lowest quality meat on the deer and isn't suitable for anything else.

Next you need to trim the meat, removing any fat and, if the meat is not going to be frozen, the "silver skin," the connective tissue enclosing individual muscles should be removed, too. If the meat is going to be frozen, leave the silver skin on, to help the meat retain its moisture, then trim it off before cooking the meat. The backstraps can be cut into small roasts or steaks - either medallions or butterfly steaks. Be careful not to overcook these tender cuts. All suitable excess meat should be saved and used for stock or stew meat, or to be ground into burger or sausage.

When it comes to freezing, the key to keeping the meat as fresh tasting as possible, as long as possible, is to make the packages as airtight as possible. The vacuum sealers on the market today are great for this. They make airtight packages, keeping meat fresh at least twice as long as wrapping. If you don't have a vacuum sealer, you can use plastic wrap and/or freezer paper. Double wrapping is recommended, whether both layers are plastic wrap, freezer paper or one of each. The key is to get as much air as possible out of the package.

Whether you use a vacuum sealer or wrapping, it's important to properly label packages with the cut of meat or what you intend to use it for, and the date.

In addition to freezing, there are several other options to preserve your meat. Curing, defined as adding salt, brine, nitrites and sometimes sugar, spices and other ingredients to a meat product, is used to preserve, flavor and color meat. Smoking is cooking food indirectly in the presence of a fire. It's much slower than grilling, so less tender meats benefit from smoking, plus the meat takes on a natural smoke flavoring. Meat can also be canned, though only a pressure canner should be used, to ensure the safety of the meat. Making jerky is widely popular and uses the world's oldest and most

common method of food preservation - drying.

All of these methods, as well as sausage making are described in detail in several resources. Your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office offers many publications covering the subject, including *Proper Processing of Wild Game and Fish*. This booklet covers aging, processing and storing, and also includes tips on the importance of temperature control, as well as recipes and a nutritional chart for various game foods.

The Game Commission offers several videos on the subject. To actually see the deer cleaning, processing and wrapping process, [Big Game Field to Table](#), is recommended. [Venison Aging, Smoking & Sausage Making](#), the most helpful video of its kind, shows how to smoke venison, make jerky, salami, sausage and hot sticks.

Delicious recipes abound for every imaginable cut of venison. [Venison Healthy & Tasty](#) takes you from the field to the feast, with detailed cooking demonstrations of classic venison dishes. All of these are available from the Game Commission for \$9.95 each (plus tax, shipping and handling) by calling 1-888-888-3459, or online from [The Outdoor Shop](#) at [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us). The Game Commission also sells the [Pennsylvania Game Cookbook](#), a collection of delicious recipes submitted by *Game News* readers that covers all Pennsylvania game, for \$4.71 (plus tax, shipping and handling).

No matter how you prepare your game meat, it's important to always use a meat thermometer. It's the only way to be sure that the meat has reached a temperature high enough to kill any harmful microorganisms. Ground venison and sausage should always be cooked to 160 degrees, while chops, steaks and roasts should reach 160 degrees to be done to medium, and 170 degrees for well done. If the meat has reached its recommended temperature throughout, it should be safe, even if it's still pink in the center, since the pink color can be caused by the cooking method, smoking or added ingredients such as marinades.

The guidelines presented here are just that, guidelines. There are many ways to process a deer, and all that's really important is food safety and cleanliness considerations. Otherwise, experiment and enjoy all the fruits of your harvest.

- By Larissa Rose, PGC Education Specialist

## Where Does the Buck Stop?

WITH THE LATE DAYS of September passing into the first cool days of October, many of us have been busy preparing for the upcoming deer seasons, scouting our favorite spots, and even spotlighting to check out the deer population where we hunt.

Preseason scouting can provide information on the quantity and quality of bucks in an area. Oftentimes, though, after weeks or sometimes months of hunters becoming familiar with "their" buck, come mid-October, the buck disappears. He's gone from his usual hangout; there's no fresh sign, where just a short time earlier the buck was a regular visitor. Now the questions begin: Where did it go? Is it dead or alive?

The abrupt disappearance of a buck in the fall may be the result of dispersal. Dispersal, or movement away from the area where the buck was born, is common in Pennsylvania. Results from our ongoing buck study indicate between 45 and 75 percent of all yearling bucks will disperse. Although some dispersal occurs in the spring, when bucks are 11 to 12 months old, most dispersal occurs in the fall, during October and November, prior to the peak of the breeding season, when the bucks are 16 to 17 months old.

### Mixing it Up

Dispersal results in substantial mixing within the deer population. Comparing capture locations of 8- to 10-month-old bucks (button bucks) in Armstrong County (Figure 1) with the locations where those same bucks were later in the fall, (Figure 2) illustrates how bucks spread out across the landscape.

If one considers the movements of this sample of marked bucks and multiplies them by all the bucks in Pennsylvania, the magnitude of movement within our deer population becomes clear. A lot of young bucks are on the move, leaving familiar haunts and traveling into unfamiliar areas.

Sometimes this lack of familiarity has dire consequences. Last year, dispersal for one buck ended abruptly when it fell off a cliff to its death. For those bucks surviving dispersal, habitat plays an important role in where they stop.

### Habitat & Dispersal

Once a buck begins to disperse, where will it stop? No single factor is likely to explain why a buck ends dispersal where it does, but habitat and man-made obstacles certainly influence dispersal movements. For instance, dispersal movements often end when a buck nears a large river. This has been seen in Armstrong County where bucks encountered the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas rivers and established their new, adult range on the near side, choosing not to cross. We have seen similar patterns involving major roads, as many bucks have ended dispersal and established home ranges directly adjoining highways.

On the other hand, what are barriers to many deer barely slow the movements of others, as the travels of two particularly adventurous deer illustrate. Buck 49 in Centre County crossed five mountain ridges and many roads before establishing his adult range 20 miles away from where he was caught.

In Armstrong County, Buck 1080 swam across the Allegheny River, which is about 300 to 400 yards wide, and crossed two major highways before setting up his adult range 25 miles from his natal range.

Population density does not appear to influence deer dispersal. In a recent analysis, we investigated the effects forest cover and population density have on dispersal. Using data from Armstrong and Centre counties and from other deer populations across the U.S., we learned deer population density has little effect on the percent of young bucks that disperse or how far they disperse.

Forest cover, on the other hand, did influence dispersal distance. As percent of forest cover decreased, dispersal distance increased. In Armstrong County, which is less forested than Centre County, bucks dispersed about five miles, while bucks in Centre County dispersed four. The relationship between less forest and longer dispersal distance was consistent across other studies as well.

## **Buck Age & Movements**

Dispersal may make hunting a particular buck difficult. A hunter may have done all of his homework, scouting the movement patterns of a buck, only to have it disperse miles away prior to or during hunting season.

Fortunately for hunters, movement patterns of older bucks are more predictable. Based on initial research results from the buck study, most dispersal occurs when bucks are 11 to 17 months old. Adult bucks, those that have survived at least two hunting seasons, are likely to be found in the same general area the following year. So, if during your preseason scouting, you come across a big buck, he's not as likely to head off somewhere else before hunting season. Of course, that older buck is by no means an easy animal to hunt, but the risk of losing it to dispersal is much less.

## **Conclusion**

Dispersal of yearling bucks has important effects on deer population dynamics and is influenced by habitat more than deer population density. Dispersal may also impact deer hunters' efforts. First, disappearance of a buck in the fall may not indicate death of a buck; rather, the buck may have dispersed, in some cases 20 to 25 miles away. Second, for every buck that disperses from one's hunting area, there is a chance a buck from somebody else's hunting area will move in. Finally, following implementation of antler restrictions, the chance to pursue an older buck has increased. Along with the greater chance to pursue an older buck comes the advantage of knowing an older buck is not as likely to pick up some autumn evening and move far away.

*- By Dr. Christopher S. Rosenberry & Eric S. Long*

## Dove Season Y2K

WCO Trainee Chad Eyler had been assigned to work with me on the opening day of the September goose and dove seasons, September 1.

Remembering what it was like to be a trainee, chomping at the bit to finally, after months of classes, actually do some law enforcement work, Chad and I had gone out on night patrol on August 31, and didn't get in until after midnight.

Up before dawn the next day, Chad and I watched several groups of hunters on the Susquehanna, but didn't see many geese flying. We finally left the river in time to get to an area I wanted to be at before noon, the start of dove season.

The year before, I had happened on several hunters who just couldn't stop shooting after they reached their limits of 12 birds, and I wanted to see if they might be back.

Chad and I parked in a secluded spot about a quarter mile from the fields we intended to watch. We loaded up with gear, water, binoculars and, most importantly, notebooks and pens. We arrived at our post by 11 o'clock.

The first shots rang out about 10 minutes before noon, but not from several fields we were watching. In fact, by 12:30 there were still no hunters around us. We could now hear shooting to the north and to the west of us, and decided to head through some woodlots and cornfields to get into position to see who was doing the shooting to the north of us. After an hour of moving slowly and quietly, though, we heard the shooting suddenly stop, and then a lot of shooting coming from some fields to the west of us.

At that point, Chad and I walked back to the truck to replenish our water and have a snack, and then hike out to the west, to see what that group of hunters was up to.

The fast and furious shooting sounded like it was coming from the west side of a wooded area just to our west. We tiptoed through the wooded area and came to an alfalfa field. No hunters, but the shooting continued, but now it sounded to be coming from the west side of another woodlot. With determined looks on our faces, Chad and I nodded to each other and headed west. After skirting the edge of the alfalfa field, bypassing some houses along a road, we made it to the woodlot. After a fierce battle with some multiflora rose, we made it through the woodlot to an unpicked cornfield. We could still hear shooting, but now it sounded like it was coming from a wooded area west of the cornfield. After laughing about our "luck," we headed west once again.

As the furious shooting continued, we made our way west, through another woodlot and were surprised to find a soybean field: and no hunters. To the west of the soybean field was another woodlot and the shooting was coming from west of that area. We skirted around the edge of the bean field, trying to remain unnoticed, and once again found ourselves at another woodlot. Laughing again at how close the shots sounded, we continued west, and when we cleared that woodlot, we reached the edge of another unpicked cornfield.

By the intensity of the shooting, the hunters had to be on the other side of this cornfield. We skirted around it, again being careful to remain unseen. I learned a long time ago that when checking hunters, I'm much better off by just staying back and watching. Typically, if I watch someone for a period of time and see no violations, I'll just leave, without the hunter having any idea I was even around. Chad and I spent the next half hour getting into a position where we could see several hunters. At last, just after 4 p.m., we started surveillance.

Surveillance is not as easy as it may seem. A WCO cannot just hang back and watch, but rather must first consider the big picture. Chad and I had figured that there were at least eight hunters in these fields. I explained to Chad that it's extremely difficult for one officer to effectively watch more than two people at a time, and that even watching two can get complicated, but between the two of us

we could probably watch three hunters, providing we could see all three without having to move.

The first step after getting into place was to watch as many hunters as we could for 5 or 10 minutes, to learn who the good shooters were. We didn't want to waste our time watching someone shoot three boxes of shells and kill only two doves. Chad and I quickly identified three shooters who seemed to be doing quite well. We checked our watches, noted the time in our notebooks, and proceeded to watch. Because we didn't know who we were watching, we gave nicknames to the hunters that would help us identify them later. The first person was wearing brown boots that stood out from the rest of his camouflaged clothing, so I named him "Brown Boots Man" or BBM for short. The second hunter we named "Long Sleeve Man" (LSM) because of his long sleeved T-shirt. The last person we called "Hat Man" (HM) because of his odd looking hat.

I started off watching and relaying information to Chad, who then wrote the information in the notebook. We were interested in things such as who shot, what time they shot, how many times they shot, how many birds they hit (if any), and if they retrieved the birds. I started calling out: "1615, Brown Boots Man shot twice, killed one, did not retrieve; 1615, Long Sleeve Man shot once, missed; 1617, Hat Man shot twice, killed one, picked up one." Chad wrote, "1615, BBM, S2, K1, DNR. 1615, LSM, S1, M. 1617, HM, S2, K1, PU1." This went on for some time, and then Chad and I changed places.

Considering all the shooting that had gone on before we had gotten into a position, we were fairly certain that some of the hunters were over their limit. I left Chad to continue watching while I went to see where the hunters had parked their vehicles. As I made my way through the cornfield in the direction the hunters had come and gone during their hunt, I could hear some talking, but I couldn't make out what was being said. As I brushed them aside, each huge leaf on the dried cornstalks sounded like thunder as I got closer to the two hunters who were back at their vehicles.

I was about 10 feet from the end of the cornfield and could make out a maroon-colored car. I could still hear the hunters talking, but couldn't make out what they were saying. I was trying to decide what to do next when I looked down at my feet. And at my feet was a plastic bag overflowing with doves. It has been my experience that hunters don't hide "legitimate" game. My choices now were to take the birds and get Chad, but risk the hunters finding out their birds were missing, or leave the birds and risk having the hunters move them.

I took the birds and started back to Chad. When I got close I whispered his name and noticed he was frantically signaling to me. "Come on, we have to go," he said.

"Look what I found," I said.

"We have to go," Chad said again.

"Okay, but look what I found."

Once again Chad insisted that we leave.

Realizing that something was up, I asked Chad why we had to go. He said that shortly before I came back, Brown Boot Man and Long Sleeve Man moved next to each other and started shooting. A short time later a red pickup came into the cornfield and a man not dressed in hunting garb got out and spoke to the two hunters. Chad told me he could plainly hear their conversation. The man said that someone had rained shot on his house and vehicles. The two hunters told the man that they had seen two other hunters in that direction, but that they had just left. Chad and I had been watching these guys for almost two hours and we hadn't seen the mysterious hunters. The man seemed satisfied with what the hunters had told him and got back into his truck and left. As soon as the man left, the two hunters started gathering gear and were preparing to leave.

After I showed Chad what I had found, we peeled off our outer camo shirts, exposing our uniforms, and got ready for a field check. I wrapped my camo shirt around the bag of doves. We cut down the

inside edge of the cornfield until we got close to Brown Boot Man. We stepped out of the cornfield and identified ourselves. Because Brown Boot Man was ready to leave, we let him lead us back to his car. Once at the vehicles, we saw Hat Man and another person we had not seen before. I was beginning to get worried that Long Sleeve Man had eluded us when a white van came down the edge of a field. LSM was driving, so Chad stopped him and asked him to get out. Because three of the four people (everybody but Brown Boot Man) had stowed their gear in their vehicle, I had everybody get their birds, shells and licenses, put them in individual piles and then stand next to their piles.

Looking at the unknown hunter, I couldn't help but think I had seen him before. When I looked at his license and saw his unusual name, I realized he was one of the hunters I had watched the year before on the opening day —although he was not the person I had cited for 18 doves over the limit. Everything was in order, and he had a limit of 12 doves.

I next went to his son, who turned out to be Hat Man. Hat Man's licenses were in order, his gun was plugged and he also had 12 doves. I then made my way to Brown Boot Man. His licenses were in order and his gun was plugged, and then I started counting his birds. When I got to 12 there were still birds to be counted. It turned out Boot Man was in possession of two doves over the limit. Boot Man feebly told me that he had shot 12, but had found the other two on the way out of the field. Remembering that we had followed Boot Man out of the field, I just shook my head.

As I made my way to Long Sleeve Man, he told me that he had, "a few extra birds." When I asked how many, LSM just shrugged. I counted 17, five over the limit. LSM also had the proper licenses and a plugged shotgun.

By this time the farmer came over on his tractor, and as I was explaining that these hunters had shot more than they were allowed, I realized that I had not seen one empty shotgun shell in their possession. I asked the farmer if he wanted me to cite them for littering. The farmer indicated that he would leave that decision up to me and then left.

I went back to the hunters and asked if they had anything else to declare, that now would be a good time to tell me about anything else. All four hunters looked at the ground, started digging little holes with their boot tips and mumbled, "no." I asked again if there was anything I should know about. When I received a no again, I asked each of them specifically, while looking directly into their eyes. Each hunter refused to meet my gaze, but said there was nothing else.

I then picked up my camouflage shirt, opened it and tossed the bag in the middle of the hunters. The bag bounced once then burst open, spilling doves everywhere. "Who shot these?" I asked. Again toes started digging holes. Brown Boot Man finally said, "Well, if nobody is going to claim them, I guess I will."

I asked each hunter where his empty shells were. The first hunter and his son, Hat Man, indicated that they reload, so had picked up all of their shells. They proceeded to show me a large bag of empties. Brown Boot Man and Long Sleeve Man just looked at each other and mumbled that after they had loaded their vehicles they were going to go back and pick up the shells.

Around this time the man in the red pickup returned. I left Chad to watch the four hunters and pulled the man aside to hear his story. I assured the man I would take care of the situation and asked if he would give Chad a ride the two miles back to our vehicle. The man agreed and he left with Chad.

While I was waiting for Chad to return with my truck, so I could start processing the evidence, I took pertinent information from all four hunters. I then let the one hunter and his son leave. I then explained to BBM and LSM that they were going to be cited for, respectively, 15 and 5 doves over the limit, and that each would be cited for a safety zone violation. I told the two that if they could work out some damage payments to the man in the red pickup, I would not cite them for damage to property, and then I mentioned the littering violation. Long Sleeve Man said he would come back the next day and pick up the shells (which he did).

By the time Chad returned and all the evidence gathered, it was well after dark. As we made our way back to my office I asked Chad if he had learned the value of hanging back and watching as opposed to rushing in, checking licenses and then leaving, missing violations. The grin on Chad's face said it all.

Several years later I am proud and pleased to call Chad not only a fellow officer, but my neighboring WCO. When one of us is having a bad day, all the other has to do is mention "the dove hunters on field training" and everything seems to get a little better.

- *By Guy Hansen, York County WCO*

## Game Care: Field Dressing to Skinning

WHAT A PERFECT SEASON. After months of anticipation and preparation everything came together, and at your feet is a prime Pennsylvania whitetail. Now what do you do? Tag it, of course; that's the law here. But then what? What you do from here on out will determine whether your harvest will be the source of many delicious meals for family and friends for months to come, or something maybe even the dog won't want to eat.

Venison is not a second-rate substitute for beef. It's a healthy and nutritious delicacy. But to get the most out of it, the animal needs to be treated properly and with care. This is true no matter what types of cuts or meats the venison is going to be made into.

This month we're covering what to do from when the deer hits the ground to getting it home and ready for processing. Next month we'll cover how to cut, package and store your venison. Much of the information presented here is from the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, and applies to all game animals, not just deer.

For field dressing a deer, it's important to have several items with you, including: a sharp knife; several feet of rope for dragging; twist ties or rubber bands; clean cloths or paper towels for wiping your hands and knife; and disposable gloves to keep you and the carcass clean — and protect against disease.

It's important to remove the entrails from the animal as soon as possible, to ensure rapid loss of body heat, prevent surface bacteria from growing, and maintain the overall quality of the meat. Ideally, to reduce bacteria growth, the body temperature should be reduced to 40 degrees or lower, without freezing.

Before actually getting to work on the deer, move it, if necessary, to a clear area where you'll have room to work. Then get out your knife, gloves, paper towels, water, and everything else you'll need before you get started. Laying everything out on your coat, for example, is a great way to keep everything at hand and from being misplaced.

For field dressing, about any knife you're familiar and comfortable with is fine. Something with a 2½- or 3-inch blade is perfectly adequate. Survival type knives are certainly not necessary, and are probably too cumbersome.

To begin, place the deer on its back, using rocks or sticks to keep it in position. You can prop a stick between the back legs to keep them apart, or tie a hind leg to a nearby sapling. Remove the genitals, then make a cut that runs along the midline from the breastbone to the anus. Cut with the blade facing up and the skin lifted, to avoid cutting any of the entrails.

Next, cut around the anus. Start by making short shallow cuts in the skin around the anus. As you work your way around, the intestine, which is like a tube, will begin to separate from the skin. At that point, keep pulling and cutting to work the intestine free until it completely separates from all the surrounding tissue. Then tie it off with a twist tie or rubber band to keep feces from contaminating the meat. Now, working from the open body cavity, pull the large intestines and tied-off anus into the body cavity, tie off the bladder, then roll the deer over on its side and roll the entrails out of the body cavity.

With the lower, abdominal, cavity now clear, it's time to remove the heart and lungs from the chest cavity. Reach up into the cavity and cut around the diaphragm to free it from the rib cage. Then reach as far up into the neck as possible (have your coat off and sleeves rolled up for this) and cut the windpipe and esophagus. This will feel like a corrugated hose about one inch in diameter. Now the heart, lungs, windpipe and esophagus should all simply pull right out.

If there are any more entrails or other debris whatsoever in the cavity, remove it, and then roll the carcass over on its belly, to drain all excess blood from the body cavity. After rolling the carcass back

over again, remove any dirt, feces, hair or blood-shot meat you can see, then wipe out the cavity with a clean dry cloth or clean paper towels. If you use water to rinse the cavity, make sure you thoroughly dry the inside, because moisture will encourage the growth of bacteria. Prop the cavity open with sticks to encourage air circulation, which aids in the cooling, as well as the drying process.

If the temperature is above 40 degrees, try to chill the carcass as quickly as possible. Filling the cavity with plastic bags of ice or snow works well. Do not, however, place ice or snow directly into the body cavity as, again, moisture will encourage bacterial growth. If you don't have ice or snow, keep the cavity open and the carcass out of direct sunlight, and get it refrigerated as soon as possible.

When you're done field dressing, gather up the used gloves, paper towels, twist ties — and all of your other man-made debris. The animal's entrails, of course, will be taken care of by other wildlife.

When transporting the carcass, keep it cool. Never tie it across a vehicle hood or roof because engine heat and sunlight will increase bacteria growth, leading to spoilage. Don't put a warm carcass in the trunk, either, as the heat there will be retained, again possibly leading to spoilage. For long trips, or in exceptionally warm weather, or if you won't be returning home for more than just a day or two, carcasses should be skinned, quartered, cooled, placed in bags (to keep meat from coming into contact with water) and packed in ice or dry ice. Don't put all the meat in one bag, use two or three, and then pack ice around each bag, to speed the cooling process. Use a thermometer to monitor the meat temperature, and if it rises above 40 degrees, add more ice.

Once you get the deer home, or at camp if you're going to be there for any length of time, it's time to skin the carcass. Start by chopping or sawing the legs off just below the "knees," and then use a clean knife to skin the lower legs (hocks) and down the backs of each leg. Carefully cut a slit between the tendon and the hock. A rope or hook can then be inserted into the opening, and used to hang the carcass. Just don't cut the tendon.

With the carcass now hanging with the hind legs up, start removing the skin from around the anus and the tail, and then down each hind quarter. Often, once the skin is free from the tail end of the animal and is down over the haunches, it can be pulled down all the way to the shoulders. Use your fist more than your knife, pulling the hide away from one side and then the other.

Once the skin is peeled down to the shoulders, cut and pull it from around each shoulder until it's free from the front legs. It's when skinning around the shoulders that having already skinned the lower legs makes this part easy. Finally skin down the neck. The skin is especially tight around the neck, so take your time. If you haven't already done so, remove the head by severing the neck. If you want to save the hide, rub the inside with fine salt and let it set for 24 to 48 hours before taking it to a taxidermist for tanning.

After cutting off the head, remove any remaining organs or parts of the windpipe or esophagus. The carcass can then be cleaned out with plenty of clean water, and stored under 40 degrees until it is processed.

For more information on field dressing and skinning, as well as the safe handling of meat, contact your county's Penn State Cooperative Extension office, or visit Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences online at [www.cas.psu.edu](http://www.cas.psu.edu). To actually see the deer cleaning and butchering process, a great video, *Big Game Field to Table*, is available for \$9.95 (plus tax, shipping and handling) from the Game Commission by calling 1-888-888-3459, or online from The Outdoor Shop at [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us).

When most hunters go into the field, they do so with the intention of harvesting an animal for food. Venison has grown in popularity, and is desired for its healthy calorie and fat levels, as well as for its delicious flavor. When handling the meat, however, there is great risk of contaminating it with bacteria that can cause food-borne illness. It's essential to know how to properly handle the animal — from field dressing to processing to cooking — to prevent illness and ensure the tastiest

meat possible. The procedures and tips presented here are just a guide. There is no single right way to process a deer. The key, though, is to be patient and keep everything as clean as possible, every step of the way.

While the information presented here is about deer, the same principles apply when field dressing and transporting all game, from elk and bears to squirrels and doves.

Next month we'll go over what to do with that skinned carcass to ensure that it will ultimately be the best table fare possible.

Sidebar: BEFORE YOU begin field dressing, tag your deer. In Pennsylvania, deer must be tagged, in the ear, immediately after harvest and before the carcass is moved. And don't forget to fill out and mail in your harvest report card.

*By Larissa Rose*

## “Under-the-Net” Evaluation of Antler Restrictions

### Adult buck captures increase as more than 2,000 deer are captured.

On March 19, 2004, biologist aids Andy Toric and Mike Surmick, and I (Eric Long) sat hidden in our truck along a field just outside the small town of Coburn. It was a clear night, with the temperature hovering around freezing and the ground covered with wet snow. The three of us had binoculars and night vision optics and, most importantly, a detonator wired to a rocket net strung out about 50 yards away. The net was folded inconspicuously, and we had baited the area with about 100 pounds of shelled corn. Over the previous few days deer had become accustomed to feeding on our corn, and we hoped tonight—with rockets charged and loaded with solid rocket fuel—would be no exception.

We did not have long to wait. Around 6:30, eight deer made their way out of the woods and down the hill toward the corn. Pausing every so often to scratch at the snow, they obviously were more interested in our bait. First one and then two deer made it to the edge of the corn, and before long other deer started to trickle down toward the baited net. As the deer came closer, we waited and watched, trying not to move.

Trapping deer is a lot like gambling: When a couple deer make it to the bait ahead of the others, we are faced with the decision to take them or hold our hand and hope others follow. On some past occasions we were too greedy, and something spooked the deer before we could trap them. Other times, our patience paid off and the entire group eventually worked its way to the bait. This night, when six of the eight deer made it to the bait and the other two did not look particularly interested, we decided to take what we could get.

Andy held the detonator as Mike and I spotted for him. When all six deer had their heads lowered and were feeding on the corn, we gave Andy the green light and he hit the button. Immediately, three rockets with the large net trailing behind arced over the deer. The deer turned and tried to run, but the net fell over them.

Andy, Mike and I burst out of the truck and dashed toward the net, but before we could get there, three of the six deer managed to escape from the net and bolted back into the woods. The other three had become entangled, and the three of us, together with some landowners and volunteers who had been waiting nearby, converged on the deer and quickly inventoried our catch.

My deer had the telltale pedicels of an adult buck that had recently shed his antlers. Andy's deer also had bare pedicels, indicating it, too, was an antlered buck that had survived the hunting seasons. Mike's deer was easier to identify, as it still sported a single forked antler that was unusually late in falling off. Capturing three deer and having all of them turn out to be adult bucks is something that never happened the first year of our study. After drugging the deer to calm them, we untangled them from the net, equipped them with radio-transmitters and numbered ear tags, and released them, “on air,” back into the woods.

The Buck Ecology Study began in December 2001, in Armstrong and Centre counties, to monitor the impact of antler restrictions. We chose those counties because they span a wide range of cover types, land use practices, management techniques and topography. Armstrong County is located in WMU 2D, which is one of the western units where antlered deer must have at least one antler with 4 points to be legal. Armstrong County is comprised almost entirely of private land, has a mix of field and forest, and is in the Allegheny Plateau region of the state.

Centre County, on the other hand, is in WMUs 4D and 2G, where deer with 3 points on a side are fair game. Eastern Centre County is in the Ridge and Valley region of Pennsylvania, where large wooded ridges are separated by wide agricultural valleys, but northern and western Centre County, crossing the Allegheny Front and onto the Allegheny Plateau, typify the “Big Woods” habitats of Pennsylvania, where there is little agriculture. Further, Centre County has many state game lands and much state

forest property, so here we were able to trap deer on both public and private land that is hunted. While many deer in Centre County were trapped in Penn's Valley, others were trapped in and around SGLs 33 and 176, as well as Moshannon, Rothrock and Bald Eagle state forests.

Between the two counties, more than 80 landowners allowed us to trap deer on their properties, and we also trapped deer at five separate hunting clubs. In this way, though we were not able to trap deer in every county in the state, we covered many different habitats and land types.

Over the course of this 3-year study, we captured 2,023 deer. Of those, 551 were bucks we radio-marked. Nearly all the bucks trapped in Armstrong County were caught on private land. Of the 220 bucks we radio-marked in Centre County, 66 were caught on state game lands, and about half of the Centre County bucks spent time on public land. All bucks in both areas were exposed to hunting pressure.

Capture crew experience, number and type of traps, and weather greatly affected deer capture success. During our first winter, despite the warm, muddy weather, our crews captured 384 deer. Based on that first year, for the winter of 2003 we increased the number of clover traps and added rocket nets. That, coupled with a snowy winter and more experienced capture crews, resulted in 790 deer captures. The winter of 2004 brought another good year, and we finished the capture season with 849 deer.

Clover traps were by far the most successful trap, capturing about half of all the deer. Drop nets followed, with about 40 percent of our deer captures. Rocket nets, a helicopter, and dart guns captured the remaining deer.

Handling more than 2,000 deer over three years provided a great opportunity to view the impact of antler restrictions. The percent of adult bucks (more than 1 year of age) captured increased substantially over the course of this study (Figure 1). This field experience suggests that following implementation of antler restrictions, considerably more adult bucks are surviving the hunting seasons.

If bucks are surviving the hunting seasons, the next question is how many survive until the next hunting season? To answer this, we are monitoring the survival of bucks wearing radio collars. Results from 2003 are encouraging. Nearly 90 percent of all adult bucks that survived the 2002 hunting seasons were still alive and available at the beginning of the 2003 archery season. With more than 200 bucks currently on the air, we expect to develop a more complete picture of buck survival and mortality causes throughout this year.

We will continue to track movements and survival of bucks through the end of 2004, and although we have finished capturing deer for this study, we will continue to monitor bucks into the 2005 hunting season.

With the many bucks that survived last year and the large number of adult bucks that we caught this year, we will be able to monitor survival for a much larger sample of adult bucks than in previous years, and this will allow us to get a better estimate of how many adult bucks survive hunting seasons. Together with data we have already collected, this information will help us better understand deer movements and survival and will assist future management decisions.

**We would like to thank the many landowners who generously provided access to their land, and we would like to acknowledge the tremendous work of our deer capture crews over the last three years. Enduring bad weather and unruly deer, these young biologists captured more than 2,000 deer, providing the foundation for all we are learning in this study.**

**Members of past and present deer capture and monitoring crews include: Bob Colden, Susan Cooper, Andrea Evans, Sarah Frantz, Heather Halbritter, Christine Hoskinson, Greg Huchko, Dennis Jones, Brad Kirr, Jason Kouger, Josh McBride, Nick Miller, Paula**

**Mooney, Sean Murphy, Ryan Reed, John Rohm, Tony Roland, Josh Schrecengost, Matt Silicki, Jim Sinclair, Khara Strum, Mike Surmick, Andy Torick, Wendy Vreeland, Willy Wenner, Jamie Winans, Nate Zalik and Lindsay Zemba.**

## **REPORTING MARKED DEER**

FOR THE next few hunting seasons, there will be many deer in and around Centre and Armstrong counties that will be equipped with numbered ear tags, and some bucks will also have radio transmitters. We encourage all hunters to consider these deer as they would any other — if the deer is legal for harvest, treat it as fair game. We do ask that if you kill a tagged deer, call the toll free number on the tag and report your kill to the appropriate region office. Additional information on this study is available on the PGC website ([www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)). Follow the links for “Wildlife,” “Deer,” and “Antlered Deer Research Study” to learn more.

THIS PROJECT is a cooperative research effort between the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Pennsylvania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit at Penn State University. The research is also supported by Pennsylvania Audubon Society; Quality Deer Management Association (specifically Susquehanna, SE, and NC Pennsylvania branches); Pennsylvania Deer Association; and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Eric is a graduate student at Penn State University, working with his advisor, Dr. Duane Diefenbach.

*By Eric Long, PSU Graduate Student  
Dr. Chris Rosenberry, PGC Wildlife Biometrician  
Bret Wallingford, PGC Deer Biologist*

## Broad Mountain Bank Robber

"FRED, could you come out to the barracks? I'd like you to look at something."

It was April 2001, and the voice on the other end of the line was Clair "Webby" Borosh, head of the crime unit at the Lehighon barracks of the Pennsylvania State Police. I could never have imagined at the time, but that call was the beginning of the most challenging investigation of my career, and resulted in the prosecution of perhaps the most prolific bank robber in U.S. history.

"What's up?" I asked when I met Webby at his office.

"Take a look at this," Webby said, handing me a paper. "I think I know what it is, but tell me what you think."

"That's the parking lot on my game lands, the one on Broad Mountain."

"You and I are on the same track," Webby said. "Can you be here tomorrow at 10 o'clock?"

I was already in Webby's office when two people, Rooster and Vince, were ushered in. They were from the FBI. I told Rooster that I was sure the map was of the parking lot on SGL 141, and asked him what we were looking for.

"Fred, do you remember the bank robberies in Carbon around the 1990s? We think the person responsible is who drew the map." Rooster then handed me a folder that contained about 25 maps. The maps had been found by kids playing in some woods in the southeast part of the state. They were inside what could be called a bunker, which also contained guns and other papers. "These maps have 'CARB' on the top," Rooster went on, "and we think that means Carbon. We have to verify that, and would like to go to the game lands and see if we can find a bunker there."

Once at the parking lot, looking at the paces listed on the map we wondered if they were single paces or double paces (like the military uses). The suspect's height, as indicated by the bank videos, was 5-6. As Webby was closest to the robber's height, we began our search where he had ended up pacing.

After two hours of fruitless searching, I had all the guys go back out to the road and then pace down the side of the road. Still in the woods, I oriented on them and began to search in their direction. Incredibly, I found the site. It was empty, so we put everything back in place, thinking the robber might use it again.

SGL 141 is comprised of 17,000 acres, and the terrain runs the gamut from flats to steep cliffs and rugged gorges. There are dense rock formations and many streams. The maps that Rooster had furnished were, to say the least, crude, and matching them to areas on topo maps took nearly three weeks of brainstorming by Webby and me before our next break came.

### Success

The day began with a call to the state police. "Webby," I asked, "are you going to be in the office for a while? I have an idea about a site I want to run by you." Within the hour I was in Webby's office with my compass, topo map and a theory. "I think a site is in this area. I found a compass bearing listed, but it can't be right. I think it's reversed."

We talked, measured and studied the map, and Webby asked about the word "cairn" on the map. Looking it up, we found that it meant a pile of rocks used to mark a location. We had to go to the area to see if the bearing was reversed, and to see if we could locate the cairn.

Webby called Rooster and Vince and made arrangements to meet and conduct a search. We covered the area using the compass bearing listed, and after a long day we were convinced that the compass bearing was, indeed, reversed.

That outing was the first of many. The calls to Webby continued as my progress continued. I considered it progress just to confirm an area as a possible site area. One day while hiking I found a landmark depicted on one of the maps. I called Webby, and the next day we hiked in and I showed him what I thought was the landmark. I started by saying that in all my hiking I could find nothing else that matched this particular landmark, that it had to be the object on the map. We searched the area the rest of the day, and although we came up empty, we were sure we were on the right track.

We continued to search for the next month until one day I was following a deer trail, and as I scanned both sides of the trail I noticed a small pile of rocks that didn't look natural. Inspecting them closer I was sure that this was the cairn. Then, searching the surrounding area, I found a bunker.

I pulled out my cell phone to call Webby. "No Service." I hiked 1 1/2 miles to where the cell would work and then made the call.

"Are you sure?" Webby asked.

"I'd bet a year's pay on it," I replied.

"I'll be up in 45 minutes," Webby answered.

The 45 minutes seemed like forever, but as soon as Webby arrived we started hiking back into the area, and I explained the what, where, when, how and why of the find, and then showed him the site. We talked about opening up the bunker, but decided to just remove one rock, to see what we could with a flashlight. I pulled out one stone and peered in, and there looking back at me was the corner of a 20mm ammo can.

We were both grinning from ear to ear as we hiked back to where we could use the cell. Arrangements were made to meet the FBI at nine the next morning. All the way back to the road Webby and I were chattering like kids at Christmas, wondering what we would find the next morning.

I slept little that night, and by six o'clock I was up and dressed and looking at the map again, searching for clues to the locations of other sites. Later, on Broad Mountain, I was surprised when 16 agents showed up. After introductions, we hiked into the site, and as soon as we arrived, the evidence recovery team went to work. Photographs were taken with everything in place and then the site was opened. Rooster identified the site as a "weapons" site, one of three the maps indicated were in Carbon County.

Rather than just watch the agents inventory the contents, I asked Rooster if I could look for other sites, and he said okay. I made it about 20 yards. "I found another bunker," I yelled. Everyone stopped and looked like they didn't believe me, then they all came over. The whole process started over, with photos and the collecting. It was evident that this robber knew how to hide things. We would later discover why.

The two sites yielded about 30 guns: AR-15s, Mini 14s, Uzis, Berettas, Glocks, and other handguns and shotguns, every one with its serial number ground off. We also recovered about 50 5-gallon buckets containing masks, make-up kits, military gear, climbing gear, ammo, holsters, magazines and other gear. On one of our trips hauling all the gear out to the road Rooster looked at me, smiled and gave me a direct order. "Fred, you're forbidden to look for any more sites today. We don't have enough room for any more stuff." This capped the day and we all felt good that we had brought this robber a little closer to justice.

### **The Maps**

Most if not all maps were crude, including only enough information to jog the robber's memory, which made them difficult for anyone else to understand.

I searched the mountain whenever I had time. On one occasion I asked a good friend, Wayne Alfano, to help. Wayne was an officer with the Fish & Boat Commission, and we had worked together

for quite a few years. After searching about four hours Wayne called me over and, sure enough, he had found a site. The bunker was empty, and we later determined that this was a temporary site, one the robber used to cache weapons until he finished a main weapons site.

Wayne continued the search and we located another site, and this one was full. We went home, called Webby, and two days later we were back up on the mountain with the FBI. Rooster started this meeting with a briefing, and he handed me a photograph of a suspect. He went on to explain that the state police and an FBI agent, working the area where the kids had stumbled on the bunker, obtained a handwriting sample that matched the writing on the maps. Rooster went on to say that the suspect was an ex-Army Ranger and a karate expert, and that he was to be considered armed and dangerous.

If Rooster's warning wasn't enough, the two agents armed with automatic weapons that accompanied us that day stood as stark reminders of the seriousness of what we were up against. We arrived at the empty site, and then went to the other site. It contained more than 1,000 pounds of ammo - which we had to carry out to the road.

### **The Records**

Over the next year Rooster, Webby and I had many discussions about the maps and sites. One map of great interest was labeled "CARB RECEIPTS." This site held records of the suspect's tax receipts for a 10-year period, his income and expenses, and even his blackjack and poker winnings. We knew this because in a weapons site we had found an inventory of what was stored in every other site. Rooster figured that with these records we could positively connect the suspect to the sites and robberies.

But first we had to decipher the map and then find the site. This one proved to be the most difficult to locate, and it took us until the summer of 2003.

Coordinating our schedules so we could conduct searches was a problem. I would search with Webby whenever possible, and often times my supervisor Joe Wenzel would come to "watch my back," as did Wayne on many occasions.

### **The Money**

We were working on one map titled "CARB M," which we believed to be a money site. Rooster had told us that the robber had made off with quite a large amount of cash, and that if we could find any, we might be able to tie it to some of the banks that had been robbed. This map showed what we thought was a stream by an old dirt road. In Carbon County, though, there are hundreds of dirt roads by streams, and each one had to be checked.

This was accomplished with the tireless help of Wayne, Joe, Webby and me, and we would have gone nowhere if it hadn't been for the help of Carbon County's GIS/Mapping Office. Without knowing what I was up to, those folks supplied me with aerial photos of all the areas we wanted to search.

During this process we continued to look in the area of the sites we had discovered. One map had a landmark that was listed as a triple tree. Wayne and I had spent the better part of a morning following a stream and we decided to take a break and look for the triple tree.

Looking around the empty site and ammo site we had found, we came upon a tree that matched the map exactly. Webby was called and, again, a meeting with the FBI was arranged.

This search came up empty, but Rooster had a theory about the stream and the map listed as CARB M. We packed up and drove to the stream and hiked down through the woods. After an hour of searching Wayne called us over: He found the money site. No one said a word as the bunker was being opened, but to our surprise, it was empty.

During all of the searches, even when we came up empty, we learned more about what the suspect thought and what he looked for in selecting a site. We also learned that he picked his sites very

carefully. Interestingly, during all our searches over the years, we never ran into another person.

### **The Dry Spell**

Our searches continued through the hot summer of 2001 and into 2002, and Webby and I continued to meet to look over the maps and discuss the clues and possible theories, but we found no more sites. Then one night in early February 2002, I received a call from Webby. He told me that Rooster had called to say that two banks, one in Harrisburg and one in York, had just been robbed, and that the FBI felt certain that it was our suspect. Also, all the weapons that we had recovered had had their serial numbers ground off, a felony, but the FBI was able to raise the number on one, and it turned out that it had been stolen in the area where our suspect had been stationed while in the Army years earlier. Probable cause had been established; the FBI had enough evidence to pick him up.

Webby told me that the FBI's SWAT team was going to apprehend the suspect when the opportunity presented itself, and that as soon as they did, they wanted me to go to the first site we had found, to see if any money from the latest robberies might be there.

Several days later I was attending a meeting at the region office, and during our afternoon break I checked my cell phone. "Fred, Rooster here. We got him. Go check the site."

The site was an hour away, and it's surprising all the thoughts that can go through a person's mind in one hour. I hiked into the woods to the site and slowly opened it. Empty.

I called Rooster to give him the bad news and he, it turned out, had some good news. The team had searched the suspect's home and found firearms with the serial numbers ground off, just like the ones we had recovered, and 5-gallon buckets that were filled and labeled just like the ones we had found. Rooster went on to say that our suspect was not talking, that he wasn't a happy camper.

When I talked to Webby the next day, he filled me in on all the details, and we both felt good that we had had a hand in bringing the robber to justice.

The case wasn't over, though. Webby and I continued to discuss the maps and clues, and one day Webby told me that Rooster was going to retire. I really enjoyed working with Rooster and was glad when Webby told me that we were going to have lunch with him the next week. When we met for lunch, Rooster thanked us both for our help and professionalism and gave us another update. Our suspect's name was Carl Gugasian. The FBI felt he was responsible for 50 or more bank robberies up and down the East Coast, over 30 years, and that he had cached stuff in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware. The only sites found so far, though, were the ones we had found.

### **Another Bunker**

Webby and I were working on a map labeled as "CARB Main."

We believed that it showed a pipe or space at the end of it, and knowing the type of containers Gugasian used, we estimated this site to be about ten feet long. We figured the pipe might be a drainage pipe under a particular road, and we developed a plan to search around each drainage pipe. The next day, near quitting time I went in to mark the pipes for a later search.

As I was hiking into the area, I found a site, but it was empty. The funny thing about it was that we had all walked past this site at least 30 times. We later found out that Gugasian used this as a drop, where he would store his gear before carrying it back to the bunkers.

I continued my hike, thinking that my recent find was a good sign, and also wondering how many other sites we had walked by. Then, something I can't begin to explain happened: As if a hand was on my shoulder, I was guided to an area that we had previously searched before, and I walked right to a bunker. I was just a foot from it before I realized it was a site. I sat down, drank some water, gave my thanks, and then hiked to where the cell phone worked and called Webby. When he asked if our theory about the pipes had worked I told him I didn't get far enough to find out.

After another 45-minute wait, Webby arrived, and after looking at the empty site we were off to the full one. The next day two FBI agents met us. Webby and I led them to the sites and I asked, "The bunker is here. Do you see it?" Both replied no. I started to point out the site and then both agents saw it.

One agent said, "Fred, there is no way that you could have found this site unless you helped Gugasian put it there."

"I'd agree, Bob," I replied, "except that Gugasian is in jail. Why would I even call you? I also know what is in this site. I could have just sold it."

Smiling, Bob looked at me and said, "Yea, you're right."

### **The Last Bunkers**

For most of 2003 we searched for the other sites, and one day Webby called to inform me that Gugasian had given up some information about some sites, and that the FBI had recovered \$47,000 in cash and seized \$500,000 from Gugasian's bank account. The information about the sites led us to an area that was 100 yards from where we had stopped one of our searches.

Heading out to the area, Webby and I were walking side by side when we both pointed and said in unison, "There's a site." The find was quickly followed by four more.

On the day of the recovery, assisting us were members of the Lehigh State Police barracks, the Hazleton State Police barracks, and the Game Commission's Game Lands Maintenance Supervisor from Carbon County.

We really needed the help, because in all we recovered more than 100 5-gallon buckets and 25 to 30 20mm ammo cans, and in them we found guns, coins, stamps, books, jewelry, gems and other items, all of which Gugasian had stolen.

We were pleased, but there was one more site to recover, THE RECEIPTS. This site was found about four miles away - not on game lands. Webby and I had talked about this area on more than one occasion. If you refer to the Receipt Map on page 23, you'll see that it could easily match many areas in any county in the state. We had to decide what it showed. We thought it was a road with a telephone pole on one side, a guardrail or wall on the other, and an old dirt road paralleling both.

When Webby and I found the bunker we were amazed. The site could be seen only by walking past it and then turning around and looking back. This produced about 15 20mm ammo cans that contained all the records listed on the inventories. This brought to 15 the total number of sites found here in Carbon County. We learned that many of the sites we had been looking for never existed, that they were ones Gugasian had picked out and marked, but never used.

The FBI called Gugasian the "Friday Night Bank Robber," because he often robbed on Fridays. Gugasian liked to travel and gamble. His trips included some to Paris, Africa and Armenia. Gugasian, while in the Army, trained with Special Forces, and used those skills in caching his gear, money, guns and other items. He also used those skills to hide his identity, race, size and features for 30 years.

Once Gugasian entered a bank, he would vault the counter, stuff the money into a bag slung over his shoulder and be out the door in less than two minutes. About 40 shoulder bags were recovered from the bunkers. While robbing the Jim Thorpe National Bank, Gugasian wounded a bank employee. Gugasian's education was, to say the least, impressive, too. A Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Villanova and a Master's in statistics and probability from the University of Pennsylvania. He also had begun Doctorial studies at Penn State.

This past December Gugasian pleaded guilty to robbing five banks and was sentenced to 17½ years in federal prison without chance of parole. His prosecution would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Pennsylvania State Police, the Game Commission, Fish & Boat Commission, the

Carbon County GIS/Mapping Department, the FBI and the Raddnor Police. And an awful lot of dogged, determined legwork.

- *By Fred Merluzzi, Carbon County WCO*

## Road Trouble

ON THE SECOND day of deer season I was patrolling in Forest County with Law Enforcement Bureau Director Mike Dubaich. Mike had picked me up early and we decided to work our way from Marienville out to Forest Service Road 127 in the Allegheny National Forest.

The evening before we had spent a considerable amount of time looking for the occupants of two pickup trucks we had found on a remote section of this road. One truck was stuck in a ditch and the other was parked in a pull-off area near the first. Because the trucks were near each other and hunting gear was plainly visible in both vehicles, we figured that the occupants had probably been hunting together. We periodically checked on the vehicles throughout the evening, to see if anyone had returned, but because no one had, and also because the temperature was near zero, we were concerned. If the hunters were still in the woods, we figured they'd be in for a long and miserable night.

Through good legwork on the part of region office dispatcher Rhonda Bimber, and with several phone calls by Forest County WCO Rich Cramer, a relative of the stuck vehicle's owner had been contacted. The relative said that the driver had called home and told of his dilemma, and reported that he was back at camp. The relative, however, didn't know where this camp was and didn't have a phone number. At that point all we could do was hope that the other vehicle's occupants were hunting with this person and were also safely back at camp.

Heading back to the pickups the next morning we mentioned how the cold temperatures appeared to have kept hunting pressure to a minimum. There were, however, several hunters around, but most had opted to stay in their warm vehicles, and Mike and I agreed that it would probably be a good day to focus on roadhunters.

Back at the trucks we found they were both in the same positions as the evening before, and they were covered with four inches of fresh snow, making it appear as though they had been there for days. A truck, with three orange-clad occupants inside, soon pulled in behind the parked vehicle. We hoped one of the hunters was the truck owner, but soon learned that these men had no connection with either vehicle. We checked their firearms, which were plainly visible, and the driver, when asked about his firearm, was quick to point out that he had a permit to hunt from his vehicle. I explained that the permit did not allow him to have a loaded firearm in the vehicle while in motion, nor did it allow him to roadhunt. I also reminded him that to be used as a blind, the truck had to be stationary. He indicated that he understood and that he didn't roadhunt.

Mike and I thanked the hunters for their cooperation and were about to return to our vehicle when the passenger in the front seat remarked that his window was frozen shut and wanted to know if he could borrow an ice scrapper. He told us that the passenger in the back seat was smoking a cigar and that he needed to roll the window down. Mike retrieved an ice scrapper from our vehicle and used it to free the window for the hunters, who then continued on their way.

Mike and I headed in the opposite direction, to the intersection of Forest Service Road 145. We checked several hunters, including one who had gotten a buck. Hunting pressure was light, however, and we decided to back track and check some areas where we had noted hunting activity on our way in.

Driving along we spotted a vehicle stopped in the middle of the road with its brake lights on. Mike stopped where we just sat and watched for a few minutes. We noted that both the driver and passenger-side windows were down. Odd, we thought, considering the temperature was four degrees. At that point Mike noted the time and mileage on the odometer. If the vehicle's occupants were, indeed, roadhunting, this information might be important.

The truck eventually continued on its way, and Mike did his best to follow every move yet remain out of sight. The hunters' vehicle never went more than five mph and made frequent stops. Mike rode

the brakes constantly to keep our vehicle out of sight.

All the while, we could see arms extending from the windows with fingers pointing toward the woods. The occupants seemed so intent on watching the sides of the road that they paid little attention to what was in front of or behind them. Several times oncoming traffic had to swerve to avoid hitting the truck. Vehicles approaching from the rear couldn't easily pass, as the driver was often in the wrong lane. If these guys spotted a deer, we had no doubt that they'd shoot; it was a classic case of roadhunting.

At one point we noticed another hunter walking along the road. As the roadhunters' vehicle passed at a pace not much faster than his walk, we could see him gesture and yell something at the occupants inside. As we also approached at the same slow rate, he yelled, "Get in the woods like the rest of us." About then, though, he realized who we were. His angry smirk broadened into a grin and he remarked, "I hope you get those guys. It's bums like them that give us all a bad name."

Finally, after traveling only eight miles in two hours, the truck stopped again. This time the occupants appeared to have spotted something. The passenger exited the truck with a gun slung over his shoulder. The driver stepped out and met the passenger at the rear bumper. We could see the driver point toward the woods and then the passenger shouldered his firearm and fired a single shot. A few seconds passed and both hunters got back in their truck. Once again they drove off at the same leisurely pace.

"Let's stop them," I said to Mike.

"Let's wait and see what they do. Maybe they'll return and retrieve a deer," Mike said.

Using a motor vehicle to locate game (roadhunting) is a serious violation, but taking a deer while roadhunting carries even stiffer penalties. If the roadhunters had killed a deer, we would not want to move in too soon. If they retrieved the deer, we would have more evidence to support charges, and the more evidence we could gather, the better.

We waited a few minutes, but the truck never returned. We drove to the spot where the hunters had stopped, and we could see the passenger's footprints in the snow and also noticed a cartridge case on the road. I got out and retrieved a .300 Savage case. We couldn't see what the passenger had shot at, but we decided that we had better catch up with the vehicle before the violators got away.

It didn't take long to catch up to the truck, because it was still crawling along, with both windows down. The driver pulled to the side of the road and we exited our vehicle. Approaching the truck both Mike and I came to the same shocking realization that the occupants were none other than the hunters we had talked to earlier that morning. The same truck and the same hunters that Mike had, ironically, used his ice scraper to open the frozen window, never suspecting that he would be facilitating their plans to roadhunt. The driver who had stated so emphatically that he didn't roadhunt was, indeed, roadhunting. The occupants also seemed shocked to see us again. I asked if anyone had a .300 Savage, and the passenger stated that he did and asked why.

"Did you just shoot from the road a few minutes ago?" I asked. At first he said he didn't know what I was talking about, but then became more cooperative when I produced the .300 Savage case. I told him what Mike and I had seen and that we had been following them for quite some time. He then admitted that he had taken a shot.

"What did you shoot at?" Mike asked.

"A deer," was the reply. He was quick to point out, though, that he didn't kill it.

The driver became irritated and again flashed his permit to hunt from his vehicle. I again told him that the permit didn't allow for roadhunting and that his vehicle could not be used to locate game. The driver replied that none of what I was saying was ever explained to him. I told him that he

received information on what he could and couldn't do as a permit holder when he initially received his permit. I also pointed out that I had told him that he couldn't use the permit to roadhunt earlier that morning. "You mean my friends can't shoot my deer for me?" the driver said. A little shocked by his statement, and thinking he was just being smart, I simply replied no.

WCO Mario Piccirilli joined the investigation, and after filling him in on the situation, both the driver and passenger were issued citations for using a motorized vehicle to locate game. The passenger was also cited for alighting and shooting from the traveled portion of the roadway. The violators were then sent on their way.

During our investigation, we had noted that the passenger didn't possess an antlerless deer license, but that the driver did. A quick check of the Forest County license list revealed that the passenger had never been issued an antlerless license. We began to wonder if he had actually shot at a buck or whether a doe was his target. Based on the statements of the driver, the passenger just may have been trying to shoot his deer for him.

We all decided that we needed to return to the scene of the violation and look for evidence of a deer. After arriving at the location we conducted a thorough search. I found an area where a deer had been standing about 80 yards from the road and in the direction that the passenger had shot. I was sure that this was the deer that the passenger had shot at and motioned for Mike and Mario to come over. We followed the tracks and found a blood trail. We followed the trail for some distance, noticing where the deer had fallen or bedded down at least a dozen times. Mike surmised that the deer wasn't hurt bad. We all concluded that additional charges would be filed against the shooter for attempting to take a deer by unlawful methods and for failing to make an effort to retrieve wounded game.

With the additional charges, the passenger was charged with more than \$1,100 in fines and costs. Later, as part of a plea agreement, the passenger pled guilty to the original charges of using a motorized vehicle to locate game and alighting and shooting from the traveled portion of the roadway. He paid more than \$400 in fines and costs and lost his hunting and trapping privileges for one year. The driver was found guilty at a hearing and paid more than \$300 in fines and costs and had his permit to use a motor vehicle as a blind revoked.

Roadhunting is unethical and violates the spirit of fair chase. As these individuals learned, the consequences can be quite costly, too. I hope that the sportsman who yelled at the roadhunters that frosty morning reads this. I would like him to know that Mike and I did, indeed, "get those guys."

What about the abandoned vehicles on that first day? They were both gone when Mike and I returned to the site early that evening, and I'm sure there's a story there to be told, too, but one we'll probably never know.

**- By George J. Miller, Northwest Region LMO**

## A Fed Bear is Often a Dead Bear

ANY WCO who has lived and worked in bear country can tell stories about bruins that have died, or at least became serious nuisance problems as a result of being fed by people. My first exposure to this occurred soon after I moved to McKean County, in 1994, when I met a man who had a passion for feeding bears. He had about 20 coming to his property, and he lived near the intersection of two busy roads, which the bears were crossing every day. Within two years I had picked up six roadkilled bruins. LMO John Dzemyan, who covered this district before me, had picked up only two bears in 15 years. I also removed two bears that had been causing problems for this man's neighbors. For two years, I showed him roadkills and explained the problems he was creating, but he continued to feed. At that time there was no law against feeding bears, but fortunately, he finally moved out of the area.

One day early last June, however, I received five nuisance bear calls from residents of Hazel Hurst. Bears were getting into garbage cans and damaging birdfeeders, and several of the callers mentioned two people on opposite ends of town who were feeding bears. I learned that several bears were coming to one family's yard to feed on corn. After I talked to them and explained how the feeding was causing problems, they stopped feeding.

On the other end of town, I spent some time with an older gentleman who first denied feeding bears, but then admitted to it after I told him the details of some of the stories I had heard. He had been luring bears with a fishing pole baited with hot dogs, and he had been known to throw food to bears while he was sitting on his front porch. One of his favorite visitors was a female bear with three cubs. The man finally realized he was causing problems and agreed to stop.

I left for a vacation thinking all was well, but WCO Tom Sabolcik, who was covering my district in my absence, received several more nuisance bear calls from Hazel Hurst, and one of the three cubs the man had been feeding was killed while crossing Route 6. The female and the two cubs, however, continued their usual rounds, and the calls continued.

Two days later, Tom and Deputy Gordon Liezert returned to Hazel Hurst to make sure the feeding had stopped. While they stood in the yard, talking to the man who had been feeding, the female and her two cubs came down from the woods and circled Tom's truck.

The man had quit feeding, but old habits are hard to break, especially for a bear trying to teach her cubs how to get an easy meal. Tom loaded his shotgun with rubber buckshot, and at close range stung the adult bear's backside as she ran into the woods. The cubs went up a tree and the female hung around to protect them. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to relocate these bears, Tom got on the radio and called WCO Mark Fair from Potter County. Mark had a tranquilizer gun in his vehicle, but just before he arrived, the bears came down the tree and ran off into the woods. A neighbor came over and directed them to a camp just down the road. It turned out that the guys from this camp were also feeding bears corn and food scraps. The officers explained why they were there, and the camp members invited them in. The troublesome female and cubs soon fed in the camp yard, so Mark eased the loaded tranquilizer gun out the camp window and shot the dart into her shoulder. She ran about 50 yards before falling over. The officers processed and tagged her, and then talked to the camp members about the problems caused by feeding bears. They then placed the bear at the foot of the tree that held the two cubs. The 150-pound female was now officially number 19891, as shown by the new tag in her right ear.

In addition to the important information we gain from our bear tagging program, we also hope that after being processed, the bears become a little more wary about being around people. Waking up with ear tags and missing a tooth (for aging) can't be a whole lot of fun. We call it negative reconditioning.

I had been back from vacation for only a week when early one morning the region office got a call from a man who had shot an aggressive bear in Mount Jewett, about two miles from Hazel Hurst. I

drove back a long dirt road at the edge of town to a couple of trailers in the woods. Two tents were set up in the yard between the trailers. The man who had killed the bear walked me to the edge of his yard and showed me the carcass. I immediately saw that it had an ear tag: 19891.

He said two cubs hung around the carcass most of the night, but they were gone by the time I got there. The man told me that he had held a family gathering and camp?out the previous night, and a lot of kids were playing in the yard. At about 11 p.m., a boy was putting a bicycle in the garage when a bear walked right past him. The boy yelled and people scrambled into the trailers. The man yelled at the bear from his porch, but when it took a few steps towards him and looked aggressive, he grabbed his rifle and shot into the woods. When the bear took a few more steps towards him he shot it. After he killed the bear he heard a scraping noise in the tree next to his trailer, and noticed the cubs clinging to the side of the tree. He now realized why the bear was acting so aggressively and he felt terrible. He also was worried about being in trouble for killing the bear.

Seven steps from where he had stood on his porch I found evidence of where the bear had stood when he shot it. We searched the woods, but were unable to locate the cubs. I asked the man to call the region office if the cubs returned, and then I skinned out the female bear and discovered that the bullet had entered between her nose and upper lip and traveled straight back through her body. This proved that the bear was facing or moving towards the man when he pulled the trigger.

That afternoon the region office dispatcher radioed me that one cub had returned and was in a tree. I returned to find the cub high in a maple tree, but there was no sign of the other one. Several people stood under the tree to prevent it from escaping before I arrived, but the cub was higher than any ladder I had access to and I couldn't tranquilize it at such a height. Someone thought they heard the other cub in the woods, and after everyone went looking for it, the cub in the tall maple began to shimmy down. I prepared a jab stick with needle and drug, and tranquilized the little bear when it hit the ground.

I put the 18?pound cub in a small animal cage at my house and returned to the woods with a large wire box trap and the female's hide. I set the trap along a trail in the woods and dragged the hide in a large circle around the woodlot. The scent trail ended at the trap, and I baited it with a small piece of the sow's hide. During the night, the cub found his mother's scent, and early the next morning I took both cubs to a rehabilitator, more than a hundred miles away, who handles orphaned cubs. This facility allows for care with minimal human contact, so bears can be released back into the wild.

Later that summer the cubs were tagged and released in Lycoming County. I'm curious to see where they'll turn up again, and just hope they don't end up as nuisance bears. Yet even if they don't, because of being fed by humans, what had been a family group of a mother bear and three cubs and been reduced to two orphaned cubs, and a lot of problems for a lot of people.

**- By Len Groshek, McKean County WCO**

## Spring Challenge

THE 2003 spring gobbler season dawned with me and my grandson, Scott Andrew, huddled in our blind on the east end of my wife's family farm in Centre County.

Our early scouting had produced a fair number of birds and two very nice gobblers, and although hunting pressure is high in this area, we felt our prospects were good.

The blind we were hunting from completely concealed us from everything - which I found necessary when hunting with an 8-year-old. Dawn came and went with no answer to our calls. Frustration had not yet set in, but I think Scott Andrew expected our hunt to work out the way many videos and TV shows portray - call twice and watch the gobblers run in to the decoys. Not this day, though, as the next five hours produced nothing. Not even a close shot was heard. It was like the season had never started. Little did I know that this was only the start of my spring challenge.

As this was the only day Scott could hunt, and wanting to take full advantage of the time with my grandson, we spent the afternoon trout fishing on Spruce Creek, which runs past our farmhouse.

As I began to think about the rest of the season, and the fair number of gobblers it's been my good fortune to bag in my 44 years of hunting, I decided to take the advice of a friend and fellow turkey hunter, Jay Gregory, who told me that I didn't know what I was missing by not hunting spring gobblers with a bow. I felt now was the time, so off to the range I went.

Using an old decoy as a target, I sat down on my turkey seat to see what a few shots with my Matthews Solo Cam would produce. What I found was the first major hurdle in my spring challenge: To say the least, shooting while sitting and trying to keep movement to a minimum proved to be quite difficult. After a few days of adjusting positions and draw weight, however, and practicing in full gear, I found that my effective range would reach to 25 or 30 yards.

My work schedule for the upcoming week allowed me to hunt every day, which is just what I planned to do, on a game lands in Blair County. The first two mornings produced answers to my calls, and on the second day a large gobbler was paying attention to both my calls and decoys when a nearby shot turned him around and sent him packing. I realized then that decoy placement and shooting location were going to be critical to my success.

Using a blind would help conceal movement, but would also make changing locations quickly a problem. I decided that the blind would wait till next year. I now was wondering what other challenges faced me in connecting with a spring bird. For the next four days I changed locations many times, and although each day I had turkeys close enough to take with a gun, the bow shot never presented itself.

I closed the season set up below a large rock outcrop on private property in Huntingdon County. Although a steady drizzle kept me company, I was determined to stay until the very end. After getting an answer to my call and seeing a large mature bird working towards my decoys, I felt my spring challenge was about to be met. But then, all of a sudden, the gobbler took flight off the ridge and headed for Route 22.

My first thought was that another hunter had spooked the bird, but looking around the area where the gobbler had come from yielded nothing. With two hours of hunting time left, I decided that I had nothing to lose by staying put. Hearing a noise from the north, I turned and saw movement coming from my left towards the decoys. It wasn't a turkey, but a mature coyote. When I reached into my vest for my camera, however, he saw the movement and was gone in a flash.

Even though I didn't harvest a gobbler, my spring challenge did produce sightings of 41 deer, 37 turkeys, four grouse, quite a few hawks and owls, many different songbirds, more squirrels than I could count and, of course, one coyote, as well as another great spring in God's woods - and an overwhelming desire to face next year's challenge.

**- By Donald Barker, Dispatcher, Southcentral Region**

## Why Not a 4-Point Club?

BELOW IS AN open letter addressed to the Game Commission by an interested sportsman, Mr. C. F. Robbins, Harrisburg, Pa. It constitutes something that all real sportsmen are in favor of, and it should be read before every sportsmen's association in the State:

"I have noticed a sentiment among good sportsmen that there isn't much fun in shooting a deer; that is, after you have shot several and you're a fairly good marksman. By this I mean any deer that comes along. Why not wait for your buck of six or more points so you have something to be proud of when you come home? And make them be points that you can see. When I started deer hunting, I always wondered after I let a deer pass unmolested, if I had failed to see the horns. But now, I can look back and recall that any deer with good horns was easily recognized and I have no regrets.

"It is not enjoyable to come home without a buck and get razzed by everyone, but it is also not enjoyable to shoot a buck and then have your friends ask you whether you carry magnifying glasses to see points so small. How many times have you and I and countless others thought 'well that fellow took a chance and shot, then looked afterwards.' Sometimes they will bring them home and other times your protectors are told where to find them, which makes one less good buck next year. You people know the above better than I do. It has made me think along the following:

"Can not some feature of recognition be provided whereby sportsmen who resolve before going in the woods that they will only shoot at deer with at least six or eight good points or more may be identified? Perhaps the Game Commission could devise something of this sort, and at the same time get deer camps to cooperate by shooting only this size buck. You know how many camps there are and approximately how many small dead bucks they report. Isn't this worth while? Perhaps the Department of Forests and Waters could also cooperate in issuing campsites to desirable parties along these lines. "Some people will think anything like this is impossible when they recall the stump hunters they pass on a drive, the arguments about who killed the buck by greedy hunters, and other examples of poor sportsmanship. For my own part, I speak from experience as I let three small bucks go by one year, four another and one this year. Anyone of these could easily have been killed by any cool shooter. I don't believe you have a case of an accident caused by a hunter in this class shooting anybody. You've got to see what you're shooting at to qualify and bucks don't look like men. After your hunting trip is over, isn't it just fine to have pleasant memories and no regrets? Even if you come back without anything, you still are not ashamed to meet the fellows you hunted with.

"Any method like I've suggested may conflict with personal rights, but even if there can be no ruling on it, there certainly can be some favorable publicity which would save a great many of these small deer for one more year in which they should amount to something in the deer herd and also be more desirable as trophies. Don't you think some of the well-established clubs would jump at the chance to display a certificate alongside of their hunting camp site permit showing the confidence the Game Commission has in them as a club of high standard and an aid in better hunting? With illegal hunting going on around them and the suspicion of the game protector on everyone in their territory, something like this would have a good moral effect that should produce worthwhile results. I believe we all have seen or been near some illegal hunting that would have been prevented by a public acknowledgment of a club's good intention. There will still be illegal hunting and lots of it, but will not the location of these good clubs and good hunters in certain localities put a scare into quite a few poor sports? A club that has signed an acknowledgment of this kind would be in a bad way if caught in any improper proceedings, and they would be watched by both good and poor sports.

"I've only got a natural sportsman's interest in this question and I hope you will not consider me a busybody. No matter whether there is feed or not and without considering a dozen other questions or answers, we all want to see more buck deer. When you come in at night, you may mention the deer you saw but you talk most about the bucks. If this suggestion would increase the buck deer it would also increase the herd in general."

**- Classic Story from February 1935**

## The Roadhunters

*I AM OFFICER Guy Hansen and am employed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission as a conservation officer. I was employed as such on December 6, 2002, the day in question. I am a graduate of the Game Commission's Ross Leffler School of Conservation, where I received more than 1,400 hours of documented training in various subjects. Specifically, as it relates to being here today, those subjects and experience gleaned over 12 years as a conservation officer deal with investigating illegally killed deer, interpreting data collected in crime scenes, and tracking.*

THAT WAS to be my opening statement in one of the biggest cases I've had. I say "was," because as the defendant's attorney and I sat in the courtroom in front of District Justice Meisenhelter, a plea bargain deal was struck and the defendants pled guilty to most of the charges filed. What follows would have been my testimony that day.

It all started on December 6, 2002, when I pulled up to Deputy Lew Kauffman's house. Lew deposited an armload of stuff into my truck and went back inside to gather the last of the things one might need on a day of "routine" patrol in southeast York County. While Lew was inside, I received a radio call from York County Control about a roadhunting incident that had just occurred on Oak Hollow Road in Lower Windsor Township. What luck, I thought, we were less than two minutes from the scene.

I hit the siren in hopes Lew would sense my new-found urgency. It didn't work. Lew came casually walking out of his house with the last of his stuff. I started yelling at him and waving my arms, trying to get him to hurry. Finally, realizing I was not just fooling around, Lew threw the rest of his stuff in the back of the cab and jumped in.

"Do you know where Oak Hollow Road is?" I asked. Lew said the only Oak Hollow Road he knew was just down the road.

Using my cellular phone I called the person who had reported the incident and was told that a red Ford pickup with license plate ABC-1234 had stopped on Oak Hollow Road and that the passenger had exited the vehicle and, while still standing on the road, shot at something. Then, as we neared the area, Lew and I kept our eyes peeled for the red pickup.

When we arrived at the scene we were met by Lower Windsor Township Police Officer Dean Leppo. Leppo indicated that he had not found the pickup, but by running the license plate he had an address.

With that information, we decided that Lew and I would go to the address while Leppo stayed in the vicinity of the reported violation. If either of us came in contact with the red pickup, we would relay through County Control, and the other would then respond as backup.

When officer Kauffman and I arrived at the address we found no sign of the red pickup, and we got no answer when we knocked at the door. With fresh snow from the day before, we figured that the one set of tire tracks in the driveway were from a vehicle leaving the garage.

Lew and I were discussing what to do next when York County Control radioed that a pickup matching the one we were looking for had just been seen near the spot of the original violation.

To this day I don't know who called this in, but the person who made the original call told me later that it wasn't her. After ensuring that Officer Leppo had been notified, Lew suggested that we take a different road back to the scene.

We were on the other road when we saw a red pickup coming at us. I'm not one to believe in coincidences, so I radioed County Control with our exact location, to have Office Leppo respond for assistance.

I activated my emergency lights and prepared for a head-on vehicle stop. Because of the danger associated with this type of stop, the fact that a firearm was involved, and that we did not know who the suspects were, my heart was racing.

At this point several things happened simultaneously. Officer Leppo arrived, pulling in behind the red pickup, and the defendant's vehicle stopped. The passenger got out and started towards my truck in an aggressive manner. I had the passenger - later identified as defendant Mr. White - stand fast until Kauffman and I had the area safe. While I was moving towards the pickup, I noticed a deer, in plain view, in the bed of the truck. At first glance, I didn't see a tag on the deer. I confirmed the license plate of the stopped vehicle. For officer safety, Kauffman and I secured a rifle that was in plain view and within easy reach of the people still in the pickup. We also separated the occupants of the vehicle.

Kauffman started talking to the passenger of the vehicle while I started talking to the driver, who was still in the pickup. I moved to the driver's side, and the driver turned out to be Mr. Pickle. A woman was in the truck, too, Pickle's wife, and I was told that she was not a hunter, just along to spend time with her husband.

I immediately thought about a woman I had interviewed many years ago who was involved in an illegal deer case. That woman told me that their marriage counselor had told her and her husband to spend more time together, so they went "deer hunting." I couldn't help but wonder if I would hear that once-in-a-lifetime story again. I did not.

As I was speaking with the driver, I noticed some shotgun shells in the center console, within easy reach. When I asked where the shotgun was, he didn't answer immediately, so I asked a second time, and was told that a shotgun was under the rear seat.

I told Pickle that for officer safety I was going to secure the shotgun, and that he would have to get out of the vehicle. I also had Mrs. Pickle, who was still in the back seat, get out as well. As I went to secure the shotgun I saw a hunting vest, with a hunting license, in plain view in the back seat. As Pickle's wife had already said that she didn't hunt, and I had seen the licenses of the other two defendants, this license was contraband. When I opened the license holder, I was surprised to find that it contained a general hunting license, two big game harvest report cards, a furtaker's license, two York County antlerless licenses (before WMUs), a Tioga County antlerless license, a muzzleloader license and bear license. All in all there were 18 separate items of contraband in the license holder. (Note that all of these licenses belonged to individuals other than those in the pickup.)

It is unlawful to possess while hunting or taking game or wildlife, or going to or from hunting or taking game or wildlife, any report card, license tag, license stamp or game or wildlife kill tag belonging to another. Naturally, I wanted to see how Mr. Pickle would explain these licenses.

When I asked him about them he said that they belonged to another friend, who must have forgotten them. Not an original explanation, but vague enough that I was not surprised by it.

I inspected the deer in the back of the pickup, and as I had suspected, it was not tagged. I explained again to the defendant that the reason for the stop was that I had received a report of roadhunting that involved a red pickup. I pointed out the illegal deer and asked the defendant about it. I never received a satisfactory answer on why the deer was not tagged.

I went over to see how Lew was making out, and he told me that Mr. White claimed he had shot the deer legally while hunting behind his house. After shooting the deer, it ran from his view, so he went home and called his friend to come help find it. The friend turned out to be Mr. and Mrs. Pickle. Mr. White went on to explain that while they were driving down Oak Hollow Road they saw the deer lying in the woods approximately 75 yards away. The pickup stopped, White got out and "scoped" the deer but did not shoot, and then got back into the pickup. White and Pickle then drove up a field road to a spot closer to the deer and loaded the deer into the pickup. They then were on their way to Pickle's house to process the deer when they met us.

In checking White's hunting licenses I found that he had an unused York County antlerless deer license, which did allow him to harvest one antlerless deer in the county. A nagging thought kept at me. If White did take the deer as he claimed, the only reason I could imagine why he didn't tag it was because he was going to try to reuse the tag.

We had no further questions for the defendants so we let them go, after Lew and I seized all the evidence we needed.

By this point Officer Jeffrey Gohn had arrived, and all four of us returned to the scene of the violation, hoping to prove or disprove the defendant's story.

Fresh snow - as I'm sure you can imagine - is like having ten officers assisting you. The day before (the first Thursday of the rifle deer season) it had snowed more than a foot, so much of the crime scene was covered with undisturbed snow.

When we arrived at the scene I noted a trail in the snow that consisted of footprints and a drag mark. The trail came from the wooded area and ended where there were vehicle tracks. The footprints, drag mark and tire tracks were all consistent with the defendant's story.

What was not consistent was that White told us that he had been walking along a wood line that parallels Oak Hollow Road, and there were no footprints in the snow to corroborate this story. In fact, there were no footprints anywhere in the area. There also were not footprints between the road and the deer. So we knew that the defendants did not grab the deer while parked on Oak Hollow Road.

Lew, Jeff and I all interpreted this lack of evidence to mean that White was not where he said he was when he shot the deer. It also would have been impossible for White to have exited the vehicle, walk away from the road and shoot the deer while not standing on the road. Because of the terrain and the location of where the deer was standing when it was shot, the only conclusion that we were able to draw from this evidence, or lack of evidence, is that White was on the road when he shot the deer.

Based on the information from the defendants and the witness, I placed the defendants and the vehicle at the scene of the violation 49 yards from one residence and 44 yards from another, well within the safety zones of both. In interviewing the occupant of one of the houses, I was excited to learn that this gentleman also saw everything that went on that morning and that he would be willing to testify. The only problem was that he was getting ready to leave for an extended stay in Florida.

Upon further examination we determined where the deer was standing when it was shot. We know this because of the tracks left by the deer and the amount of hair and blood at this particular spot. Looking to the west, there was no blood along the track line. Looking to the east, we did find blood along the deer tracks. We followed those tracks approximately 50 yards and found where the deer had collapsed and died. At no point in either direction did we see where the deer had reversed direction, meaning that during the time of the violation the deer was moving from west to east. At the point we were able to determine where the deer had died we observed the beginning of the drag marks.

Back where the deer had been standing when shot, Lew found hair on both sides of the trail. Keep in mind that the defendant had indicated that he was north of the deer shooting south, and that the witness had indicated the defendant was south of the deer shooting north.

We collected two sets of deer hair from the crime scene that day. One set was long, full length hair with follicles and some skin attached; the other set was much shorter and looked like all of the hair had been clipped off. Due to training and experience we know that clipped hair comes from near the bullet entrance, while hair that still has the follicles attached are from where the bullet exited. (These hairs are actually "blown" off of the deer and retain their full length and the follicle.)

Lew found the "clipped" hairs on the south side of the deer trail and the "blown" hairs on the north side, indicating the deer was shot from south to north.

To confirm this evidence I examined the deer more closely. Upon cutting the skin and peeling the hide back to examine the inside of the skin and the carcass, I found that on the side the defendant claimed was the side he shot at there were bullet fragment holes and actual bullet fragments consistent with an exit wound. On the other side there was a single, round, uniform hole that is consistent with an entry wound.

As a result of all our evidence, charges were filed against two defendants. The shooter: shooting from a road, using a vehicle to locate game, hunting in a safety zone, possession of a deer that was not properly tagged and six counts of possession of another's license while going to or from the field. The driver was charged with identical charges except that he was not cited for actually shooting from the road. The woman in the back seat was not charged.

After I filed the citations, I learned that White (the shooter) was the father of the woman in the back seat. He was always referred to as either "my friend" or by his name. At no point in my interviews with the defendants did they ever call him "Dad." The daughter went so far as to call him "a friend of the family."

After filing the charges I spoke several times with the defendants' attorney. He wanted to plea bargain, but we could not come to a deal. The hearing date arrived, and I was there with all the witnesses. The defendants showed up, and their attorney again wanted to make a deal. The attorney indicated that both of his clients would plead guilty to possession of the illegal deer (\$500), safety zone (up to \$500), and the shooter would plead guilty to shooting from the road (\$200), if I would drop the other charges.

All in all, I thought we had done an excellent job in investigating and preparing for this case, and I was anxious to prove it in front of the district justice, but when I leaned back and took a deep breath, I realized that I had already achieved my goals: I found the guilty parties and, second, got their attention and let them know that hunters and the public would not tolerate this type of behavior. Therefore, I indicated to the DJ that I would accept the deal. I also took solace in the fact that the defendants would lose their hunting and trapping privileges for several years.

**- Guy Hansen, York County WCO**

## Setting the Spring Season

SPRING TURKEY HUNTERS hear gobbling on scouting trips long before the season opens, because there is some pretty intense gobbling activity from March through the middle of April. Understandably, turkey hunters want to be out in the woods when they believe that the birds are gobbling best, but just when does that happen? When is the most gobbling going to take place each year and how should our hunting seasons be timed?

Wildlife biologists have studied the breeding cycle of wild turkeys and how it relates to the timing of a spring hunting season. There are many factors to consider, and biologists in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region have looked at this extensively.

As I would hope every hunter would agree, spring gobbler hunting must provide recreational opportunity with minimal risk to turkey populations. In general, the season should open when hen turkeys are apt to be laying or incubating their eggs. In this part of the country, there is a 6-week window of opportunity for spring seasons during April and May.

Breeding and nest initiation are stimulated by the length of daylight hours (photoperiod), but weather also plays a role. When light conditions are right for breeding, cold or unseasonably warm weather can speed up or delay the process by as much as two weeks.

Biologists use several methods to determine when the spring season should occur. According to the scientific literature, there are three peaks of gobbling activity. The first is associated with the break-up of winter flocks; the second with the beginning of incubation among hens; and the third with re-nesting of hens that lost their first or second nest attempts. Seven to 10 days after many of the hens are incubating, gobbling frequency increases, as toms seek the few remaining available hens. Surveys of gobbling toms in New Jersey, Virginia and West Virginia indicate that the second peak occurs from the last few days of April through mid-May. The timing of peak gobbling may vary based on weather and other factors, but it seldom shifts more than 10 days in either direction.

Capture of turkey poults in late summer allows biologists to age the young birds (in days) with a fair degree of accuracy, which then allows them to count backwards to a hatch date, and, in turn, an incubation date. This provides a cross-reference to check the accuracy of gobbling frequency observations. Perhaps the best way to determine the timing of peak nest initiation, the onset of incubation and hatch dates is through radio-telemetry.

Radio-marked hens can be closely monitored, allowing researchers to accurately obtain nesting data. According to a study in Pennsylvania from 1953-63, the average statewide incubation date for hen turkeys was April 28. More recently, in a Game Commission radio-telemetry study on South Mountain in southcentral Pennsylvania, the average incubation date for adult hens was May 8. Juvenile hens in the same study had an average incubation date of May 13. Both the older data and the recent information suggest that Pennsylvania's spring gobbler season is timed correctly. Check out the accompanying graph to see a representation of gobbling and nesting activity through March, April and May. The graph was developed using data from West Virginia. Peak breeding, egg laying and incubation probably occur 10 days or so later in most areas of Pennsylvania.

Spring turkey season dates are established according to the reproductive cycle of the wild turkey. Setting the season carefully, using the parameters just covered, is the primary reason we can hunt gobblers during the spring and not affect long-term population levels or disrupt the breeding behavior of the birds. That generally means hunting seasons open around the same time hens begin nesting.

In Pennsylvania, hunting occurs when most of the breeding has been completed and many hens are on the nest. Most state wildlife agencies set spring season dates after the first peak in gobbling and breeding. In response to requests for an earlier spring season, Bill Drake, a now-retired PGC biologist, looked at data available from surrounding states. His report recommended that the spring season here open on or near May 1 each year. This recommendation can also be found in the "Wild

## Turkey Management Plan for Pennsylvania."

Quiet gobblers, "henned-up" toms, warm days and hunting after full leaf-out are often cited as reasons the spring gobbler season should start earlier. Interestingly enough, interference from hens may suggest that the season is as early as it can be. Gobbling activity decreases with increases in hunting pressure, so the woods may be silent, not because the birds are "gobbled out," but because they have been pressured. An earlier opening day might allow hunters to take advantage of cooler weather, fewer insects, fewer leaves and a time period in which some gobblers might be more susceptible to being called, but gobbling activity will always decrease once hunters enter the woods. Also, biologists must consider more than dates and hunter success when setting spring seasons.

A later opening date provides a measure of protection for turkey nests, hens and even jakes. Hens that are in the process of laying eggs are prone to abandon their nests if disturbed. Starting the season close to May 1 may reduce nest abandonment. Hens that are not yet incubating are often found with gobblers early in the season. Lone hens in the process of laying eggs are apt to be moving around the woods during hunting hours if the season occurs too early. The later the season opener, the fewer hens will be available for accidental or illegal shooting. Later opening days may, therefore, enhance the survival of hens. In studies, illegal harvest of hens accounted for 34 percent of all the hen mortality in the spring in Virginia and 13 percent in West Virginia (where the season opened later). Jakes tend to be more vulnerable to harvest earlier in the season. As May progresses, hormone levels and testes size decrease in jakes more quickly than in adults. Therefore a later season may protect some jakes and allow them to mature. An appreciable harvest of males before the bulk of the breeding could affect nesting success and reduce populations in subsequent years. Setting the season to occur after most of the breeding is complete assures that the population will continue to grow.

A later season may make hunting a bit more difficult because full leaf-out limits visibility and hearing. Hot weather may suppress gobbling activity and hunter participation. The managing agency must decide which compromise is in the best interest of the wild turkey resource as a whole and which one is most suitable for hunters.

Pennsylvania has a large turkey population but also a lot of turkey hunters. Tradition and demand for fall hunting opportunity remain high. Given the large number of hunters and the desire to provide good hunting opportunities in both spring and fall, Game Commission biologists have recommended a later season opener than some hunters would like to see. In order to ensure that the turkey flock continues to grow, the later opening day is a wise decision. Commission biologists are examining other options for expanding spring hunting opportunity. Since the first spring season in 1968, the season length has grown from six days to four weeks. Hunting hours have expanded from a 10 a.m. closing to the present noon closing time.

Spring gobbler hunting is excellent right now in the commonwealth. The Game Commission has done an outstanding job restoring and managing wild turkey populations. My advice is to hunt whenever you can. Although there might not be as many birds gobbling at first light as you heard in April, some of the best hunting can be had late in the season, when the old gobblers are seriously looking for hens. I've worked gobblers in the Keystone State right up until quitting time on the last day, and I've often heard gobbling into June.

When you are out this spring, think about the responsibility biologists have to the wild turkey resource. Remember that most turkey biologists are also turkey hunters. Realize that wildlife biologists do their best to provide you with good hunting opportunities, but their decisions involve compromise and concern for the resource. Enjoy the spring season and the chance to experience the thrilling gobble of a tom, and above all, hunt safely.

**- Bob Eriksen, NWTF Regional Biologist**

## Got Bats?

### *House bats and bat houses . . . five problems and solutions*

FOR MOST PEOPLE, bats are unwelcome house guests. They can, however, be good neighbors. They eat a lot of night-flying insects and try to stay out of your way. If bats have made their way into your home, here's some tips on how to get them out and into a safe house of their own.

Bat houses are for maternity colonies, primarily female little brown and big brown bats and their young. Bat houses are not for adult males or species that prefer trees to houses. Those generally solitary bats have no trouble finding housing in Penn's Woods, which is why we don't recommend purchasing or building a birdhouse-size bat box. They're rarely used and not needed.

In April or May, female house bats will return to your neighborhood after spending the winter hibernating in a cave or mine. In spring and summer, they are attracted to the hotter parts of buildings -usually an attic or the under-roof of an outbuilding - to birth and nurse their young. Each year a female little brown bat will give birth to a single pup, while big browns have two. Pups are born in June and ready to fly by mid to late July. Females and juveniles begin to leave their summer quarters in August and September, and by October or November they're swarming around caves and mines, getting ready to hibernate.

House bats may use multiple day-roosts (buildings). If a preferred roost is disturbed, destroyed or remodeled, they'll find other, secondary roosts in nearby buildings. Population build-up occurs for two main reasons: bats are capable of living in excess of 20 or even 30 years and are faithful to a neighborhood; and when buildings with bats are remodeled or destroyed, bats become more concentrated in the roosts that remain. A stable day roost will eventually house a large number of female bats and their young. While maternity colonies of big brown bats are small, with fewer than a hundred bats, some old buildings in Pennsylvania house thousands of little browns.

At some point in buildings bats are using, their numbers will become so great that they'll be noticed; and at that point, homeowners want them evicted.

**Killing bats.** Killing these important species should not be an option. It will not solve the problem, which is the attractiveness of your building, and within a year, other bats from nearby colonies will start to filter in. The permanent solution, good for you, the bats, conservation and your neighbors, is to seal the bats out of your building and provide them with their own bat house.

**Impatience.** Wait until fall and the bats will leave your house for free. Meanwhile, observe where they fly out of your house, then in late fall and winter seal those holes and cracks so the bats cannot get back in the spring. Unlike mice, bats can't chew their way into your house, so even soft materials like Styrofoam will keep them out. There are companies that will help you solve your problem right now - for a price. But if "right now" is summertime, there's always the danger that hidden, newborn bats incapable of flight will be trapped and die in your home.

**Eviction.** By excluding the bats from your house, you've created a problem for the bats and your neighbors. In the spring, the returning but now displaced colony will attempt to find another way into your house or move into other nearby buildings. The best solution is to provide them with a bat box meeting the specifications provided by the Game Commission, Bat Conservation International, or Bat Conservation and Management, a Pennsylvania based wildlife consulting company. While small, store-bought boxes may seem like a quick fix, they are incapable of providing the range of temperatures or space needed by colonial house bats.

**Location, location, location.** Don't put bat boxes on trees, in too much shade, or with their bottoms less than eight feet from the ground. In Pennsylvania, bat boxes should receive at least six (preferably more) hours of direct sunlight every day, and the largest surface of the box should be angled mainly toward the south. Bats are quicker to move into a bat box if it was part of their

summer neighborhood and installed before they left to hibernate.

**Bouncing bat syndrome**, a community problem. Older communities, especially those along rivers and large streams, often house thousands of bats in multiple old buildings. As these old buildings are destroyed or remodeled, surviving bats access the remaining day-roosts in other buildings. Fewer day-roosts with more bats spells trouble for homeowners and for bats. The Game Commission is recommending a proactive solution to this unwanted scenario. Engage in community bat management by installing a huge bat house called the Condo. Finished, it's 8'x8'x8' and capable of housing 5,000 bats.

The town of Newport, in Perry County, installed a Condo at its water treatment plant as a community project spearheaded by the high school's conservation club. Other communities are encouraged to follow suit. For information on how to build and install the Bat Condo 5000, contact Bat Condo, PA Game Commission, Bureau of Wildlife Management, 2001 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg PA 17110-9797 or phone 717-787-5529.

Bat conservation includes, above everything else, debunking the myths and learning the facts about bats. Once you've started down this path, you can't help but admire them. Bats are just trying to survive our ignorance. Help them out by building and installing a safe home for bats.

**- Jerry Hassinger, Retired PGC Biologist**

## The Great Gobbler of Path Valley

PATH VALLEY in Franklin County is truly a lovely vale, buttressed on either side by rather tall, heavily wooded mountains. It runs from the Juniata River southward almost to Mercersburg. In the famous academy there, for more than 30 years I tried to teach English. The hunters in the little mountain village were very kind to me. As I had always been a hunter, we naturally drifted together, and they gave me tips on where to buy quail, ruffed grouse and turkeys. Moreover, although my school was just halfway between the battlefields of Antietam and Gettysburg, and although I am the son of a Confederate colonel, people could not have been kinder. Some local hunters introduced me to Path Valley and to Bear Valley to the east. I owe them deep gratitude; also I remember the kindness to me of the farmers of the Valley who so graciously permitted this Rebel, far from home, to hunt over their lands.

I was born in South Carolina, educated in New York State, and taught for 33 years in Pennsylvania. I have never found any great difference in people. Although my father, as a Confederate, fought against them, I never had any better friends than the old Federal veterans of the little village. During the tragedy known as the Civil War, Mercersburg was a hot corner. It is on an almost direct line between Harrisburg and Washington. Couriers between President Lincoln and Governor Curtin often passed through this small town. On its streets there had even been skirmishes between Confederate raiders and some of the local citizenry. I once found a Confederate grave in the town's cemetery. It was marked "unknown." I was told that the man was with some Virginians, and had been killed on the town square.

But when I went to Mercersburg, all this kind of thing had passed. At least I was treated as if it had never been. The first winter in Pennsylvania, one of my old soldier friends died. He left me his entire library. One book was the great autobiography of General Ulysses S. Grant. I was touched by the inscription my friend had put on the first page for me: "To my dear young Rebel friend, Arch."

But back to my story. One day while hunting in the Valley, I thought I heard, far across the Valley, a shot. Almost at once I saw this great black-looking bird take off from near the top of the mountain opposite. At first I thought it might be a buzzard, but the absence of circling and sailing made me more and more certain it was a wild turkey. As it came closer, I was sure it was a big gobbler.

He had started on a course for me, but would he hold it? This business of having a great prize among birds fly clear across a wide valley, right into my arms, as it were, seemed too much of a miracle.

There were so many other places he could have gone. He could have flown over the far mountains, and come to rest in western Maryland, perhaps near the great Woodmont Club. He could have gone far along either side of the great mountain on which he had been. He could have headed far to the north of me, towards the Juniata River. He could have flown to the south of me, and landed on a slope of Mt. Parnell. But, no; he was coming for me, and coming fast, his bulk rapidly increasing in size. From where I was standing I could see some of the farmers in the Valley point excitedly at the great trophy passing powerfully over them. They identified him. I could see that. One man actually ran back to his house to get a gun, but by the time he reached his yard, he saw it was too late.

I once wrote a poem called, "Something is Always Happening to Me." Well, here it was: the noblest game bird in the world, flying straight at me.

I was in a little clearing about 100 yards above the Path Valley branch of the Conococheague Creek. On either side of me towered two mighty white oaks. It looked as if the big gobbler was coming between the oaks; indeed, for a few seconds I wondered what I would do if he alighted on me. But he was still fairly high, although he was fast coming within range.

I take this moment to give an unasked for word of advice to younger hunters. I have hunted for more than 80 years; and although I am now 87, I still hope to bring down another buck or another

gobbler - or both.

A hunter should marry his gun; that is, he should not borrow a strange one, or hasten to get a new one. By not being divorced from one gun, he learns to love her, to know her capacity, and to learn at what distance she is deadly. When I say "gun," of course I mean a rifle, too - any firearm of the chase.

There is another caution that any hunter should steadily develop. This is the ability to judge distance. For example, a young hunter told me he had shot a big buck running at full speed through the woods at 300 yards. I did not tell him what I thought, but what I conjectured was this: he did not know the meaning of 300 yards; then I doubted if he could see a buck running through the woods at that distance (which is pushing a quarter of a mile). Every hunter must remember that there is a limit to the accuracy of his eyesight.

In South Carolina I once killed a buck with a shotgun and buckshot at 105 yards. I was shooting an old 32-inch Westley-Richards; the deer was standing, and one buckshot broke his back. The performance was a miracle, and we must not expect those in hunting. Miraculous feats may happen in hunting, but they should not be expected.

I now return to my great Path Valley gobbler. On he came, as if he had a compass bearing on me. While he was still 200 yards away, to avoid his seeing any motion by me, I got my gun up. I would give him the choke barrel loaded with No. 2s (now illegal for turkeys). He was flying about 60 yards high, and kept coming in strong, level, purposeful flight. I have studied a great deal the speed of birds in flight. The duck hawk is one of the swiftest; but I have seen a Wilson snipe out fly and out dodge one. Teal are very fast, and mallards and black ducks can fly at about 60 mph. But the speed of anything usually depends on what is after it. I have seen a mallard, pursued by a bald eagle, do about 75. Yet there is a deep wisdom in old Satchel Paige's advice, "Never look behind you. Something may be after you." However, in such circumstances, I think it quite likely is far better to know than not to know.

As my gobbler drew nearer, it stopped beating its wings. It was coming lower, and was now sailing in. I did not want to shoot him in the breast, tearing him to pieces. Some hunters believe that a wild gobbler should be shot in the head, but that is risky business. A wild turkey can jerk his head about so fast that if a hunter aims at that alone, he may miss the turkey altogether. I have shot 107 gobblers - most in the south, where a number may be taken each season - and I always take one in the back if I can. When this great bird swept over my head, I turned, and just as he spread his great wings to alight, I shot him in the back. He never knew who threw the brick. A noble prize was mine - the great gobbler of Path Valley.

**- Archibald Rutledge, (Classic Story from April 1972)**

## Snow, Mud, and Runaway Wheels

Following is the second of a [two-part feature](#) based on journals kept by George E. Sprankle, detailing the early years of his career with the Game Commission, as compiled by George's son, Lynn Sprankle

ON MARCH 16, 1937, George E. Sprankle, newly graduated from the first class at the Game Commission's training school, was assigned to Fayette County. Near the end of July 1940, his journal begins mentioning things that show a transfer is imminent. He got bids from moving companies, inventoried tools and equipment, and briefed others on interim duties, and in early August he began his new duties in Cameron County.

SGL 14 is in southwestern Cameron County, between St. Marys and Emporium; its 13,500 acres comprise the East Branch and West Branch drainages of Hicks Run. There were four refuges to be maintained: 14A (1,200 acres), 14B (209 acres), 14C (375 acres), and 513 (1860 acres). Refuge 513 was on state forest land, hence the different numbering.

*Aug. 6, 1940. Left Punxsutawney at 10:45 a.m. and arrived at Hdqts. on SGL 14 at 2:00 p.m. Moved furniture in one room of Refuge House. In Cameron County, his headquarters was a state-owned house, four and a half miles from the nearest neighbor, a far cry from the apartment he had in downtown Connellsville when assigned to Fayette County.*

There were other differences between the two assignments. In Fayette County, he had WPA crews and NYA boys working on the game lands at irregular intervals, but in Cameron County his help was limited to a few men hired for short intervals, and usually for specific purposes. In Dunbar, he seldom went on night patrol, but at Hicks Run law enforcement became a bigger part of his job. For example, during one 2-week period shortly after his arrival in Cameron County:

*Oct. 10, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Looked at raccoon traps {for "predator" control, a common game protector activity at the time}. Contacted Game Protector Ostrum and accompanied him patrolling in North Creek and Four Mile Run sections. Also Crooked Run section. 2:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.*

*Oct. 12, 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Looked at raccoon traps. Patrolled Bell and Shaffer Drafts. 5:05 p.m. to 4:15 a.m. To Refuge 517 for Land Manager Narby. Picked up Deputy Wright and attended Deputy meeting on Driftwood Mt. Patrolled for night hunting in Red Run, Mason Hill, Rich Valley & Four Mile Run sections. Was accompanied by Officers Narby & Wright.*

*Oct. 16, In a.m. Looked at raccoon traps and went to Emporium to register. 12:30 p.m. to 12:15 a.m. To Benezette and patrolled that section with Deputy Berry. Checked woodcock hunters and patrolled for night hunting.*

*Oct. 19, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Patrolled for woodcock hunters with G. P. Narby near Beechwood . . . 6:45 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. Patrolled vicinity of Wittimore Hill & Rich Valley. Accompanied by Officers Narby & Ostrum (stayed at Ostrum's, left 10:30 a.m.).*

*Oct. 24, 8:45 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. Looked at raccoon traps and patrolled vicinity of Refuge 513, First Fork, Sterling Run & Wittimore Hill. 8:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Patrolled Moore and Wittimore Hills with Game Protector Ostrum.*

Ostrum was Max Ostrum, Emporium, Game Protector for Cameron County. Narby was Paul Narby, Sizerville, Game Protector?Land Management. Berry was Deputy George Berry from Benezette. I don't remember Mr. Wright. Just looking at the number of hours worked exhausts one. Oh, to be 26 again!

The journals list most of his arrests and prosecutions, citing name, address and offenses. There were more in Cameron County than there had been in Fayette County, and in Fayette County arrests had been of predominantly local people, while most of those in Cameron County were non?local. This probably reflecting the relative proportion of local/non?local hunters in each area.

The Refuge house was along the West Branch of Hicks Run. It was four and one half miles from the house to the top of Moore Hill and another mile down Moore Hill to Howard Siding, on the road between Emporium and St. Marys. Although Moore Hill is paved today, it was a dirt road while we were at Hicks Run.

The frame house had a kitchen, living room, dining room and small office on the first floor. Upstairs were three bedrooms and a bath. One of the bedrooms was reserved as a guest room and was frequently used by Game Commission personnel for a day or two. We had indoor plumbing, with water by gravity flow from a spring on the side hill, but no electricity. The house had a coal burning kitchen range that my mother endured for one year. Lighting was by kerosene lamps, and we had a battery powered radio. There was an old crank telephone that worked some of the time - trees were constantly breaking the line. Heat was provided by a coal furnace, which kept the house reasonably warm, when it worked. There also was a woodshed, a small barn and a small garage or equipment building.

*November 16, 1940 . . . To Emporium to get a plumber to fix furnace . . . helped plumber with furnace . . . [Plumber 6 hours @ .95 = \$5.70] . . . A plumber charging 95 cents per hour leaves me absolutely speechless. Of course, my father made \$1,610 that year, and his gasoline record indicates 10 gallons cost \$1.39 - less than one gallon today.*

One other inconvenience was the washing machine. This was a wringer type washing machine, but unlike most others, it had a gasoline engine down under the agitator. On laundry day we would run the flexible metal exhaust hose out the window, and then Mom would get on that kick starter just like it was a big Harley motorcycle. It would finally catch with a roar and the blue smoke would fly.

In early October, this was one of the prettiest places in the world. The house was down in a little valley, and when the fog burned off, the deep blue sky and puffy white clouds formed a magnificent backdrop for the veritable explosion of autumn colors. We often had visitors in October, and they would inevitably say something like, "Oh, I'd give anything to be able to live here." To which my father would just as inevitably reply, "Why don't you come back in February and see how you like it then." In later years, when asked how long he had lived at Hicks Run, he never replied five and a half years. It was always, "Six winters and five summers." He felt the winters counted more at Hicks Run.

Between the end of the deer season and May, we saw almost no one, and the roads were incredible. I can pick and choose to make my point, but mid-January 1943 is typical. *Jan. 15, Started for Howard Siding but got stuck in snow drifts on the red hill. Jan. 16, Plowed snow and shoveled out snow drifts trying to open the road to Hdqts. Jan. 17, Plowed snow and broke open the road to Hdqts. To West Creek for gasoline. Got truck stuck and had to leave it and walk home. (Broke two chains). On the 18th he stayed home because of a heavy storm, but on the 19th, Went to the East Branch hill and got the truck out of the ditch. Shoveled more snow.*

This activity did not always come without cost. *Jan. 30, Plowed snow on the road to Moore Hill. (When I was pulling the snow plow in place to hitch to truck I fell real hard on the ice. Landed on left arm and shoulder.) Jan. 31, When I wakened up my arm was stiff and sore, so was my neck. Felt stiff all over. Was wakened in the night by pain in left arm and neck.*

When he is referring to a snow plow, don't think of the typical big yellow PennDOT type piece of equipment. The snow plow consisted of three large wooden planks bolted together in the shape of a letter "A". A chain would be fastened to the top of the letter and the contraption was then dragged by whatever was available. It looked crude, but worked quite well, as long as the snow was not too deep and the vehicle or horses pulling it could get through. My dad would put chains on the pickup, fill the truck bed with ashes, and away he would go. The plow didn't always go where it should. One spring, as the snow began to melt, we found our vehicle tracks were barely a foot away from the edge of the bank.

That first winter he had to use his personal automobile, the 1940 Plymouth, for work, and it was not really adequate for the region's deep snows. On January 24, 1941, he mentioned the arrival of a snowstorm. *Jan. 25, ... To Moore Hill for mail. Shoveled snow at Hdqts. 9 miles walked.* No vehicular mileage was indicated and it was four and one half miles to the mailbox, so he probably walked out to the mailbox and back. January 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 all show no vehicular mileage, indicating he was unable to get out. This was fairly common each winter. He spent time each of those days cutting browse within walking distance of the house. On February 3, he walked down the West Branch and back, a distance of 10 miles, on snowshoes. I sometimes question his sanity but never his veracity.

Although the winters were hard, we were never glad to see the snow melt, because with the melt came the mud, and mud seemed almost diabolical. *April 1, 1941. 0 miles driven. 9 miles walked 7:20 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Finished reports and took them to the mailbox. Cleaned out drains and culverts to the Middle Branch. (1 crow).* He did eventually get a new truck and access to the outside world improved - a little bit. *May 8, 1941. 6:45 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Checked on the planting of the trees near refuge 14A and 14C. Left Hdqts. at 11:10 a.m. to Harrisburg to get a truck.* He mentioned the train fare from Emporium to Harrisburg was \$3.85.

Anytime it rained, mud could be a problem. Even a new truck was not always the solution. *June 4, 1941 . . . To Moore Hill in the p.m. for the mail. Got truck stuck and had to be pulled out. 4 hours.*

Life was probably pretty boring for my mother, isolated back there with just me for company. We did a lot of walking. Several of my aunts were horrified when Mom complained that I couldn't walk more than two miles in two hours when I was two years old. I well remember one day we walked out the road to meet my dad and we inadvertently got between a mother bear and her cub. I doubt Jesse Owens could have kept up with us as we went back down the road with her hanging on to my hand and my feet hitting the ground about once every 15 feet.

Another problem was rattlesnakes. Every summer we would get several in the yard. A typical scenario would have me racing into the house hollering that there was a snake in the yard. Mom would burst through the back door, grab a hoe she always kept on the back porch, and race out through the yard and attack the snake. The results were always the same: The snake lost. As a child, I never worried much about the snakes, but I suspect that parents worried a great deal.

*Aug. 28, 1944. To Moore Hill to get the men but returned to Hdqts. on account of the rain. Took care of office work and put new handle in axe. Patrolled in vicinity of refuge 14C 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Teddy [dog] bitten by rattler.* Teddy was part collie, two years old at the time. The snake bit him on the nose. He stayed under the barn, holding his face in the cool earth. We put food and water in with him, but he refused to come out. *Aug. 31 Teddy's face was all swollen but is now O.K. except for a small scar.*

One snake incident I'll never forget. When we moved to Hicks Run, my father was 26 and my mother was 22, and being young, they occasionally did silly things, such as race each other out to the garage. One day I was playing in the yard when my mother came running down the front porch steps as fast as she could go, and as she started between the two Norway spruce at the end of the sidewalk she saw a coiled rattler. There was no possibility of turning in either direction, nor was it possible to stop, so she jumped over the snake. I saw the snake strike, its head with open jaws, slide just beneath her foot and end up completely stretched out across the sidewalk - Just another day for a game protector's wife.

Mid-July 1942 saw heavy rains over much of northern and central Pennsylvania, culminating on the 18th. *July 18. At Hdqts. in a.m. on account of rain. 2:00 p.m. to 7:15 p.m. tried to get away from Hdqts. but the East and West Branches of Hicks Run had all the roads flooded.* Although I was only three, I remember parts of that day very well. We had tried to go to Emporium, but the East Branch was pouring across the road, all brown and roily. We turned back and drove down the West Branch and came to a bridge where the water was almost touching the bottom of the bridge. We continued on a short distance and came to a spot where the stream had jumped its bank and was now using the road as its new course. We backed up and turned around, but by the time we got back to the

bridge, it was under water, and then things became pretty frightening. My father removed his shoes and socks and, against strong protests from my mother, walked out into the brown water to find the bridge. I don't remember how deep the water was over the bridge, but he hurried back and immediately drove us across. We got home, but the water had risen over the road in several places. *July 22. Officer Ostrum called with instructions concerning attendance of Div. Supervisor Ross's funeral. Washed car etc. Picked up officers Narby and Ostrum and proceeded to Williamsport . . .*

John Ross was Supervisor of Division C, and had drowned while rescuing people during the flood. My father knew and liked John and was quite distressed at his death.

The war was never far from one's mind, even back at Hicks Run. Occasionally, flights of large planes would pass over our world and there was rationing. The Game Commission was not immune to shortages, and the journal frequently makes mention of problems in securing tires and gasoline for the truck, and when going any distance, officers would often borrow one another's tires. *Aug. 15, . . . In evening to Sizerville to get tires from Protector Narby's truck so I could go to Lock Haven for turkeys. April 22. To Emporium to let Land Manager Narby use one of my truck tires to haul coal. Helped him with the coal. 8:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.*

Securing gasoline was a regular problem. *Feb. 15, 1944. On patrol in the Hicks Run section checking on beaver trappers. Built a snow plow. In evening to Dents Run for gasoline for the truck. Could not get gas there so had to go to Benezette for it as I did not have enough to get home. 6:45 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. 7 miles walked.*

In 1945, I was all excited about starting school, and because it was not practical to have a bus come for me, the school district appointed my parents school bus drivers and paid them a tiny stipend to drive me out to Howard Siding to catch the bus. This worked fine until winter. *Nov. 29, Started to meet the school bus but got stuck in the snow. Got the dump truck and pulled the car out. Started for Moore Hill for the snow plow but the transmission in the truck went bad. Helped mechanic work on the truck. Accidentally dumped the load of coal and had to reload it. 7:15 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.* I must expand on the last statement. Periodically, he borrowed the dump truck from Land Manager Ed Richards who lived near Portland Mills. He would have it a few days while he brought in as much coal as the bin would hold. After the truck transmission was repaired, he went for a load of coal. There is a steep incline at the top of Moore Hill, and when he attempted a rapid gear change on the hill, his pant leg caught on the dump lever and dumped the entire load of coal in the middle of the road. Why the truck didn't upset is beyond me, but the real problem was the load of coal in the middle of the road. It had to be reloaded, one shovel at a time. Twenty years later, he could laugh about it, but not then.

The winter of 1945-46 seemed to be particularly bad:

*December 14, To Moore Hill to get help on opening up the road to hdqts. Shoveled snow . . . Walk 10 miles. [Gets damn tired on snow shoes] He had underlined the 10 miles twice, which meant he was very impressed.*

*January 8, 1946 Got the truck stuck in the mud and had to dig it out (6 hrs)*

*January 23, Water pipes froze and burst. Took them apart so that repairs could be made. Put out feed for turkeys in the Hicks Run and Huston Hill sections. To Emporium for waterpipe. Repaired the broken water pipes at hdqts.*

*Jan. 27, Worked on frozen water pipes at hdqts.*

*Feb. 14, Mud was so deep I could not get out to meet Protector Ostrum to assist in a search warrant in Benzinger Twp. Got the truck stuck and had to dig it out . . .*

In the 45 years I knew my father, I saw him express excitement only a few times. His journals read the same way. He handled most of the problems and experiences as they developed, but once in a

while, the reader can perceive just a hint of excitement. *Feb. 19, Started for Red Run to meet Deputy Oldani but got stuck on the Driftwood Mt. [Damn near went over the edge of the mt. Icy as all hell. Made a fire and put hot gravel and wood ashes on ice to get traction. Lucky as hell]. Had to go around Wykoff Run. Did not find Oldani at Red Run. Returned to hdqts. on account of snow storm . . . Deputy Oldani was David Oldani of Bryndale.*

His 32nd birthday was interesting. *Feb. 22, Checked on the beaver dams in the Hicks Run. Started for Paige Run but a wheel came off of the truck and I had to walk home for tools to repair it. Got the wheel back on and returned to hdqts . . . 9 miles walked.* I remember him describing this event on several occasions. He was driving along when, all of a sudden, a tire and wheel went rolling right past the truck and on up the road. He knew he was the only person around for miles, so from where could this wheel have possibly come. Just then, he found out; the rear corner of the truck crashed to the ground.

Even when I was an adolescent and my father had suddenly become, in my mind, pretty much of a dolt, I knew I stood in the presence of greatness where tire chains were involved. Many times I saw him, in a coat and tie or his full dress uniform, install tire chains. He would put one leather glove on the ground or snow, put a knee on the glove, and then perform magic. The links would be straight, the chain tight, and there would not be one speck of dirt, snow or mud on him. I studied his technique carefully and copied it assiduously, but whenever I would put on a chain, it would be crooked, loose, and I would resemble a losing mud wrestler.

Another skill my father possessed was the ability to find lost hunters. I couldn't hazard a guess as to how many, but in his 43 years, he found a lot, and he always contended his success came about by accident and, perhaps, sometimes it did. The first occasion this shows up in the journals is November 20, 1940. *When I was returning from the Dents Run section about 9:00 p.m. on Nov. 20, I heard someone yelling so I stopped the car and flashed the light in their direction. Two men came out of the bushes all out of breath. They said that they had been lost since before dark and had no idea where they were. They certainly were relieved when they saw my car lights. It had been raining all evening and they were wet. I took them to Goetz Summit where their car was parked.*

On April 22, 1946, Dad was transferred to Clearfield County. This was the third of my father's six permanent assignments. Some of our relatives used to joke, "It must be time for a new baby; George has been transferred." I was born in Connellsville, Lee in St. Marys, Dale in Clearfield, and Vicki in Franklin.

I have lots of memories of the Clearfield years, but this is my father's story and his journal stopped July 31, 1946, and so shall I. Reading these journals has generated hundreds of questions I would have liked to ask my father but, of course, such is not possible. He would have grumbled a bit about kids nowadays not really knowing very much, but then he would have been able to give me a pretty complete history of the early years of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. If you still have a father, I'd wager there are a few things you would like to ask him. And while he may grumble a bit and make a few disparaging remarks about the younger generation, he'll be glad you asked - And in an all too short period of time, you'll wish you had asked more.

**- Lynn Sprankle**

## Pennsylvania's First Spring Gobbler Season

IN ITS TIME, the Game Commission has collected many wildlife management laurels, but few were such immediate successes as Pennsylvania's first spring gobbler season in May 1968. It was one of those programs that made us glad we are professional game managers; and it was particularly gratifying to those who helped promote and assure its successful conduct.

Naturally, the usual complaints from skeptics were heard when this new sport was proposed, but now we hear only praise from those who actually tried spring hunting. Surprisingly, hunters who didn't bag a bird or even see one were satisfied simply to hear a gobbler sound off at daybreak. This vocal display by the tom turkey to let hens and, unintentionally, hunters know he's available is apparently the key to this sport's great appeal. Turkey hunters, particularly those disheartened after going through the previous fall season without so much as a glimpse of their elusive quarry, were amazed at the abundance of gobbling birds that populated our prime turkey range in the spring.

Although enough gobblers were taken to make spring hunting mighty interesting, the harvest was often not the main measure of success. Just to hear sportsmen enthusiastically compare tales of gobblers heard or seen was indeed a refreshing experience. And to those hunters who had the added good fortune of calling one of these fanned-out monsters into range, the shooting was almost anti-climatic to this magnificent sight. This was quality hunting at its best.

The Game Commission was especially happy it turned out this way because it proved quality isn't necessarily lost in the process of providing recreation for increasing numbers of sportsmen; and also because the success of this experimental hunt could be credited largely to the hunters' attitude and behavior.

As you may recall, the Game Commission had done its part to ensure success by exhaustive investigations before spring turkey hunting was recommended feasible for Pennsylvania. The experiences of other states that already had spring hunts enabled us to make predictions on the probable outcome of our own season. But to make sure we were on the right track, our studies continued through and after the spring hunt. In all, we had five separate surveys in operation to determine hunting pressure, hunting success, hunter behavior and effects upon the turkey population.

The first of these was a count of hunters conducted over established routes throughout the turkey range by Game Commission and Allegheny National Forest biologists. The findings showed spring hunting pressure was less than half of that occurring during any comparable day of the fall turkey season. Also, pressure was least in the vast northcentral turkey range and greatest in range nearest the heavily human populated regions of the state.

Much as we had expected, 50 percent more hunters were counted on the last Saturday of the 6-day season than on opening Monday. This initial season was opened on Monday purposely to avoid the possibility of excessive pressure that might have occurred on a Saturday opening.

The next survey was completed by you, the hunter, who found post cards left on your car windshield or were given one directly by a game protector. A good percentage of you took time to include your hunting results on the card, and we are grateful for the care taken to record this information accurately. As a result, an extremely high 99 percent of the data cards were usable in our analysis.

Computer processed, the cards revealed the average spring hunter spent two mornings afield, heard 3.3 gobblers and saw 1.4 turkeys. Twelve percent of the respondents reported bagging a turkey. Hunter success was greatest in the prime range of northcentral Pennsylvania and least in the southeast section, where turkey range is limited and hunting pressure is highest.

The third survey involved findings from game protectors throughout the commonwealth's turkey range. They noted that hunter behavior was generally good. Reports of only six illegally killed hens

were verified, and two of these were voluntarily turned in by hunters for payment of one-fourth penalty. Only 36 turkey nests were reported accidentally encountered by hunters. Of this total, most were known to have hatched successfully.

Game protectors examined 275 gobblers and two legal bearded hens. Their counts and estimates total 1,636 turkeys bagged in Pennsylvania's first spring season.

The results of the last two surveys weren't available until later in the year. One of these is the annual game bird reproduction census, or brood count, conducted by all Game Commission field personnel during the summer. In the case of turkeys, all sightings of hens and their broods of poults are counted and recorded. Brood counts have been carried on through a long period of years to establish a base line for normal or average reproduction to which each individual year's crop of young turkeys can be compared.

The other survey is the annual winter census of turkeys on certain research study areas. This involves locating and counting the flocks by their tracks in the snow while they are concentrated on their winter range.

Obviously, these surveys were most important because they could determine if spring hunting had harmed the turkey population. If it had, regardless of the great sport provided, future spring hunts could not be justified.

The results, after the last brood reports were compiled and analyzed, and the winter census was completed, showed no evidence of harm to turkey reproduction by spring hunting. In fact, turkey populations had increased in some areas, even where spring hunting pressure had been greatest.

Because of the clean bill of health given to the 1968 spring hunt by these turkey population inventories, and also by the good behavior of the participating hunters, the Game Commission has set another season in May 1969. We intend to scrutinize the effects of the second season just as closely as the first, but now with the experience of one season behind us, we can be even more confident of its outcome. Consequently, the 1969 season was increased to seven mornings by including a Saturday as opening day to provide more hunters an opportunity to enjoy this season.

The 1968 spring hunt followed most of our predictions quite closely. But we did underestimate (to the tune of about 40 percent) the 1968 gobbler harvest simply because we did not fully appreciate the extraordinary skill of our Keystone hunters. They learned this new sport quickly.

Fortunately, the gobbler harvest is the one thing we can afford to underestimate in planning for a spring hunt. At least three times the 1,600 surplus toms bagged in 1968 could be taken annually and scarcely be missed by the remainder of the turkey population.

We did overlook something important, however, when we forgot to explain how gobblers develop swelled chests in the spring, much like the swollen necks of bucks during the fall rut. Thus the "diseased" or "infected" gobblers that were reported invariably turned out to be healthy birds with a perfectly normal growth called the "breast sponge." This is a layer of gelatinous fat that forms beneath the breast skin of each male turkey each spring to serve as a nutritional reserve during the mating season. This does not harm the bird in any way, but should be removed before cooking.

On the positive side to the benefit of the hunter, this fat reserve also makes bragging-size trophies. Toms that weighed 18 pounds in the fall were pushing 20 pounds in the spring. We had reports of a few in the 25-pound category, but it takes a mighty big turkey to beat 20 pounds in the fall. This was a rather pleasant surprise to many hunters who, expecting turkeys to be skinny after a long winter, found they were plump and good eating, too, unless the trophy was an unusually old bird.

Now that Pennsylvania's first spring season is history, the "veteran" of the first hunt is looking forward to the next with considerable excitement and anticipation. But the beginner may be somewhat apprehensive, because spring hunting for gobblers is an entirely different sport than he's

ever been exposed to. Consequently, his past experiences with other game, and even fall hunting for turkeys, might not be of much benefit. The best the novice can do is read up on the subject or pick the brain of a veteran.

Just to brush up on some spring hunting methods: First of all, calling gobblers is the name of the spring hunting game, so learn to use a turkey call. Most experienced hunters wear camouflage clothing. After locating a tom by listening for his gobbles, sneak up within 200 or 300 yards of his location. Then take special care in selecting a good hiding spot, such as a natural depression, where the turkey can't readily see your position. Now you are ready to call. Wait until the gobbler approaches close enough for a sure shot - less than 40 yards is recommended - aim carefully, and he's yours. At short range, under 30 yards, say, the vulnerable head-neck area is the best aiming point.

Above all, avoid any chance of killing an illegal beardless hen. Besides the tom turkey's distinct beard and larger size, there's no reason to mistake the white-crowned blue head on the gobbler's bright red neck for the drab-headed hens. Remember that the future of spring gobbler hunting seasons depends upon how well you mind your hunting manners and, especially, how well you follow the hunting regulations. These regulations are necessary safeguards for the future of your sport.

Another spring hunting tip worth passing on to the beginner may help solve the frustrating problem of the reluctant tom that can't be lured in with the hen yelp imitation, especially when he's with a harem of real hens. Try gobbling. Hunters who tried it last spring sometimes had toms come running with blood in their eyes to challenge the interloper. Seems like gobblers can't stand competition any more than a spring turkey hunter can.

Speaking of competition, the bane of the spring hunter's success, we can expect it to increase with the popularity of this sport. There is a way to lower the odds, however, simply by applying this law: "Spring turkey hunting success is greatest where gobblers are most and hunters are least." So go north, young man, where there's plenty of elbow room and the turkeys aren't quite so call shy . . . yet.

**- Jerry Wunz, PGC Biologist, Retired**

## On the Way Home the Bumper Fell Off — The Dunbar Years

Shortly after moving our mother to a care facility, the family began the difficult task of closing the house and disposing of the accumulations of a lifetime. Among the unexpected discoveries were my father's professional journals for his first nine years on the job. On the cover of the first book is *Record of Official Duties Starting with March 16, 1937, as Game Refuge Keeper located in Dunbar, Fayette Co.*

George E. Sprankle was one of 27 graduates in the first class of the Game Commission Training School and (retiring in February 1979, after 43 years) the last of the original class to leave PGC service. He died five years later.

He entered the training school July 2, 1936, and was graduated February 28, 1937, a few days after his 23rd birthday. His first assignment was as a refuge keeper for SGLs 51 and 138 in Fayette County. He arrived there on March 16, 1937, and began his journal that day, keeping it faithfully 365 days a year until July 1946, when it stopped suddenly in the middle of a book.

*March 16, 460 miles. Snow. Wind. Arrived at Dunbar at 4 p.m. Looked for a house and found an apartment above the First National Bank in Dunbar. Contacted John Gouker, the temporary refuge keeper. Secured board and lodging there until I could locate in the apartment. Called up Game Protector Bryson in the evening. Total from Reynoldsville to Harrisburg to Reynoldsville and then to Dunbar was 460 miles. Roads were drifted with snow and very icy.*

I have typed the entries just as they appear. The reader must remember the journal was not intended to be read by anyone other than my father. His punctuation and capitalization are not up to his usual standards, but I'm quite proud of the fact there are very few spelling errors. I have included names, except in cases of arrests or other negative connotations, where I have put a line.

Much of the journal is simply routine, working on roads and cutting browse for wildlife, clearing and painting boundary lines, and patrolling for Game Law violations. His problems, on the other hand, tend to be more interesting and may give one a vignette of what wildlife conservation work was like more than a half century ago. As you'll see, equipment was a persistent problem.

*March 17, 1937, Left Dunbar with Deputy Gouker at 8 a.m. for refuge 51B with salt and feed. Roads were too icy to travel over. Car caught fire . . . How's that for your first day on the job. As I read and reread these journals, I kept running into places where I wanted to ask, "And then?" or "Why?"*

Two days later he had his first flat tire on the job. He can tell it better than I . . . *Started home about 6:00 p.m. but had a flat tire and damned if I wasn't out of cement so had to carry the tire, tube and wheel to the garage. Home (Goukers) at 8:00 p.m. The cement he referred to was a glue-like compound for securing the repair patch to the inner tube. March 26 . . . Left refuge at about 4:00 p.m. Had a flat tire enroute home and Mr. Smith pumped it up enough to hold till I arrived in Dunbar. Changed the tire there and got to Goukers at 5:45 p.m.*

His second weekend on the job saw him returning to Jefferson County for his new bride. He had grown up in Reynoldsville and had married Margaret Forrest, from the Punxsutawney area, just three months earlier. As he was still in the Training School and she was working in Punxsutawney, they continued in place until he got his first permanent assignment. They had a flat tire on the way back to Dunbar. It was the third flat tire in the first two weeks, which did not bode well for the future: In the next nine years, he mentioned 52 flat tires.

As refuge keeper, George's major responsibility was two recently established game lands, 51, east of Uniontown, and SGL 138, south of Uniontown. These now total almost 20,000 acres. There were two refuges on SGL 51 for which he was particularly responsible: 51A, 727 acres located adjacent to Limestone Run, and 51B, 317 acres on the ridge overlooking the Youghiogheny River to the north. Refuge 51B contained a log cabin for tool and equipment storage, and he decided to erect a similar

cabin on the other refuge. I doubt he knew anything about log cabin building, but when one is 23 and in a new job, all things are possible. On April 2, he started cutting logs, and after four days' work, he had cut 30. The cabin was finished in July. Clifford Guindon, the land manager for that area today, arranged to have his foreman, Rocky Bartholow show me the location of these cabins (both now gone) and other sites mentioned in the journals — a kindness for which I am extremely grateful.

Interspersed throughout the journals are observations of all kinds. The weather is always important and frequently generates comment. He was particularly attuned to the flora and fauna and their ecology.

*While patrolling near State Game Lands 138, I came upon a place in the snow that was covered with rabbit hair. About 10 feet from this spot the hind legs of a rabbit could be seen sticking out of a snow drift. By the tracks it was evident that a weasel had killed the rabbit. There was a small hole eaten in the head of the rabbit. It was 26 yards from the place the weasel came upon the rabbit tracks to the spot where the rabbit was killed. The next day I passed the place again and the rabbit had been pulled into a hole in the snow. Its head was completely eaten. I set a trap beside the hole in the snow bank and in two hours had the weasel.*

*There has been quite a bit of snow in the mountains. In some sections of SGL 51 and 138 there were from 12 to 14 inches. In some sections of SGL 51, especially in the refuges, the snow and ground under the oak trees are all torn up by deer hunting acorns. Grouse tracks are plentiful on both game lands. While putting out ear corn on Saturday near the Cranberry Swamp, I found a flock of quail. There were 19. It was unusual to find quail so far back in the woods, the nearest cultivated fields being about 3 miles away. The next day I put out some scratch feed for them. While the snow is so deep I am having the WPA men on both tracts of Game Lands make thinnings in blocks of about 2 to 3 acres each. In Refuge 51A they are making the thinnings adjacent to the ones made last year, and in sort of a checkerboard style. I find quite a number of grouse in last year's cuttings. (Several Depression era agencies, notably the National Youth Administration [NYA] and the Works Progress Administration [WPA], provided the Game Commission with manpower for projects such as road building and tree planting.)*

There were some interesting confrontations. *April 13 . . . Warned \_\_\_\_\_ in the presence of John Gouker not to make or hide any liquor (moonshine) on the state land . . .* Those must have been interesting times. On May 31, he made his first arrest and prosecution. He had arrested people before, but turned them over to the Fish Warden or the local Game Protector; however, on this occasion he handled everything. The previous day he had seen two cows pastured on the game lands and on the way home, he saw them again.

*May 31. Left Hdqts at 4:45 a.m. for Elk Rock to see if Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s cows were pasturing on SGL. Found 5 head of cattle. Arrested Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and helped him drive his cattle home. Took him before Alderman Munk of Connellsville. Found guilty, and Alderman gave him 40 hours to raise money. Back to Elk Rock had a flat tire and had to walk 6 miles for cement. To Moag place to finish planting seed To see Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ about cows on SGL. He threatened to shoot every deer on his place. To Hdqts at 6:20 p.m.*

Always nice to meet new people on the job.

The forty hours elapsed and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ could not come up with the money to pay the fine, so . . . *June 2. Went to Elk Rock and took Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ to Connellsville before Alderman Munk. Got a Commitment and took him to Uniontown to Co. jail. Bought him his dinner . . . \$1.00 for lunch for self and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_.* In later years, I don't recall my dad being quite so compassionate.

Let us not forget the ubiquitous flat tires. On March 28, 1937, he had a flat tire. On April 14, it was a broken spring, but on the 16th it was back to a flat tire; likewise May 12. On the 14th he got stuck in the mud — something that happened with astonishing regularity. Had another flat on June 9, and again on the 24th and then broke another spring on the 4th of July. On July 12 he had gasoline stolen and on the 13th — *Tank empty this morning and spare tire and tube stolen. Also one nut off the spare wheel. 4 valve caps.* There is no more mention of theft after this entry.

All of these problems had been with Dad's Model A, but he is about to receive his first state vehicle. *Oct 10, 1937. Left Hdqts at 9:25 a.m. on trolley for Greensburg to meet Div. Supervisor Heffelfinger and Game Prot. Schafer. Accompanied them to Harrisburg to get a pickup truck.*

The truck did not end his tale of woe, however. *October 18, . . . At 2:00 p.m. started to 51A with a sack of corn but got stuck. Had to walk home. Got there at 8:45 p.m. Got help from Alva Gray and Theo Leaphart and went back with some chains. Got the truck out. To Hdqts. at 11:00 p.m. He got his first flat tire on the truck, March 3, 1938 and a second on April 28.*

Although the flat tire was the most common vehicle problem, during this 9-year period, he also had 14 broken springs and 9 dead batteries. Then there were those mysterious misfortunes; 13 times he indicated the truck had "trouble" and wouldn't run.

The truck cooling system also tended to cause a few problems. *Mar. 21, 1938 . . . Went to refuge 51A. On the way one of the heater hoses broke and lost all the alcohol from radiator. Repaired hose . . . June 5, 1940. To refuge 51A and planted the balance of the clover and Pa. Mixture seed Started for SGL 138 but the road was closed. Started for SGL 51 but fan belt broke near Chalkhill and it was necessary to change water in the truck 7 times between there and Dunbar. I could go only a few miles and the water would be hot enough to boil.*

There were other exciting events as well. For example: *July 21, 1938 — Left Hdqts. at 6:00 a.m. To Farm Game Project 35 and gathered up 6 rolls of wire. Took 7 rolls of wire and 250 steel posts and 50 refuge signs to . . . Indiana Co. 5:15 p.m. to 7:20 p.m. with Game Protector McLaren in Indiana. While driving back the tie rod end came off and could not steer the car. Springs broken when car stopped in ditch. Towed in to Connellsville. To Hdqts at 1:00 a.m.*

Things were soon to return to normal, however. *August 29, Had a flat tire in Indiana. September 6 . . . and changed tire on the truck. September 19 he had a flat tire on the way home and had another flat tire on September 28. October 11, Left hdqts. 7:00 a.m. Found that I had a flat tire. Then on October 26, Run out of gas. The litany goes on and on, but my all time favorite occurred November 17, 1938 . . . On the way home the bumper fell off.*

It appeared no equipment was immune from breakdown. November 22, 1937, he broke a strap on his snowshoe and had to return home to make repairs and, to heap insult upon injury, *Jan. 20, 1938 . . . Took typewriter in for repairs . . .*

There were problems beyond those of equipment. *November 19, 1938, Left hdqts. At 12:30 p.m. Went to Justice of the Peace's office and secured a warrant for Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ of Dunbar, in the section known as Irishtown. Went there via Mt. Independence school and served the warrant on Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, but he refused to come with me and called out two of his sons to help him. Rather than have trouble under those circumstances I returned to Hdqts. and called Game Protector Schafer for assistance. We brought \_\_\_\_\_ to Dunbar and he pled guilty to grazing livestock on SGL. Posted bond to pay fine by the 26th of Nov. To Hdqts at 9:00 p.m. Rather matter-of-fact for an event that would have had my adrenalin flowing for a week. Game Protector Schafer was Theodore T. Schafer from Uniontown.*

*On May 2, 1939, while patrolling the boundary line on SGL 138, I came upon a large blacksnake. Just as I started to kill the snake a grouse flew out of the brush about four feet away. The snake measured five feet in length. Thinking that the grouse might have a nest nearby I started to look for it. It was in the leaves and twigs at the side of the trail and contained 13 eggs.*

Grouse were my father's favorite game animal. He always knew where they were and what they were feeding on. I have never found even one grouse nest in my life, while he could find two or three on the same day. He had very strong opinions on grouse management and bag limits, which seem to have filtered down to his children. Several years ago, my brother Lee and I went grouse hunting. We had been hunting hard for several hours when I spotted a grouse near Lee. I managed to point it out and we stood there, taking a breather and watching the grouse. Finally I asked Lee if he wanted it. He thought for a moment and then said, "No. He never did anything to me." We

continued to watch for a few minutes until the grouse moved over the bank, and then we got back to our hunting. Can't tell that to a nonhunter.

*Today while patrolling near refuge 51B I came upon a grouse with several young. Although the young were very small, one of them managed to fly about three feet. I came upon another old grouse that was dusting itself on the road. It allowed me to approach within 8 feet before running into the brush.*

He was curious about the behavior of most birds and animals. *While patrolling SGL 51 near Chalkhill, I noticed several places where the bear have been very destructive to the June Berry trees. In sections they have broken down practically every tree including a number that were five inches in diameter. I followed the trail of one for about one-half mile and found where he was tearing stumps apart hunting grubs.*

Weather, too, created major problems. June 28, 1939, saw an extremely heavy rainfall. His journal mentioned the storm and his going out to assess the damages, but did not go beyond that. The Refuge Keeper had to submit a Weekly Report, detailing the actual work performed each day, type of work, and hours devoted to each task. I have his copies of these reports for 1939, and found he had expanded on the storm damage in that report.

*The rain on the 28th of June done considerable damage to the road along Limestone Run, leading to refuge 51A. One of the bridges was washed downstream and the footbridge was washed away also. This water was over the banks and in places deep gullies were washed in the road so that it is impossible to drive it. Much work will have to be done to repair that section of road. About one-third of the cloverfield was covered with water and the clover was flattened. A couple of apple and nut trees were washed out. Along the upper end of the refuge the road is washed so much that the road is now lower than the stream bed. Am planning on having the W. P.A. do the repair work.*

Sometimes my father left out the best parts. *March 31, 1938, Left hdqts. at 6:30 a.m. for Pittsburgh. Went to Western Penitentiary and got 5000 Auxiliary Refuge signs to be used on Farm Game Projects. Left 1000 signs at Irwin for Div. Sup. Heffelfinger and stored the rest in Dunbar. To hdqts. 4:30 p.m. 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Office work at hdqts.*

I remember him telling about this incident on several occasions, and in his journal he failed to mention some key details. You have to realize he carried a firearm every day. When it was cool enough to wear a coat or jacket, he carried his 6-inch Colt .38 in a shoulder holster. After one does this for awhile, it tends to be forgotten, which is what happened this day. He drove the truck into the main yard of the prison and was standing among the prisoners while they loaded the signs. It was only after all the signs had been loaded and the guard asked him to drive the truck into an area for checking that he remembered the gun, and that it was probably bad form to have brought a firearm into a state penitentiary. He said his palms started to sweat, then other parts of his body joined in, and he was literally drenched before he made his exit. One has to admit, his job sure had variety!

When I began reading my father's journals one of the first things I did was to turn to May 3, 1939, the day he became a father for the first time — a bouncing eight pound, seven ounce baby boy. *May 3, Left Hdqts. at 9:00 a.m. To refuge 51B and planted evergreen trees. Returned to Hdqts. at 4:45 pm. 4:45 pm. to 5:10 to see Justice of the Peace McDowell concerning fish case.*

Although it was impossible for him to keep his professional and personal life separate (it is unlikely any field officer for the Game Commission can), he did keep his personal life out of his professional journal. I got no mention! I always knew the event was important for him, though; when it came time to bring his first born home from the hospital, he passed up the Model A and used the Game Commission pickup. He generally followed regulations pretty closely, but he made exceptions when he felt the occasion called for it.

**- Lynn Sprankle**

## The Baited Treestand

Some things in life are just too good to be true, even for WCOs. The following is about an offender who just wasn't clever enough to avoid being apprehended.

One early November morning Deputy Francis Bodema and I were on our way to interview a Mr. Taff about a baited treestand in the southern end of my district near Mars. When we arrived Mr. Taff promptly met us in his driveway and said, "Boy, am I glad to see you guys. You gotta see this. You just won't believe it. This guy's nuts."

Mr. Taff told us he has lived in the area all his life and that during the summer someone bought a small plot of ground just below his residence, near a power line, and posted it with no trespassing signs. Towards the end of summer he noticed salt blocks and large amounts of corn on this posted property. As summer turned to fall, Mr. Taff became concerned because deer season was just around the corner and many deer and turkeys were regularly visiting the well-maintained bait site. Mr. Taff was upset because he and his neighbors have hunted in the area for years, and he knew that this illegal activity made all sportsmen look bad.

I asked Mr. Taff to show us the site, and we followed him 150 yards down the road to where it sloped and made a bend to the left. At this point every tree along the road had "No Trespassing" signs on them. Continuing on another 40 yards, Mr. Taff looked into the woods and pointed, "There it is. See it? Right there." When I looked over I couldn't believe my eyes. Over an area about 30 feet wide, it looked as though someone had painted the entire forest floor yellow and then added white "castles" about two feet high here and there. I looked at Francis and commented about the amount of shelled corn and salt blocks. The baited area was only 65 yards off the road and easily visible. I thanked Mr. Taff for his help and informed him that Francis and I would investigate further and let him know the outcome.

Proceeding to the baited area we found an elaborate treestand constructed of treated lumber, about 12 feet high. We photographed the scene, collected evidence and left the area quickly. Before leaving I looked at Francis and asked, "Do you really think anyone could be this bold to bait an area so close to the road?"

"It takes all kinds," Fran replied.

This case was not at all like the baiting cases we had learned about in the training school and in field training. Usually, the offenders are relatively ingenious at ways to conceal their bait, or select a remote area. I was beginning to think that no one could be this brazen, and that he was probably baiting elsewhere and that this location was just to divert my attention.

I contacted Deputy Harold Kennedy, who lives in the area, and had him keep an eye on the site. Harold subsequently called to inform me that the site had been replenished the week before and then on Saturday, two days before the first day of the firearms deer season. He also indicated he hadn't seen any vehicles in the area around the baited area.

We discussed the site at our deputy meeting prior to opening day. On the first day Harold, my new deputy, Doug Paulsen, and I would work the baited area. The other six deputies would pair up and patrol the district. Doug and I would stay in my marked vehicle and Harold would be dressed as a hunter. Harold would check the area to see if the hunter was in the stand, drive by and then walk in from the south end. I would drop Doug off at the north end, and I would come in from the west.

On the opening day, as I prepared to leave at 5 a.m., I still could not help but think that I was being duped, that this person was trying to lure me away from where he was actually hunting. I left my house under a cold, bright starlit sky, picked up Doug and then went to a spot where we would wait to hear from Harold. About 6 o'clock Harold radioed to let us know he was out. He met us about 6:15 and we went over our plan. Harold had seen a vehicle near the power line, but there wasn't

enough light to see the treestand.

After a few minutes Harold left to get into position. Within minutes the Northwest Region Office dispatchers were in the overwhelm mode with calls, and the radio was constantly buzzing. At 6:30 Harold radioed, "I'll be out on location; give me 10 minutes to get in position." I turned to Doug and said, "Showtime. Get ready."

At 6:40 Doug and I pulled out and drove the mile and a half down to the bait site. Doug immediately hopped out, got the vehicle license plate number and then we continued west for 80 yards before turning south across a small ravine and up to the north side of the treestand. I let Doug out and drove another 200 yards and looked into the woods. I looked over at the treestand and couldn't see anyone, but then I noticed a slight movement, and realized that not only was the hunter in the stand, but that he was in complete camouflage. I jumped out of my vehicle and headed directly to the treestand. I had gone about 20 yards when I shouted, "State officer, Pennsylvania Game Commission," at which time my right foot caught on a branch and I tripped, nearly falling flat on my face. I jumped back up, brushed myself off and told the hunter in the treestand to unload his firearm.

"What's the problem?" he asked.

I told him to point his rifle in the air and unload it. Harold and Doug were now closing in on our location, and after he had unloaded his rifle and handed it down to me, I asked him what he was doing.

"I'm deer hunting," he replied.

I asked him if there was a justifiable reason why he was hunting near a pile of corn and salt blocks.

"It's just corn and salt. No big deal. My kids and I feed the deer all summer," he replied.

I asked him if he thought that this behavior was a little unfair, not to mention illegal.

"It's just corn and a little salt," he answered.

I informed him that if he wanted to hunt at this location he would have had to remove all of the bait 30 days before the season, as indicated in the regulation digest. I then asked him why he was not displaying the required 250 square inches of fluorescent orange material on his head, chest and back while deer hunting. He then lifted up his camouflage poncho to reveal an orange-camo coat. I asked him if he had an orange hat, at which time he dug through his pack for a couple minutes and finally produced one. When I asked him why he didn't have his orange displayed he just looked at me and said, "I have it on." I asked him again why he didn't have it displayed, and at that point he started to mumble and stutter.

Prior to asking him why he wasn't wearing and displaying fluorescent orange clothing, I photographed him in the tree, in his complete camouflage outfit, just in case he couldn't recall what he was wearing if we ended up in court.

He was charged with baiting and not displaying any orange and paid fines totaling \$350. He ultimately angered quite a few of the residents, because we had to post the area surrounding the baited site with no hunting signs for the entire deer season. As we were finishing up with citations and evidence tags, I thanked the offender for his cooperation, and I couldn't help but wonder if he ever watched that TV show about criminals who do ridiculous things and get caught.

**- Mario L. Piccirilli**  
Butler County WCO

## Deer in Pennsylvania - Past and Present

MY FIRST deer hunting was done in 1885, and I have missed but one season since. At that time, and for many years after, few counties in Pennsylvania had any considerable number of deer, but some had more than a mere remnant of former days. In some counties where deer should have been found, they had become extinct. In fact, a complete extermination of this beautiful creature in Pennsylvania seemed far more than a possibility, but heroic measures came in time to save them.

A word as to the several causes that brought them dangerously close to the point of extermination. First, I will name the long open season that ran from November 1 to January 1. Most of the hunting was done in the month of December when the ground was well covered with snow. Another factor that contributed enormously to the destruction of deer was the Salt Licker [person who hunted over salt blocks or salt licks]. This character operated extensively on every deer range in the state. His methods are too well known to call for detail; I will merely add that the "Licker" worked from May until September. I saw a lick as late as 1908 in Clinton County.

Still another feature of destruction was the use of buckshot, 9 for a 12-gauge and 12 for the 10 bore. About 70 percent of our Pennsylvania hunters used this weapon between 1880 and 1900. The substitution of the shotgun for the rifle was due to the fact that after the primitive forest had practically gone, the curse of the forest fire with its blighting influence was visited upon every deer range in the Commonwealth. Millions of acres of healthy, young, second growth forest was destroyed again and again. And then the aftermath. A conglomerate of jungle growth so dense that the visibility was so completely reduced that short range shooting became the order of things, for rarely was a deer seen beyond 40 yards. Hence, the popularity of the shotgun with its charge of buckshot for quick action and surer hitting. But its wounding propensities condemned it, and later on its use was prohibited by the passage of a measure known as the Anti-Buckshot Bill, which prohibited the use of more than one bullet or missile for each shot. (This bill was the creation of the writer.)

Of the several agencies that contributed greatly to the destruction of our deer in bygone days, both direct and indirect, there was one in a class alone — the dog. "Hounding deer," though illegal since back in the 1870s, was continued in many counties well along into the '90s. As a rule, this method was employed after deer had become too scarce for successful still-hunting or the drive. It was a sort of mopping up process that contributed greatly to the final depletion. But hunting with dogs was not the only way the dog figured in the process of extermination. Prowling dogs that roamed at will reaped an enormous harvest. They worked almost incessantly and were especially severe during the winter and early spring when deer were thin and weak. On three different occasions I found deer killed by prowling dogs. I also knew of a water hole in Franklin County where seven deer were killed by dogs during a severe winter about the year 1891.

The years 1880 and 1881 were extremely severe, and a very heavy snow fell late in December 1880. A heavy crust formed and remained for nearly four weeks. In the Pine Grove region of Cumberland County, deer were nearly exterminated by dogs crusting these helpless creatures. I hunted there in 1885 and saw the bleached bones of deer that had been killed as above mentioned. I will also add that during the six days I hunted, I saw the tracks of but three deer. Dogs had practically exterminated them. Those were the days when our game law enforcement ended at the foot of the mountain and was seldom enforced elsewhere.

When dogs acquire the deer habit there is practically no limit to their energies. They will travel many miles to a deer range and often stay away for days. But at this writing I am pleased to say that wise legislation and liberal enforcements of its provisions has greatly reduced the dog menace. And here let me add that this and several other timely measures have increased our deer to an astonishing degree.

**- Capt. G.W. Dillin**

*Classic Article from December 1939*

## Pennsylvania Turkey Hunting

THE KEYSTONE STATE, Pennsylvania's nickname for its central position among the 13 original colonies, is also appropriate because our state has been a keystone for restoring wild turkey populations throughout the U.S. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, when most of our surrounding states had completely lost their wild turkeys, small wild flocks held on in the rugged ridges of central Pennsylvania's Ridge and Valley region. If you have ever hiked the steep, rocky, remote ridges along the Mid-State Trail then you know why these areas became the last havens of wild turkeys during the late 1800s. These locales were not suitable for farming or lumbering.

A hundred or so years ago, only 30,000 turkeys were thought to remain in the entire country, and 10 percent were right here in Pennsylvania.

As habitat conditions improved throughout the 20th century, and also thanks to regulated hunting seasons and the trapping and transferring of wild birds, turkeys repopulated the woodlands throughout Pennsylvania. What many hunters today also may not realize is that while most states closed their turkey seasons, the Game Commission offered turkey hunting statewide for every year but 1913, 1914 and 1926. Unlike most states, where wild turkey populations were gone, Pennsylvania maintained our turkey hunting tradition. To this day fall turkey hunting is a major recreational tradition here. Pennsylvania typically has more fall turkey hunters than any other state. In 2001, 228,564 fall turkey hunters took to the woods. Why is fall hunting so popular here? It stems back to traditions established years ago.

Market hunting for turkeys was very popular in the 1700s and early 1800s because the birds were so abundant. With no seasons, no bag limits, nor any other sort of regulations or protection, turkeys were killed year-round - gobblers, hens and whole broods. At times entire flocks were shot from nighttime roosts.

As the early settlers exploited the turkeys and the axe consumed the bird's habitat, turkeys became so rare that in 1873, for the first time, a law was enacted that closed the turkey season from January 1 to October 1, with a \$25 fine (pretty hefty back then) for killing or possessing a turkey out of season. A \$10 fine was established for violating regulations prohibiting the use of blinds, snares, traps and the destruction of nests. In 1897 - two years after the Game Commission was created - a daily limit of two birds was established, with no season limit. In 1905 a season limit of four was passed, with a daily limit of one. Turkey seasons were again shortened in the following years, to run from mid-October to the end of November.

Spring hunting was made illegal in 1873, because it was generally believed that turkeys were easily called in and killed then. During the fall they were thought to be more wild and dispersed, making them more challenging to hunt. Also, prior to closing the season from January to October, there were no regulations against killing hens in the spring, and nesting hens could be (and were) killed while incubating. This was certainly detrimental to the already low turkey population.

Then, in 1913, in a timely and unprecedented move, the legislature closed turkey hunting statewide for a 2-year period, to protect the state's struggling turkey population. This was the first time turkey hunting had been stopped since the state's colonization. The first season following the closure produced a harvest of 3,651 turkeys, and this enormous harvest was directly attributed to the 2-year closure. Based on field estimates, hunter numbers from 1915-1919 averaged 316,800 per year, with turkey harvests averaging approximately 3,905. With further restrictions came improved harvests. In 1917 the season limit was reduced to one, and with this reduced limit, two years later, in 1919, hunters reported taking 5,181.

In 1923, the turkey season didn't open until November 1, the same as the opening date for other small game, to prevent illegal hunting. Calling was made illegal, and hunting hours were set from sunrise to sunset, eliminating nighttime hunting for roosting turkeys.

A report from 1942 by Edward L. Kozicky, who was studying wild turkeys as a graduate student at the Pennsylvania State College (the predecessor to Penn State University), commented that the fall hunting strategy of scattering and calling a turkey flock was "employed to a small extent." The most common method back then was chance. Kozicky writes, "The hunter employing this method selects a spot where he thinks turkeys are ranging and waits for them. Some hunters, although it is illegal, construct blinds at their favorite turkey crossing."

Hunting strategies certainly have changed since then. Turkey blinds again are legal (refer to current digest), calling is legal, and the most common fall strategy today is scattering and calling back the flock.

Today, fall turkey hunting seasons still open mostly in November, but differ in length according to turkey population densities within different units. Rather than limit the number of turkey hunters, the Game Commission controls fall harvests by regulating season lengths in wildlife management units. Seasons vary from a closed season in WMUs 5A & 5B to three weeks in several other WMUs. The daily and season limits remain one. Fall harvests currently exceed 40,000 birds, with more than 225,000 hunters.

Biologists generally agree that fall either-sex hunting can affect population growth, that turkey populations fluctuate annually, and that the vulnerability of wild turkeys to hunting increases in years of poor mast production. Most also believe that hunting mortality occurs in addition to natural mortality, not instead of natural mortality. This is a very important point to remember.

Fall harvests can impact survival of both young birds and adult birds when certain circumstances occur. The challenge faced by wildlife biologists is how to balance the popularity of fall hunting with the effect harvest may have on turkey numbers. In years when there is a poor hatch, adult turkeys are more vulnerable, simply because young birds are not there for hunters to get. In turn, an over harvest of adult hens can significantly reduce the number of nesting hens available the following spring. Similarly, when natural food supplies are poor, the entire turkey population is more susceptible to hunting mortality. In years of low mast production, turkeys use fields more, which makes them easier to locate. When acorns, beechnuts or other mast is abundant, flocks are widely scattered and are more difficult to pattern, so hunter success is lower.

With the rising popularity of spring gobbler hunting, biologists began to examine the potential impact of both spring and fall hunting on wild turkey flocks. The task is to make certain that the demand among hunters for both spring and fall hunting can be safely met. One of the first states to study this issue was Iowa in the 1980s. Fall hunting was new to the state, and the woodlot-type habitat in which turkeys resided was believed to make the birds more vulnerable. Biologists speculated that fall turkey harvest was an additive mortality factor. In other words, many of the birds taken in the fall season would have survived to reproduce if there were no season. The result of the study was a determination that turkey populations varied mostly because of variations in poult survival, but fall hunting slowed the rate at which turkey flocks could recover from a bad year. The authors of that study reported that if more than 10 percent of the fall population is harvested, the population may decline. The trouble, though, is knowing when the 10 percent level is reached.

Intensive studies of turkey productivity and survival in Virginia and West Virginia in the early 1990s indicated that high fall harvests may suppress population growth and limit spring gobbler harvests. The researchers concluded that maximum population growth and the highest spring harvest could be achieved by eliminating the fall season. However, the researchers also showed that even with a liberal fall harvest, turkey numbers could still grow, but at a slow rate. In other words, continued heavy fall harvests could be maintained if hunters were satisfied with lower success in the spring.

They found that when the fall season length was greater than six weeks, the population growth rate was slow. If fewer birds were taken, the annual population growth was greater than 10 percent. Limiting the fall season to a degree produced better population growth, and ultimately hunters were more satisfied with the number of birds they saw and heard in both seasons.

As a result of the studies, Virginia reduced the length of their fall season and West Virginia began to limit the number of hunters in counties recently opened to fall hunting. Both methods preserved fall hunting opportunity and allowed for better population growth.

Here in Pennsylvania, fall turkey harvests vary by wildlife management unit. In most units, productivity and survival of young appear to be good. Using the spring gobbler harvest as an index, turkey numbers are increasing. But it is important for biologists to remain vigilant. Adjusting fall seasons is the best way of providing optimum hunting opportunities. At times, it may be necessary to reduce the length of fall seasons to allow populations to grow. In the worst case scenario, fall seasons may occasionally be closed. But in the good times, fall hunting opportunities should remain liberal.

Currently, the goal of wild turkey management here is to allow the population to grow. In most wildlife management units that can be accomplished with a 2- or 3- week fall season. Longer seasons and more liberal bag limits may not be achievable with current hunter numbers and the high interest in fall turkey hunting.

Right now Keystone State turkey hunters are living in the "good old days." Hunters can enjoy golden days in the autumn woods for up to three weeks in some units. The air is crisp, the scenery ablaze with color, and fall hunting is great exercise.

We are privileged to be able to enjoy both spring and fall hunting in this state. To continue to have the outstanding hunting we have come to expect, fall harvests are carefully monitored and trends in spring harvests are watched. Modern research has shown that spring gobbler hunting can provide maximum recreational opportunity to hunters with little impact on the turkey population. Research has also shown that we can maintain fall hunting, too. However, we must acknowledge that as hunter numbers and the popularity of the sport grow, fall hunting opportunities might not expand as rapidly.

As the turkey population and our understanding of them grew, traditions also changed. Spring turkey hunting was reinstated in 1968, after being closed since 1873, but with the restriction of harvesting bearded birds only, protecting nesting hens. Because the spring season opens after the peak of breeding, and gobblers are polygamous, acquiring a harem of hens to which he breeds, the excess gobblers can be harvested annually without impacting the population. Ever since 1984 Pennsylvanians have enjoyed a month-long spring season, statewide.

Traditions continue to change. More and more people are discovering the joys of spring turkey hunting. Since 2000, the number of spring turkey hunters has exceeded that of fall turkey hunters in Pennsylvania. According to estimates from the National Wild Turkey Federation, this switch is not only the result of fall hunters switching to spring turkey hunting, but also an influx of new turkey hunters who hunt only in the spring. With more spring gobbler hunters than any other state, Pennsylvania definitely remains a keystone turkey state.

- **By Mary Jo Casalena**, PGC Biologist and **Bob Eriksen**, NWTF Biologist

## Greed on the National Pike

*I was almost to the truck that was backed into the barn when all of a sudden an individual wielding a handgun came running out. It wasn't what I had anticipated for what was supposed to be my day off, but we had to deal with the . . .*

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2001, was a day off, but while I was catching up on work around the house my office phone rang. It was the region office dispatcher telling me he had just received a call from an individual who had witnessed two men shoot an antlerless deer from a road in Addison Township. While they were loading it into the vehicle the witness recognized one of the men, Swampy, and it was his car they were in. The caller provided the necessary information that all WCOs love to get. A color of the car, the license plate number and a description of those involved. I told the dispatcher I was on my way.

I called newly commissioned Deputy Mike Boyce and filled him in. I also told him that he would have to drive, because my state vehicle was in the garage for repairs. I quickly dressed into my uniform and drove my personal vehicle to Deputy Boyce's residence, and then Mike and I were off.

Based on the information provided I knew we would find the vehicle at Swampy's residence along the National Pike (Route 40) in Addison. We found Swampy sitting on the porch, and after introducing Deputy Boyce and myself I told him about the report we had received. He said he knew nothing about it, but the single-barrel shotgun on the front seat of his car and the blood on the rear bumper indicated otherwise.

While we were talking to Swampy, I noticed a truck backed into Swampy's barn and at least one individual milling around inside. I told Deputy Boyce to follow me down to the barn, but just then an individual came walking toward the house, wearing blue jeans covered in blood and carrying a knife. This guy, Slim, ignored my greeting and appeared to be intoxicated. As Slim proceeded toward the house, Deputy Boyce instructed him to take a seat next to Swampy. Slim placed the knife on the floor and Mike secured it. I was almost to the truck that was backed into the barn when all of a sudden an individual wielding a handgun came running out from the side of the truck. "Gun," I yelled, to warn Deputy Boyce, and I pulled my sidearm and took the ready position. "State officers, put the gun down!" I yelled.

The individual, we'll call him Runner, ignored all verbal instructions to stop and surrender the firearm. Instead, he ran into a woodlot near the barn. I followed for a short distance and then I heard Mike yell, "Brian, there are two other guys in the barn." As we maneuvered to the barn entrance the two individuals quickly raised their hands and placed their knives on the tailgate of the truck. Hanging behind them was an antlerless deer that had just been skinned. There were several liquor bottles and beer cans on the tailgate as well. Deputy Boyce and I escorted them up to the house.

I felt it was necessary to call for assistance and, luckily, I had my cell phone, because Mike's newly installed radio wasn't working. I phoned the region office, briefed the dispatcher on the events and informed him that we didn't have radio service, and said we could use additional officers. I also called the State Police barracks in Somerset and informed them of our situation, and that we had a suspect running loose with a handgun.

I then walked back to the side porch where Mike was speaking with Swampy and the other two men. I asked where Slim went to, and Mike informed me that when we went to the barn he left.

I thought this was strange, because no vehicles were gone and Slim was wearing just shoes and jeans. I then noticed movement in the house. I could see Slim peeking at us from the kitchen, and when he knew we had seen him he took off running. We caught him as he came out the basement door into the backyard.

Slim wanted to fight but quickly changed his mind and was handcuffed. At some point when he was

in the house Slim had put on a clean pair of jeans and a T-shirt. When I asked him what had happened to the bloodstained jeans, he said he knew nothing about them. I read him his Miranda warning.

While I was talking to Slim a State Police officer arrived, and as I updated Trooper Nick on what we had, Mike began gathering information from the suspects sitting on the porch. Soon after, WCO Stan Norris and Deputy Dave Griffin from Fayette County arrived, and I updated them. The State Police trooper radioed his dispatch, and State Police Corporal Hetz, along with Trooper Broadrick, soon arrived.

WCO Norris, deputies Boyce and Griffin, along with Trooper Nick, helped interview Swampy, Slim and the other two men on the porch, while Corporal Hetz, Trooper Broadrick and I piled into the police cruiser and headed off in the direction where Runner was last seen.

We searched an abandoned home that joins the woods where he had fled, but turned up nothing. We then drove west on the National Pike from Swampy's place to the Fireside Inn. Runner was not there, but we learned he had left only five minutes before our arrival. Runner had gotten into a vehicle with someone he knew at the inn, so we hurried back to Swampy's.

While we were gone, WCO Dan Jenkins - now retired - arrived. WCO Norris took me down to the barn and there, along one side, were parts of other antlered and antlerless deer. It seems the guys we had in custody were involved in quite a poaching operation. We learned the true identity of Runner from one of the defendants, so tracking him down was no problem, and because Runner had abandoned his vehicle it was impounded. My search of it turned up a cooler in the back seat that contained ground meat in plastic bags. They were seized as evidence, as well as a shotgun, the deer hanging in the barn and some additional deer parts that were located beside the barn. A consent to search form was signed by Swampy, who was now willing to cooperate. A search of the house turned up Slim's bloodstained jeans.

Before we left, deputies Boyce and Griffin had the necessary information to file charges against the suspects. Deputy Griffin's nearly 30 years of experience proved to be invaluable, because he and Swampy had had dealings over the years and Swampy felt comfortable fessing up to Griffin. WCOs Norris and Jenkins collected the evidence from the barn, and I wrapped up the inventory search and additional notes.

Charges were filed in District Justice Sandra Stevanus's office in Confluence. Swampy and the two men who had been in the barn pled guilty to charges of unlawful taking or possession of game or wildlife, and had fines totaling \$3,000. Slim and Runner chose to take a hearing.

I contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, because I wanted to confirm through DNA testing that the plastic bags of meat in Runner's vehicle were venison, and that they matched samples taken at the crime scene. Another key piece of evidence was Slim's bloodstained jeans. I strongly suspected that the blood on Slim's jeans would match that of the deer that had been hanging in the barn, thus proving his possession of the deer. I submitted the items, along with a bloodstained knife, to forensic scientist Jim LeMay. I requested a continuance from the district justice, due to the length of time it took for the evidence to be tested and reports drafted. A hearing date of January 17, 2002, was scheduled for Runner and Slim. The testing was conducted and conclusions drafted by the end of December 2001.

Mr. LeMay phoned me and updated me on his findings. I informed him of the hearing date and that his testimony would be extremely important. Mr. LeMay made the arrangements and flew from Oregon to Pennsylvania for the hearing. On January 16, 2002, Mr. LeMay arrived in Somerset, and we met to discuss the evidence and findings. Everything was set for the next day.

Another interesting point was that I had to arrange to get Runner and Slim to Confluence for their hearing, because both defendants had been incarcerated for other charges since my incident with them. Runner was in the Fayette County jail, while Slim had residency in the Somerset County jail. I

contacted WCOs Stan Norris, Rod Burns and Scott Tomlinson. The plan was for Stan and Rod to bring Runner over from Fayette County, and for Scott to pick up Mr. LeMay at his hotel, while Deputy Boyce and I would transport Slim from the Somerset County jail.

The hearing began and I made a motion to the court to amend the citation to reflect restitution expenses incurred by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory and Mr. LeMays. The court favored the motion. Deputy Boyce and I testified to the events that had occurred on September 10, 2001, and presented the seized bags of meat, while Mr. LeMay presented testimony relating to the testing process and his findings.

The DNA testing proved that the blood on Slim's jeans matched with the deer that had been hanging in the barn. The bags contained meat from two different white-tailed deer. One bag matched the sample of deer parts found outside of the barn, and the bloodstained knife contained blood from more than one deer. The hearing concluded with guilty verdicts on all charges.

Runner was found guilty on two counts of unlawful taking or possession of game or wildlife, and one count of resisting or interfering with an officer. His fines and restitution totaled \$2,700. Slim was found guilty on one count of unlawful taking or possession of game or wildlife, and his fines and restitution were nearly \$1,400.

In all, slightly more than \$7,000 in fines and restitution were issued to the defendants involved. The assistance of the Forensics Laboratory and Jim LeMay's expertise was invaluable.

This case began from a call from a concerned citizen who had observed a violation. Greed is often at the heart of a game law violation, and in this case several deer were poached, robbing sportsmen of the opportunity to legally harvest the animals. My thanks to all who assisted in this case to stem the greed that had taken place on the National Pike.

- **By Brian Witherite**, Somerset County WCO