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Blood and Dishonor

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh . . .

— Gerard Manley Hopkins

Blood and Dishonor

By William Wasserman

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2002. The sun had set on the first day of bear season and I was headed for the check station when word came over my 2-way radio about bait at the Rocko Camp. At the time, I had no idea that the ensuing investigation would drag through the courts for five long years and become the most important case in my 30-year career as a wildlife conservation officer. Several years back I investigated a report of baiting at Johnny Rocko's Forkston Township camp, and I was sickened to discover two dead bear cubs. They were next to a 20-pound block of dark chocolate and had gorged themselves on its sweet, rich flavor until their stomachs and intestines were crammed full. A chemical compound called theobromine is found in all chocolate, and can be fatal when ingested by animals. A single pound of chocolate is enough to kill a 40-pound dog. The cubs had eaten three times more. Unable to metabolize the chemical effectively, their systems had become poisoned, leading to heart attacks, internal bleeding and, eventually, death. Bear season had ended and the camp vacated months earlier. I supposed the chocolate had been left behind, and questioned Johnny Rocko at his home regarding the incident. He denied knowing anything about it, and without more information or a witness to prove otherwise, I had no choice but to walk away.

But now things would be different. The information was fresh and I intended to pursue it immediately. Rather than use the open airwaves, I got back to the radio dispatcher by cell phone and was pleased to learn that the informant would talk directly to an officer. After jotting down the person's name and phone number, I started pushing buttons on my cell phone once again. It rang twice when someone answered, and the voice at the other end told me that Johnny Rocko's camp was heavily baited with corn and apples, and that he may have shot a bear near the cabin. "Look, I don't want to get tied up in this," the informant said in a tense voice. "You've got my number; call if you need more information, but keep me out of it."

"No problem," I replied. "No one needs to know who you are. You gave me enough reason to go in and look around just by calling."

"I hope you get him," the voice came back.

"I'll do my best. You've got my word on that," I promised. I pocketed my cell phone and continued driving. The local check station was 30 minutes away, and I was anxious to see if Johnny Rocko had reported killing a bear.

My neighboring officer, Jim Jolley greeted me when I arrived at the check station. Thumbing through a stack of harvest reports, he smiled as I walked through the door. "I heard the dispatcher call you about Rocko's camp." He pulled a paper from the stack on the table and handed it to me. "Looks like Johnny might have some questions to answer."

I took the paper from him and examined it. The information revealed that Johnny Rocko had brought a bear into the check station that morning—a 200-pound female taken in Forkston Township. It was killed at 6:45 a.m. — only nine minutes after the opening hour. I looked up at Jolley. "We definitely need to talk to this man."

He nodded in agreement. "Rocko lives in my district, and probably has the bear at his house night now. Want to head over there?"

"First I want to see if anybody is still around the camp." I dug into my coat pocket for my cell phone.

"I have a deputy still out..."

Twelve hours had passed since Rocko killed his bear and it was pitch black as Deputy Jeff Pierce cruised down the 2-track woods road toward his camp. He had traveled on it for a half mile when he came to a lane that cut to his left. The property was posted with "No Trespassing" signs here, and a heavy steel cable guarded the entrance. Pierce shut off his engine and stepped into the cold night air.

The surrounding forest was so still he could hear the faint metallic tick his push button flashlight made when he switched it on. He stepped over the cable, trained his beam on the dirt lane before

him and began to follow it toward the cabin. Soon a thin line of corn zigzagged ahead, the yellow kernels reflecting brightly in his light. Pierce suspected they had leaked from the tailgate of a pickup truck loaded with fresh bait. His pulse quickened at the notion that someone might be at the camp. Someone watching, waiting perhaps, until he rounded an obscure bend in the murky darkness. His eyes lifted from the trail more frequently now, straining to see as he pressed ahead. But before long, the outline of a large cabin loomed. The absence of interior lights suggested it was vacant. Suddenly, something moved to his right. Pivoting quickly on his heels, he cast his light into the gloom and there was a frenzied crashing through the brush as the shadowy form withdrew deep into the woods. A bear, and a very large one, by the sound. And it had been lurking within mere feet of him. Pierce looked again, and his light reflected a mass of reddish-brown pulp where the bear had been moments before. He stepped closer. Apples. Hundreds of them. Smashed into a pulp and dumped yards from the cabin, their pungent, heady scent would have been a powerful draw to bears for miles around. And as his light glided over the great fermenting mass, he came to know the indignity that had taken place here earlier in the day.

An hour passed before I heard from Deputy Pierce again. "I'm at the camp, standing by a big pile of mashed apples," he explained over his cell phone. "I can see the footprint of a bear in the mash and I found blood drops on two leaves near the bait."

"Good work, Jeff," I replied, amazed that he'd actually been able to detect tiny blood spatters in the black of night. "Find anything else?"

"I can see an impression in the mash, like a bear fell into it and then got back up and took off. I think one was shot right on top of the bait."

"Okay, Jeff. I'll head over to Rocko's house. Put the bloody leaves in an envelope and we'll go back to the camp tomorrow when it's light out."

As I pulled my patrol vehicle into Rocko's driveway the headlights swept across a bear carcass hanging by its neck from the bucket of a large commercial backhoe. "That bear has got to be 10 feet off the ground," Jolley remarked as we walked toward the house.

"So the world can see it."

I knocked on the front door. From inside I heard a latch jiggle and soon the door opened wide.

Johnny Rocko stood before us with a gaping jaw. He was medium height and stocky. "Pennsylvania Game Commission," I announced. "This is Officer Jolley, I'm Wasserman. We'd like to talk to you about your bear." I inched suggestively toward Rocko and he stepped back and invited us inside.

"We were at your camp tonight and discovered that it is baited with apples and corn," I said flatly. Rocko shrugged off my charge. "I know," he said. "It's there to feed the animals."

"We found blood near the apples," I continued. "We think it's from a bear — your bear."

"Don't look at me!" Rocko protested with raised palms. "I shot my bear away from the camp."

"Oh, really," I replied, "where would that be?"

"Take the woods road past my camp about a quarter mile and you'll come to a clearing where two big oak trees stand out. Walk between them, straight ahead, and you'll see where I gutted my bear. I shot it broadside as it crossed in front of me right there in the field."

"If what you're saying is true, you were still too close to the bait," I told him."

Rocko's thick brow wrinkled with frustration. "You sayin' my bear is illegal?"

"Let me put it this way," I offered. "If I had apple mash and corn at my camp I wouldn't be hunting in the same township, let alone down the road a little ways like you've just admitted." I looked directly at him. "I intend to have a DNA analysis performed on the blood we found at your camp. If it came from your bear, we're going to know about it. Sure you don't have anything else to say?"

Rocko paused for a long moment, then shoved his hands in his pockets and nodded confidently. "Do what you gotta do," he muttered.

"You can count on it," I assured him. "I want you to drop the bucket on your backhoe. We're taking your bear."

The following morning Deputy Pierce and I went to the open field where Rocko claimed he killed his bear. We found the entrails exactly where he said they'd be. The stomach contained undigested corn and apples, so I bagged a small portion for evidence. We could also see that the bear had been shot through the heart and lungs, which had considerable damage.

After photographing the internal organs we went back to Rocko's property, hiked up the lane to his cabin, and photographed two large bait piles — one containing mashed apples and the other ears of corn. I stood by the apples and held the end clip on my tape while Pierce wheeled it back to Rocko's cabin. "Thirty-two yards," he hollered, reaching the front wall. I waved a hand of acknowledgement

and raised my eyes to the second story balcony 10 feet above him. It had a door permitting access to it from inside the cabin. Satisfied we had seen enough, I took evidence photographs and then hiked back to my vehicle with Deputy Pierce.

"Rocko's bear couldn't have been shot back by the entrails like he claims," I said as we drove off. "The bullet went through the top of its shoulder in a downward angle."

Pierce glanced at me. "But the field by the entrails was flat. He'd have had to be in a treestand to make a shot like that."

"Or a balcony," I mused. "Tomorrow I'm going to take another look at the carcass to confirm it."

The following day Deputy Gene Gaydos and I performed a bullet trajectory analysis on Rocko's bear. By carefully inserting a steel rod into the wound, we were able to trace the slug's path from its entry point behind the right shoulder as it traveled downward, exiting the ribcage into the heart and lungs in a 45-degree angle — suggesting that the bear had been shot from high above. Confident in my belief that Johnny Rocko had killed the bear from the balcony of his cabin, I decided to proceed with a DNA analysis to cement my case. I removed a dime-sized piece of muscle tissue from the carcass and forwarded it to the National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, along with a blood-spattered leaf found at the apple mash.

Because the laboratory is the only facility in the world dedicated to solving wildlife crimes, and handles 900 cases annually, it took almost a year for the results to come back. It was worth the wait, though. We had a match, lending compelling evidence to my belief that Rocko's bear had been shot while feeding on the bait pile.

Convinced that I had enough evidence to convict Johnny Rocko, I filed charges against him for unlawfully killing a bear and for hunting over bait, which carried a \$1,000 fine. Rocko responded by hiring a defense attorney to represent him in court.

The first of four ensuing court battles came before District Justice Patricia Robinson in Tunkhannock. I arranged for the Forensic Specialist who performed the DNA analysis to be flown out from Ashland, Oregon, to testify as a witness for the commonwealth. In return, I asked Judge Robinson to have the cost of his airfare — \$1,800 — included as restitution to the Game Commission if she found Rocko guilty.

Although Johnny Rocko denied shooting the bear at his camp, he never took the stand in his own defense. Instead, his attorney argued that Deputy Pierce and I had entered upon Rocko's private posted property to obtain evidence without first securing a search warrant, which he maintained was a violation of the Pennsylvania Constitution, and as a result, the blood evidence shouldn't be admissible. I contended that the Game and Wildlife Code authorizes wildlife conservation officers to "go upon any land or water outside of buildings, posted or otherwise, in the performance of the officer's duty."

The trial lasted three hours, and when it concluded, Judge Robinson found Johnny Rocko guilty as charged, sentencing him to pay his \$1,000 fine plus restitution to the commonwealth in the amount of \$1,800 for the Forensic Specialist's flight, and an additional \$800 for the loss of one bear.

Rocko appealed the decision to the Wyoming County Court of Common Pleas, arguing again that his constitutional rights had been violated, but on April 22, 2004, a 6-page written opinion by President Judge Brendan J. Vanston declared Johnny Rocko guilty, and ordered him to pay \$3,600 in fines and costs. Once again, however, the persistent Rocko appealed, this time to a panel of three judges in the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania. However, eight months later the Justices came out with an 11-page opinion affirming Judge Vanston's decision that Rocko's Constitutional Rights had not been violated.

Johnny Rocko's final appeal was heard before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court by a panel of seven judges. There was much riding on their ultimate decision: If the Supreme Court Justices found for the defendant, serious implications would follow for all law enforcement officers throughout the commonwealth. For as Judge Vanston had stated in his opinion, "It would emasculate the enforcement of the Game Code on any privately owned realty, as one would only have to post 'No Trespassing' signs to keep out the 'game wardens'."

On November 20, 2007, five years (almost to the day) after my investigation began, Johnny Rocko's conviction was upheld, ensuring that wildlife conservation officers could enter private posted property to investigate violations. In a 25-page written opinion, Supreme Court Justice Ronald D. Castille wrote "Game and Wildlife Code Enforcement, it is worth noting, is a monumental task. For every 350 square miles of land in Pennsylvania, only one full-time WCO is assigned to conduct wildlife protection. In light of the foregoing [extensive research into case law], we hold that the guarantees

of Article 1, Section 8, of the Pennsylvania Constitution do not extend to open fields; federal and state law, in this area, are coextensive. Therefore, we affirm the Commonwealth Court's determination that officers Wasserman and Pierce did not violate appellant's right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures."

Bill Wasserman recently published his fourth book, *Poacher Wars*. A prolific writer, *Game News* readers no doubt remember many of the exciting stories he penned over the years (*The Killers*, *Outlaws at Wildcat Ridge*, *Graveyard Shift*, etc.). Join Officer Wasserman as he shares, in a most captivating style, some of his most exciting and harrowing experiences as a Pennsylvania wildlife conservation officer. In more than 30 years he's encountered it all, from hardened criminals seedy enough to make your skin crawl to the most unbelievable encounters with wildlife. Featured in this 150-page book are 16 true stories with photographs. The price is \$12.95 plus \$3 shipping or two for \$20 plus \$3 shipping. All books are signed by the author. Order directly from Penn's Woods Publications, 105 Benjamine Perry Ct., Simpsonville, SC 29681. Visa/MasterCard 570/905-6681.

Requiem for a Heavyweight

Requiem for a Heavyweight

By Thomas Hendricks

DUE TO MANY empty districts across the state, Wildlife Conservation Officers often cover some, if not all, of a neighboring empty district. Last August I was assigned northern Cameron County, in addition to my McKean County district. I've been assigned to McKean County since I graduated from the training school in 1996, but all I knew about Cameron County was that it had elk and rattlesnakes, both of which I quickly learned to deal with.

I started to become familiar with northern Cameron County as I drove around handling incidents. Elk surveys in September also helped me learn my way around. I soon realized that the mountains of Cameron County are not really that high but, rather, the valleys are deep. I spent several evenings in October overlooking scenic vistas and listening to bull elk bugle, imagining what this area was like before modern man came along.

With November came elk season. On the first day of the season, Deputy Jeff Anderson and I patrolled the elk range in northern Cameron County, but no elk were taken there. On the second day Deputy Gordon Liezert, who has been a deputy for 49 years, and I patrolled together. Just as we neared the Cameron County line we received a radio call from the region office about an "elk in distress" near a construction site near Truman. The elk, we were told, had a horse halter and several ropes entangled in its antlers and was wandering around trying to free itself; it was near exhaustion. The elk had been reported by construction workers in the area.

The area the elk was roaming is split by Big Run Creek, which was approximately 14 inches deep and 20 feet wide. On both sides are farms with open fields, small woodlots and several ponds situated near the base of large hills. On the south side of Big Run is a farm with a small barn and horses, and this is where the elk likely became entangled with the halter and lead ropes he was adorned with.

We decided to track the elk downstream, assess the situation and proceed accordingly. If the elk was uninjured, he could be tranquilized and the harness removed. On the other hand, if the elk had severe injuries, we'd have to put him down.

I followed the stream for several hundred yards until I detected movement about 10 yards ahead. It was the bull thrashing a spruce tree, trying to free himself from his entanglements. He appeared to be in good shape. I radioed Gordon and told him to ask WCO Doty McDowell to meet us with tranquilizing equipment.

I backed away from the elk about 25 yards, and by then he was seated, presumably resting. After five minutes the elk stood up and again gave the spruce tree a severe thrashing. He looked in my direction and gave several loud grunt calls before moving off toward the horse barn. When he passed me I could see that he sported an impressive 5 x 6 rack. I also noticed that he walked with a slight limp and that his hip looked atrophied, perhaps from a previous injury.

I followed at a respectable distance until he reached the horse barn. I was amazed to see this elk, with what appeared to be a rack with at least a 40-inch spread, walk effortlessly through the 30-inch doorway of the barn. Without hesitation he dipped his rack to the right, placing one antler through the door and then reversed the process to enter the barn. He did not stop, nor did he hit the door jam with either antler. I radioed the office and was told that it would be 30 minutes before help would arrive; I was to contain the elk until then.

After several minutes the elk ran out of the barn's large doors and chased several goats before heading back by the creek where I had first seen him. I instructed Gordon to go back to the other side of the stream and stay near my vehicle at the construction site. That way we could keep sight of

the elk. The bull crossed the stream and proceeded to walk on the dike of a pond on the north side of Big Run towards the construction site. Several times Gordon turned him away from the construction site. The bull seemed frustrated by the entanglements and appeared to be tiring. We wanted to keep him on the south side of the stream, so that he was farther away from Rt. 120 and a bridge replacement site.

After thrashing the brush on the pond's edge for 10 minutes or so, the bull once again crossed the stream, this time he headed directly towards me. I was leaning motionless against a 10-inch birch tree when the elk came within arm's length of me. I dared not move because I didn't want to spook him, nor did I want him to cross back over the stream. When he passed by me and I shifted my body to better protect myself, the bull let out a startled grunt. Then he squared off and charged the tree I was hiding behind. I could feel the power of the charge through the tree. Then he charged again, this time to the left of the tree and I shifted to the right. The third charge came from the right and when I moved back to my left the bull tossed his antlers around and clubbed me, knocking me to the ground.

I quickly got up, drew my service pistol and fired two quick shots into the ground. The bull grunted again and walked off slowly, crossing the stream again. I must say that I believe the bull did not charge out of anger but, rather, out of frustration.

I radioed Gordon and told him what had happened. Gordon radioed the region office and informed them that the bull had sent me up a tree. (It's my understanding the office personnel and others listening to the radio had a good chuckle at my expense. It also got back to me later that some folks wanted to see the size of that tree.) I told Gordon that the bull was heading his way, so he'd better be careful.

I followed the bull and crossed Big Run; the water was cold and filled my boots. I wanted to assess the situation and I asked Gordon to grab the shotgun and be ready to use it if necessary. We didn't want the angry bull elk to enter the construction zone where a dozen men were working. I followed the bull from the opposite side of the pond just in time to see it chase Gordon around the vehicle and into the passenger's seat. I was impressed that Gordon, age 70, could move that fast.

By the time I reached the vehicle the elk had reversed course and was once again walking on the dike of the pond away from Rt. 120. Gordon and I decided that we had better warn the people at the farms to avoid the elk.

I crossed back through Big Run so that I could watch the elk. Gordon drove to the neighboring farm and talked to the people there. When he returned, the elk was nowhere to be found. We assumed that the elk had finally lain down. It was then that WCO Doty McDowell and veterinarian Walt Cottrell arrived. We sighted the elk again after about 20 minutes. He had entered the construction zone. Three construction workers had been securing a Bobcat tractor on a trailer when the elk approached them and began to flail the Bobcat with his antlers. The workers were trying to shoo the elk away as if it were a poodle nipping at their ankles.

When he finally left the Bobcat and workers he had trapped there, the elk crossed Big Run again and headed back to the horse barn. The elk entered the barn and this time Doty was waiting for it when it exited. Doty shot the bull at close range with a dart gun and, several minutes later, the drugs took effect and the elk went down.

A hood was placed over the elk's eyes and Dr. Cottrell examined the bull while the harness and ropes were removed. He was an old bull and was suffering from a nagging hip injury, possibly from an automobile collision. The elk's antlers were sawed off, so more of his energy could be placed into overcoming the injury. The elk also was tagged and fitted with a radio collar so he could be monitored. Then he was given the antidote for the tranquilizing drug and his blindfold was removed. He staggered to his feet and I remember thinking, that's a mighty humble bumble, from Yukon Cornelius in Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer.

He looked lost without his antlers, and despite my run-in with him, I wished him the best. For the rest of the day I kept thinking about the old bull, how magnificent he looked and acted and how time and fate seemed stacked against him.

The next day, after picking up several roadkilled deer and answering a bear complaint, I received a message that the bull was back and that he was in the middle of a pond and unable to get out. When I arrived on the scene and saw the old bull in the pond, he looked much older than the day before. Instead of a forceful, strong call he was now softly bellowing.

The pond had steep banks, nearly 10 feet high, on all sides, and I could see that he struggled in the sediment of the pond each time he took a step. The water was no more than 18 inches deep but he was mired in the muck and he looked like he did not have the strength to get himself out. I contacted the region office, and within a few minutes Dr. Cottrell called me. He suggested that I fire rubber buckshot into the pond to see if I could herd the bull to the pond's edge where he might climb out. I loaded my shotgun with rubber buckshot and proceeded to the opposite side of the pond.

The elk was forcefully grunting and I yelled at him to get up and get moving. When I fired into the pond he grunted and moved several feet, struggling each time to free his legs from the muck. Each step he took seemed to drain enormous amounts of energy from him. Several times he would lie down and I'd yell at him to get up or else he would die in that pond. Each time he moved he would go only a few feet then turn around and return to the same spot and refuse to move. After lying there for about 30 minutes he started to convulse, and I knew that if he did not get out of that pond soon he was going to die of hypothermia.

I reloaded my shotgun to give it one last try. After the first shot the old bull stood up and gave it his all; with all my heart I cheered him on. I fired twice more, screaming and pleading for him to get going. I wanted to jump into the pond to help him, but I knew that was not possible. More than anything I wanted him to survive. I walked to the edge of the pond one last time to look at the old boy.

Old age, his previous injuries and his weakened condition ganged up on him to seal his fate.

It took several hours to remove his body from the pond. During that time I pondered what his life had been like. He was truly a magnificent creature blessed with enormous power and presence. I believe that at one time he may have been the dominant bull of the area. But like a heavy weight boxer at the end of a successful career, each struggle and hardship took its toll and, in the end, contributed to his downfall. Still I envied his nobility. I'm glad that I gave him every opportunity to survive. He fought to the very end and died at the end of the struggle with the dignity of a true champion.

Tundras

Tundras

By Mario L. Piccirilli, Crawford County WCO

THE TUNDRA SWAN is one of the most beautiful birds our creator put on this earth. They are a dazzling white and angelic in their V-shaped flight formations. Their synchronous flight is poetry in motion. I always stop to watch in awe as they wing their way over the fields at our Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area.

Formerly called whistling swans, their vocalizations are easily differentiated from Canada geese. The tundra's vocalizations sound like a high-pitched *Uh, oh, oo*, and once you hear them, you'll never forget their unique calls. When alarmed, their call resembles a high pitched *bup, bup bup*.

Their length (from the tip of their outstretched beak to the tip of their tail) can be up to 58 inches and they can weigh up to 16 pounds or more. They can be distinguished on the water by their neck, which is usually straight or slightly curved, black legs and feet, and a black bill. Adults have a distinctive little yellow spot on the lore (the space between the eye and bill). The tundra swan's large size, with its long extended neck actually equal to the length of its body, easily differentiates it from the snow goose. In their V-formations flying overhead, the swans' wing beats are slow and steady, and when flying over water they form long lines in flight. When I came to this district, Land Management Officer (LMO) Jerry Bish told me that the tundra swans arrive in the Pymatuning area during November, on their southern migration. His predictions have been right on every year.

By comparison, a snow goose is considerably smaller than a tundra swan. There is a lesser snow goose and a greater snow goose. The lesser snow goose has two color phases. The white phase, called the snow goose, and the darker phase or plumage called the blue goose. Lesser snow geese may be up to 29 inches long and weigh up to six pounds. The white phase is white, except for black wing tips. Their legs and feet are described as a rosy red color, and their bill is pink with a black patch that makes the snow goose appear to be grinning.

Snow geese fly faster than Canada geese and tundra swans, as evidenced by their rapid wing beat, and they fly at various heights and seldom in the distinctive V-formations like the tundra swans and Canada geese normally do. Snow geese make a *whouk* or *kowk* sound.

The greater snow goose is just a slightly larger version of the lesser, with lengths up to 31 inches and weights up to 7½ pounds. In comparison, a tundra swan is twice the length and almost triple the weight of a snow goose, yet, incredibly, inexperienced waterfowlers sometimes mistake the large tundra swan — which may not be hunted — for a snow goose.

In 2005, the tundra swans arrived in the Pymatuning area about two weeks before bear season. The waterfowl seasons had just gotten underway as I was traveling through Conneaut Lake Borough when I heard that familiar calling. Looking up I saw a large flock of tundra swans, flying in their oblique formation, winging their way west toward the Pymatuning area.

I was on my way to the Pymatuning administration building, located just north of Hartstown. This is where goose hunters gather in the early morning hours on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, along with duck hunters. The goose hunters, who have been successful in drawing blinds, check in to claim their blinds for a day of waterfowl hunting. The duck hunters assemble in lines outside of the administration building, in all types of weather — mainly inclement — in the wee morning hours to be one of the first hunters to be given a badge to hunt in one of the coveted duck areas on the Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area. These are areas J and L, between Jamestown and Linesville, and are managed exclusively for waterfowl by LMO Jerry Bish and his food and cover workers. This is a true duck hunter's paradise, thanks to the hard and diligent work of Jerry and his crew.

Arriving at the Pymatuning administration building, Peggy Fox, a food and cover worker assigned to work in the building that morning, approached me and said, "Mario, a hunter just drove up here to report that some hunters just shot at some tundra swans, knocked one down, and one of the hunters who shot it was giving chase in the controlled hunting area."

I turned right around and drove down to Ball Road, where the hunters were supposed to be, about a half a mile away. Along Ball Road, the entire east side is the controlled hunting area of SGL 214, where only hunters who have drawn goose blinds may enter. The west side is also part of SGL 214 and is open to public hunting. This west side receives a lot of hunting pressure as the geese fly out of the controlled hunting area and into the fields of the public hunting section.

Driving down Ball Road about a third of a mile, where it turns right onto Hathaway Road, I saw no vehicles parked along the way. I radioed Peggy to tell her I could find no vehicles in the area when, out of the corner of my eye, I made out goose decoys interwoven among the corn stalks, on the side open to public hunting. As I slowed down, portions of one, two and then three camouflaged hunters standing in the corn slowly came into view, as if frozen in time.

I radioed Peggy to tell her I'd located the hunters. Then I left my vehicle and approached them. They were about 100 yards out in the field, just inside the standing rows of corn. They stood stock-still, scarcely breathing. I introduced myself and checked their firearms and hunting licenses and asked them what they were hunting.

"Geese and ducks," they replied. Noticing shotgun shell hulls on the ground, I asked if they had gotten any shooting, and they all said that they hadn't. While checking Mr. Levar Chubbs, I asked why he didn't have a federal duck stamp. He gave me a bewildered look and then asked, "What do you mean?"

I informed him that to hunt waterfowl, a person must possess a signed federal duck stamp, in addition to a Pennsylvania migratory game bird license, which he did have. I also pointed out that his hunting partners had signed duck stamps in their possession. I then asked the three hunters again if they had gotten any shooting this morning, and I further requested them to be cognizant of their responses, because I knew the answer.

Mr. Chubbs hesitated and said, "Well, ya, we did miss a few geese."

I asked him if he was sure about his answer when his companion, Jasper Bootleg, who was hunting with his 32-year-old son, Harpo Bootleg, broke in and replied, "Ya, we missed some geese this morning." I asked them again if that's all they shot at. The group was adamant that they had only shot at and missed some Canada geese. I told them that I had a witness who not only watched them shoot at a flock of tundra swans and knock one down, but also saw one of them, Mr. Chubbs, enter the controlled hunting area, where they were not permitted, and chase the wounded swan.

"Now you wait a minute. I want to know who said that we..." Jasper interjected in a loud manner, attempting to cut me off.

"No," I said, "you wait a minute, please, I'm not finished." Continuing on I said, "Furthermore, Mr. Chubbs, once you caught up to the tundra swan you and your friends wounded, you immediately turned around and left the controlled area to let the bird succumb to its injuries, and subsequently not report it." I looked at Mr. Chubbs and said, "Did I leave anything out?"

Mr. Chubbs gave me the deer-in-the-headlights stare, looked at the ground and realized their storytelling was over as his faced turned beet red. He admitted that everything I related to him was true. I asked Mr. Chubbs when he approached the tundra swan if he realized what they had shot and he said, "Yes, I knew it wasn't a snow goose because it was too big and had a real long neck."

Mr. Bootleg then made one of the most stellar comments I've ever heard from a game law violator. "Hey, do you realize how far away those swans were when we all shot? We couldn't tell what we were shooting at, especially that far away." I just stood there hardly believing how incriminating a statement he had just made.

I asked Jasper if he had heard the words that had just come out of his mouth, and he paused a moment and reality seemed to sink in, as reflected by his face. Mr. Chubbs went on to say that he should be the only one charged as he thought he was the one who actually hit the swan. I asked the Bootlegs if they had emptied their shotguns while shooting at the swans. They both admitted they did, but were pretty sure that their pellets missed the swans. I asked Jasper and Harpo why they were shooting at the swans if they didn't want to kill them. The pair just continued to say that they really didn't mean to kill a swan, even though they were shooting at them. What a contradictory statement.

I told the trio that one of the first things we teach in our HTE classes is that hunters must positively identify their target before pulling the trigger, and I asked them why they were shooting at birds so far out of range. Here again Jasper said that he really wasn't good at estimating distances. I replied, "Precisely, why shoot if you know you can't make a clean kill?"

I then asked them to show me where the wounded swan was. Mr. Chubbs started to give me directions, but I stopped him and said, "No. Let's go. You need to show me where it went down." The trio hesitantly filed out of the corn and into the field toward the road. Deputy John Ittel met us at the road and I filled him in on what had transpired.

We walked about 300 yards and then heard that familiar, *bup, bup, bup*. There, out in the middle of Patterson Pond, in the controlled hunting area, was the swan, flailing about, unable to fly. I turned around to the hunters and said, "There's your swan," as they all just lowered their heads in silence. John and I then went back to my truck with the defendants, to collect all the information I would need to file charges. I informed them that they would be receiving citations in the mail for shooting the protected swan, and that Mr. Chubbs would also be receiving citations for not having a federal duck stamp while hunting migratory waterfowl and for entering the controlled area on the Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area. I asked them if they had any questions before they left. They all just shook their heads and proceeded to collect their gear and then promptly left.

Later on in the afternoon, after the hunters in the blinds were done shooting for the day, LMO Jerry Bish and I went back to pick up the injured swan. On a more discouraging note, by the time goose season closed in the Pymatuning zone, I had cited 11 hunters for shooting at and attempting to kill tundra swans in mistake for snow geese, with guilty pleas in all the cases. We also had to put down another tundra swan mortally wounded by an unknown hunter. As evidenced by the photo of LMO Jerry A. Bish holding a snow goose next to a tundra swan, there should be no mistaking a tundra swan for a snow goose.

Mr. Chubbs pled guilty and ended up paying \$348.50 in fines and costs for his three citations; Mr. Bootleg and his son Harpo also pled guilty and each paid fines and costs of \$153.50. All three also received a year's revocation of their hunting privileges for wounding and attempting to kill a protected bird.

Once again, thanks to the cooperation of a concerned sportsman, we were able to do our jobs. My hat is off to the sportsmen of the commonwealth for their efforts in wildlife conservation.

Hawkeye

Hawkeye

By William Wasserman

ZIGGY AND JED had been cruising the back roads in their run-down pickup for hours when they finally spotted the buck. A spectacular 8-point, it stood before them in the grassy field like a great bronze statue, its massive head high in the air.

“Man, look at that!” crowed Jed, his foot nudging the brake peddle. He peered into his rearview mirror; behind him, the desolate country road stretched for a half-mile before disappearing around a wooded bend. “No one is around, Zig; you could hit him easy from right here.”

“Keep driving!” snapped Ziggy. “You’re gonna spook him!”

Jed winced under his brother’s sharp rebuke. “There’s a bend up ahead,” he offered. “Once, we get around the corner you can jump into the back of the truck with your bow?”

Ziggy nodded, knowing they’d have to be quick. Someone could come along and see them at any second.

Jed rounded the bend and brought his truck to a lurching stop. Ziggy jerked back the door handle and sprinted to the back of the truck. He glanced nervously behind him as he climbed over the tailgate. “Go! Go! Go!” he commanded.

Jed turned his truck around and started toward the deer. Drawing close, he took his foot off the gas and coasted to a stop. Gravel crackled like popcorn under his tires, causing the regal buck to turn his head in mild curiosity.

Ziggy had been hunched against the tailgate. He stood now, his arrow nocked, and in one fluid motion, he raised and drew his bow, bringing his string hand to the corner of his chin. By the time the buck sensed danger, Ziggy had already relaxed his fingers on the bowstring, his deadly arrow searing the air and finding its mark. The whitetail flinched as the arrow struck him and then bolted toward a distant woodlot.

Jed howled with glee as he watched the great deer stumble and then fall at the woods edge. His brother never missed. The broadhead had entered behind its left shoulder, piercing vital organs. Ziggy jumped to the ground, yanked open the passenger door and slid inside. Jed glanced over at him and smiled. “Hawkeye,” he murmured with wide-eyed admiration. “What a shot!”

Ziggy threw his head back and let out a great belly laugh. Jed always made him laugh when he called him that. And he would do it only when they were poaching deer together. “You’re right!” he chuckled. “It was a great shot. Now get out of here before someone sees you.”

Jed dropped his truck into gear and sped down the road while Ziggy made a 100-yard dash to the deer. He was amazed it had collapsed so soon, and delighted that he didn’t have to track it. Ziggy quickly dragged the carcass out of sight into the woods and gutted it. Then he waited for his brother to circle back.

When he heard the pickup’s low throaty rumble, he grabbed a front leg and started dragging the deer toward it fast. He reached the road in one minute flat, his lean body breathless from his hard work. Jed quickly dropped his tailgate and helped heave the deer into the bed. After slamming the tailgate shut, Ziggy raced his brother to the front seat and jumped in alongside him. They glanced at each other for a moment, grinning broadly; then Ziggy bellowed a triumphant warrior’s whoop and they smacked hands. “*Hawkeye*,” Jed whispered shaking his head in feigned reverence. And both men began to laugh uncontrollably as they sped into the night.

The poachers were approaching the trailer park where they lived with their mother when Ziggy whipped his head angrily toward his brother. “Where are you going?” he frowned.

“Home ... why?”

“We can’t go home; bow season doesn’t open until tomorrow; somebody will see the deer.”

Jed’s face displayed a look of genuine bewilderment. “What else can we do? I’ll get a tarp and cover it, Zig.”

“No way. Can’t risk it. We’ll take the deer into the woods up the road and hide it. Then I’ll come back tomorrow morning and tag it. Presto. The deer suddenly becomes legal.”

“But Wasserman lives on the other side of the woods. What if he sees us?”

“He won’t.” hissed Ziggy. “Just stop along the road. I’ll jump out and drag the deer into the brush while you head home. Then I’ll cut through the woods and meet you at the house in about 20 minutes.”

Jed nodded and soon found himself pulling to a stop while Ziggy leaped out the passenger door and ran to the back of the truck. He dropped the tailgate, grabbed the buck by its broad antlers, and gave the deer a fierce tug. The trophy whitetail slid from the bed and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then Ziggy hustled it into the woods...

I never expected to run into Ziggy that fateful morning as I drove out my driveway. But just as I pulled my patrol car onto the highway, I glanced into the woods on my right and observed a hunter crouched over a trophy buck a short distance away. He looked up and spotted me at the same time, and his arms and legs started flailing in a dozen different directions at once. Then he was suddenly on his feet and racing wildly toward his four-wheeler.

I jammed my brakes and threw my Expedition into reverse. He’d be gone in seconds, I thought as I shot back to a narrow opening in the woods. He was directly in front of me now, head down so I couldn’t see his face as I came at him.

He leaped on his machine cowboy style, then cranked the engine and yanked on the hand-throttle. His knobby tires dug into the earth, spinning him into an abrupt U-turn and sending thick clods of dirt into my windshield like a raging hailstorm as he sped off. I shadowed him, my cumbersome Expedition barely squeezing by the trees on either side. Suddenly a knoll appeared, and I watched the maniac machine launch into the air and vanish over it.

The chase abruptly ended when my shoulder harness slammed into my chest as I skidded to a stop over the knoll. The wheelbase too long, my truck had hung up. I shoved open the door and leaped out. In the distance, I could hear the rough mechanical thrum of an ATV fading into oblivion.

I left my patrol car seesawing on the knoll and took off on foot. Perhaps he’d bog down somewhere, I thought as I sprinted along the broken terrain. I had run a good hundred yards when I noticed a plastic hunting license holder on the trail just ahead. I stooped down, my pulse quickening as I pulled the cardboard license from its plastic sheath and read the owner’s name: Ziggy Zagg. I could hardly believe my eyes. He was a career poacher who I had been after for years, and he’d always managed to give me the slip. But this time his lucky streak was about to end.

I jogged back to my Expedition, scrounged up some big rocks and a couple of logs, and jammed them under my wheels. Then I climbed inside the vehicle, dropped it into gear, and pressed gently against the gas peddle. I felt my tires grab hold of the makeshift base, and I slowly backed off the knoll. Continuing to back along the trail until I reached Ziggy’s 8-point, I was surprised to see Deputy Gaydos kneeling by the carcass. He looked up and walked over to my vehicle.

“What brought you here?” I asked. Deputy Gene Gaydos — with 35 years service — was one of only a few field officers on the job that had more time on than I did. And he was a crack investigator.

Gaydos cocked his head toward the deer, 20-yards away. “I was driving by when I looked over and saw the buck lying there. Didn’t seem right, so I thought I’d better check it out.” He peered critically at my patrol car: A tortured branch poked from the undercarriage like a long, bony arm; the windshield and fenders covered with mud from Ziggy’s escape. “Good thing, too,” he added with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, “it looks like you need some help!”

“Story of my life,” I grinned in agreement. The poacher must have thought so, too; he left this behind.” I handed Gaydos the hunting license I’d found, and his jaw slowly dropped as he examined the name. “I was just on my way to pay him a visit.” I continued.

“I don’t blame you,” replied Gaydos, “especially since the deer was killed yesterday.”

“Say what?” I snapped back

“You didn’t know?”

“Pretty tough to tell when you’re traveling at warp speed.” I replied, nodding at my patrol car.

Gene chuckled at the notion and then turned toward the deer. “Eyes are glazed,” he muttered pensively. “Knew right away it was poached. Rigor mortis, too — stiff as a board.” The deputy looked back at me, squinting into the sun. “I measured the body heat while you were back there chasing Ziggy,” he continued. “My thermometer says the deer was killed less than 24 hours ago.”

We secured the deer to my big game carrier and proceeded to the address on Ziggy’s hunting license. People milled about the trailer park as their children played in the narrow streets, all heads turning to gawk at the giant buck on my vehicle as we drove by. I stopped in front of Ziggy’s trailer; a battered pickup was parked in the rear driveway. Gaydos focused on it as we walked to the front door. “There’s blood on the back of that truck,” he exclaimed in a low voice.

I glanced over. A large crimson stain marked the tailgate. I had almost missed it. “Wondered how long it would take you to notice that,” I quipped.

Gaydos cocked a skeptical brow and I quickly knocked on the door before he could respond. “Just a minute,” boomed a voice from inside. I heard the scrape of a chair pulling back and then footsteps approaching. Ziggy’s mother opened the door and eyed us suspiciously. “Game Wardens,” she cried wearily. “What did he do now?”

I told her we suspected that Ziggy had killed a deer unlawfully. “We’d like to talk to him,” I said.

She put her hands on her hips, let out a long sigh, and turned her head toward the back of the trailer. “Ziggy, get out here.” she bellowed. Her voice softening, she looked at us. “Where are my manners? Please, come in gentlemen.”

Gaydos and I stepped into the trailer as Ziggy came shuffling from a back room, his pregnant teenaged wife shadowing him. Ziggy was 21, with a tall, lanky build and a mop of strawberry blonde hair. His face ashen with fear, he stared at the badge pinned to my chest. “I shouldn’t have run,” he sighed. “I knew I shouldn’t have run.”

“That’s not all you shouldn’t have done.” I leveled at him. “We know the deer was killed yesterday.”

“Yes, sir,” he acknowledged. His mother folded her arms across her chest and glared at him. Suspecting that her domineering presence would work in my favor, I pressed him further. “Who owns the truck out back?”

Upon hearing the question, his mother almost swooned at the grim realization that her other son could also be involved. Ziggy saw her and his face began to wilt. “It’s my brother’s,” he mumbled at the floor — and from that point told me everything.

I was ready to throw the book at Ziggy until his mother persuaded me to reconsider. Her eyes moist and pleading, she explained that Ziggy had just started a new job, at minimum wage, and that he and his pregnant wife lived with her so she could help them get started in life. She added that Jed lived there too, and lent a hand with the bills.

Realizing that multiple charges against the two poachers would have punished the entire family, I wrote single citations for both Ziggy and his brother. Each carried a \$500 fine, the minimum for unlawfully killing a deer. They also received revocation of their hunting and trapping privileges.

The Advantage

The Advantage

By Victor Rosa, WCO Wyoming County

Cool moist air passes through his hunting jacket as he makes his way in the dark morning. It had rained a few hours earlier and the smell of wet October leaves reminds him of why he loves the fall archery season. As he reaches his stand, the first sounds of the morning come alive and he knows the hunt will soon be on.

PAUL HUNTER is not your typical archery hunter. He and a small group of extremely dedicated sportsmen have spent the last 30 years trophy hunting on land they purchased in Wyoming County. Trophy hunting can mean many different things to many different people, but to Paul and his buddies it means dedication, perseverance, hard work and patience.

Paul has a family, makes a decent living and has a burning passion for deer hunting. Most of Paul's spare time is devoted to his quest for a trophy buck. Scouting, selecting and preparing stand locations, food plot maintenance, and readying equipment add to the excitement of the October season.

This morning, like the previous several mornings, started with the promise of that one special deer - the buck Paul had never seen but had "shot" with trail cameras over the past several months. With the excitement of a child on Christmas Eve, Paul sat anxiously and waited, as did the other members of his hunting camp. But as morning turned to afternoon and then evening, the promise of something special faded just as it had each day afield for the past two weeks. He'd spent another day not seeing a deer, a turkey or a bear, not even so much as a squirrel.

Back at camp Paul discussed the day's events - or lack of events - with the other hunters. At least one of them had seen the back end of a deer for a moment. Frustrated, the group discussed the photos their trail cameras had been taking throughout the summer and fall. The photos were their only hope and indication that deer were on the property. From the photos they knew that the deer were moving at night and that they all seemed to be heading in the same direction.

Paul's cell phone rang and the group watched his face. The room went silent. Only faded mumbles from a voice on the other end and Paul's occasional, "Uh huh," broke the quiet. Paul hung up, his expression leaving the room speechless. For a few moments no one wanted to ask what had happened. Then Paul said, "He's dead."

Now, you and I would've thought that a person had met his fate, but not this group; they knew what Paul meant. The big guy, the king, the one dreams were made of, the ghost, the large-racked buck that they had been seeing for three years was dead, taken by a hunter on a neighboring property.

The room exploded, "Are you sure?" "How do we know?" "Maybe it's one of the other bucks we have on film?"

But Paul was matter-of-fact, "It's him."

As it turned out, the club next to Paul's property had had some good luck. In fact, they'd had good luck for the past few years. The Lucky Boyz club had taken some impressive deer and bears over the past few seasons. Although Paul and his buddies had been suspicious about the members of the neighboring club, they'd always shrugged it off as good stand locations and fine woodsmanship. After all, the guys seemed friendly when they did meet, but the notion lingered in Paul's thoughts. What if?

It was well known that the Lucky Boyz fed deer from the beginning of February right up until 30 days before the start of the archery season. Paul had seen one of the large feeding areas right next

to the club's cabin. He also had seen photos of the deer, turkeys and bears at feeding sites on the property. What if? What if they didn't stop feeding, but kept distributing bait during the season? Paul started talking to some of the other neighboring clubs. All had heard about the large buck taken and suspected something wasn't quite right.

A week later, Paul was still out hunting. And although he knew several nice bucks were still roaming the area, some of the hunting season excitement had been taken away. What really bothered him was that a buck-of-a-lifetime may have been taken unfairly, and that the Lucky Boyz could be taking deer illegally at that moment. Paul left his stand early. It was unseasonably warm and the bugs had gotten the best of him. Besides, his heart wasn't really into it. He had, at least, seen a deer, although it was heading toward the Lucky Boyz club.

When Paul returned to the cabin he found a note hanging on the door. Paul Hunter, please give me a call, Nick. The mere presence of the note was curious, because not too many people knew where the cabin was. Paul made the call immediately.

As it turned out, Nick was from Philadelphia and had been visiting a neighboring camp the week before the archery opener. Nick is not a hunter but enjoys riding ATVs on the camp property. He told Paul that he'd been walking his dog near camp. When the dog bolted after some deer, he chased it a few hundred yards before securing and scolding the pup. On the way back to camp he passed a stand with fresh corn and a trail camera. He hadn't given it a second thought until later, when he was talking to another club member, one who did hunt.

That was all Paul needed to hear. He thanked Nick for the information, hung up, and immediately called the Game Commission's Northeast Region Office. That's when I got involved.

Based on the information Paul had received, there was enough probable cause to visit the property and see if, in fact, bait was being or had been used in the area and whether any wildlife had been unlawfully taken as a result. The Lucky Boyz club consisted of a few hundred acres with some rough terrain. Being new to the area and also because I was covering parts of Susquehanna and Lackawanna counties, I knew I needed help. Deputies Gene Gaydos and Jeff Pierce assisted.

Due to the mountainous terrain and the inaccessibility of the Lucky Boyz club, we had to find a way to the property that would not alert anyone to our presence. This proved challenging but, with the help of a state police helicopter, we got up and over the property in a matter of hours. While we were not able to see bait from the air, we did get a good idea of the terrain and just how difficult it was to get in. That is why we gained access from the cabin.

We couldn't get back to the club until the first day of bear season. Deputy Peirce and I entered the property near the cabin where we saw two vehicles and a hunter dressed in orange. We were in full uniform, with orange vests and hats for safety. We walked the perimeter of the property and noticed several large, old permanent stands. A few of the stands had cable and winch setups used for hanging cans filled with feed. Some of the setups had been there so long that the trees were growing around the winch supports.

As we made our way down into a small streambed we heard an ATV, and although we thought it was close we could not see it. Interestingly, the ATV headed out from the cabin toward the back of the property, with about an hour of legal shooting time left. It was getting late, so we started back to our vehicle.

Although we hadn't located any baited stands we were still suspicious. From experience we knew that locating bait, even when the exact location is given, is tough and we were dealing with hundreds of acres. What we needed to do was think like someone trying to break the law, then, more than likely, we'd find what we were looking for. Sure enough, we found fresh corn and oats along with a trail camera chained to a tree. The stand was a new portable ladderstand on the edge of an opening. Had the hunter seen us and left? As we headed back to our vehicle we saw an ATV trail that we thought might lead to other potential stand locations.

Over the next several days Pierce, Gaydos and I discussed a plan to access the property and determine how many stands the Lucky Boyz had and if any were baited. We had wanted to return during the rest of bear season but it just didn't happen. The district we were covering was large and we had to prioritize the case load, and there were other cases that needed immediate attention.

We had planned to be at the club first thing on the opening day of rifle deer season, but we were delayed until noon. The gate to the Lucky Boyz camp is always locked. Our plan was to post Deputy Pierce at the gate, in the state vehicle, then Deputy Gaydos and I would drive right past the camp on ATVs. Deputy Gaydos was instructed to stop at the camp should any deer be observed. As we approached the camp we saw several parked vehicles and one hunter outside, but no deer, so we continued through the camp and down an access road through the property. We knew we needed to get to the stand before word got out that we were there. Deputy Gaydos followed the main road and I split off to the baited stand we had found earlier.

I was not surprised to find the stand empty, as it was lunchtime and many hunters would have gone back to camp to eat. I met two men on an ATV who asked why I was on the property. After I explained my presence, Deputy Pierce met them back at the camp. Deputy Gaydos and I continued our search for other stand locations. We knew there were two baited stands, six hunters at the camp, and one hunter still in the woods. Although the hunters were cooperative, I was not comfortable leaving a lone officer with several suspects, so Deputy Gaydos and I did a quick survey of the area and headed back to the camp.

Investigations like this are never short and quick, especially when the suspects deny knowing anything relevant. The Lucky Boyz told us that two deer had been taken during the archery season, a 6-point and a large 13-point. A bear had also been killed on the first day of bear season, late in the afternoon. Perhaps that had been the hunter we'd heard on the ATV. All the suspects denied hunting in the area where the baited stands were found. In fact, they stated that they'd been hunting in the old stands on the edge of the property, as far as they could get from the baited stands.

As the sun crept lower and lower, Deputy Gaydos and I searched the prime hunting areas on the property and returned with evidence of two baited stands along with two trail cameras, which we seized as evidence. Although I had my suspicions, I base my investigations solely on the facts; facts that I can prove in a courtroom.

But our work that evening was far from over. We interviewed hunters from neighboring clubs, but the most interesting information was found in the photos taken by the cameras we'd confiscated. The digital cameras revealed several hundred photos of deer, bears, raccoons, porcupines and turkeys. Conveniently, each photo was marked with the date and time it was taken. One camera even had the name of one of the club members listed on the photos.

The photos painted a clear picture of the extent of the club's feeding and baiting practices, beginning in late winter and continuing into early spring and then summer, right up to the opening day of the firearms deer season. The photos showed the 13-point feeding at the bait a few hours before it was killed, bears feeding the night before and even during the opening day of bear season, and the suspects refreshing the bait during the bear season and the weekend before the firearms deer season. The photos also revealed several different locations where bait had been placed, indicating that there were many more potential bait sites to find. Some photos had even been taken the year before.

The following day was a busy one. Armed with property boundary maps, topo maps and aerial maps, Deputy Gaydos and I grid-searched the most likely areas to contain baited stands. It didn't take us long to find another stand and camera. Interestingly though, we did not find any bait. The ground, however, was completely torn up. Thanks to the camera, we discovered that in a matter of a few days wildlife had completely cleaned up every shred of food at the stand. The proof was in the photos.

By the time we completed our search we had found seven newer stands, three had visible bait, three

showed evidence of heavy feeding and one had a mineral deposit blended into the ground. The older stands that bordered the property had shown no signs of bait or use by hunters.

Although we were confident we had enough information to prosecute all individuals at the camp and close the property to hunting, we didn't believe we'd found every stand, baited or otherwise. We met Deputy Pierce back at the camp, along with the camp members who had taken the two deer and the bear. The members all believed they had been far enough from any bait to be legal, and assured me that they did not take any of the deer or the bear from the baited stands.

The Lucky Boyz had had an active feeding/baiting program right up to the first day of firearms season. They had baited the property from one end to the other over several months, during the open hunting seasons.

In the end, the not-so-Lucky Boyz conceded. The resulting prosecution resulted in the seizure of two bucks and one bear, the suspension of hunting privileges for three individuals, the successful prosecution of five individuals for hunting in a baited area, and more than \$2,000 in fines.

My question to you is, "Did the Lucky Boyz have an advantage?" I know what Paul Hunter would say.

Hunt of a Lifetime

Hunt of a Lifetime

By Jack A. Lucas

THERE ARE EVENTS in every conservation officer's career that are particularly memorable. Early last year I met Anthony Fonte at the Allegheny Sport, Travel & Outdoor Show. Anthony, with the Christian Bow Hunters, was attempting to raise money to pay for a bear hunt for Hunt of a Lifetime. He told me the story of a young man involved in a very serious accident. Through intensive surgeries and rehabilitation the young man is able to hunt once again; his ultimate goal being to hunt for black bear. But, paying for a hunt like this is a task in itself. I asked how I could help. This is where the journey begins.

Dakota Corle of Osterberg was involved in a vehicle accident in August of 2004. He was hit by a truck while he operated a dirt bike. He was flown to the Altoona Hospital where he was stabilized. From there he was flown to the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh for intense surgeries. For several months Dakota was involved in serious rehabilitation.

Last year Dakota and his family had a meeting with Dakota's doctor. The doctor recommended they contact Make-A-Wish. After reviewing how he qualified for Make-A-Wish, Dakota opted to hunt. Make-A-Wish referred Dakota to Hunt of a Lifetime.

Anthony Fonte, a schoolteacher, talked to a couple of his students and they, too, took the challenge to help Dakota - the challenge to raise money for his airfare and equipment. During Dan George and Wayne Mauthe's pursuit for funding, Big Grass Outdoors of Manitoba, Canada, agreed to sponsor a bear hunt for Dakota. Cabela's stepped up to provide clothing, boots, binoculars and miscellaneous hunting gear. Gander Mountain provided Dakota with a .300 Short Mag. Savage and gear to go with it. Through intense work Dan and Wayne raised the funds for Dakota's trip to Manitoba.

We knew Dakota had a bear hunt set up in Manitoba, but we wanted to enhance it with a local hunt. Anthony Fonte and I discussed the possibility of hosting a local hunt for Dakota as well. As we brainstormed, we became more excited about what Pennsylvania has to offer. To have the ability to offer this special experience is as fulfilling for us as it is for the participating youngster. We came up with several options: a spring turkey hunt during the youth season, a youth season waterfowl or pheasant hunt, or fly-fishing on some of Pennsylvania's pristine waters. After contacting Dakota's father, Fred, we set up a spring turkey hunt. We began scouting, locating birds, selecting potential blind sites and finding a caller. As the hunt drew closer, we invited the young men who had done the fundraising for Dakota's bear hunt to hunt with us. Our excitement continued to grow.

At 4:30 a.m. on the day of the hunt, I heard the first knock on my door. As I began to welcome Dakota and his father, the young guys that worked so hard for Dakota's hunt showed up and, for the first time, met Dakota. The day had already been a success. Common ground between total strangers - the love of hunting in Penn's Woods.

We organized two groups of hunters. PGC Food & Cover Crew Leader Charlie Reichel and I took Dakota and his father to our favorite hunting location. Deputy Josh Henning took Dan and Wayne off to his blind. The hunt was on.

At 6 a.m. you could've heard a twig snap at a hundred yards, all was quiet. As Charlie began to call, the intensity began to grow. At 6:15 we heard something moving. As Dakota got ready, a pack of coyotes began howling about 75 yards away. My heart sank, with the coyotes howling at first light, I figured there wouldn't be a bird on the ridge that would answer the calls.

Dakota asked, "What was that?"

I replied, "Coyotes. Get ready in case the birds come in." The wily coyote knew to stay out of sight.

A short time later, Charlie began calling again and, to my surprise, a bird answered off at a distance. We sat as patiently as we could. A couple hours passed with the occasional gobble in the distance.

Josh called on the radio, "Anything?"

"Nope. You?"

But, there was one bird on the other ridge that kept hammering every time Charlie touched his call.

They, too, had heard the pack of coyotes howling at first light. Josh decided they were going to move on to the other ridge to try their luck there, and I told him we would see them at camp for lunch.

It was time for us to move. Charlie and I had set up blinds in a couple other locations just in case. We moved to our next blind, got set up and Charlie began to call again.

Dakota exclaimed, "Do you hear that?" A hen turkey was 30 yards from the blind. He got set up and ready to go in case there was a gobbler pursuing her.

Then a gobble rang out just as a gobbler moved over the brow of the hill. Our hearts began to pound. Adrenaline. Nervousness. Charlie feverously worked the bird. The hen began to move out. That could be good or bad. Maybe the gobbler would see our decoy. Charlie patiently worked a cache of calls to lure the gobbler in. Eventually all was quiet and we feared that the gobbler had moved off with the hen.

At 10:45 we moved one more time to our final blind. After everything had calmed down, Charlie, about 10 yards behind us, began to call again. A gobbler instantly answered from a distance. Patience, patience, patience. Dakota exclaimed, "Hey, look, there's a groundhog."

Charlie continued to call and the bird moved a little closer. As time ticked away, Dakota pointed out some deer moving across the field in front of us. Dakota asked, "Where do you think the turkey is?"

The bird eventually became silent. Many times, that means the bird is on his way in to the decoy, but it could also mean it had found another option. Charlie called on the radio, "Well, it was a good day in the field. It's almost noon and the hunting hours are just about over." We picked up our gear and began to meander back.

Josh, Dan and Wayne met us at camp. We discussed the day. The highlight had been hearing the pack of coyotes so close our hair actually rose. We heard birds all around us. We saw a variety of songbirds and mammals. The weather was perfect. Success depends on who the rater is. Being able to spend a day hunting is icing on the cake. Harvesting game is decorations on top of the icing. The young hunters made new friends and we had an awesome time in the field.

While we were eating lunch I interviewed Dan and Wayne. I asked them why, as youth hunters of Pennsylvania, they took on the challenge to raise money to pay for a hunt for someone they didn't know? They replied that because they both had family members with medical problems, they recognized the importance of help. They commented, "It's kids helping kids."

Events like these special hunts for Dakota demonstrate the dedication of Pennsylvania's sportsmen. Gentlemen, thank you all for the opportunity to be a part of a hunt of a lifetime.

PA Turkeys Q&A

PA Turkeys Q&A

By Mary Jo Casalena, PGC Turkey Biologist

THE WILD TURKEY is certainly a popular game animal in Pennsylvania, and the Game Commission is working hard to manage the bird in the best possible manner and, at the same time, provide hunters with the best hunting opportunities possible.

Following are answers to common questions about Pennsylvania's wild turkey management plan and how the Game Commission determines and sets turkey hunting seasons.

Why is data from the previous three years used to determine fall season lengths rather than the current year's data?

There are a few reasons why the previous three years of data is used to make season length recommendations. First, the fall season recommendations are based on trends in two independent population indices: spring harvest per square mile and summer turkey sighting surveys. The Board of Game Commissioners sets seasons and bag limits during its April meeting, before the current year's spring gobbler season has even begun and before the spring breeding season is over. Second, the 3-year trend is used to determine if the population is truly increasing or decreasing or remaining the same. Because turkey populations can fluctuate tremendously on an annual basis and data from the spring is unavailable when making recommendations for the following fall and spring seasons, using population trends to make season recommendations has proven to be the most effective management approach. Third, research has shown that Pennsylvania turkey hunters appreciate consistency in fall season lengths, so the season length is changed only when the data show a consistent upward or downward population trend. For more information see pages 21-28 of the [Turkey Management Plan](#).

Is the PGC considering extending the spring season?

For 2008, the Board has extended the spring season to include the Monday of the Memorial Day weekend. This extends the season by only one day, but it will provide additional recreation opportunities for many turkey hunters during the holiday weekend without imposing a biological impact on the resource.

Why doesn't the spring season start earlier?

Although a large portion of hens may be bred by April 15, the peak of incubation does not occur until about May 1. Pennsylvania's spring season is timed to begin around the peak of incubation; it generally opens on the Saturday closest to May 1. Hens, on average lay one egg per 1.5 days. With a 12-egg clutch, it takes almost three weeks to lay a full clutch and begin incubating. Once hens have begun incubating, they are less likely to come to a hunter's call or abandon their nest. Opening the season earlier would create additional breeding and nesting disturbance, and could lead to an increase in illegal hen mortality. The amount of additional illegal hen mortality and reproductive disturbance caused by an earlier spring season has not been studied. However, timing the first week of hunting during the pre-incubation season, with about 230,000 spring turkey hunters, could have substantial impact. Pennsylvania has more turkey hunters than most other states, and does not regulate hunting pressure. Therefore, a conservative approach to timing the spring season protects the resource.

According to our 2001 Turkey Hunter Survey, there is not an  overwhelming desire for an earlier season. While 48 percent of Pennsylvania turkey hunters were in favor of an earlier season, 33 percent disagreed with starting the spring season earlier and 20 percent were undecided. When asked if the spring turkey season should start on May 1 each year (if Sunday, then May 2) and include the entire month of May, 43 percent agreed, 26 percent disagreed and 31 percent were undecided.

When the first spring season was offered, in 1968, it did not open until May 6. The current season actually opens earlier than it used to (see table). There was a 4-year period, 1987-1990, when the season opened earlier than it does now; the earliest opening being April 21 (1990). For more information on this topic refer to pages 21 through 23 of the [turkey management plan](#).

Do other states have earlier seasons?

In a recent study that reviewed data on timing of nesting in 34 states and Canadian provinces, researchers found that 25 opened spring hunting seasons more than two weeks prior to the mean date of incubation initiation, and 18 of those states and provinces also allowed fall either-sex hunting. Because extended fall seasons and spring hunting during the pre-incubation period can lead to additive and unsustainable levels of female kill, the researchers concluded that harvest management in many states has the potential to negatively affect the population and, therefore, negatively affect future harvests and hunter satisfaction.

The same research found that eight states open the spring season 1 to 14 days prior to mean incubation initiation (during egg-laying). Pennsylvania typically opens 0 to 5 days prior to mean nest incubation initiation. The other states are: Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, Wisconsin and West Virginia. Maintaining the current regular spring season opening date in Pennsylvania to coincide with the peak of turkey nest incubation is important, it will minimize nest abandonment, as well as accidental and illegal hen mortality.

Does spring green-up affect the timing of incubation?

Even during early springs, when leaf-out occurs earlier than average, the timing of turkey nesting has not started noticeably earlier. The timing of turkey nesting is more dependent on hours of daylight than spring green-up. The timing of the spring gobbler season is determined by finding the time that poses the least detriment to wild turkey reproduction while optimizing hunter success. Pennsylvania's season is timed to protect the resource rather than appeal to hunters, particularly because the extent of harm and benefits are not well known.

Does spring green-up affect hunter safety?

In most of Pennsylvania, leaves have typically emerged by the end of the turkey season. This can make it difficult for hunters to see long distances. Hunters should never shoot at a target that they have not positively identified. There is no evidence that hunting incident rates increase due to green-up.

Are gobblers gobbling less?

Turkey hunters want to hear gobbles. The peak of gobbling in Pennsylvania is not known. However, West Virginia's first peak period of gobbling is between April 23 and May 1, with a second, smaller, peak about two weeks later, and Pennsylvania's may be similar. But, a recent study in Iowa found that hunting activity suppressed gobbling. So, regardless of when the season begins, gobbling activity is likely to decrease with the onset of hunting pressure.

Like many eastern states, Pennsylvania experienced record breeding seasons in 1999, 2000 and 2001. This means that there are many older gobblers in the population, and some turkey biologists hypothesize that dominant males suppress the gobbling of younger males; the net effect being less gobbles to be heard. With increasing turkey populations and with more spring turkey hunters in the field, it may take more time to call in gobblers and new hunting strategies may be needed.

Is the number of spring turkey hunters declining?

A look at the data (see figure below) shows that, although the number of turkey hunters decreased from 1981-1991, numbers have increased since 1991 by 38 percent.



Full Moon Hunter

Full Moon Hunter

By Dan Lynch, PGC Wildlife Education Specialist, Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officer

IT WAS ABOUT two in the morning, September 2004. The phone call woke me out of a sound sleep. It was my neighbor, who in a slightly panicked voice told me that someone had just fired a rifle outside of her window and that from her vantage point she could still see the tail lights of the pickup. I asked her which direction it was heading and told her I'd be there as soon as I got dressed. In 11 minutes I had my uniform on and was out the door. I drove by her house in the direction that the vehicle had gone, and in only a few minutes noticed a vehicle approaching very slowly. I passed it at the regular speed limit, hoping not to spook the potential shooter with my vehicle, and then turned around. When I got back in sight of the vehicle, it had stopped again directly in front of my neighbor's house.

I immediately got behind the vehicle and it took off. I put on my red lights and followed the truck for about three miles until the driver pulled over. When I approached the vehicle I identified myself and told the driver that I'd pulled him over because someone had just fired a shot from the road right in front of the house that his vehicle was stopped in front of. I also mentioned that it was just after 2 o'clock in the morning. I asked him if he had any justification for: one, not pulling over for me right away and, two, for stopping right in front of that house.

He said that he never saw my red lights and that he had seen some deer cross the road and that was why he'd stopped in front of the house. I asked him for some identification and the vehicle registration. He had no personal identification and he was driving a brand new truck for which he had no vehicle information. Instead, he offered that I should know him, because I was just at his son's hunter education class at a local gun club the night before. I told him that I didn't recognize him.

While we were talking I noticed a rifle lying on the floor of the back seat. I asked him to step out of the vehicle and he asked me if I wanted to see the rifle in the back seat. I said yes and when I picked it up he said that if it smells like it had just been fired, it was because he'd been shooting it at work where a friend wanted to try it before buying it. I inspected the rifle and the truck and found no cartridges nor any spotlights or flashlights. I later learned that the empty cartridges were in his front pockets.

I had all the information I could get from him. I was convinced that he was the one who had done the shooting, but because I had no deer and no admission from him, I let him go. I then went back to the scene to look for more evidence. I drove up and down the road, looking for blood, cartridges or a deer, but couldn't find anything. I sat in a neighbor's driveway till 5 a.m. and then went back home for an hour's sleep.

I left my house around 6:30, and while taking my daughter, Nicole, to daycare we drove by my neighbor's house once again. I couldn't believe my eyes. There, not 30 yards from the road, in a mowed section of her yard, was a bloated deer. I never saw it hours earlier. I immediately got out and had Nicole help me take some forensic measurements to determine time of death (TOD). We took its nasal and thigh temperatures, and measured its pupil diameter and distance from the road. Later, at the office, we did an electrical conductivity test using jumper cables and my truck's engine. I was able to determine that the deer had been shot and had died several hours earlier, at approximately the same time my neighbor had called about the shot outside her home. I gathered as much information as I could and when my boss, WCO Bill Vroman, and I got together we decided to contact the driver of the truck, I'll call him Tom, and ask him a few more questions.

Ironically, while Tom was on his way from work to meet with us, Bill got a call from a landowner who lived within 10 miles of my neighbor's house. She said that someone had shot a deer that night,

which had ended up in her driveway, and that her caretaker had buried it in the woods. Under the circumstances, the news was particularly interesting and we wished we had had time to go to the scene before Tom arrived at the office for questioning.

We decided to wait and see how the questioning went. If we thought it was worth it, we might bring up this new information about the other deer. Tom arrived about 20 minutes later and, after a few short minutes of denying everything, he broke down and spent at least an hour giving us all the details of his nightly adventures.

It had all started when he told a buddy of his at the bar that he would go out and shoot him a deer. He had a few drinks, picked up his 30-caliber rifle and went looking for a deer. He didn't need a light because there was a full moon. He drove around and saw a group of deer standing in a yard next to the road by my neighbor's. He stuck the gun out the window and shot at one of them. It moved off and he got nervous and decided to drive down the road, turn around and then go look for it. That's when I happened along behind him and cut his "hunt" short. He couldn't believe that I let him go and never checked his pockets where he had the empty cartridges.

After getting it all out he asked if he could go. That's when Bill brought up the other deer. Down went his head again and he admitted that he thought he'd missed that one. He figured that because he had missed the first deer, he would just continue looking for another deer to shoot. We explained that both deer had been standing in front of houses that were just back off the road. He was lucky that neither bullet had hit any buildings or people. After another hour of statements he left the office.

We headed to the scene of the first deer he shot and ended up spending an hour with shovels digging up the carcass. We wanted to confirm that it had been shot, which it was. We also spent time looking over the landowner's house, barn and other outbuildings for the bullet that passed through the deer and continued on somewhere. We never found the bullet.

A month later we made some arrangements with his lawyer and he pled guilty to charges including illegal deer, shooting from a vehicle and having a loaded gun in a vehicle. He lost his license for several years and paid a hefty fine.

Thankfully, we have responsible citizens who are willing to get involved and do what it takes to bring game law violators like Tom to justice.

The Summer of Washi

The Summer of Washi

By Ted Morus, PGC Wildlife Educator, Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center

"WASHI!" . . . Hollered a young voice from over my shoulder. Turning, I saw a little Japanese boy with eyes rounded-wide in excitement, pointing his finger up into the sky towards the soaring bald eagle. As I watched him, he kept saying, "Washi, Washi, Washi."

Language may have been a barrier between us for the moment, but the natural world is a universal connector between cultures that enables all people from all over to relate to each other through wildlife.

Last summer, Regis Senko, the Northwest Region Information and Education Supervisor, selected me for the seasonal position of wildlife educator for the Game Commission's Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center. The position carries two specific responsibilities, overseeing the daily operation of the Center, and conducting all wildlife education programming, Thursday through Sunday, from April through the third weekend of September, which is when the Pymatuning Waterfowl Expo is held.

For all of you folks who visited the Center and bought a patch, a book, participated in a program, or asked a question, I was the fellow that you talked to. Thank you again for your purchases, donations, comments, and for your support of this wildlife and habitat conservation agency.

As wildlife educator, Washi - which is Japanese for eagle - was just one of the critters I was able to share with not just this young boy, but with the thousands of people who visited the Center.

As he and I went into the Learning Center and walked among the many wildlife display mounts of native Pennsylvania animals, he shared with me the Japanese name of each animal that he recognized, and I taught him the English names.

Bald eagles are one of the main attractions that draw the visiting or vacationing Pennsylvanian or 'out of stater' to the Center. And so, that link which that little boy had with the eagle really set the tone for the summer for me; and that is that people have a need to feel connected to nature. And to feel connected I have found that it helps greatly if they are exposed to what I refer to simply as "interesting-education." The Wildlife Center lays the framework for this to happen because it offers an attractive venue, both visually and self-interpretively; but people still need a guide to explain it all and to help inspire them to want to understand and to want to know more. That's the role of the wildlife educator. Education is the key to understanding, and also to breaking down learned misconceptions and misinformation about Pennsylvania wildlife.

I engaged in much discussion with visitors over the summer and found that the majority is very supportive of what the Game Commission does. However, not only the nonhunter, but also the hunter needs to understand more about the Game Commission's role in wildlife and habitat conservation and management. Many people view the PGC as just "the agency that is in charge of hunting." They do not realize the complexity of the agency in regard to its role in wildlife population management and restoration, and habitat development and maintenance. My role was to educate and inform, and in doing so, I experienced many memorable events.

Besides myself, visitors to the Center were met by PGC volunteers Betsy Ceremuga and Glenn Clark. Betsy had been volunteering for the previous six years, and was a familiar face to many returning visitors. Glenn brought with him close to 50 years' experience as a PA Hunter-Trapper Education instructor. My sons Wyatt and Noah also helped out, and our grounds caretaker Ed Stevenson answered countless questions daily as he worked about the property outside.

Daily we would come into conversation where we would be called upon to instruct and educate.

Some questions were fairly simple to answer and dealt with explaining a certain animal's habitat, lifecycle or feeding habits.

Answering other questions, we needed to explain to people that what they had heard about the Game Commission was simply not so. The three top reoccurring misnomers from people were: "I heard that the Pennsylvania Game Commission is reestablishing the Mountain Lion." Second was, "I heard that the Game Commission released coyotes years ago in Pennsylvania to lower the fawn population because the car insurance companies pressured them." And, third, was, "I heard that New York State released timber wolves to reduce their fawn population, and the wolves have now come into Pennsylvania and are killing our deer population."

At least once a week, every week, we were asked at least one of these questions. The questions were always referred to me, and my response was always the same, "No. That is not true." While people do legally and illegally transport different animals across state borders and, yes, there is always the possibility that one could escape or be illegally released, the Game Commission has done none of these things."

Years ago I worked with mountain lions and timber wolves at Zoo America in Hershey, and I found that their instincts are such that you would not want them prowling around anywhere in such a widely populated state as Pennsylvania. And while the PGC is all about enhancing wildlife, releasing animals such as the mountain lion and timber wolf is not something that they have any intentions of doing. (Trying to convince some people about that can be a whole other story, though, sometimes.) Let it be known, however, that the Game Commission is an agency that truly is more than willing to follow-up on any potential sighting that supports reliable evidence; after all, we live in a world where people participate in illegal activities, hence the Game Commission is also an agency of law enforcement and investigation.

Refuting and correcting exaggerated and unsupportive claims is only one small fraction that is dealt with at the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center. For the most part, welcoming visitors and sharing with them this beautiful facility and attractive educational displays was a daily joy that I will never forget.

I quickly came to realize that the Center is located in an area that is considered a destination of national and international interest. I had conversations with people from 18 states, and international visitors from not only Japan, but also from Tanzania, China, Germany, Canada, Newfoundland, France, Italy, Venezuela and Australia.

School districts from Erie, Crawford, Venango and Mercer counties, and from Ashtabula and Trumbull counties in Ohio, scheduled with me for wildlife education tours and programs. Over a thousand children and adults attending these programs learned about the different mammals in Penn's Woods, the bird's of prey and songbirds, and about the many species of waterfowl that frequent this area. Game laws and seasons were reviewed, and on-site local habitats were observed and analyzed for similarities and differences.

One particular program that I had was with a kindergarten group; as I was sharing with them some pass-around nature objects, a very young fawn strolled out of the woods, came within 5 feet of the children, and then circled back into the woods and out of sight. Needless to say, anything that I had to offer them there after was of little interest to them, as some got up and ran over to the wood-line and tried to coax the fawn to come back.

One weekend a young black bear passed through the property. Recently forced by its mom to leave and head out on its own, it caused quite a stir among the visitors as it lumbered by. People were really surprised to find out that bear can be found in this part of the state. Throughout the summer I received a fair number of calls from area residents within a 15-mile radius of the Center who had encountered a bear on their property. In some instances it was the same bear passing from place to place, however there were at least three to four different bear sightings around the Pymatuning region at any one time in different locations. One morning a fellow called from the Jamestown area.

He had a bear in his barn, eating out of his horses' grain bin. He called just to report the sighting, being more amused over the ordeal than concerned. He was one of many callers who understood that bears were not in the area to attack anyone, but just to get some food and then move on in search of a place to make a home.

Some callers though were frantic and terrified, in fear of their very lives. Reassuring these folks that all would be fine was a challenge; but once callers learned the truth about Pennsylvania black bear habits and intentions, most of them would calm down and just wait until the bear would leave during the coming night's cover. I never had a call from the same person twice, as the bear were just passing through.

Other conversations concerned skunk and groundhog removals from under outbuildings, to bat colonies in residential attics. I would receive calls for dead-deer pick up, sickly looking raccoons that were running around in circles, robins that wouldn't stop pecking at living room windows, injured geese and dogs running loose. One Sunday morning I even had a woman call me to say that the shower over at the state park campground would not shut off, and asked me if I could look through the telephone book and call out a plumber to take care of it.

Fortunately when it comes to the public needing information, the Game Commission puts out multitudes of pamphlets on just about every subject in regard to wildlife education and concerns; all obtainable through the agency website, or by visiting a regional office.

The Summer of Washi was a summer to take deeply into one's heart. Over 27,000 people visited the Pymatuning Wildlife Learning Center during the season. They traveled here for various reasons, to camp, fish, hunt, sightsee and share quiet family time away from the commercialization that the peaceful Pymatuning region spares them from. They came to relax, to enjoy and to find that certain solitude that only seeing majestic eagles flying overhead can bring. They heard the mesmerizing honking of flights of geese; saw picturesque sunrises over placid, early morning waters to the east, and watched the awesome red-evening sunsets on the horizon to the west.

As this coming season begins afresh, plan to come and experience what the Pennsylvania Game Commission has to offer in the Pymatuning region. One of just a few such professionally designed wildlife interpretative centers and grounds of its kind in the State, it offers so much, and there is no-charge to park or visit. It's a perfect family destination, with interactive fun and educational displays for the adult as well as the child.

Banding Ducks

Banding Ducks

By Lori D. Richardson, PGC Wildlife Education Specialist

FOR ABOUT SIX WEEKS at the end of each summer, wildlife biologists all across North America trap and band waterfowl as part of the North American Bird Banding Program, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Geological Service (USGS) and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Bird banding is important for wildlife research and management. By being able to identify individual birds, scientists are able to study a species' dispersal and migration, behavior and social structure, life-span, survival rate, reproductive success and population growth. The information attained through the banding program is fundamental to managing waterfowl species.

This past summer, more than 20 Game Commission staff and many dedicated volunteers operated 21 duck banding stations statewide, working long hours and often seven days a week until the job was done.

Staff at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area in the Southeast have been banding migrating waterfowl since the 1970s. This past year, PGC wildlife biologist Jack Gilbert and PGC wildlife management supervisor John Morgan set and checked traps from August 6 until September 14, relaxing only on Sundays. They used 10 traps: eight mobile units and two permanent set ups, and to run the traps took four to five hours, each morning and again each evening. On Saturday evenings the portable traps were pulled and the permanent traps were closed.

The birds banded at Middle Creek are part of the Atlantic Flyway - the migration highway for birds on the East Coast. The information collected about each banded bird and about each band that is recovered (either by harvest, recapture or because the bird was found dead) is stored in a USGS database at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland.

HOW ARE THEY TRAPPING DUCKS?

Each trap is baited with some sort of grain, most often whole corn. Where carp make a point of disturbing the trap to get to the corn, other grains have been substituted, some of which have a tendency to float and are, therefore, not as tempting to the carp. Both the permanent traps and the portable traps are in locations frequented by dabbling ducks.

The traps are such that the ducks don't have too much difficulty finding a way in to get to the bait, but finding a way out is a different story. Traps often have a tube-shaped wire mesh entrance that the ducks can squeeze through to enter but can't push the raw wire ends apart to get back out.

PGC staff and volunteers check traps at least once a day, sometimes twice. They drive from trap to trap and approach each one in waders with large nets and burlap sacks. The top of the trap is opened watchfully, and any captured birds are carefully secured using nets and then placed in the burlap sacks. Then the birds are brought to the edge of the water or the truck tailgate for processing.

WHAT DO THEY DO WITH DUCKS THEY CATCH?

The species, age and sex of each duck is determined and recorded. Each duck is then banded with a small metal federal bird band engraved with a unique ID number and a 1-800 number for reporting band recoveries. The birds are then released back into the same pond where they were caught.

HOW MANY DUCKS ARE CAUGHT?

This past summer at Middle Creek, 580 ducks were banded. Statewide, more than 2,900 were banded, including mallards, wood ducks, black ducks, blue- and green-winged teal, northern pintails, mallard/black duck hybrids and a hooded merganser. See the included tables for details.

Banding totals this past summer were down 25 percent from the previous summer and 28 percent from the past 18-year average. The decline could be the result of continued reductions in trapping efforts due to budgetary constraints, to drought and/or to having fewer mallards and black ducks statewide.

WHAT IF A CAPTURED DUCK IS ALREADY BANDED?

If a duck is a recapture - a duck that has already been banded - the band number is recorded, in addition to the species, age and sex. Recaptures are reported to the USGS, just like all other band recoveries.

Most of the recaptures at Middle Creek are birds that had been previously banded at Middle Creek but, on August 31, 2004, Gilbert trapped a banded hen mallard. When he reported the band he was surprised to learn that the duck had been banded as an adult on August 19, 2002, about 50 miles northwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

When the North American Bird Banding Program was just getting started, in 1920, recovered bands could be reported by writing to an address inscribed on the band. The transition to the use of bands engraved with the 1-800 number, and later a web address, began in 1996 with the intent of increasing reporting rates.

With these new reporting methods, reporting rates have more than doubled. Though the reporting rate study is ongoing, results suggest that, in the Atlantic Flyway, approximately 73 percent of bands recovered on mallards, wood ducks and resident Canada geese are reported, while 55 percent are reported for recovered black ducks and migratory Canada geese.

AVIAN INFLUENZA - DON'T PANIC

In addition to banding the birds they trap, for the past two years Gilbert and Morgan - along with biologists all across North America - have also been gathering samples for avian influenza testing. The PGC is collecting the samples as part of an international AI surveillance effort.

Using small cotton swabs, biologists collect cloacal and oropharyngeal samples. The swabs are secured in glass vials containing a growth medium solution, labeled with barcodes provided by the USDA, Wildlife Services division and packed in blue ice along with the data sheets before being overnighted to the Animal Diagnostic Lab at Penn State for initial screening. This past summer the USDA Wildlife Services division gave Middle Creek a test sample quota of 30 dabbling ducks.

As of the time this went to print -the end of January - the USDA had not detected any sign of the high-path AI virus dangerous to humans in North America. USDA has been testing samples from both live waterfowl and dead birds of all types, as well as hunter-killed waterfowl, and the water sources where migratory birds congregate. In 2006, more than 152,000 samples from U.S. and Canadian wild birds tested negative. More than 74,000 samples gathered in 2007 have tested negative so far, more than 600 of which are from Pennsylvania. Test results are updated daily at <http://wildlifedisease.nbii.gov/ai>.

For more information on Avian Influenza visit www.pgc.state.pa.us, click the "Wildlife Diseases" quick click in the top right column, then click "[Avian Influenza](#)."

The Barn Poachers

The Barn Poachers

By LMO Jon Zuck

My right hand slid to my holster, ready for the worst. "Let me see your hands! Get your hands up!" I shouted to . . .

"WHAT'S THAT GUY doing?" I asked my partner, Deputy Ed Mills. We were patrolling on the morning of the second day of the 2006 firearm deer season when we spied a hunter in a field. The hunter, about 150 yards away, was kneeling by a 4-wheeler, and was preoccupied with something in the tall grass. I immediately grabbed my binoculars on the console beside me and glassed the field.

"He's field-dressing a deer," I told Ed, after seeing the legs and white belly of a deer. "Let's wait here until he loads the deer on the ATV and check to make sure the deer is tagged."

There was an old red wooden barn a short distance from the hunter's location and I had a hunch that was where he would take his deer. Once he was finished field-dressing the deer, he heaved it onto the rear of the ATV and drove away from us and toward the barn.

I eased the truck into gear, pulled onto the road and headed toward the barn. The hunter's path through the field paralleled the road, and I surmised that if the hunter hadn't already known we were around, he did then, as less than 100 yards of open terrain separated us. We turned onto the gravel lane and followed it to the rear of the barn where I thought we would find our man. Stopping the truck short of the rear of the barn, we cautiously walked the remainder of the distance.

Expecting to see a hunter with a deer, to our surprise the only thing we saw when we rounded the corner was a rifle propped against the side of the barn near an open door. I thought the hunter may have placed it there after getting off the ATV and going inside the barn. I inspected the rifle and found that the .270 Winchester was loaded and, for safety reasons, I unloaded it. Deputy Mills located the ATV parked by the side of the barn, and with an untagged doe lying on the rack.

"Hello, Officer Zuck of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Is there anyone here?" I asked. I scanned the barn's dimly lit interior through the open doorway. Hanging inside were five skinned, headless deer carcasses. I spied a few sets of antlers that appeared to have been removed from freshly killed bucks. After seeing what was inside and outside the barn, I had an inkling we were looking for multiple hunters rather than just the individual on the 4-wheeler. "I'm going to go to the house. Perhaps the guys we need to talk to are there," I informed Ed. "You stay here and watch the barn."

As I approached the side porch of the farmhouse I noticed another rifle leaning against the side of the house. It, too, was a loaded .270. After getting no response to my knocks on the door, I unloaded that rifle.

Frustration was beginning to set in because I knew the people we were looking for were hiding from us. In an attempt to coax our "hide and seekers" into coming out, I instructed Ed to drive our truck off the property and go to a location that was not visible from the barn or house. I would hide somewhere to catch the crew as they came out.

As Ed pulled out of the driveway I backed up against an exterior wall of the milk house, where I had a view of the barn and the house, and began my wait. Except for hearing distant shots and watching a group of deer trot across a nearby field, the hour-long watch produced nothing. I dialed Ed on my cell phone and told him to return to the barn to assist in collecting information and evidence to obtain a warrant to search the barn, house, vehicles and other buildings on the premises. If these guys weren't going to show themselves, we were going to conduct a thorough search. Ed documented the vehicle information while I took photographic evidence of a utility trailer, a second

ATV, and a pickup, all containing what appeared to be blood and deer hair.

It would take at least a couple hours to type up the search warrant application, submit it, and assemble the officers needed to search the property safely and efficiently. With it being the second day of deer season, I had a lot of other areas to patrol and investigations to pursue, and I didn't want to get bogged down all day with this. In an attempt to bring the investigation to a quicker conclusion, I again yelled into the doorway of the open barn and stated, "Officer Zuck of the Pennsylvania Game Commission; you have five minutes to come out."

In just a matter of seconds, noises coming from a dark corner of the barn doorway got my attention. Because we were dealing with folks who left loaded firearms around, and who had to this point refused to obey orders from a law enforcement officer, and because of the skinned deer, my right hand slid down to my holster to be ready for the worst. "Let me see your hands! Get your hands up!" I shouted.

The shadowy figures of two men emerged from behind a trailer saying, "Whoa, whoa, we don't have any guns."

I instructed the men to keep their hands where I could see them and to come outside. Once we were positive they were not armed, Deputy Mills and I began to ask them about the deer. Their drivers' licenses indicated Jack Johnson and Ted Smithko were both from Maryland. I asked Jack and Ted who shot the doe lying on the ATV. Both denied it. I again asked the question and again got the same answers. They suddenly became more talkative, however, when I explained I could charge each of them for six illegal deer. "Okay, guys, where is the hunter who did shoot these deer?" I asked.

Jack looked down at the ground, kicked some gravel and mumbled that his son-in-law from West Virginia, Bo Ridgely, shot the deer. I asked where Bo was and Jack said he didn't know, but that he would try to contact him on his cell phone.

"You might as well come out; the game warden's got us." I heard Jack grumble into his cell phone. A few seconds later a door to the stable slowly creaked open, a man dressed in camouflage rubber boots, pants and shirt walked out. It was the guy we'd seen with the deer in the field.

While taking down more information I asked the men if they had current Pennsylvania hunting licenses. I was not surprised that they did not.

Once I recorded their personal information I told them we needed to look at the deer in the barn. I instructed Jack to show me which deer he killed. He handed me two sets of antlers - a 4-point and a 5-point. Jack told me he shot both deer on opening day. Ted readily admitted to hunting on opening day, but said he did not shoot any deer. Bo reluctantly grabbed a 10-point rack from a blood stained table as well as a 6-point rack that was hanging on a saw horse and gave them to me, stating he had killed them on opening day.

"What about the doe you shot this morning?" I inquired.

"I only shot her because her jaw was broken," Bo piped up as he tried to justify his illegal activity.

"You do not have a valid antlerless deer license, therefore you are not entitled to harvest a doe, regardless if she is injured or not," I responded.

Four of the five deer hanging in the barn were claimed, that left one unaccounted for. I asked the guys again how many of the deer hanging in the barn they killed; both Bo and Jack said they each killed two.

"Two plus two equals four. There are five deer hanging here," I said. But Bo and Jack were adamant that they had collectively shot only four deer.

"Let me say this again. Two plus two equals four, but there are five deer. I want to know who shot the fifth deer."

I noticed Bo looking awfully hard at the barn floor and kicking some loose straw with his foot. "Bo, you look like you want to tell me something."

Bo asked if he could take responsibility for the unclaimed deer and I explained he could do that only if he actually shot it. After more straw kicking and staring at the planks in the barn floor, Bo confessed that his younger brother, Cory, shot a buck on opening day. I asked where the rack was and Bo relayed that Cory had the rack, but that he was working out of the area the rest of the week and would not be home until the weekend. Fortunately, Cory, the only Pennsylvania resident of the bunch, lived in the farmhouse and would be fairly easy to locate.

As we wrapped up the interviews, Deputy George Conner arrived to assist in confiscating the deer and collecting evidence. Ironically, the same guys who poached the deer helped us load the carcasses into the bed of Deputy Conner's pickup.

All four men were charged with hunting deer without the proper licenses. Bo received additional fines for hunting antlerless deer without an antlerless license and three counts of unlawful taking or possession of a deer. In addition to the license charge, Jack was charged with two counts of unlawfully killing a deer and Ted was charged with one count of aiding, abetting or conspiring to unlawfully possess deer. Cory was charged with unlawfully killing a deer in addition to his license charge. All those involved pled guilty to all charges and paid more than \$4,600 in fines and court costs. Additionally, they lost their hunting and trapping privileges for a total of seven years.

The poachers in this case were brought to justice because officers happened to be at the right place at the right time. Many times officers are dependant on information from the public not only to alert them of illegal activity, but to help the Commonwealth prosecute violators of hunting and trapping laws. Unfortunately, many choose not to report the violations.

I wish the citizens that have chosen to remain silent could have seen Deputy Conner's pickup bed stacked full of the illegal deer carcasses we confiscated that day. That is one image I will never forget, and perhaps it would change the attitudes of folks who witness violations but do not take a stand against the unlawful actions.

Although the deer in this story were not wasted, they were not harvested through legal means, and law-abiding sportsmen were, therefore, robbed of the opportunity to harvest them. How many junior hunters missed their chances to take their first deer. Instead of a happy hunter having his picture taken with a 10-point trophy, the photo is left untaken because of the actions of these greedy killers. The message is clear: Wildlife and true sportsmen suffer when poachers and other law-breakers go unpunished.

Mange in Black Bears

Mange in Black Bears

By Mark Ternent, PGC Wildlife Biologist

LAST FALL a trail-cam photograph of some sort of creature at the base of a tree in northern Pennsylvania gained widespread state, national, even international attention as the latest "big foot" sighting. Well, most certainly, the photograph was of a black bear with mange.

What causes mange? There are two types of mange that can affect bears. Demodectic mange - sometimes called red mange in domestic animals - is caused by mites that live inside hair follicles, and sarcoptic mange, which is caused by mites that burrow into the skin. Mites are microscopic bugs similar to ticks and chiggers; they are part of the Arachnid (spider) family, as they lack a multi-segmented body, antennae and wings, and have more legs than true insects.

The mites that cause demodectic mange occur naturally in all mammals, including humans. The species found on black bears is *Demodex ursi*. In most mammals, *Demodex* mites are transferred from mother to young during the first few hours of life. Once transferred, they migrate into hair follicles and remain there without causing problems for the remainder of the animal's life. However, if the animal's immunity system decreases because of malnutrition, disease, increased competition for resources or other environmental factors, *Demodex* mites can proliferate and demodectic mange develops. In dogs, some breeds have a genetic predisposition to demodectic mange, but it is unknown if a hereditary link occurs in black bears. It also is unknown if bears acquire *Demodex* mites by the typical mother-to-young pathway, or by some other route.

Demodectic mange may appear as dry and scaly skin around the eyes and down the muzzle, or in severe cases, as swollen, hairless and thickened skin. Mild cases of demodectic mange may correct themselves if the animal's immune system returns to normal. For example, biologists visiting black bears in dens during the winter occasionally see dry scaly skin around the eyes and muzzle. Often, when these bears are handled again during the summer, the symptoms are gone. The presumption is that physiological stresses related to hibernation temporarily allowed the mild symptoms to develop.

Unlike *Demodex* mites, which live in hair follicles, the mites that cause sarcoptic mange burrow into the skin. The primary species is *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Although classified as one species, several varieties of *Sarcoptes scabiei* exist; they look identical but live on different hosts. That is, the variety of *Sarcoptes* found on bears is different from the variety found on dogs. *Sarcoptes* varieties usually have a low degree of cross infectivity, meaning that the dog variety will typically not cause mange in bears and vice versa. Another burrowing mite, which is found exclusively on bears, is *Ursicoptes americanus*. Both species, *Sarcoptes* and *Ursicoptes*, have been found on bears in Pennsylvania.

When *Sarcoptes* or *Ursicoptes* mites burrow into the skin, they create tunnels by ingesting cells or cutting tissue. They also produce secretions and deposit foreign materials such as their molted skin and eggs as well as dead mites. Although their burrowing damages the skin, mange also occurs because the body develops an allergic reaction to the secretions and foreign materials. The allergy causes intense itching, and repeated itching damages the skin, leading to bacterial infections, hair loss, and skin discoloration, thickening and crusting.

Hair loss and skin debilitation may appear first on the face, elbows, ears or lower legs and then move up the legs and to the rear with the ridge of the back affected last. Bears with severe symptoms become emaciated, dehydrated, and eventually die from infection or starvation. Studies have reported that some animals that survive a mite infestation develop partial immunity to subsequent outbreaks, but it is unknown if such an immunity develops in black bears. Mite infestations can be treated with drugs that kill parasites. However, animals with large infestations require multiple treatments because mites reappear from eggs, which are not destroyed by the drugs. The Game Commission currently treats captured bears with mild to moderate mange symptoms, but typically

euthanizes those with severe symptoms.

HOW DO BEARS GET MITES?

Mites can be transferred directly from animal to animal because the larvae and nymph stages of mites occasionally wander on the skin surface. Mites also can survive off of an animal, allowing them to be indirectly transferred through the environment. For example, researchers have documented that dens previously occupied by infected foxes can transfer mites to new foxes. The route of infection in bears is not clearly understood because bears are typically solitary (so there is minimal animal-to-animal contact) and rarely reuse nests or dens. However, any activity that brings bears into close contact with each other could facilitate the transfer of mites, thus, artificial feeding, which congregates wildlife, is discouraged.

HOW IS MANGE DIAGNOSED?

In domestic animals, treatment for mange may be started if hair-loss or skin symptoms are present, but verifying the presence of mites confirms the diagnosis. Mites can be detected by scraping or collecting skin and examining it under a microscope. However, even in animals that do have mange, mites may not be detected because they are burrowed deep in the skin or located somewhere other than where the skin sample was taken. In some cases, mange may be caused by a persisting allergic reaction even when very few mites remain on the animal. Tests that measure for allergic responses in blood are now available, but their use on bears has not been tested.

IS MANGE DANGEROUS TO PEOPLE?

Humans and pets can acquire *Sarcoptes* mites from bears, but the resulting infection is typically short-lived. Small bumps that itch intensely may develop on exposed skin or along areas constricted by clothing, such as the waistline, but mites do not burrow extensively and symptoms disappear within a few weeks in individuals with normal immune systems. Hunters are advised to not eat bears with moderate to severe symptoms, and are so advised when they bring their animals to a check station. Sightings of bears with severe mange should be reported to the nearest Game Commission office.

IS MANGE IMPACTING PENNSYLVANIA'S BEAR POPULATIONS?

Sarcoptic mange occurs worldwide in over 100 species of domestic and wild animals. Some wildlife species experience only isolated cases of mange, whereas others, such as foxes and coyotes, can have large outbreaks that lead to population declines. Sarcoptic mange is not presently believed to impact Pennsylvania bear populations, but it may affect local bear densities.

Unfortunately, we do not have current estimates on how many bears die annually from mange, or if mortality is greater for a particular sex or age group. Each year in Pennsylvania between 15 and 20 bears are discovered dead or are euthanized with severe mange symptoms, and another 20 or more are trapped and released that have mild to moderate symptoms.

At present, there are approximately 300 records in the Game Commission's black bear capture/mortality database that mention "mange," and they occur in about one-third of the primary bear range. However, there appears to be an increase in both the number of reports recorded each year and the number of townships affected. With the exception of Pennsylvania and Florida, very few eastern states report more than an occasional observation of mange in bears. Consequently, little research has been done.

IS THE PGC STUDYING MANGE IN BEARS?

In 1996, the Game Commission collected skin samples from bears during the hunting season to test for the prevalence of mites that cause mange. *Sarcoptes* and/or *Ursicopes* were found on 1.6 percent of the bears harvested. This percentage is considered a minimum value because mites are notoriously difficult to detect by randomly sampling skin.

In 2007, the Game Commission sampled bears at nine check stations to measure the prevalence of infected animals. This time, however, staff collected blood instead of skin. New methods of testing can detect the presence of a mite infestation with a blood test. A similar process was used in 1993 to

study the prevalence of toxoplasmosis in Pennsylvania black bears. This data should provide a better estimate of the prevalence and distribution of mange in Pennsylvania black bears.

The Game Commission will be testing the blood samples for other diseases as well, thereby investigating possible links between mange and other illnesses that may promote mange.