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# Life & Times of the Whitetail Biologist

#### Deer Season from the other end of the gun

It HAS TAKEN 350 days, but deer season in finally here. If you are one of Pennsylvania's deer hunters, the excitement and anticipation on the weekend after Thanksgiving is almost tangible. If you are a Game Commission biologist or any other person assigned to a deer aging team, those aren't exactly the words you'd use.

For us, seven of the next 15 days will be spent aging hundreds of deer heads. It takes a small army to collect deer harvest data. Deer & Elk Section biologists coordinate the effort, and are accompanied by more than 10 percent of the agency staffers. Together we charge the hill...of deer heads.

Meat processors across the commonwealth save mountains of heads, and soldiers in our biologial army record age, sex and license information for thousands of these deer each year. These data are used to estimate harvests and monitor population trends. Annual reports detail how many males and females were checked, how they were dispersed amoung the age classes, how many were checked and how many were reported harvested.

But, the annual reprots lack the true experience. Although the deer-aging army is well-trained for battle--having passed a deer aging exam with a 95 percent or higher, having become familiar with datasheets and equipment, and being stocked with supplies -- little can prepare a person for the sights, sounds and smells of deer aging--think Dirty Jobs, not Animal Planet.

The sights: 50-gallon drums overflowing with deer heads, brain matter, bulging eyeballs, blood clots, and an indescribable soupy red mix at the bottom of the barrel. The sounds: the telltale thud of 10-pound deer head hitting the ground, the wicking of the knife as it slices through the cheek to reveal the lower jaw, the pop of the jaw with the twist of the spreader. The smell: let's just say a strong stomach is a requirement. Although green is a term used to describe someone with little real-world experience, it is also the color of some novice deer agers. That's the sight picture from the biologist's end of the gun.

By J.T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

#### **Deer Wrestlers**

WHEN I ASKED Clayton Lutz — crew leader of four bio aides gathering data for one of the Game Commission's deer research projects — to tell me about deer trapping, a big grin spread across his face, "Deer trapping is fun!

"An amazing amount of time, preparation, planning and equipment go into trapping; that's what makes trapping a deer so rewarding. We have to scout for places to trap, acquire permission to trap there, make educated guesses about good locations, set a trap, bait the trap, and check it daily, all in hopes of being successful."

The list of equipment is huge: there are 4WD trucks to traverse snowy, icy trails and, of course, there are traps, trailers to transport the traps, and bait for the traps. There are also headlamps and batteries to keep them lit; night-vision goggles and two-way radios (more batteries); trail cameras (batteries); nets, poles, charges and remote triggers (seems like every piece of equipment takes a different type of battery); sledge hammers and post hole diggers; winches and chains for getting vehicles unstuck; the can't-go-a-day-without-using-it Leatherman tool; spare rope and extra pieces of wire for on-the-spot repairs; blinds and hand warmers for net sits.

Then, once a deer has been trapped, there are clipboards, pencils and data sheets, blindfolds, ear punches, antibiotics, ear tags and reward tags, radio and GPS and satellite collars, and the appropriate tools for securing them and, later, the appropriate receivers and antennae for tracking them, compasses . . .

During the 2008-09 winter, four teams captured deer across the state, one each in WMU 2D north of Pittsburgh, WMU 2G in the Northcentral Region, WMU 3C in the northeast, and the crew I joined for two days in WMU 4B, near SGL 88 and Tuscarora State Forest, in the southcentral part of the state.

Trapping begins in mid-January, the day after the last day of flintlock deer season, and runs until early April, when spring green up begins, providing deer with so many food options they aren't as enticed by bait. This year the crews got a bit of a late start, because of the governor's hiring freeze but, by February 25, when I joined them, the 4B team had 16 Clover traps in operation and had already trapped 68 deer. By the end of the season, they had trapped and tagged 175 deer and processed 23 recaptures — deer that had already been trapped and tagged.

This team had 30 radio collars and was able to deploy 25 of them, on an almost even mix of males and females, both adults and juveniles. Each collar transmits a radio signal that can be picked up by a receiver. A location for the animal wearing the collar can be inferred by recording the direction from which the signal is being received from various vantage points. The collars keep sending out a signal until the battery wears out, which can take years. Some of the deer collared in 2005 still have working radio collars.

The 4B team also put four GPS collars on two adult does, one juvenile doe and one adult buck. These units will collect and store the GPS coordinates for the deer's location once a day during most of the year, and once every hour beginning in September and continuing through mid-January. The team was able to disperse these collars throughout WMU 4B, three on Game Lands and one on a state park. After the hunting seasons, Game Commission staff will remotely detonate a charge to detach the GPS collars from the deer. Once the collar has been retrieved, the location data will be downloaded from the collar and analyzed.

In addition to the radio and GPS collars, one satellite collar was put on an adult doe on Game Lands. This collar will send location information to satellites orbiting the earth, which will trigger emails sent directly to agency biologists about the deer's location. The collar records a location once a day until September and then every hour. The collar will last about a year and is expected to drop off the deer in January 2010. There are currently 84 deer with various types of collars "on air" in 4B that biologists are keeping tabs on.

The Game Commission captures deer in three ways: rocket nets, drop nets and Clover traps. Rocket net sets involve a long line of bait placed near several rockets that are attached to a 60- by 40-foot net. When several deer are near the bait with their heads down, a remote trigger ignites the charges and the rockets fire, pulling the net over the deer and capturing them.

Drop nets are suspended on poles and bait is placed under the center of the net. When several deer are under the net, a remote trigger releases cables holding the net up, and it falls to capture the deer.

Both net types require bio aides to sit on site while the net is set, usually at night, and release the trigger IF the right circumstances occur. This can be time consuming and uncomfortable, to say the least, because weather conditions that time of year often bring snow and ice, and temperatures regularly dip below freezing after the sun sets.

Clover traps allow biologists to set the trap, leave and check traps the next morning; they are, more or less, a metal cage frame with nylon netting. They are placed in secluded areas absent of human activity and disturbances, and where there is evidence of deer activity. They are usually placed near thick cover where captured deer will, presumably, feel safe.

Bait is placed at the back end of each trap, farthest from the open door. Sometimes the bait is drizzled with molasses as an added incentive, and a short trail of corn is trickled from the bait pile to just outside the trap entrance as a way of luring deer into the trap. A trip wire is set near the bait, and when a deer paws at the bait or lowers its head to eat, it trips the wire and the door falls shut behind it, trapping the deer inside.

Captured deer usually settle quickly, consuming the rest of the bait throughout the night and bedding down, but the trap is staked to the ground to prevent it from flipping, if they struggle. As the trap design evolved, critter bars were installed a few inches above the ground all around the trap to allow squirrels and rabbits and such to enter the trap and get to the bait without chewing through the nylon netting, thus creating weak spots in the trap and allowing escapes. The critter bars have really cut down on repairs and kept the integrity of the capture design.

Checking traps each morning is a 2-person job. A duo sets out to drive the trapline along routes that are often precariously steep, snow covered and icy. When the team approaches a trap, both members jump out of the truck and head toward the trap. If the trap door is still up, one checks to see if the bait needs to be replenished, while the other hangs back away from the trap. The less the site is disturbed, the better.

Often, if the trap isn't within eyeshot and, if there is a capture, when they jump out of the truck they can hear the cage jingling as the deer (excited by the sound of the truck) moves around within it. Both bio aides spring into action, racing to the trap, one carrying a "capture kit" of tools, the other revved up to enter the trap and attempt to bring the deer to the ground. One person lifts the door enough to squeeze into the trap, maneuvers on top of the deer and, in a bear hug-type fashion, pulls the deer's front legs toward its body and uses the deer's own body weight to bring it to the ground. Sometimes the bio aides take quite a beating.

The other bio aide makes sure the door shuts behind the first one, to prevent an escape, and readies the equipment. Once the deer is down, a sock-like blindfold is placed over its eyes to calm it. If the deer has already been tagged, its information is recorded quickly as a recapture and it is maneuvered to face the door and released, its white tail bounding through the woods in a frenzied getaway. If the deer has not been captured before, reward tags will be secured in each ear before it is released.

Information about the ear tags and sex and age of the deer will be recorded, along with the trap number, date, time and weather conditions. This team has been saving the collars for deer captured in net sets, where deer are often immobilized with drugs and the team has more time to work.

Hearts pounding, the team then moves on to the next trap. Sometimes they take turns being the "deer wrestler." Sometimes the run is over quickly without any captures. Sometimes they'll capture a double — two deer in the same trap at the same time — that can be really exhilarating. Sometimes the same deer is captured in the same trap more than once; so the experience of getting caught can't be all that bad. But, always, as Amanda Horning says of the anticipation and excitement of running the trapline, "My heart does that flutter thing each time we approach a trap."

The telemetry data from this study will be used to monitor deer movements (particularly during hunting seasons), survival, causes of mortality, and harvest rates. Deer captured for this study are part of the Game Commission's evaluation of the 5-day antlered only/7-day antlered and antlerless firearms season in WMUs 2D, 2G, 3C and 4B. This research will continue through 2012.

For more information on the Game Commission's deer management program and to see a short video on Clover trapping, visit the Deer Program pages at www.pgc.state.pa.us.

By Lori D. Richardson, PGC Wildlife Education Specialist

# On the Road Again

THREE PGC vehicles motored down an Allegheny National Forest Road. Several miles in, two pulled off while the third went another mile before driving back an old logging road to hide and wait. Several WCOs and I exited the first two vehicles and quickly unloaded our cargo before anybody showed up.

I grabbed my old Army rucksack, which held my portable radio, white camouflage clothing, a notepad, remote control and several other pieces of equipment, and ran up the steep roadside embankment. I found a large oak tree where I could drop off my equipment, and then ran back down the hill. By that time LMO Rich Cramer, WCO Frank Leichtenberger and Deputy Chuck Worley had the other equipment set up.

Rich and I double-checked and felt confident the set-up would work. The three of them then made a quick retreat to their preplanned hiding spots before anyone came down the road. I backtracked to the big oak and prepared myself for the next few hours.

I cleared a small spot of deep snow and laid down a thick moving pad. I put on my insulated coat then a white parka over top. I put the batteries into the remote control and manipulated a few of the levers. Down through the woods I could see the head of a deer move. Good, I thought. Everything was ready to go.

It was late Friday afternoon during the first week of the firearm deer season and we were running a decoy operation on a remote road in my district. It seemed everything was in place and all we had to do was wait.

We had about three hours of daylight remaining, and I was glad we had gotten set up without encountering anyone driving by. If word got out we were there, we may have had a boring afternoon.

Shortly after settling in I heard a vehicle approach. My heart rate climbed and I prepared myself to react. The truck passed without so much as a show of brake lights, though. By the equipment in the truck bed, I figured the driver was tending oil wells. I took a couple deep breaths and my heart rate settled.

It started to snow and I pulled my knit cap down over my head and flipped up my collar. I hadn't been there long and wasn't cold and that's how I wanted to keep it.

I saw some movement off to my right and noticed a real deer approaching my direction. With my binoculars I saw it was a mature doe, and as quickly as it appeared, it was gone. Historically, I've brought bad luck to decoy operations. During my field training with Cambria County WCO Shawn Harshaw, a deputy and I sat watching the decoy when a car slowly drove by. I knew they were roadhunting and was waiting for the shot, but the vehicle crept by without the passengers ever seeing the decoy.

I radioed to the chase vehicle that nothing happened. Within minutes I heard a shot come from the direction of the chase vehicle. "We got them," another deputy said over the radio. The occupants of the vehicle that had just passed me drove up the road and shot at a live deer standing near the deputy in the chase car. Oh, well, I thought, at least somebody caught them.

I participated in several other operations in different counties, but they were all quiet. I honestly believed I was bad luck to any and all decoy operations I participated in. In one

instance, an LMO told me after we had sat for hours that he had never before run a decoy operation without catching somebody.

So there I sat, huddled next to the oak tree, wondering if my luck would change. My heart rate stopped racing after the third or fourth time the oil truck passed. But just like hunting, things changed quickly.

I heard the tires crunching in the snow-packed road, and moments later I saw a flicker of the chrome grill through the trees. Before I knew it, a truck was in front of me and both the driver and passenger — both middle-aged men — emerged from the cab.

I watched the passenger exit, but could only see the barrel of his rifle. He held the firearm close to his body, and I could tell from his movements he was loading it.

The driver's side door was facing me and I saw everything he did. He had his gun in his left hand and quickly approached the tailgate area of his truck. But before he got there, the passenger shot. The driver slammed his magazine in and closed the action. As he shouldered his gun, the passenger shot again. The driver quickly followed suit.

Three shots were good enough for me. I stood up, removed my white parka and quilted coat. Underneath I had on my official green uniform jacket and fluorescent orange vest, and I quickly donned my orange ball cap displaying an embroidered WCO badge.

A couple more shots rang out before I could get to them, and as I approached I could tell the men were confused about why the deer hadn't fallen. The two eventually felt my presence and turned around: They knew they had been caught.

I radioed LMO Cramer, and he showed up and quickly escorted them away to write their citations.

I climbed the hill again and quickly put on my warm coat and white camo. Within an hour a second vehicle showed and stopped as abruptly as it appeared. The lone driver exited and looped around to the passenger's side near the rear bumper. He loaded his gun as he calmly took a knee and squeezed the trigger. He worked the bolt without hesitation and fired another shot. Before I could stop him he fired a third shot. This time he opened the action and looked at the deer and then at his gun as if something was wrong.

As I approached he looked in my direction, and I asked him if there was any legal reason he was shooting from the roadway. "There are deer down there," he answered.

The reason his deer hadn't fallen to his barrage of bullets finally sunk in as my presence as an officer was absorbed.

We had several other vehicles pass as light faded. The occupants of one vehicle saw the decoy and almost came to a stop, but continued on for some reason.

With light about gone I called off the detail. As I approached the road, the vehicle returned and the occupants had a look of disbelief and relief as they drove by, knowing they had almost made an error in judgment.

Decoy operations play an important role in curbing roadhunting and jacklighting activities. If you know an area receiving a large amount of these unlawful activities, please don't hesitate to call your region office.

# What line of work are you in?

IT'S PRETTY common when I meet new people to be asked this question. When I answer, "wildlife biologist," I'm met with looks of curiosity, envy or fascination. My mother still shows me off like a circus oddity. Most of my colleagues are also wildlife biologists, making it the norm in my world.

This profession seems to capture the imagination; I am still fascinated by it. Not everybody has the opportunity to wrestle deer, radio-collar elk calves, visit a sow and her cubs in the den, fly over mountains and valleys chasing bats, or be an integral part of a species management program.

But being a wildlife biologist isn't all Jeff Corwin and Animal Planet. TV frequently covers only the "fun" stuff, which is edited neatly into an hour, often omitting equipment failures, weather issues and uncooperative wildlife. Reality isn't always so exciting; there are endless reports to write, mountains of paperwork to complete, and barrels of smelly deer heads to collect data from.

In an attempt to show you "real world" biology and biologists, *The Life and Times of the Whitetail Biologist* will follow the scientists who follow this graceful ungulate. For the next year, you will have a front row seat to all the mundane and exciting things biologists of the Game Commission's Deer & Elk Section do.

The work of a biologist changes seasonally and involves what some might consider unique tasks. From being a slave to the computer, to not remembering what your office looks like because you haven't seen it in weeks. And let's not forget the most dreaded aspect of every job – the meetings. Yes, biologists must endure them, too. And while the "job" of wildlife biologist isn't quite what I expected, I can't imagine doing anything else – except maybe winning the lottery and doing fun field work (Animal Planet-type stuff) the rest of my life.

So let's explore the adventures of the wildlife biologist. Perhaps it won't be what you expected, either!

By J.T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

# The Pymatuning Monarch

AS THE BIG BUCK trotted through the field down into the adjoining swamp, his nose to the ground, he was on a mission to find the doe in estrus he'd been tracking. A mature buck's tenacity for life is surpassed only by his drive to breed during the rut, which can be attested to by many a hunter.

It was the end of October 2007, and this big buck, the Pymatuning Monarch, was in full rut. His neck seemed to be an extension of his massive chest that terminated under his chin. The Monarch's normally razor sharp caution was not as acute as it usually was when approaching the roadway. The overwhelming scent of the doe was driving him on. The doe the Monarch was following had crossed the road at this same location, just minutes earlier, with her twin fawns.

Seventeen-year-old Emily was driving her father's pickup, and as she approached the curve in the road, she started to slow down. She knew the curve was difficult to see around, because the trees and brush grew right up to the road edge. In a flash, as Emily started around the bend, the Monarch leaped out of the woods, his outstretched body directly in Emily's path. Emily braked hard and thought she was going to narrowly miss the buck, but the driver's side headlight brushed the deer's left hindquarter, about three inches up from his tail. The Monarch was knocked down by the impact, but instantly gathered himself up and dove into the high, thick brush-choked woodlot on the opposite side of the road. Emily, shaken and surprised, pulled over to inspect her father's pickup for signs of damage and to gather her wits. The only noticeable trace of the deer was a few hairs stuck between the driver's side headlight and the hood. Emily was shaken but otherwise okay, and much to her surprise, so was her father's truck.

As the Monarch proceeded through the woodlot, about 100 yards wide, he approached Ball Road, which crosses into the Controlled Goose Hunting Area on the Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area. The Monarch was still following the exact path the doe had taken just minutes before.

Luke and Roger were slowly driving up Ball Road. They were scouting for an area to hunt geese later on in the afternoon and had just noticed three deer, a doe and two yearlings, cross the road ahead of them, about 300 yards away. They then heard a vehicle's tires screeching on the paved road just to their west. As they continued driving on, they noticed a large buck step out onto the dirt road where the other three deer had just crossed. The buck's gait was deliberate and labored as he walked, head down, with a slight limp, across the road and into a cornfield on the Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area.

The pair couldn't believe the size of the deer standing in the corn, his rack swiveling back and forth. Before either of them could say a word, a pack of three feral dogs appeared out of nowhere, two black ones resembling Labradors and one white mix that resembled a pit bull. The men watched in shock as the dogs attacked the wounded buck. Unable to run, the buck would turn and face each dog with its heavy rack. As Luke and Roger sped up to the scene, the dogs took flight, and the buck just stood in the corn, looking back at the men. Luke and Roger got out of their car and stood a mere 30 steps away, mesmerized at the size of the rack.

I was at the Pymatuning Administration Building at 11 a.m., completing citations, when I heard a knock at the door. The two hunters introduced themselves and then proceeded to tell me about the big buck. Their words were coming so fast I had to ask them twice to tell me the exact location of this buck, and then I just finally asked them if they could show me.

Upon arriving at the location, I parked my truck as Luke and Roger both pointed to the buck that was still standing in the cornfield. Luke and Roger said that they normally bow hunt for deer at this time of year, but had left their bows and arrows at home this day to hunt geese. I asked if they would park their vehicle a ways down the road while I checked out the buck.

Had I not known this buck was in the cornfield a scant 10 feet away, he would have gone totally unnoticed; his massive rack especially blended into the cornstalks. I was astounded by the size of his

rack, at least 13 points and brow tines that jutted up like broom handles.

The buck had obviously been sparring with other bucks, as a patch of hair was missing from the top of his head, and he heaved with each breath. I noticed that his left hindquarter, just in front of his tail, had a small amount of blood on it. Between me and the buck, about 20 feet, were patches of his hair from the fight with the dogs.

LMO Jerry Bish and I had seen these dogs running wild in the area, but had been unable to round them up. The big buck just stared at me, tracking my every move. While I was looking the buck over, Luke and Roger walked up and said they wished they had their bows with them. I looked at them and asked, "What do you mean?"

Luke spoke up and said, "If this deer was on the other side of the road, he would be fair game."

"Yes, you're right," I replied, "but how could you justify shooting such a magnificent animal when it's down and out and call it fair chase?"

"I don't know," Roger said, "but he has a big rack and I would shoot him."

"Well, no one is going to shoot him while he's in the management area," I said.

The pair then said they would like to wait around and take some pictures of the big buck after I put him out of his misery. I explained to the two that during the rut it's not uncommon for a buck to become totally exhausted. At the time I didn't know the buck had been hit by the vehicle. I went on to say that the buck could someday make some hunter a real trophy, and that I owed it to the buck to give him a chance at survival. I then asked the guys if they'd move on down the road, so as not to stress the buck further.

I watched this magnificent titan for another 15 minutes, as he very slowly took a step or two and lowered himself to the ground an inch at a time. I finally called LMO Jerry Bish to meet me. Jerry's truck was being serviced, so I went to pick him up. On our return Jerry mentioned that he's seen rutting bucks run themselves so ragged they could barely move.

Returning to the cornfield, I saw that the buck had moved deeper into the standing corn. I was trying to point him out to Jerry, when he finally saw the buck's eye, and then the rest of the body came into view. Jerry commented on how amazing it is that a deer can use cover in such an effective manner.

The large buck's rack was most unusual, as its brow tines were so large, and there were multiple points all over the bases. We actually had no idea how many points this buck was sporting. Jerry agreed that this buck was most likely totally spent from breeding and ended up in a good, safe spot, except for the feral dogs.

Luke and Roger came back and asked us what we were going to do, as they would like to get some photos if we put the deer down. I told them that we were going to give the buck a chance to recover.

I dropped off Jerry and then periodically checked on the big buck throughout the afternoon and evening. Each time I returned the deer was deeper into the standing corn. Returning home after dark, I wondered how he would fare overnight.

The next morning, a Saturday, I drove back to where I last saw the buck and followed his large hoof prints as they meandered through the cornfield for more than 400 yards. I was hoping I wouldn't find him piled up among the cornstalks. At the end of the long field the buck's tracks led through a swale that dipped into a swampy area and then up into the open woodland, where I soon lost the sign among many other deer tracks. Looking up into the 1,700-acre area, I could only imagine where this big buck was hiding out and recuperating. I was glad I hadn't put this deer down and hoped he

would fully recover.

A few days later I was at the Administration Building when a fellow came in and mentioned a big buck his daughter had hit with his truck a few days earlier, just down the road. After he told me the story and the date and time, I told him that I had seen this buck and that it was a trophy.

Seventeen-year-old James Danos was excited to have been chosen, along with his father, George, to hunt in the special late flintlock/archery hunt in the Pymatuning Wildlife Management Area. They were selected for the first hunt, on December 20, 2007. Both James and his father anxiously prepared their gear the night before their hunt.

The next morning the guys were on their way to Pymatuning well before daylight, their 45-minute drive filled with excitement. They pulled into the parking lot of the Administration Building in Hartstown two hours before daylight.

They attended the mandatory orientation given by LMO Jerry Bish to all the participants hunting during the special hunt here. Conditions this day were ideal, with six inches of snow on the ground and temperatures in the high teens. With the newly fallen snow covering the landscape under a bright moon, walking was easy.

James's father selected a spot along the edge of a woods line adjacent to a field where friends who have hunted in the special flintlock hunt had recommended. James continued another 80 yards along the woods edge and then went into the woods about 60 yards and set up facing the Pymatuning Lake at the other end of the woods. James was unable to see his father, due to the hilly terrain. Both hunters could hear deer running in all directions before daylight, and both were using 54-caliber Thompson Center Renegade flintlock rifles loaded with roundballs.

James and his father began seeing deer at first light, but no shot opportunities were presented. George Danos stated that at one point right after daylight he had no fewer than 80 deer (does and small bucks) completely encircling him.

James said he was also seeing deer nonstop and couldn't believe how many. The temperature was "a little bit chilly" according to James, but seeing so many deer kept him warm. Around 8:10 James said that he was preparing to sit down when he heard a noise behind him. Turning around he saw two does, one behind the other, coming toward him, about 20 yards away. They had veered, one to each side of him. He then saw the buck with its massive antlers. At the same time, the buck spotted James and was backpeddling and sliding to get stopped in the snow.

James said it all happened so fast, and that the buck was only 10 yards away when he stopped sliding and turned broadside. "It all happened so fast. I just raised my rifle, looked down the barrel and touched it off," James said. As the smoke cleared he could see the buck's antlers as it ran down into a small depression toward his father and he could hear the antlers ticking off of trees in the thicket. He figured he'd missed.

George heard the shot and was turning to where his son was when he saw the big buck run within 20 yards of him and fall over. George hollered for his son to come over and get his buck. Young James's shot was true, a perfect heart/lung shot. As James hurried over, the buck seemed to just get bigger and bigger the closer he got. Needless to say, father and son were beyond ecstatic, as the red gods smiled on them on this special day.

I was on patrol with Jerry that morning, and we'd just pulled off onto Ball Road when two fellows approached our vehicle. I recognized the two fellows as brothers of one of my high school classmates. They asked if we could help a father and son who had just shot a monster buck at the other end of the management area. We agreed, and my classmate's brother said, "Mario, he shot a big buck, I mean a really big buck, and they're back by the lake side, just north of the barn."

Jerry drove over to where the pair was hunting, and we soon found a young hunter sitting on the

ground beside a deer. What was most memorable was the rack, which we could see protruding up in the air from more than 200 yards away. "Wow, what a buck!" I exclaimed.

"It sure is, we grow them big up here," Jerry said.

When we got to the young hunter Jerry asked me if I recognized the deer. "That's the buck you almost put down on Ball Road in October," he said.

Looking closer at the rack, I recognized the broom-size brow tines. "My goodness, you're right, Jerry, it's him. I never thought I would see the Monarch again, but I'm sure glad a hunter got him."

We counted 19 points on the titan, with a 20-inch inside spread. James told us all about his hunt and he couldn't believe he was so fortunate to have harvested such a trophy. We loaded the big buck into the back of Jerry's truck and hauled it back to James's father, who was waiting at their pickup. Back at their truck I said to James, "Congratulations, young fellow. Now let me tell you a story about this big buck you got . . ."

By Mario L. Piccirilli, Crawford County WCO

#### On Old "Game Wardens"

I'M NOT BIG on nostalgia, but there are several things I'll treasure forever. My mother gave me a keychain with a wood duck forged on the front made at Wendell-August Forge in Mercer County, and my dad's old Winchester Model 94 30-30 is another of my coveted possessions. My wife made me a plaster imprint of my son's hands when he turned one; it sits on a shelf in my office.

There's one particular item I value that represents my year at the Ross Leffler School of Conservation, the path to get there and my continuing career as a WCO. It's not my badge or gun, nor the diploma I received at our graduation ceremony. It's an item that probably cost the PGC pennies to provide — it's an old tie tack.

Just like any endeavor in life, a person needs inspiration and guidance to help achieve his or her goals. I've been lucky to have had that during my quest in becoming a WCO. Three men in particular were the inspiration to start my journey: my father, Bill Schmidt, and two long-time family friends and retired PGC officers, Dan and Tim Marks. Teachers, relatives, coaches and the U.S. Army also helped me with the blocks needed to build my career. My path did not end with my graduation; it continues every day I go to work. I continue to learn from my fellow officers, supervisors and the public. When I retire some day, if the tie tack is still part of our uniform, I hope to relinquish it to a member of the next generation of WCOs.

A rite of passage, so to speak, for all WCO trainees (now cadets) is field training in the fall. Each cadet heads to the field at the start of the fall archery season and accompanies WCOs through the end of the regular firearms deer season. Each member of my class split their time with four WCOs, or Field Training Officers (FTOs), as they were known.

Horror stories proliferated through our class before we left. Rumors included FTOs feeding cadets nothing but roadkilled deer, making cadets sleep in unheated rooms; not allowing any sleep. The list went on and on. In the end, we all survived and had some interesting stories to tell.

I spent the first half of my field training in the Southwest Region, honing my skills with Stan Norris from Fayette County and Shawn Harshaw in Cambria County, and the second half in the Southcentral with Jim Brown from Perry County and Blair County WCO Al Zellner.

During my stint I learned a great deal from each of my FTOs, and it amazed me how different each was, as were the districts they covered and how they taught and tested me. Jim Brown keyed on the importance of empathy, stressing we are trained in dealing with wildlife and do it all the time, but most people don't have those skills and experiences.

Al Zellner tested my nerves one dark night when a large bear climbed a tree in the heart of Altoona. Hundreds of people flocked to see the outcome, including several news reporters. As some deputy WCOs shined their flashlights on the bear, Al handed me an old hinge-action dart gun with just a front sight. I managed to hit the bear several times, but the drug wasn't working. Al must have sensed my nerves were shot and took over. As I watched in amazement, he uncased a new CO<sup>2</sup> propelled laser- sighted tranquilizer pistol, loaded it and shot the bear. The bear quickly fell to the ground. I asked why I wasn't allowed to use the fancy pistol and he told me he wanted to see how well I held up under pressure.

Shawn Harshaw taught me how to manage my time during the busy hunting seasons, as well as provided me with a myriad of citation writing opportunities, and later a valuable speech lesson.

My first FTO, though, was Stan Norris. The following incident happened within hours of meeting Stan.

The night was cold, but I didn't realize it quite yet. It was the evening before the 2001 archery deer season, and I was tucked in the back corner of some field in southern Fayette County with Stan. We had just arrived at the rural location, both dressed in our summer uniforms, which consisted of our light green pants and short-sleeved shirts. The temperature was probably in the high 40s or low 50s and, although I remember the stars being out, it wasn't a bright night.

After Stan backed his green truck into our hiding spot, he turned off the engine, put on his coat, pulled out an old Army wool blanket, covered himself and told me, "Wake me if anything happens, kid." I thought about what constitutes "anything."

We were out on night patrol. Not just any night, but my first night. This was my on-the-job training, and it was time to get my hands dirty. Little did I know they'd be filthy by the end of the night.

By 9 p.m., Stan was settled in and cozy, but I was on high alert. There wasn't much to see with the darkness and all, but within 10 minutes I noticed a vehicle whose occupants were spotlighting coming down the road. "Stan, here comes a spotlighter!" I exclaimed.

"That's good, kid. Wake me up if anything happens," Stan answered.

At first I couldn't understand how he could sleep through all the excitement, but over the next few weeks I would find out. Stan had many years as an officer and many nights under his belt that season on night patrol. He was taking the opportunity to catch up on some sleep, I figured, while I was on watch, but he was at my immediate disposal if I needed him.

That first vehicle passed and nothing transpired. Exciting, I thought, my first encounter with spotlighters.

During the next hour several more vehicles with spotlighters passed, but on those occasions I didn't disturb my FTO. Then, around 10 p.m., I noticed another car heading our way, but it was traveling slower and the occupants were more methodical in using the spotlight. I thought about rousing Stan, but decided against it. Even after the vehicle passed our location, I could still see the ambient glow working the neighboring field. *Crack*.

The tranquility of the night was broken by the shot from a small caliber firearm. Holy cow, I thought, that was a gunshot. "Anything" had just happened, I was certain, but before I could utter a word, Stan had the truck started and we were on our way — so much for my thinking Stan had been sleeping.

We arrived at the suspects' truck within seconds. Stan calmly gave me a few quick reminders. "You go right, I'll go left. Stay out of the lights. Take charge of your guy."

Our red light lit up the night like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and after Stan pulled our truck "nose to nose" with the suspect's vehicle, we both exited. I swung wide to avoid being in both sets of headlights. I looped around, scanning the area, and noticed three guys in the truck. Keep Stan out of the firing line and take charge, I thought.

The three guys were in such shock they didn't know what to do. Jaws dropped and they knew they had been caught red-handed. We had the driver, the man in middle holding the spotlight and the window passenger with a .22 rifle. We collected their information for the citations, the rifle, and released them. Stan and I returned to the vehicle. The cold night air and the adrenaline finally caught up to me. I started to shake uncontrollably, and my voice wavered every time I spoke. I held up my shaking hands to show Stan and a smile came over his face.

"Don't worry, kid. You did fine. The same thing happened to me on my first night poaching case."

After I stopped shaking, Stan said we probably had used all our luck at that spot and should try another area. He drove the back roads of Fayette County and eventually pulled into another field and went through the same routine with his coat and blanket. "Wake me up if anything happens, kid."

The next day we found the deer. It had been shot in the head and a necropsy revealed a .22 slug in the brain. We labeled it as evidence and would send it to the forensics lab with the seized .22 rifle to match the rifling, if needed. The poachers pled quilty, though, were fined and lost their hunting privileges.

Over the next three weeks Stan and I had many more night encounters with poachers and others breaking the Wildlife Code. I learned a lot from that man, but most importantly, how to treat people. Even though we issued many citations in those weeks, he never got angry or rude with violators.

After a couple weeks with Stan, our summer uniforms were swapped for our winter duds, which included ties and long-sleeved shirts. In Stan's basement two clothes hooks were attached to a wooden pole. Stan hung his pistol belt, shirt and tie on one and I hung mine on the other. Preparing for work one morning, I put on my shirt and tie when I noticed my tie was somewhat dirtier and the tie tack was worn. Stan entered the room sporting a brand new tie and a shiny new state emblem tie tack. I asked him if he was sure he had the correct tie, and he assured me he did.

Although I swapped out his old tie with an extra I had brought, I proudly pinned Stan's tie tack on my tie and wear it to this day.

Several years later Stan retired. Many people attended the dinner. Shawn Harshaw gave a speech and acknowledged even though our current title is Wildlife Conservation Officer, Stan would always be one of the last "game wardens."

When Stan gave his remarks he reminisced about notable events during his career and looked at me and asked if I remembered our deer case.

How could I ever forget? And, of course, there's that tie tack.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO



# Bubba was here

# Life & Times of the Whitetail Biologist Bubba was Here

HE'S OF PRIME AGE and is available. He hangs with the bucks in the Y-oak gang, but he is not the biggest or the baddest. He passed by on Tues. at 3 o'clock. This is a lot to communicate, but deer can get this information from a quick whiff at any signpost. Bucks place signposts —licking branches, rubs and scrapes — year-round throughout their territory. Because bucks and does travel in different social circles, signposts facilitate communications for both sexes.

In the spring and summer, when tender new antlers are developing under a cushion of velvet, bucks communicate through the communal licking of branches. These branches usually are located over a trail or along the edge of a field, just above normal deer height. By mouthing the branch and sometimes rubbing it with their forehead or preorbital glands, bucks smell and taste "notes" left by other deer. Identities, status and social bonding can all be gathered through the nose. During summer, the licking branches are used by all bucks in the area, dominant or not; a one-stop gossip rag for all the deer in the neighborhood.

After their headgear has hardened and the velvet begins to shed, bucks begin tearing and rubbing the bark off bushes and trees with their antlers. Rubbing during and shortly after velvet loss is violent, as bucks thrash bushes to get a feel for what has been growing on their heads all summer. As the rut progresses, rubbing evolves into the more typical, highly visual buck rub. Once the rub is complete, bucks anoint it with their forehead gland. Some rubs are used year after year. Age plays a factor in rub making. Yearlings typically rub saplings no more than two to three inches in diameter, while a mature buck may rub trees six inches or larger. This work doesn't go unnoticed, as bucks and does visit rubs.

The most complex signpost bucks use is a scrape. It is used most intensely just before the peak of the rut. A full scrape involves branch marking, pawing and urination. A scrape starts with an overhanging limb on which a buck will rub his forehead or preorbital gland. If the mood strikes him, he'll even rattle the branch with his antlers. He takes the twig in his mouth and moistens it, thereby leaving his mark and detecting the mark of others using the scrape. Then he clears a 3- to 6-foot circle by pawing the ground, steps into the circle and urinates onto his tarsal glands while rubbing them together. Usually, only mature dominant bucks produce a significant number of scrapes. So while the whitetail spends its days in relative silence, plenty is being said. You just have to look, lick or smell.

By J.T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

# What is Public Access? -The PGC's Best Kept Secret

IT WON'T SURPRISEmost hunters that Pennsylvania has led the nation in a hunting related statistic for more than 30 years. It isn't license sales, number of deer harvested or Pitman-Robertson funding, though the commonwealth is among the leaders in those categories. The statistic that Pennsylvania has led for decades is the number of private landowners enrolled in voluntary cooperative access programs and, for most of those decades, Pennsylvania led the nation in the number of acres enrolled in public access.

We have the foresight of our predecessors to thank for this lofty status. Long before most states began seeing the destructive spiral of hunting leases, Game Commission officials predicted Pennsylvania's fate by studying our neighbors to the east. As land became more developed, and huntable land diminished, increased pressure was placed upon the remaining lands by a few hunters with the misguided intent to protect good hunting lands for themselves. Not by buying and preserving the land, but by leasing it from existing landowners, and at the expense of the rest of the hunting population. Over time, this created overly abundant, unmanageable wildlife populations, similar to the situation we face in urbanizing suburbs in parts of Pennsylvania today.

But, instead of capitulating to the inevitable, the PGC used its long-term working relationships with both farmers and forest landowners to create programs that would preserve hunter access to private lands. It is important to provide public access for reasons rooted in the American model of wildlife management. In a reaction to the feudal estates' of Europe, where tenant laborers starved while wild game ran abundantly on the large properties owned by the privileged few, the American model established that wildlife belonged to the people of the state, not the landowners. This model also rests on our rights to own and use firearms, the non-commercialization of wildlife, the protection of sensitive species, and the most important derivative, an army of sportsmen who keep populations in balance with their habitats.

To counter hunting access concerns, the PGC has always strived to acquire State Game Lands to provide permanent hunting opportunities. Pennsylvania has nearly 29 million acres, with an impressive 1.4 million in State Game Lands and another 3 million in other public ownerships, yet 85 percent of the state remains privately owned. Fortunately, many landowners are still close enough to the land to appreciate the miracle that is the American model of wildlife management, and have voluntarily enrolled more than 3 million acres in PGC public access programs. In the past year, the agency has been updating and improving the program for both landowners and hunters.

There are currently three public access programs: Farm Game, Safety Zone and Forest Game. The Farm Game program was initiated in 1936, in Chester County, and has grown to more than 1.6 million acres. This program is administered by the agency's land managers and Food and Cover crews, and provides landowners with signs to help control access and hunter use of their properties, tree seedlings to improve wildlife habitat, and habitat management planning and technical assistance to improve habitat and reduce wildlife conflicts on farms. The program strives to group adjacent landowners into projects encompassing huntable lands of at least 1,000 acres. Today there are 189 Farm Game projects across the state. Recent changes reduced the minimum project size to 500 acres, to address the loss of habitats to development in existing projects.

The Safety Zone program was created in 1958 and operates similar to Farm Game, but is administered by the WCOs and deputies. It includes properties that provide good huntable habitat for hunters, but that are not adjacent to other cooperators. Safety Zone cooperators also receive free tree and shrub seedlings to improve wildlife habitat.

Finally, the Forest Game program was initiated in 1971 for landowners with predominantly forested lands of at least 1,000 acres. These are often absentee landowners or corporations that receive assistance from the PGC in enforcing ATV trespass, to retain the important wildlife values of these large forested tracts. These landowners are also eligible to receive free tree and shrub seedlings and bird boxes. To address the shrinking size of many of these tracts, in 2008 the minimum acreage to

enroll was lowered to 500 acres. Today, there are 85 cooperators and more than 600,000 acres in this program.

Landowners interested in learning more about these programs are encouraged to contact their region office for more information. Landowners with a minimum of 80 acres enrolled in public access are eligible for a reduced-cost landowner hunting license. Those with at least 50 contiguous acres are eligible to receive a landowner antlerless deer license. Each fall, landowners receive an order form to select their choice of up to 500 free tree and shrub seedlings and a free bird box of their choice.

Changing land ownership patterns and wildlife management challenges create changes in the needs and demands for public access. The Game Commission was awarded National Shooting Sports Foundation grants to survey hunters that use public access properties and landowners enrolled in public access programs. The majority of hunters surveyed rated their hunting experience, the quality of habitat, and the quality of game as good or excellent. However, hunters that recently stopped hunting rated the lack of places to hunt and the lack of access to hunting areas as the top reasons for discontinuing the activity. The survey indicated that 80 percent of hunters contacted the landowner prior to hunting; the agency hopes to see that number increase during the next survey.

Landowners replied that 95 percent of their lands were used by hunters and that the hunting pressure was about right. The Game Commission had provided habitat improvements to 31 percent of landowners, and 55 percent were interested in ordering tree seedlings to improve habitat. Landowners reported that their properties were used by deer, rabbit, squirrel, turkey and pheasant hunters. Many landowners indicated that they would like more flexibility in limiting access for some hunting seasons, and 57 percent did not want their property designated on maps available online. Nineteen percent of landowners wanted the food plot seed program and complimentary *Game News* subscriptions that were suspended due to budget constraints to be restored.

Balancing the needs and desires of hunters and landowners is always a challenge. As the public access programs were updated, staff visited each cooperator and signed new agreements. This ensured that landowners were aware of the updated requirements. To improve the identification of individual properties for hunters, the Game Commission requires that Public Access signs, which the agency provides, be visible on every property enrolled. Public access properties now are roughly identified on county maps available on the Internet, and although many landowners feared that this would increase the hunting pressure on their properties, there has been no increase in landowner complaints.

To access the maps, go to www.pgc.state.pa.us, click on the "Go Hunting on Private and Public Lands" link on the home page, select a county from the state map, and zoom into your area of interest to find hunting locations. Remember, public access doesn't mean you can enter without permission. Always follow individual landowner instructions, either written on signs or given verbally by the landowner prior to hunting.

To give landowners the ability to better manage their property, a species selection feature has been added that allows landowners to restrict access on their properties to particular seasons or species. Restriction categories include deer, turkey, small game and trapping. Many landowners enjoy the flexibility that this new feature offers.

Through an innovative web-based technology, the complimentary *Game News* subscription has been returned to public access cooperators via the internet. The agency is also improving its landowner recognition program. Some landowners and their families have been in the program for more than 50 years. Landowners that have been in the programs the longest are being recognized in each region, and certificates of appreciation are being sent to participants that have been enrolled for 10, 20, 30 and more than 50 years.

The Game Commission anticipates the ability to improve its public access programs if funding becomes available through the 2008 Farm Bill's Open Fields grant program. The agency also would like to someday restore pheasant stocking opportunities to public access properties with appropriate

habitat, an effort that could be rekindled by a license fee increase.

Public access is more than fostering good relationships with landowners and increasing opportunities for hunters. With more than 85 percent of Pennsylvania lands in private ownership, retaining a viable public access program is critical to the long-term success of hunting as a tool for wildlife population management. If you are a landowner interested in participating, please contact your region office. Region office phone numbers are listed in the "Conservation News" section of *Game News* .

By Mike Pruss, PGC Private Lands Section Chief

#### Wild Goose Chase

I PATROLLED until 2 a.m. without any incidents, went home for some sleep, and then got back up at 10 a.m. to complete some administrative work at the region office in Franklin. I also attempted, without luck, to contact several landowners throughout the day to re-enroll them in the PGC's Safety Zone Program. A rather uneventful day, I thought, as I pulled in my driveway around 4 p.m. I went inside, removed my pistol belt and changed into civilian attire. And then the phone rang.

I heard my wife talking and heard "goose," "safety zone" and "Tidioute" mentioned in the conversation. Before long I was on the phone, talking with Mary from Tidioute in Warren County. Mary is a fellow employee of my wife's and knew I worked for the PGC. She called to report that two guys had just shot and retrieved a Canada goose near her home along the Allegheny River. Hearing shots, she looked out and saw two men dressed in camouflage paddle up to her yard to retrieve a goose. She was sure the animal was in her safety zone and wondered if I could help.

I told her I would try to reach the district officer to inform him of the incident. Unable to reach him, I donned my uniform and headed to Tidioute. I knew my Law Enforcement Supervisor, Jim Egley, lived in the area and would be passing through on his way home, so I tried him on the radio for assistance. He acknowledged my request and said he'd be there shortly.

I arrived at Mary's house and she walked me through the entire sequence of events. This time she elaborated by telling me the men were in a green canoe and continued down the river after the incident. I measured the distance from the house to where the goose had been retrieved, and sure enough, it was well within the 150-yard safety zone.

I left her house and made a short trip to the public boat launch on the north side of town. Several high school kids were there, and I asked them if they had seen a boat pass through. They said they did, and shortly after heard several shots. They described it as a dark colored boat and thought it had a trolling motor. There weren't any cars or boat trailers in the lot, indicating the shooters had probably launched elsewhere. The students agreed, and added that the boat had come from upstream. At that point, Jim showed up and I briefed him on what was going on. He knew several of the kids and asked several more questions.

Jim thought the hunters wouldn't be back through and decided to go to the nearby SGL 309 building and get the PGC's Go-Devil river boat. I told him I would drive down Route 62 and check all the camp roads to see if I could locate the canoe.

I crossed the bridge from Tidioute leading to Route 62 and headed south. Close to an hour had passed since Mary's call, and I hoped the suspects were taking their time on their way down the river. I turned down a lane that had a nice view of the river, but didn't see any boats. I knocked on a camp door and a man answered. I asked if he'd been watching the river and if so, if he had seen a boat. He said that he hadn't noticed anything, but that he wasn't paying much attention, either. I thanked him and stopped at a neighboring camp to talk with another gentleman but had the same luck.

I headed back to Route 62 when the radio crackled for me to return to the first camp. I arrived, hoping the canoe was floating by but, instead, the lady of the house said she had seen an orange canoe pass a short time earlier and heard several shots. When she looked out she saw one of the boaters reach into the water and pull out what she thought was a duck of some sort. Once again I thanked them for their time and headed for the next camp road to the south.

Orange canoe, I thought. Nobody had mentioned an orange boat. Oh well, it'll just be that much easier to see. I made a right onto Bronze Back Lane and continued my search. The lane paralleled the river and gave me a great view of the watercourse.

Eventually, I caught a glimpse of orange floating down the river, hugging the opposite shore. I pulled

out my binoculars and saw an orange canoe. As the current shifted I noticed the bow of a green canoe emerge. That solved my little mystery. I watched the tethered boats for several minutes and noticed they were full of camping gear, several fishing rods, what appeared to be a shotgun muzzle, and four boaters.

"That's them." I mumbled under by breath, but how was I going to get to them? The two boats were getting close to an island and would disappear for a short time, so I figured that would be a good time to try and reach Jim. I called him on the radio, but without success, and then requested assistance from the region office to try him.

They also were unsuccessful. I thought he may be heading my way in the boat, and with the motor running may not be able to hear our calls. Gambling he was on the way, I continued.

I moved my truck farther down the camp lane to watch the end of the island for the boats to emerge. As luck would have it, owners of a local camp showed up just as I got out of my vehicle. They asked me if I needed something, so I asked if they had a boat I could borrow. They had two canoes and said they would be happy to lend me one. The owner ran into his camp to retrieve a key to unlock the boats. As he was gathering a life jacket and paddles, the canoes emerged from the tail of the island.

There was another island downstream and I thought for sure the four boaters would be able to paddle their way through the channel and onto my side of the river. I blew my siren and drew their immediate attention. They looked my way and I motioned them to come to me.

Although I couldn't hear them, I could see that they were up to something. They halfheartedly made an attempt to make it through the channel but came up short and then disappeared behind the second island.

I was pretty upset because I knew if they had anything to hide they were doing it. I hopped in the canoe and paddled off. Luckily, I didn't have far to paddle and the current aided in my efforts. Within minutes I was to the island and quickly hopped out. I heard the hum of a motor and looked upstream and saw Jim running full-throttle.

Great, the cavalry is here, I thought.

Two of the boaters greeted me and we headed over to the beached boats. The rain was now coming down as we trudged through the high wet grass. When we arrived at the boats two more guys were there waiting and I explained to them who I was and why I was there.

I saw one shotgun and asked who was hunting. Only one of the men confessed, so I checked his license. He had all the right paperwork, but hadn't signed his Federal Duck Stamp. I asked which canoe he was hunting from and he said the orange one.

"Why is your shotgun in the green canoe?" I asked.

He didn't have a good answer, so I asked him for his geese. For some reason the geese were not in any of the boats, but stashed in the grass away from the canoes was a garbage bag with five geese in it. I asked if there were anymore guns and a second canoeist admitted to having a pistol, which he had a valid permit for. I asked again if there were any more firearms. Nobody confessed. I reiterated that I had a witness who saw somebody from the green canoe pick up a goose from her backyard. Feet began shuffling and people started avoiding eye contact.

I confronted the first man who admitted to hunting and asked him, "How many of these geese did you shoot?" He hesitated for a minute and finally admitted to shooting three. I asked the other three who shot the other two. The second guy finally admitted to killing the other geese and did so without a Migratory Bird License. He continued by saying he hid his shotgun in the grass. When Jim showed I briefed him on what happened and then retrieved the gun.

They also admitted to retrieving a goose from the yard in Tidioute, but denied that they shot within the safety zone. The two geese were confiscated and citations were filed. The unlawful hunter pled guilty and paid his fines for the illegal geese. And, finally, my long day came to a close.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

#### **Hunter Education Celebrated 50**

THE GAME Commission is celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> year of its hunter education program. The program actually started in June of 1958 when a small group of Game Protectors gathered at the agency's training facility in Brockway for six days. Educators from the NRA taught them how to instruct the subjects of hunter safety and rifle marksmenship. Then, in 1959, a formal, 4-hour program was adopted. By 1966 there were more than 6,000 hunter safety instructors and nearly 85,000 students had been certified.

Today more than 1.8 million students have been trained and there are more than 2,400 active volunteer instructors that conduct roughly 800 classes — certifying about 34,000 students — each year. Hunter safety has since become Hunter-Trapper Education (HTE) and the new and improved curriculum has been carefully crafted to meet the national standards of the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA). The Game Commission's updated training is so well designed that natural resource agencies in Florida, Ohio, Oregon and other states have requested permission to use it for training their own students. Twice Pennsylvania's Hunter Education Division has been asked to train other state agencies in how to create programs that meet the IHEA standards.

The updated curriculum has three instructional formats: traditional classroom lecture and demonstration, classroom instruction with skills stations, and independent study. The variety of formats accommodates the needs of both students and the capabilities of the volunteer instructors. The skills-based training is the most effective and enjoyable for students; it includes an intensive hands-on component with simulated live fire. Firearm safety is facilitated at skill stations where students learn to handle and shoot real firearms similar to ones they're likely to use in the field. The stations are a valuable component of the program but require space and time for setting up equipment and more staff; more instructors are needed to reach the full potential of the skills-based program.

To help accommodate today's busy family schedules, HTE is also available via independent study. Students complete an at-home course using either the Internet or study guide and then attend a short class session, at the end of which they take the standard exam.

HTE has evolved beyond hunter safety into a selection of programs designed to make tomorrow's hunters not only safe, but also successful. Today's hunters can enroll in an optional advanced course, Successful Bowhunting, to learn skills and techniques to archery hunt. More advanced courses are in the works; Successful Turkey Hunting is scheduled to debut in 2010 and Successful Muzzleloading in 2012, and there are plans for Successful Big Game Hunting and Successful Waterfowl Hunting. This year, the current Cable Restraint Training will expand into Successful Furtaking, those who complete the course successfully will be certified to use cable restraints as a furtaking mechanism.

To commemorate the program's golden anniversary, a fine-art print was designed by George LaVanish of Blair County. The print depicts an instructor training two students and is entitled *Tomorrow's Hunters*. A 4-inch embroidered patch with a scene from the print was also commissioned. All active instructors will be receiving a copy of *Tomorrow's Hunters* and a patch in honor of their service.

Leon Ochs of Reading has been teaching hunter education for more than 50 years. As a young man recently out of the service, he joined a local rifle and pistol club. The club was an NRA affiliate and one day he came across paperwork to become an NRA instructor. He sent it in and has been teaching ever since.

Leon says that when he started teaching, they were using 10-cent NRA handbooks in a 4-hour course. "Now we have the best manual we've ever had." He describes the course as cookbook teaching. "If you follow the overheads and the powerpoint, you can't go wrong."

Leon enjoys passing on the sport and his outdoor lore and experiences. "It's been a lot of fun. I've

seen a heck of a lot of kids over the years."

Twenty two instructors have been with the program since its inception in 1959. Each was presented framed editions of *Tomorrow's Hunters* during the July Commission meeting. Thank you, gentlemen.

By Lori D. Richardson, Wildlife Education Specialist

#### The Old Beech Tree

There it stood, over three feet in diameter, worn and tired with its dying gray bark only partly covering its trunk, only remnants of what it looked like a century and more ago. It towers like a behemoth over the pole stage timber surrounding it on the small knoll overlooking an 18-acre wetland to its west and a large hardwood stand to the east. To the north is a 4-acre patch of overgrown thickets that tear at your clothes as you attempt to bust your way through. This combination raspberry patch and multiflora rose thicket is a haven for cottontails, turkeys and deer.

A small creek with its origins in the hardwoods to the east meanders along the south edge of the woodlot the big beech is in. The creek empties into an 18-acre pasture reverting back to thickets and small saplings interspersed with wetlands that breach its west side. The broken down and rotted fence posts with rusted barbed wire, some still clinging to the fence posts and the rest consumed by the forest floor are evidence that cattle once used this pasture decades ago.

Patrolling here one early autumn afternoon during the archery season I noticed how the beech tree seemed out of place and its persona so forlorn amongst the maples, oaks, hemlocks and hickories. It rose to a height of about 40 feet, with a few gnarled limbs reaching out like craggy arms of an old weary scarecrow. It looked tired and aged, a mute testament to the toll time takes on any living thing. The beech was loped off at the top, probably from a windstorm or possibly a lightning strike. Walking by the tree, carvings on its weathered gray bark caught my eye. From its base up to about 18 inches there were signs of deterioration in a honeycombed appearance. Shredded pieces of bark from the woodpeckers lined the forest floor around its base.

Walking up to the tree I placed my hand on its trunk and wished it could reveal its history. About five feet up I noticed an inscription in its bark. It read "June 1922" and "SWA," with the last letter nearly obscured from age. More dates from this era were carved into its trunk. Reading the carvings I could only begin to wonder who was there almost 90 years ago to inscribe these dates and initials.

Two high school sweethearts? Possibly two young neighbor boys out squirrel hunting after school with their .22 rifles? Maybe a deer hunter marking where he took a nice buck. If this tree could talk I could only imagine the stories it could tell of those who have passed beneath it and the countless wildlife it has witnessed.

Discussing this tree with a forester he informed me that beech trees can live a long time, and that this particular tree probably had its origins in the early 1900s or late 1800s. It was readily apparent how the four seasons had taken its toll on the giant beech during the past 100 years. The numerous holes drilled into its trunk were evidence of how the pileated woodpeckers were at work. I know squirrels still called this old beech home by holes farther up into its cavity. When I was assigned to Forest County I often noticed beech trees with the telltale marks of bear claws marring the trunk.

Thinking back to 1922 I wondered what this area may have looked like and who might have been its inhabitants. At the turn of the century I know that Pennsylvania was deforested, and I'm certain this area was no different, save for this woodlot in its infancy and the adjacent pasture. Looking around I realized that where this beech was located would have been an excellent deer hunting spot. It was situated on top of a small hill about 30 feet above the rest of the woods and the woodlot to the east and the 18-acre reverting field to its west.

Deer trails were gouged into the forest floor and resembled miniature muddy highways. I made a mental note to return and hunt at this location during archery season. Standing with my back to the tree I only then noticed the trees that were rubbed by bucks using the area. Looking over the carvings one more time on the tree I bid the old giant farewell for the day and continued on patrol. Within a hundred yards I jumped a big buck that ran in the direction of the big beech, which made me smile.

I did take up the bow in 2008 after a 10-year hiatus. I decided to hunt in and around the area of the

old beech tree. My first time out was with a friend, Lawrence, who harvested a plump doe within an hour from when we climbed up our portable treestands. My son also shot a doe that we tracked a short distance and ended up fewer than 30 yards from the old beech tree.

I subsequently hunted the area around this tree and always saw deer, primarily bucks. I harvested a doe and on one hunt spotted three bucks chasing a doe close to the old beech tree. Talk about a heart-pounding experience, with three large bucks, all in range. I took an 8-point with a 17-inch spread on that hunt. The other two bucks chasing the doe were substantially larger than the one I harvested, and actually hung around after I climbed down to tag my buck.

Again, on my way out of the woods with my buck in tow under a starlit sky, I passed the old beech tree and smiled up at this old titan, knowing that its life was soon coming to an end. The squirrels and chipmunks, I hoped, had buried some of this centurion's seeds in the surrounding forest floor, and its offspring will eventually shoot up and live into the next century.

By Mario L. Piccirilli, Crawford County WCO

# Is there a doctor in the house?

Viruses, bacteria, and parasites — each can cause illness or even death to a white-tailed deer. Entire books are written on the topic. But there are no doctors in the forest. Luckily, 99 percent of the time, deer are healthy. Usually, only when deer are stressed and their immune systems are compromised do they become susceptible to an endless list of unpronounceable pathogens.

Hemorrhagic disease is caused by the epizootic hemorrhagic disease and bluetongue viruses. The first documented outbreak was in 1955 in New Jersey. In its acute form, it causes sudden loss of appetite, disorientation, weakness, respiratory distress and rapid death. Die-offs occur suddenly and almost exclusively in late summer and early fall and coincide with peak populations of insects called midges or "no-see-ums," which transmit the disease. It is common in southeastern states though outbreaks have been documented outside of this range including in Pennsylvania. Many infected deer live and show only mild signs of disease or no signs at all. Even if a forest emergency room existed, this deer disease is untreatable.

Another virus causes cutaneous fibromas — hairless tumors found on the skin. They can be found on any part of the deer's skin and vary in size from ¼-inch to more than 8 inches in diameter. Most fibromas are black or gray in color, and they can be smooth or warty. Deer with cutaneous fibromas won't win any beauty contests, but the growths are often temporary and usually harmless.

Bacteria don't get as many headlines as viruses. Anthrax is an often-fatal disease caused by the anthrax bacterium, which can remain in the soil for years. While this is a frightening thought, only a few outbreaks have been reported. Brain abscesses are also the result of bacteria. A number of bacteria can be responsible for infections that cause neurological problems like circling, lack of coordination and other abnormal behaviors. Sparring and rubbing puts bucks at a higher risk of developing brain abscesses than does.

As for hitchhiking parasites, liver flukes, nasal bots, louse flies, a variety of worms, and more than 20 species of ticks can call a deer home. Deer tolerate them all without much fuss.

By J.T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

# The Five for Nine Gang

THE BIG BUCK'S nose pointed upward, testing the wind, its massive shoulder muscles rippling, cautiously it inched forward. The buck's heavy wide-beamed rack swayed back and forth, enough to make any deer hunter's heart pump faster. This bruiser had lived his entire life in the prime farmland of northern Crawford County. His tines reached skyward, gleaming in the sunlight as Willy settled the crosshairs of his scope on the buck's shoulder. At the shot, the deer lurched forward and dropped ten steps from where it had stood.

Willy had just harvested his second buck in less than two days. His excitement was paramount as he called his hunting partners, Buford and Jed, on his radio to tell them. Running to the downed buck 80 yards away, he recalled the handsome 7-point he had shot the day before, the opening day of the '06 deer season. What a season he and his four hunting companions were having on the farm. The group had traveled from their home state of Tennessee to hunt deer on a friend's farm.

Upon reaching his downed buck, Willy's radio buzzed from Buford and Jed calling to find out his location. Soon they were jumping up and down around the large buck, giving Willy the high five. Buford commented on how good the group had done. They had taken three bucks, two button bucks and two does. Jed boasted, "And we still have all of our buck tags left and never bought any doe licenses." Buford and Jed then helped Willy field-dress the deer and get it back to the farm with the other deer they had killed.

It was Thursday afternoon about 3:15 p.m. on November 30, when Ken Clark, Northwest Region dispatcher radioed for me to call him. He had information he didn't want to put out over the air. I called him promptly. He stated, "Mario, a person who wants to remain anonymous called about a group of five hunters from Tennessee killing multiple deer off of Gooseneck Road, on the Codger Farm. He left his number for you to call; I think it would be worthwhile to call as soon as you can." Ken then gave me vehicle descriptions and locations on the farm where the hunters had been shooting deer. I thanked him and called the informant immediately.

"Hello, this is Officer Piccirilli from the Pennsylvania Game Commission." The individual breathed a sigh of relief and thanked me for calling so soon. He told me that the group from Tennessee had been driving around in their red pickup trucks, shooting multiple deer. They did not care about antler point restrictions, having anterless licenses, or tagging their deer.

He said, "I saw the guys yesterday. They were all at the farm posing for pictures with their deer and bragging about how many they had killed. It made me sick and it's not right. Can you do something about it?"

I stated that I could, but that I needed more information about the location and the violators. I jotted down some more notes and thanked him for his timely information and for his help in protecting our wildlife resources.

After the call, I realized that I hadn't asked if he knew how long the hunters would be on the Codger Farm. When I called him back he said that the group was planning on returning to Tennessee on Saturday morning. I thanked him again and started making plans to apprehend the individuals and confiscate the illegally killed deer.

I thought about driving up in the morning but decided to not wait. It would be getting dark in about an hour or so and I could slip in under the cover of darkness to observe. Then I'd have time to assemble a group of officers for a late Friday night or early Saturday morning raid. Proceeding to the farm immediately turned out to be the best decision I made.

The temperature was hovering at 50 degrees with a light drizzle as I drove to the Codger Farm. I checked my maps but drove right by the farm. The farm is large, more than 1,200 acres. I went to

the end of the road, turned around and was headed back when I noticed a large tanker truck spraying the fields just below the farmhouse. The tanker continued toward several farm buildings and parked.

It was getting pretty dark as I crept down the main farm driveway and scanned the area to make sure the two red pickups allegedly involved were not there. Not seeing the suspects' trucks, I eased down the long farm lane past the house and farm buildings.

Continuing back to where the tanker had parked just moments before, I observed two camo-clad workers walking over to a large building housing farm equipment. I pulled my vehicle up to the workers but thought it odd they were dressed in hunting attire. Stepping out of my truck I introduced myself and informed the workers I needed to speak to Mr. Codger and asked if they knew where he was.

Their response that Mr. Codger wasn't around didn't bother me, but their heavy southern accents revealed I had a problem. These were the guys I was looking for and now they'd made me. I could tell they knew they were in trouble.

The pair identified themselves as Willy Crooks and Buford Cheater, both from Tennessee. About 10 feet to their right I noticed two hunting coats and two scoped rifles. I asked if they'd been hunting and Buford started to get nervous, avoided eye contact and said, "Ya, we been huntin'."

The hunting licenses on their coats had the deer tags torn out, but nothing was printed on the tags. I checked their rifles to make certain they were unloaded and I asked Buford if he killed any deer. He started shifting back and forth apprehensively and said, "No, nuttin' et all."

"Did you shoot at any deer this week?"

Buford's immediate response was, "No, neva tuk a shot."

I said, "No shooting at all?"

"Nope."

Willy was getting nervous and began to walk into another part of the building when I asked him to return. I asked Willy the same questions and his responses were identical. I had the pair stand in front of my truck headlights as I wrote down their information. I didn't want them to alert their buddies on their cell phones.

I informed the pair that I had information suggesting they'd been shooting deer illegally and that, in fact, a witness saw them yesterday posing for pictures at this very farm with the deer. When I asked them where the deer were, I thought Buford was going to fall over from trembling. He started to stutter and nervously blurted out, "We ain't kilt no deer." Willy stood motionless with a blank look on his face and said he didn't know what I was talking about. I informed the pair that I had probable cause to believe the deer were on this farm and that we would find them in a matter of time.

Now it was well after shooting hours, dark and raining. I radioed the Northwest Region Office to round up some assistance. WCO Mike Wojtecki answered immediately, headed my way and said he would call when he got closer for a more precise location.

Knowing that Mike was 15 to 20 minutes away I called LMO Jerry Bish, who was familiar with the area, and left a message. "Jerry, it's Mario. I'm a little jammed up and need help. I have two nonresidents in custody and three more out in the field, all of them have killed deer illegally. Officer Wojtecki is on his way and needs specific directions. Call me as soon as possible." I couldn't take my eyes off of Willy and Buford.

Jerry called within four minutes and informed me that there were three different parcels of the

Codger Farm. I told him there were three big blue silos behind me and he said, "I'm on my way."

As soon as I hung up with Jerry, Willy walked out a door into another building. I asked Buford where he'd gone and he just shrugged his shoulders. When Willy walked toward another door I saw he was going to make a call on his cell phone and I instructed him to get back over to my truck.

I received calls from Keith Harbaugh, Northwest Region Director, and my deputy, Lawrence Hergenroeder (now a WCO), asking if I needed help. I gave them both my location and they eventually keyed in on the three big blue silos.

While doing paperwork in my truck and waiting for assistance, I looked in my rearview mirror and saw two more hunters approaching from the rear. I stepped out and met them before they reached my truck. As it turned out, Jed Poker and Rufus Hobo, other members of this Tennessee hunting party, also stated that they hadn't gotten any shooting and didn't know anything about any illegally taken deer.

I was checking their hunting licenses and rifles when WCO Wojtecki pulled in. I breathed a sigh of relief, filled Mike in and we started to collect all of the Tennessee group's information.

The fifth member of the group finally showed up. Lukey Drool also denied any knowledge of multiple deer kills. It was obvious that these individuals were not good storytellers; their body language belied them.

Within minutes LMO Bish pulled in, followed by Deputy Hergenroeder, then Director Harbaugh with Deputy John Ittel. Mr. Codger, the owner of the farm, came out from an adjacent farm building with a very perplexed look on his face. I explained to him what was going on and asked him if he knew this group. He said that his son knows Lukey Drool from college.

I read the five suspects their Miranda rights and again asked them if they shot any deer. Again, they denied shooting any. I looked at the group, "Gentlemen, I'm going to apply for a search warrant and search every building and vehicle on Mr. Codger's farm for the deer you allegedly killed. You fellows need to decide whether or not you want to inconvenience Mr. Codger and his son, after they've extended you their hospitality to hunt on their farm."

I asked Mr. Codger if he knew anything about the deer and he threw his arms up saying, "I don't want any part of this, you do whatever you want with these guys, keep me out of it." WCO Wojtecki then asked Mr. Codger if he would sign a consent to search form, giving us permission to search his farm for the illegal deer.

Willy spoke up then and said, "Could ya'll give us boys a minute o' two to talk bout dis?"

I said, "Yes, go ahead," and the five assembled about 30 feet away in a hurried discussion.

Within a minute Willy broke away from the group, approached me and said, "Ya. We dun it. We shot a bunch of deer just like ya'll sed."

"Where are the deer now?" I asked.

Willy replied, "Dey in da walk-in coola cross from da farm house."

I asked them who shot what. Willy killed two bucks. Buford shot a half-rack buck and a doe. Jed shot a doe and a button buck, Rufus said he killed two does and Lukey alleged he didn't kill any deer, just helped everyone else. The group admitted to killing eight deer, not tagging any of them and not having any antlerless licenses.

Director Harbaugh, WCO Wojtecki and Deputy Ittel searched the walk-in cooler. Director Harbaugh returned, drenched from the rain, and stated, "These guys have nine deer in the cooler. Find out who killed the ninth deer."

I approached the group and asked who killed the ninth deer. They looked at one another silently. When I informed them that they would all be charged with possession of the deer Willy and Lukey claimed it, saying they were skinning deer behind the walk-in cooler when a hunter in a white pickup pulled up and asked if they wanted another deer. The deer was illegal, not meeting the antler restrictions. I asked Willy and Lukey if that's what really happened and explained that the fine would be the same whether they possessed the deer or shot it, but they were sure the deer came from another hunter.

After a call to Law Enforcement Supervisor Jim Egley concerning a legal question, we started writing citations. I explained the citations to each member of the group and they acknowledged them with their signatures. Willy received four citations for killing and possessing three deer and shooting over the limit. Buford, Rufus and Jed were cited for killing two deer apiece and shooting over the limit. Lukey was issued citations for possessing a deer and for aiding and abetting. I explained that they also could have been charged with not tagging their deer, not having antlerless licenses, aiding and abetting one another and more.

I asked when they planned on leaving for Tennessee and Willy replied, "We's all gonna leave early in the mornin'." If I had waited, the criminals would have fled with a cargo load of illegally shot deer. Because I had responded immediately to the dispatcher's call, and by using the anonymous witness's information, these lawbreakers did not get away.

Inside the cooler the deer were skinned and quartered with backstraps and tenderloins neatly separated. I had to take four consecutive photos of the deer in the cooler to get them all. It was obvious that these guys were not neophytes when it came to killing deer illegally. We filled two state trucks with the meat, racks, hides and heads.

We left the farm at 9:30 p.m. and drove the five defendants to Saegertown.

At the Crawford County jail we met Lincoln Zillhaver, the on-call magistrate. Once in the courtroom, I provided the magistrate with the defendant's citations and Justice Zillhaver commenced the arraignment. He verified their names and addresses and asked them if they had any prior arrests. Willy and Buford shamefully raised their hands indicating they had previous arrests and convictions in Tennessee for the same thing they were presently in court for.

Justice Zillhaver set their bond at \$500 apiece and the group breathed a little sigh of relief. Then the Justice said, "Gentlemen. That will be \$500 for each citation. Mr. Crooks," the Justice continued, "this court needs \$2,000 in bond from you; Mr. Cheater, Mr. Hobo and Mr. Poker, this court requires \$1,500 from each of you; and Mr. Drool, this court needs \$1,000 bond from you." A flurry of conversation erupted.

Jed said, "I jus can't stay here, I got to goes home!" His face turned so red I thought he was going to explode. The group tried to convince the magistrate to allow them to go and return with the bond later, but the magistrate directed us to take the defendants to the booking area. When the magistrate left the courtroom, Jed asked, "What's gonna happen to us now?"

WCO Wojtecki said, "You're going to jail until you come up with money for your bond."

Lukey Drool said he had a plane to catch, but the corrections officer just handed him a plastic box and told him to remove everything from his person.

The Tennessee gang spent that night and the following day in jail. They also had their rifles and scopes seized as evidence. They all pled guilty and paid their fines (after numerous calls home) in front of District Justice Rita Marwood in Linesville. Their fines in aggregate were \$7,500, plus court costs — and Lukey had to reschedule another flight.

I met with Willy and Lukey after they were released to return some of their belongings. They said

that they plan on never repeating this stunt again and that they resolved to abide by the law in the future. Willy commented, "You know we paid a lot of money for a hunting license and we wanted to bring something back."

I replied, "I understand, Willy, but all you had to do was purchase your antierless licenses, tag the deer you killed and obey the law and you never would've had a problem."

Two weeks later I received a call from an anonymous individual who knew the defendants in Tennessee. The caller thanked us for apprehending the group and said, "I'm glad somebody finally caught up with these guys; they've been shooting deer in Tennessee for a long time and even have their own makeshift butcher shop to process the illegal deer."

I once heard that outlaws have to be lucky 100 percent of the time to avoid being caught but WCOs have to get lucky only one percent of the time to apprehend them.

It all started with a phone call from a concerned sportsman. Am I glad that I decided to check it out right away? You bet I am!

By Mario L. Piccirilli, Crawford County WCO

# On Trapping Turkey

I WAS ATTEMPTING to locate some tom turkeys for a cooperative multi-state study sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation on gobbler harvests during the spring seasons. The Game Commission's role was to trap and band 300 gobblers a year for five years. The responsibility was divided among the six regions, with each region responsible for 50 birds. It sounds simple, but many factors, including weather, equipment and the animals themselves, can make it difficult.

WCOs play a valuable role in the trapping process. Leading up to mid-January, we keep an eye out for turkeys and turkey sign in our districts. If we know where some birds are hanging out, we begin baiting sites after the late archery and muzzleloader deer seasons close.

If the weather is mild and not much snow is on the ground, luring the birds consistently can be difficult. Turkeys seem to have little problem finding food during the mild weather. However, when the snow is deep and temperatures fall, they readily come to bait, and usually early in the morning after a cold night on the roost. This scenario often creates an easy opportunity for trapping.

Another factor is equipment. We typically use a large net stored in a wooden box. The top of the box is open, allowing the large net to be pulled out by the three rockets electronically ignited by the trappers. Recently, our newer net configuration has proved to be highly successful. It's deployed with one corner leading the way, flying in a shape more like a diamond than a square.

We've also had problems with weak rocket charges and tangled nets. On one occasion we waited all day and finally had five nice gobblers show and present a clean shot. But we deployed the net only to have a small piece of wire tangle the net. We're still not sure how the small piece of wire got in the box, but it did spoil our efforts.

The most important factor of trapping turkeys is the birds. They can be the most frustrating of all the variables in trapping. I'm sure most hunters can relate to the quirkiness of these wild animals.

During the winter of 2007, I was monitoring several bait sites. One location had a large flock showing on a routine basis, but there weren't any gobblers in the flock. I kept baiting the site in the hopes of gobblers showing, but none ever did.

Another site I was watching was on a small peninsula along the Tionesta Creek. I had five beautiful long-beards showing, but they never showed at the same time or on consecutive days. One day I checked and the birds hit the bait early in the morning. Then they didn't show for two days, and when they did show up again, it was at 4 p.m. Eventually, the birds were showing on consecutive days, but at different times. When I finally decided to get the team together to plan a trapping date, I checked the site one more time, only to find that a recent snow melt and some rain caused the creek to rise and flood the peninsula.

I had birds coming into several other sites, but where there just was not enough room to place and deploy the net. I was running out of hope, because I would soon be on leave. My wife was pregnant and she was to be induced on March 6. I was running out of time, and the opportunity would not present itself for another year as we typically stop trapping at the end of March. I exerted all my options and had nothing to show for it.

Then one morning I left to check a new site close to my house. I traveled south along the west side of the Allegheny River, toward Jamison Run Road. I checked a couple possible areas with no luck and headed back north. When I reached the mouth of Dawson Run Creek I caught a shimmer of black out of the corner of my eye. Low and behold, a large group of gobblers was pecking away at a corn feeder in the yard of a local residence.

I turned around at the next pull off, returned to the site and parked far enough to not frighten the birds. Using my binoculars I saw twelve nice mature gobblers. They eventually ate their fill of corn and disappeared back into the surrounding Allegheny National Forest.

I visited the property owners and they filled me in on the turkeys' activities. They informed me there

were actually 16 birds showing every morning, and sometimes a couple times a day. I informed them about the study and how we capture them. They happily granted us permission to set up and use their feed station. I also told them I would be providing the corn, so they would be saving some money on their corn bill.

I quickly placed out more feed and also a large bail of straw where the wood box holding the net would be placed. I believe conditioning the turkeys to the sight of the bale relieves tension when the actual box is set.

I was at the site early the next morning, and sure enough, the birds showed on schedule. Only eight came in, but the sight of those birds was encouraging. I called my neighboring WCOs, Dustin Stoner and Frank Leichtenberger, and told them I would watch the site a couple more days to verify their feeding time. Sure enough the birds did not disappoint.

March 1 was the date, and Dustin, Frank and I decided to meet at the site shortly after 7 a.m. Dustin brought a high school student from his district for a job shadowing project. We quickly set out the box holding the net and laid out the weights and ropes used to anchor and prevent the net from flying into the neighboring county. We then covered the ropes with some of the straw. We re-baited the site with corn and sunflowers seeds in a tight pattern. Our goal was to have the birds concentrated in the center of where the net would land. We finished by setting the three explosive charges in their rockets and launching brackets and then ran a wire connecting the charges to our vehicle. This wire is then connected to a trigger device that sends an electrical charge to the rocket charges, which ignites the powder that, in turn launches the rockets.

We were all set. We settled into our vehicles and were rewarded with a short wait. We could hear birds gobbling on the wooded hemlock hillside. We thought we heard some birds fly off their roost and soon we saw some movement in the forest. A line of birds weaved down the hillside toward the bait. Our senses peeked and our bodies prepared for a quick exit from the vehicles. When the net is deployed trappers must get to the birds as quickly as possible, to keep the birds from flopping and escaping, and also to prevent the birds from possibly injuring themselves.

The eight mature birds approached without hesitation and entered the site. We patiently waited for all the birds to lower their heads to feed, and then Kaboom! The powder charges ignited and three WCOs exited their vehicles in a sprint to reach our trapped turkeys. The eight gobblers flipped and flopped, but the net deployed perfectly and the long-beards weren't going anywhere until released by their captors.

Dustin prepared the leg bands while Frank, the student and I untangled the birds and prepared them for Dustin. Along with banding the birds we also removed several feathers for DNA testing and measured both the spurs and beards before releasing them back into the wild. All this information, along with the band numbers, were recorded for the biologists.

Some may ask why we didn't wait for more birds to show. Remember the old saying? "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." This definitely holds true for turkey trapping.

As we removed debris from the net and repacked it, we could still hear birds on the hillside, talking up a storm.

Deciding to try for the other gobblers on the hill, we repeated our procedure in setting the charges, rockets and wire and headed back to the vehicle. Eventually we had more birds show. All seemed to be working in our favor until the birds entered the bait site. Five birds entered and nervously exited our site, not presenting an opportunity to deploy the net. A couple birds even reentered the site only to quickly depart in nervous fashion.

We figured that the birds were nervous because of the feathers the previously trapped birds had lost during their capture. In effect, the baited area looked like the scene of a turkey kill, and we thought the birds figured the same thing.

Soon, however, three different turkeys entered the site. They, too, were very nervous and we

deployed the net at the first opportunity we had. All three were caught and we quickly banded and released them.

The day was a success. We trapped eleven mature gobblers on two nettings and all birds appeared healthy when released. While I was on leave, Frank and Dustin trapped eight more birds and my son was born on March 7.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

## **Even in August**

# **Even in August**

By Daniel P. Schmidt Forest County WCO

WHAT A HOT, humid miserable day, I thought as I drove through my new district in southern Clarion County. I had been in the area for a little more than a month, and was still amazed at the road system. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the web of dirt and paved roads. Hardly any seemed to run north/south or east/west for very long, but just seemed to meander through the rolling hills.

I later found the large scale coal industry had a lot to do with the tangled mess. My law enforcement supervisor informed me that when he had the district, all the strip mining could change the local road systems in a matter of weeks.

As I continued my exploring, the region office dispatcher radioed. "Franklin to 118, could you please call for a possible illegal deer kill?"

"10-4, as soon as I get cell phone coverage."

As I searched for better reception I couldn't help but wonder who would kill a deer in this hot August weather. I finally got a few bars on my phone and called dispatch. The dispatcher informed me that a fisherman from Ohio was in his boat along the Allegheny River in the town of West Monterey when he noticed two men firing rifles from a bench across the river in Armstrong County. As the men shot at targets two deer came off the steep wooded embankment to get a drink of water. When the deer reached the river's edge, one of the men shot and killed one.

The two men then got in their pontoon boat and retrieved it. The angler stated he didn't want to make it obvious that he was watching and wasn't able to see what was happening in the pontoon boat. He did say that the two cruised downriver and then back up to their camp, where they exited the boat and quickly put all their guns and ammunition away. The witness, who preferred to remain anonymous, also stated the two men were now on their porch drinking beer. I acknowledged the information and quickly pulled out my map to locate the small village.

Luckily, I was nearby and when I got to the area I found the bench the fisherman had mentioned and noticed two men sitting on the porch of a small cottage. I also noticed the pontoon boat docked along the shoreline. I tried radioing the region office to let them know where I was but, once again, there wasn't any coverage. My cell phone was useless as well.

I approached the two sitting on the porch. One was nervous and fidgety, while the second was calm and collected and had a blank stare. "Hello, gentlemen, I'm Officer Schmidt with the Pennsylvania Game Commission and I'm here conducting an investigation concerning someone shooting a deer. Do you two know anything about it?"

The two denied any involvement, but did admit to shooting their rifles across the river. I told them I had a witness to the incident, and the information led me to them. They still denied any involvement. I asked them their names and they readily supplied that information and their drivers' licenses. I asked to see the firearms, and once again they obliged. I recorded all the information and asked if I could take a look at their pontoon boat.

The nervous man, Nelly, became more agitated, but granted me permission to look on his boat. Expecting to find some blood and hair, my confidence grew. With plenty of sunlight I inspected the boat from stem to stern, including a cooler and a rope near the motor. "Nothing," I mumbled to myself. Not one hair or drop of blood. As I approached the once nervous gentlemen, I could sense he knew I had nothing. I gathered my thoughts and told the two I would return. They acknowledged and said they weren't going anywhere.

I knocked on several of the neighbors' doors to inquire if they had heard or seen anything, and all responded that they had heard the shooting, but didn't see any deer. Several also commented that gun shots in that area weren't uncommon.

I went back to my truck and pulled out my map, looking for the best route to get to the opposite bank in Armstrong County. It was heavily wooded and steep, and according to my map, the only access was an old logging road. I tried the different dispatch centers and other officers again, but my efforts were futile.

Taking a look I noticed several other boats docked in West Monterey. An older gentleman I had spoken to moments before was still standing on his porch watching intently, so I went over and asked if any of the boats were his. He said the second pontoon boat was his, so I asked if he could help me out. He happily agreed and within minutes we were heading south to Armstrong County. I looked up at my suspects, and once again, Nelly was showing signs of guilt and worry.

As we puttered across the channel I watched the bank ahead. I instructed the man to start downstream and work our way back up. He was extremely boat savvy and agreed that would offer better boat control. We hugged the shore as close as we could and finally passed the debris the two shooters admitted to shooting at.

We kept motoring and I finally noticed a slight disturbance on the muddy embankment. We continued on for several yards and I asked to be dropped off. He touched his bow to the grassy, muddy bank and put his motor just above idle to maintain the craft's position. I hopped off with several envelopes and camera to collect evidence, hoping the dead deer was there. I didn't find the deer, but found blood on some of the high grass and a few strands of deer hair.

After about a half hour I stopped my search and asked the operator if he could motor me downstream. He obliged and we traveled about a mile or so before turning around. The current wasn't that swift, so I was hoping we might just stumble across the dead animal. We checked several log and debris piles in the river but with no luck.

We returned to the Clarion side of the river and I confronted the two suspects again about what I found. Once again they denied any wrongdoing, but Nelly still watched me like a hawk. I walked the West Monterey bank downstream for close to a half mile without any luck in finding the deer. I was sweating profusely and the mosquitoes were eating me alive.

I was starting to get frustrated and thinking of how refreshing it would be to go for a swim in the cool water, but when I got back to the suspect's boat, Nelly couldn't handle it anymore. His conscience finally took over.

"Officer Schmidt. Could you please come up here for a minute?" When I got up to their porch I asked what he wanted. He admitted, "My cousin shot the deer."

He went on to explain what had transpired. They were shooting across the river when two deer came down to the water. Nelly bet his cousin he couldn't hit the big doe. When he shot, the deer dropped, and they both looked at each other in amazement. He continued by admitting it was wrong and they really didn't want to kill the deer. They went over and retrieved the carcass and tied it to the boat with the rope I had checked. After traveling downstream he cut a section of the rope and the deer sank. They returned to their camp shortly before I arrived.

I asked him why it had taken so long for him to admit his bad judgment and he confessed he just felt bad for me and at the same time admired my determination in finding the deer.

I also think the small crowd that began gathering helped him to confess. I thanked him for his eventual cooperation. Coated in mud, sweat and mosquito bites, I went into the cottage and had both individuals fill out statements, noting in their own words what had occurred.

Charges were filed and the cousin pled guilty and lost his hunting privileges for several years. Nervous Nelly pleaded not guilty to his charge of unlawfully transporting illegally taken game, but was found guilty in front of the presiding District Justice. He also lost his hunting privileges.

Nelly and I met several times in our later travels, and one day I even met him on a back country road during archery deer season. As we approached each other in our vehicles I recognized him and stopped to talk. His window was already down and he had his compound bow on the passenger seat with an arrow nocked. I mentioned to him it was odd to have a nocked arrow while driving and it looked to me he may have been road-hunting. He denied it and I couldn't prove any wrong doing that day, and he wasn't about to admit to anything.

#### **Habitat Sweet Habitat**

IF THERE'S one thing everybody needs, it's a place to call home — a place to find shelter, a good meal, a drink of water and a warm bed. For deer and other wildlife, that home is called habitat. Any place that provides food, water, bedding areas, fawning areas and escape cover can be deer habitat. Deer are very adaptable. There are few places that a deer cannot find the things it needs to survive, which means they can be found from the big woods to Lancaster farms to Pittsburgh suburbs. Though deer can live almost anywhere, all habitats are not created equal.

In "good" habitat, food and cover sources are plentiful and of high quality, resulting in less time and travel to find them. The body condition of deer in good habitat is better because they expend little energy for the essentials of life, and they are more productive. Deer in poor quality habitats spend more time and energy finding food and cover.

What does good and poor habitat look like? Take a walk outside, what do you see? Would a deer have a place to hide or something to eat? What is growing within a deer's reach — below a height of five feet? Just because it's green and grows, doesn't mean it's deer food. Hay-scented fern, for example, covers vast expanses of the forest floor, but deer avoid browsing it because it contains an enzyme that inhibits a deer's ability to absorb nutrition.

Deer need to consume four to eight pounds of forage (thousands of calories) a day for body maintenance, growth and activity. The bigger the deer, the more food it needs. During winter, the maintenance energy for a 120-pound deer is more than 3,100 calories per day. Add in the energy needed for normal activities like travel, feeding and, for females, fetus growth, and that number jumps to two or three times this baseline.

Nutritional quality varies among food sources. Consider some of a deer's winter forage: hemlock has about 2,300 calories per pound; hobblebush twigs, 2,100; maple twigs, 2,100; cedar, 1,050; pine and twigs, 1,100; and aspen, 1,150. If it's a good year for acorns, the supply can last well into winter, and they have about 2,300 calories per pound. Not all forage below five feet is our equivalent of filet mignon.

By J. T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

# The History of State Game Lands Acquisition

In 1985 the Game Commission was created out of a need to restore wildlife that had been decimated by unregulated hunting and habitat destruction. Specifically, the agency was charged with regulating hunting and protecting wildlife habitat in Pennsylvania.

To restore wildlife, Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker authorized the Board of Game Commissioners to establish Game Refuges. The Refuges were located on state forests, and hunting was prohibited. There were 24 refuges in all.

Under powers conferred by an act of the General Assembly of 1919, the first State Game Lands was purchased by the Game Commission on June 15, 1920. State Game Lands 25 was a 6,288-acre tract in Elk County owned by the Wright Chemical Company. The price was \$2.75 per acre.

By 1950, the Game Commission had purchased 898,936 acres, and the maximum purchase price that could be paid from the Game Fund had been raised from \$2.75 per acre to \$30 per acre. Since the 1950s, the Game Commission has continued to acquire State Game Lands by using combinations of hunters' dollars with federal and state funding.

The Project 70 Land Acquisition and Borrowing Act, enacted June 22, 1964, permitted the commonwealth to purchase lands that would be used for conservation, recreation and historical preservation. With Project 70 funding, the Game Commission was able to acquire 20,016 acres in 15 counties.

The Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, for example, was obtained mostly with Project 70 funds. Comprised of more than 4,300 acres, Middle Creek provides excellent habitat for waterfowl, as well as forest and farmland wildlife. A 400-acre lake hosts thousands of snow geese and tundra swans as they migrate through Pennsylvania in November and again in early spring.

Another significant land acquisition purchased with Project 70 funds is an area known as "The Glades," which is located on SGL 95 in Butler County. More than 2,000 acres were purchased from 38 landowners, and it is now a protected waterfowl and bird migration area. This huge wetland is used not only for the protection of migrating waterfowl, but also is of great benefit to the Game Commission which, in conjunction with Audubon Pennsylvania, have monitored the wetland's nesting birds, such as the osprey, and have studied other wetland species of special concern.

Project 500 Funding was used to purchase parts of the Shohola Wildlife Management Area on SGL 180 in Pike County, and Scotia Range in Centre County, which is part of SGL 176. Project 500 was funded to clean waterways polluted by acid mine drainage, reclaim abandoned mines and other habitat improvement projects.

The Land & Water Conservation Fund, enacted in 1965, has been instrumental in the Game Commission's purchase of more than 48,000 acres, in 15 counties. More than 2,000 acres were added to SGL 156, in Lancaster and Lebanon counties, through the Land & Water Conservation Fund. In Luzerne County, on SGL 57 and 91, more than 7,000 acres were added. SGL 108, in Cambria and Blair counties, had 4,095 acres added through the Land & Water Conservation Fund. SGL 312, located in the counties of Lackawanna, Monroe and Wayne, boasts an addition of nearly 4,000 acres by means of the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

In 1990, the General Assembly had raised the maximum amount the agency can pay per acre to \$400, where it remains today. With the Game Commission's limited budget, there has been more of a trend to increased partnerships and diversity in funding.

The Piney Tract, now SGL 330, is a 2,254-acre tract that was purchased using a State Wildlife Grant and partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alliance for Wetlands and Wildlife. Through this public/private partnership, the Game Commission was able to protect vital grasslands in Clarion County.

The Woolridge Tract in Clearfield County is 1,000 acres of small game habitat and old reverting strip mines that was purchased through Pittman-Robertson Funding and partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This tract provides vital access to a 113-acre parcel of SGL 100 that was separated from the main portion of the Game Lands by the West Branch of the Susquehanna River.

The Landowner Incentive Program, a partnership between private landowners and the U.S. Department of the Interior, is a grant program to share the costs incurred in conserving and restoring the habitat of endangered species and at-risk plants and animals. The Landowner Incentive Program, private funding, the Clearwater Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, were all instrumental in the Game Commission's purchase of a 245-acre Conservation Easement in Centre County.

An additional 7,000 acres in Elk County was added to SGL 44 in an acquisition from the New Shawmut Timber Company in exchange for a gas lease. This large addition protects habitat for grassland wildlife and provides hunters improved access to remote portions of SGL 44.

With the assistance of the funding already mentioned, and help from conservation-minded individuals and conservancies, the Game Commission has acquired more than 1.4 million acres of Game Lands. Land acquisition continues to be a vital part of the Game Commission's mission to preserve and protect wildlife for the citizens of the commonwealth. The Game Commission is committed to being a responsible steward of these lands by having extensive land management programs in place that best serve wildlife and hunters, furtakers and all others who enjoy the benefits of these public lands. This requires hard work and dedication from Game Commission Food & Cover Corps crews, whose job it is to, among other duties, develop food plots, control erosion and mark boundary lines. These crews often use heavy equipment to build roads and bridges.

The Game Commission receives no tax dollars from the commonwealth. Protection of wildlife habitat is funded through hunting and furtaker license fees and, increasingly, federal grant programs and through funds from the sale of oil, gas, coal, timber and minerals obtained from State Game Lands.

There are many ways you can help protect wildlife and wildlife habitat. When you purchase your hunting license, your money goes into the Game Fund. The land acquisition budget, limited to \$400 per acre, comes from the Game Fund. Monetary donations are always welcome. You may specify that your donation goes to land acquisition. Remember the Game Commission in your estate planning. Family members and friends may memorialize their loved ones by sending donations to the Game Commission. If you have land that you believe would be of benefit to the Game Lands system, sell or donate it. If you are unable to offer financial help, donate your professional services, such as real estate appraisal or legal services. If you know of land for sale that would make good wildlife habitat, contact your Game Commission region office.

Contact your legislator to support raising the price per acre that the Game Commission is allowed to pay.

Contact your legislator to support increased funding for the Game Commission. All of these will be beneficial for wildlife and wildlife habitat, now and for many generations to come.

By Jackie Dattisman, PGC Paralegal, Bureau of Wildlife Habitat Management

## Where's the Gun?

MANY ASK the question, "Are you afraid dealing with people who have guns?" The answer is no. The hunters I see with firearms are not the ones I fear, because I can see them, and I realize hunters use guns to hunt; I expect them to have them. It's the folks I see without guns that make me nervous. Several times during my short career I've encountered people afield that I knew were hunting but didn't have a firearm. Usually, they denied the fact they were hunting, but I later found the gun they'd stashed. I use a higher level of precaution when dealing with these folks. They're hiding the gun for a reason, and it's a WCO's job to find out what it is.

My first hidden gun episode was during my first fall hunting season. Jim Egley is the Law Enforcement Supervisor for the Northwest Region and also my direct supervisor. I've ridden with Jim several times through the seasons and we've had a few good cases together. He's put up with a lot from me over the years, and he still comes back for more each hunting season.

Jim was my passenger one autumn day shortly after he'd issued me a new vehicle. I had emptied everything out of my old Bronco and organized almost everything into my new Ford F-150 pickup. I picked him up early and we headed north to Erie County where we worked our way up to SGL 314.

We conducted field checks on several hunters from Ohio. All their information and licenses checked out, and we were just chatting when we asked if they were hunting with others. They said there was one more hunter in their group. Just then Jim looked down the dirt road and saw a man approaching about 150 yards away. Jim glanced back to us, then again to the man walking down the road. He then asked me to come with him. We separated ourselves from the group and Jim informed me that the first time he saw the man walking he had a gun, but when he looked at him the second time, he didn't.

We asked the group again what their buddy was hunting, but they quickly changed their story and said he was just scouting. Eventually, the man joined our conversation and reiterated he was just scouting. We hopped back in the truck and Jim insisted that a gun was hidden along the road somewhere. We sat in the vehicle and waited to see what the group would do. For several minutes they just shuffled around their vehicle patiently waiting for us to leave.

Jim and I came up with a plan. We decided to drive up the rode where Jim last saw the gun. We would turn around but as we did Jim would hop out of the vehicle and hide in the woods. I would then turn on my red-light and quickly drive by the hunters with the hopes of misleading them into thinking we were responding to an emergency.

I gave Jim my portable radio and prepared to pull out when Jim asked, "Do you have any paper?" I pulled out my notebook, thinking he needed it to write down their names when he caught them.

"Not that kind, I mean toilet paper."

"Sorry, I do not."

"What kind of "game warden" doesn't have TP?" he asked.

I almost blamed it on him, because he was the one who issued me the new truck, but I figured that might not be wise. I apologized and explained my mistake. He just shook his head in disbelief. I thought for sure I would never get off probation that year.

I started the truck and drove away. As I began my 3-point turn, Jim quickly exited the vehicle and hid in the brush. I turned on my red light and zoomed by our suspect. I made a quick right turn and within minutes heard Jim on the radio, "113, they got it."

"Did you catch them?"

"No, they left before I could get to them. They did not turn around, so if you make another right you should meet them head-on."

Sure enough, they made the loop and I initiated a traffic stop. I asked the hunter several questions and he admitted he'd hid the firearm, because he didn't have the proper hunting license. Eventually, he opened the trunk to show me the gun he had hid in the weeds. I went back and picked up Jim and the violator pled guilty to multiple charges.

Jim taught me a valuable lesson that day, and I've been thankful to him on more than one occasion. Sometimes, I even have two rolls of "paper" in my truck.

This past winter I patrolled along a dirt road in Forest County when I encountered a vehicle blocking an access road. The land was open to public hunting, so the driver of the vehicle was in violation. I wrote down the license plate number and took a picture for evidence. It was still flintlock muzzleloader deer season and late small game season. There was plenty of snow on the ground and two sets of tracks crossed the road and headed into the vast forested tract. I slowly picked my way through the trees and deep snow as the tracks zigzagged through the white powder. Several times it appeared the hunters were putting on small, one-man drives. One hunter took up position looking over a hemlock thicket while the second made a loop in the hopes of pushing some deer.

Eventually, I caught up to the hunters. I could hear them talking to one another just ahead. As I approached the first hunter, I noticed a flintlock cradled in his arms. He hadn't seen me yet. He was talking to another hunter to my right. I barely saw the second hunter through the thick hemlock stand he was working his way through. His fluorescent orange and voice occasionally revealed his location. When I was within 75 yards of the muzzleloader hunter he looked my way and his attention quickly refocused to his son, I learned later, hunting through the thicket.

The old man cupped his hand and mumbled a few words and directed his son to leave the area with several hand motions. I identified myself to the older hunter and asked why he was warning his hunting buddy of my presence.

He denied the hand gestures and told me he was wiping his nose. I conducted a field check while maintaining a safe distance and trying to focus on the second hunter. I could only see an occasional flash of orange through the trees.

Eventually, the second hunter exited the stand of hemlocks and walked my way without a gun. I told him my name and affiliation and asked what he was hunting. He quickly denied hunting and told me he was just putting on drives for his dad. He had a valid hunting license, but repeatedly denied hunting. I inquired why his dad motioned him to leave, but he denied any such movements.

The two exhausted my patience, so I finally told the son I knew there was a gun hidden amongst the trees and it would be very easy for me to find with all the fresh snow on the ground. Finally, he admitted he left his shotgun leaning against a fallen log in the thicket. We back-tracked and found the gun buried in snow under the log. He said he placed it there because he didn't know who his dad was talking to and felt safer if the gun was left near the log.

Thinking he may be using slugs to help his dad harvest a deer, I checked all his shells. All were legal bird shot. Things just weren't adding up. He was properly licensed, wore the appropriate orange and had legal arms and ammunition. I still could not figure out why he hid his gun.

All three of us returned to our vehicles, and with the help from a region dispatcher and supervisor, I ran the guy's name for warrants. Finally things started making sense. He had a rap sheet from other states and a warrant from South Carolina for not appearing to a hearing. Although I was not able to send him to his day in court in South Carolina, he and his father were issued a couple of citations and paid them within the legal timelines.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

# Bobcats & Coyotes & Bears, Oh My

Life & Times of the Whitetail Bobcats & Coyotes & Bears, Oh My!

By J. T. Fleegle

DOROTHY isn't the only one afraid of getting eaten by a bear. For a prey species, danger could be lurking around every corner. Deer have been meals for mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, bears, lynx, bobcats, eagles and even alligators. Through it all, deer have persevered in this evolutionary catand-mouse game. In Pennsylvania today, the deer's list of enemies is shorter than it once was, but still includes bobcats, coyotes, black bears and, of course, humans.

Historically, mountain lions, wolves and people were the main predators of white-tailed deer. Mountain lions are solitary predators that stalk their prey. In western states, 60 to 80 percent of their diet is deer. Wolves chase their prey in packs and travel extensively to find their quarry. The staple of their diet throughout their North American range is white-tailed deer. An adult wolf can consume 20 or more deer annually, half of which may be fawns. A recent Pennsylvania study investigating fawn survival showed 46 percent of mortalities were the result of a predator — 1/3 from coyotes, 1/3 from black bears, and 1/3 unknown. Bobcats killed only a few fawns. Pennsylvania research has documented only three coyote kills, one black bear kill, and one bobcat kill out of hundreds of collared adult deer.

Deer are not completely defenseless against attacks. Evolving with mountain lions and wolves has given them some pointers. Deer are most vulnerable at birth. In a strategy called predator swamping most fawns are born in a 2-week period, swamping the market with more fawns than predators can eat. And when fawns remain motionless, their speckled coat and lack of odor help them escape detection. As fawns age, they get stronger. In three days, a fawn can outrun a human; in three weeks, a coyote; and in six weeks, a bobcat. When they reach adulthood, alertness and speed are a deer's greatest defenses. Hearing, sight and smell become fine-tuned instruments, multiplied by 5, 10 or 20 herd members, a predator's meal becomes a tall order.

While bobcats, coyotes and bears are a fact of life for every deer, deer have played the game before and victory is experienced with every escape.

#### State Game Lands

## An Integral Part of Pennsylvania History

By Wes Bower

PENNSYLVANIA ENJOYS A major place in this country's history. Our commonwealth's link to this nation's past began in 1643, when the Swedes established the first permanent colony in the vicinity of Tinicum in Buck's County. In the 3 1/2 centuries since, the historical events that occurred here are a proud part of the heritage of this state's citizens.

Sportsmen should be especially proud that our present-day State Game Lands mark the sites where more than just a few of these historical events occurred.

While these sites were, of course, not State Game Lands at the time, it's noteworthy that because the Game Commission has since acquired these lands, their historical significance is protected.

In 1919, the legislature passed a law authorizing the PGC to purchase land, to be known as State Game Lands. These parcels were to be used for public hunting, as well as game refuges. It was 1920 when the first game lands was purchased. The cost was \$2.75 per acre, and the parcel became known as SGL 25, primarily because the tract had already been established as a refuge, refuge 25. By 1935 the PGC had title to over 500,000 acres of State Game Lands. The total cost of the acquisitions for all of this acreage was approximately \$1.1 million. The average cost per acre was \$3.60.

By 1965, 45 years after its initial purchase, the agency had acquired one million acres. The average cost of this one million acres was \$5.65 The PGC currently owns 305 State Game Lands, in 65 counties, which have a combined acreage of more than 1.4 million acres.

While this land was purchased primarily for wildlife and sportsmen, nonhunters are also free to enjoy State Game Lands for a wide variety of outdoor recreational pursuits. Another seldom thought of benefit is that by purchasing this land, the PGC has preserved a slice of "Americana." All outdoor enthusiasts can visit these tracts, enjoy the recreational opportunities and, with a little effort, learn and appreciate the historical background of these lands. Here are a few examples of the uniqueness of our Game Lands:

**SGL 26** is an 11,926-acre tract around the intersection of Bedford, Blair and Cambria counties. During the 1800s, a lumber camp was located along Bob's Creek. A large pond was available to float the logs to a power mill. A small gauge railroad, using a series of switchbacks, took the boards up the face of the Allegheny Front. Upon reaching the top of the mountain, they were transported to Portage and Beaverdale. The sawmill was removed in the late 1800s, and in the early 1900s, the railroads tracks were stripped away. Some old apple trees in the bottom flats indicate the original site of the lumber camp.

An incident where this SGL now is will always be remembered as the "Lost Children of the Alleghenies." On April 24, 1856, the Cox Brothers, George, age 7, and Charles, 5, wandered away from their home, which was located in the primitive Spruce Hollow area. Word of the lost children quickly spread, and by the next day hundreds of searchers were combing the isolated mountains.

During the ensuing week, on some days the searchers numbered more than 1,000. The lost children captured the imagination of the Pennsylvania citizenry, and opinions, rumors and theories about their fate were widespread. One common suspicion was that the parents "did away with the children." Their potato patch was uncovered and the dirt floor of their cabin was investigated for recent digging, all to no avail. On the fourth day, a woman who claimed she possessed "magical powers," took command of the search and for several days she led her "followers" up and down rocky heights and across spring-season swollen streams. Eventually, the searchers lost patience with the old woman and took away her mantle of leadership.

On the 10th day of the search a local man named Jacob, who reported that he had had a dream of the location of the lost children, discovered a shoe of one of the boys. The lost children were located soon thereafter. The bodies were discovered approximately six miles from their home. More than 5,000 Pennsylvanians showed up for the funeral, and the boys were interred in one coffin in a Mount Union cemetery, located near Pavia. A monument, which stands off Route 869, is located near where the bodies were found.

**SGL 73** is a 20,000-plus-acre tract in Bedford, Blair and Huntingdon counties. Located at the crest of the mountain in the Snake Spring area in Bedford County, and located adjacent to Route 36, entrenchments are still visible near the roadside. These "ditches" were prepared in June 1863 by militia troops under the command of Col. J. G. Higgins. The Union Army thought advancing Confederate troops were preparing to attack the railroad hub near Altoona, to disrupt the supply lines of the Northern troops. Instead, the Confederate troops deployed towards Gettysburg and the major confrontation between the two armies occurred there. If the Northern Army generals had been correct in their original assumptions, the major battle of the Civil War might have taken place in this Bedford County area.

**SGL 65**, in Fulton County, is about 6,000 acres in size. On Sideling Hill, about 100 yards east of Bark Road, there is a crater-like depression known locally as the "Bear Wallow." While there is much speculation about the cause of the "hole in the ground," the widely accepted theory is that in some earlier time it was caused by a large meteor.

**SGL 124** is a 7,000-acre tract in Fulton County. In 1965, the PGC added what is known as the McCullough tract to this parcel. This is the site where many years earlier the Davis Fort was located. On February 29, 1756, Indians attacked and destroyed the fort. Remnants of an old lime kiln stand approximately 600 feet southeast of the fort site.

Other unusual and/or historical aspects in the southcentral section of the state include an old charcoal operation on SGL 166 in Blair County and remnants of the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad on SGL 281 in Perry County. Much Indian history surrounds the Hoovers Island tract, which is located on the Susquehanna River. This island is officially known as SGL 233.

One of the largest and most popular Game Lands is SGL 211. This tract is nearly 45,000 acres in size and is located in Dauphin, Lebanon and Schuylkill counties. Because of its significant railroad history, it is a popular destination for steam engine buffs. In the mid 1800s, a railway connected Schuylkill County's coal and timber riches with the industrial centers in the southern and western parts of the state. There are several points of interest along the old railroad bed. The remnants of a water tank with swinging spouts which provided water to steam locomotives traveling through the valley and those of an old caboose once haunted the old bed. After the railroad closed, for many years the old caboose served as a hunting camp. The Rattling Run Station served the village of Rattling Run, a small community founded around 1827. This village, which served as a stagecoach stop, was located on the South Side of Sharp Mountain. A train station, water-powered sawmill and several other structures were located near the tracks. Eleven house foundations have been uncovered in the vicinity of the top of the plane.

The Yellow Spring station was located on the top of Sharp Mountain and served as a coal-transfer station for Yellow Springs. A path north of where the village stood will take you to the top of the mountain where a "mystery tower" once stood. It's believed this tower was used in mining operations. In the early 1840s, three deep mines operated near Yellow Spring.

Used as early as 1775, this famous spring triggered substantial development in this area. In earlier days, water was bottled and sold from this spring. Prior to 1840, a bathhouse and other buildings were built near the spring. In 1870, a hotel was built, but 14 years later, it was destroyed by fire.

Years later, the Lancaster YMCA purchased the property and operated the spring facility as a retreat. The area was named Camp Shand, and at one time, the site consisted of a railroad station house,

spring house, bowling alley, dance hall, barber shop, post office and saw mill. Dresden Lake, located along Cold Springs Road, south of the railroad station, was used for boating, swimming and ice making. Some remnants of the breastwork of the lake still remain. At times more than 2,000 people lived in the valley.

Today a 19-mile, PGC maintained road runs through the area. The road is open for foot and non-motorized travel. It is closed to motorized traffic, except for one day, a Sunday in mid-October, when it's opened for vehicle tours. This roadway allows outdoor enthusiasts to explore this game lands and enjoy not only the ample wildlife, but also the area where once, "the railroad was king."

- **SGL 220** is one of the smallest Game Lands. Located in northeastern Lancaster County, near Blainsport and Reinholds, this tract contains only 96 acres. A unique feature of this reverting farmland parcel is a large bank barn. Built in 1795, it is constructed of stone and hand-hewed lumber. It is located less than a half mile from the Swamp Church, which was built during the same era. Both provide a sense of pride to local historians.
- **SGL 182**, a 273-acre tract in Berks County is the site of an undeveloped natural cave. The entrance to this cave, now sealed, is near the Sacony Bridge.
- **SGL 110** is in Berks and Schuylkill counties. Consisting of more than 10,000 acres, it straddles the two counties along the Blue Mountain. This area is ripe with Indian history. In colonial days, for protection from Indians, a series of forts was established along the Blue Mountain. Fort Northkill was located adjacent to this SGL boundary, and the Appalachian Trail spans the entire length of this Game Lands.

The original dirt road that traveled over Blue Mountain was initially an Indian trail. At the top of the mountain, where Game Commission turkey hardening pens once stood, was once the site of Ney's Tavern. This early day road was used by farmers with horses and wagons hauling produce to Pottsville, making the return trip home with wagon loads of coal. The legend is that the buildings and bar was half in Berks and half in Schuylkill County. When revenue agents made their way to the top of the mountain to collect taxes, they would find that the bar goods and other equipment had been moved to the opposite county. Reportedly, for many years, by using this nefarious scheme, the tavern owners evaded taxes.

Pennsylvania has long been noted for its excellent trout fishing opportunities. It's noteworthy that **SGL 60**, located in Centre County and comprised of nearly 7,300 acres, is home to the headwaters for four major trout streams: Trout Run, Big Fill Run, Trim Root Run and Wilson Run all originate on this public land.

- **SGL 114** in Lycoming County contains nearly 3,000 acres. It was once the site of thriving tanneries, and remnants from this industry can still be seen there. On the northern edge of this Game Lands, along Larry's Creek, numerous ditches, stone walls and depressions in the ground mark the site of one of the tanneries.
- **SGL 252** is 3,018 acres and located in southern Lycoming County and northern Union County, about midway between Elimsport and Allenwood. In early days this was the site of the small community of Alvira. Remnants of old foundations, including two churches, can still be found here. Susquehanna University uses this site as an archaeological study area. In the early 1940s, the federal government acquired this land and the area became the site of the Susquehanna Ordinance Depot. The depot was designed to manufacture and store ammunition. However, the project was soon suspended and the area was subsequently abandoned. 135 concrete bunkers were built and are located in an 800-acre section of this parcel. These bunkers are covered with vegetation and are now included in PGC management plans.
- **SGL 12**, in Bradford and Sullivan counties, is comprised of 24,479 acres. It was purchased in 1920 and was the second parcel purchased by the Game Commission. Attached to SGL 36, which comprises another 18,929 acres, they offer a public hunting area encompassing 43,408 acres. During

the Depression era, President Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps established Camp Laquin on the area. The rural community was a stopover along the Susquehanna and New York Railroad. When the CCC Camp was dismantled in 1940 and the post office closed in 1941, the small community became a ghost town. During the early 1940s, the railroad tracks were removed and utilized in the war effort.

One of the earlier legends about this area involved an Indian "war-party" that was returning to its village after raiding and plundering settlers along the Susquehanna River basin. Heading back along the fabled Lycoming Path, the raiding party split up at the junction of Schrader and Towanda creeks. Included in the raid booty of the party following the Schrader Creek trail was a large bell. The plan was to ring the bell to find each other when they reached their meeting destination. However, a mysterious plague beset the Indians who were traveling along the Schrader Creek Trail. Many became sick and perished. The remaining few decided they could no longer carry the loot from the raid, so the valuable articles, along with the large bell, were hidden along Schrader Creek. Reportedly, the treasure was buried in the vicinity of a large tree that hung over the waterway. Legend has it that the Indians never did return or that they could not locate the area where the loot was hidden.

In the early 1900s, logging camps became a common site along Schrader Creek. The local story is that one evening, a cook on an evening stroll discovered the bell. Reportedly, the remaining loot was never found.

- **SGL 127** consists of 25,500 acres in the northwest corner of Monroe County. At one time, portions of this tract were part of the Tobyhanna Military Depot, and it was used as an impact area for artillery practice. In addition to the regular military training at the depot, this site was used by West Point Cadets for maneuvers up until the end of World War 11.
- **SGL 165**, located in Northumberland County, is nearly 1,200 acres in size. Several foot trails bisect this Game Lands, including "Swank's Path," which crosses over Little Mountain on the western end of this parcel. It ended near the intersection of Mountain and First streets in Trevorton. This path was used by all, but most notably by miners from the Trevorton area, to get to the numerous mines on the other side of the mountain. Old timers in the area can still vividly recall observing, at the beginning and end of mine shifts, the lightning-bug-like glow from miners crossing this mountain trail, the carbide lights on their hard-hats providing a subtle light.
- **SGL 209** in Pike County, consisting of about 4,400 acres, has a history of producing high quality limestone. The resource was quarried and shipped to many locations, particularly New York City. The stone was desired for sidewalks and curbing.
- **SGL 66** consists of about 7,791 acres in Wyoming and Sullivan counties. This parcel was the site of several old lumber camp operations along Brisket Mountain, Dutch Mountain and Indian Ridge, and many old apple trees now mark the remnants of these camps.
- **SGL 302** in Washington and Greene counties is a 1,196-acre tract adjacent to the West Virginia Line. Flower enthusiasts and photo buffs enjoy this tract because of the impressive spring wildflower display featuring the Blue Eyed Mary. This flower is characterized by white upper lobes and bright blue lower lobes.
- **SGL 271** in Somerset County is comprised of about 1,885 acres, with the original purchase being made in 1969. Snow enthusiasts would do well to visit this Game Lands, as elevations up to 2,980 feet and extreme snow depths are the norm. Mt. Davis, which at 3,213 feet is the highest point in Pennsylvania, is located a few miles east of this tract.
- **SGL 50** in Somerset County comprises 3,158 acres. This mountainous tract is located along the Allegheny Plateau with no elevations less than 2,000 feet. The remains of an old sandstone quarry may be seen in the Bear Rocks area where the stone was quarried for the construction of railroad bridge abutments.

- **SGL 42** consists of 15,652 acres in Westmoreland, Somerset and Cambria counties. Remnants of the Baldwin Iron Furnace, once part of a major industry, are located along Baldwin Run. There are also some remains of the old ore pits which were located on Laurel Mountain.
- **SGL 277** in Crawford County is less than 1,000 acres. Prior to the PGC acquisition, this tract was a regulated shooting ground, and before that it was the site of a fish hatchery, and was used as an experimental project for the rearing of furbearers, primarily muskrats.
- **SGL 314** in Erie County, which consists of about 3,100 acres, was purchased by the PGC in the early 1990s. Located adjacent to the Pennsylvania/Ohio border, this Game Lands is commonly known as the USX property. In the early 1970s, the area was slated to become the site of a modern steel mill. However, that project never came to fruition. Located along the Lake Erie shoreline bluffs, many summer cottages once lined this tract, but their remnants have since drifted away.
- **SGL 24**, in Clarion and Forest counties, contains more than 8,300 acres. Much of the land was purchased between 1930 and 1933, with one small block added in 1969. One of the early day refuges, which was 11 miles in circumference, was located on this Game Lands. Golinza, Little Egypt and Red Hot were small lumbering communities once situated on this site. Remnants of these communities can still be seen. Most of the initial property was owned by large lumber companies and many of the tram grades can still be located.
- **SGL 54** consists of more than 23,000 acres near Brockway in Jefferson County. This Game Lands holds a special place in the hearts of many "game protectors." Beginning in 1936 an old hunting camp (built in 1915) on this SGL, served as the Game Commission training school until 1987.

The school, named the Ross Leffler School of Conservation, consisted of three primary structures: the main building being the 1915 hunting camp; the classroom/dormitory, which was erected in 1941; and the barn. Shooting ranges and a baseball field were also on the site. The school was the first training school for "game wardens" in the nation. Being adjacent to two large game lands, the school, PGC officials boasted, provided the "largest campus in the world."

The first 19 classes, comprised of 454 officers, were trained at this facility. Unfortunately, the upkeep of the antiquated buildings, along with the school's remote location determined the facility's demise. During the mid-1980s, the training operations were transferred to the newly-constructed central office in Harrisburg. Today the school is gone but a stone marks the site where it once stood.

- **SGL 29** in Warren County is nearly 10,000 acres and is completely encircled by the ANF. One of our earlier Game Lands, the tract was purchased between 1920 and 1922, and it was the site of three major refuges the largest about 1,800 acres. Because the area was once the site of a major lumbering industry, old railroad beds proliferate.
- **SGL 253** in Venango County is less than 700 acres, but it is unique in that it is the site of a monument celebrating the one millionth acre of land purchased by the PGC.

In each of the six regions there are State Game Lands where old cemeteries can still be located. Some of these "hallowed grounds" are mowed or receive basic maintenance. On some Game Lands, the maintenance of these old cemeteries has been taken over by volunteers for whom the area enjoys a special significance.

Admittedly, only a few of the many historical and geographical areas of significance on our Game Lands are highlighted here.

Veteran hunters proclaim that some preseason scouting is recommended to increase your opportunities for an enjoyable hunting safari. Perhaps it's also appropriate that the outdoor enthusiasts who visit and enjoy public land also partake in some "scouting." By checking the archives at county public libraries and talking to local old-timers who have knowledge about local history of the SGL you visit and/or hunt, it's probable that the total enjoyment of your visits will be considerably



# Bait and an Eight

## Bait and an Eight

By Brian Witherite Somerset County WCO

OBTAINING information on a game law violation and where it is occurring can be difficult for a WCO. However, when such information is received and acted on promptly, it is extremely rewarding when all the pieces come together and justice is served. Such was the case in point during the fall of 2007.

A few weeks prior to the archery deer season I received information that an area around Boynton was being baited, and that multiple stands were going to be used. I made several attempts to locate the stands and the bait prior to the opening day, but with little success. However, something told me to remain vigilant and continue to search.

I contacted Deputy Jeremy Coughenour and arranged for him to meet me on the opening day of the season. I briefed him on what I had and we headed to Boynton. I decided to try and find the stand that bordered a cornfield, woods and thicket first. It was a perfect location for deer activity. No one came to use the stand, but I did spot a legal buck and a doe. When Jeremy and I regrouped I suggested we attempt to locate the two other stands, which were across Piney Run. We walked across the dirt road and crossed the stream. On the other side there was an overgrown field with woods surrounding it. I told Jeremy that I would walk the far side and he could walk the stream side, and then we'd meet in the middle while maintaining radio contact. After we separated it didn't take long for me to find the stand location and bait pile. There was grain spread out on the ground and an empty treestand overlooking it. It was obvious from the sign that deer were visiting regularly.

Discouraged that nobody was there and wondering if we had spooked off the individuals responsible for the bait, I collected some evidence and continued walking the field edge. I didn't walk more than 50 yards before my portable radio crackled. Jeremy informed me that he had found the other location and that there were two individuals present. I jogged my way over, with thoughts racing through my mind: Were they the targets of my information, or were they unaware hunters who stumbled into the area?

When I arrived I noticed two individuals in camo and archery gear lying on the ground along the woods. Jeremy came over and told me an 8-point buck was hidden in the weeds at the edge of the woods. Apparently, when Jeremy engaged these two individuals, Bo and Luke, they were standing over the deer when they spotted him and walked away, thinking Jeremy hadn't seen the deer.

After I introduced myself I realized that I knew both individuals from previous interactions at a local deer processor's in the Boynton area. I explained to them why we were there. Initially, both Bo and Luke had no knowledge of anything. They claimed they had been hunting for deer and that Luke shot the 8-point and they were in the process of getting it out when Deputy Coughenour came upon them. I asked Luke why he didn't tag the buck. Luke said he was excited about shooting it and didn't give it a thought. While I was speaking with both hunters Jeremy was looking around. It didn't take long for him to give me the "come here I found something" look. When I walked over he pointed out two treestands in the same tree, 20 yards into the woods, with a pile of apples and grain nearby. I asked Bo and Luke to walk with us to the treestand. With the overwhelming evidence at hand, they decided to confess and tell us the events that had taken place that morning. Apparently, both hunters had taken their climbing stands and placed them in the same tree. The purpose of this was for one to video the hunt while the other shot. Upon hearing this I asked if they actually did video the morning hunt. Bo said he did and took out his camera and played the video for me. It showed in detail the 8-point standing in the middle of the bait pile, eight yards away, and Luke delivering an arrow behind the shoulder. There were saplings on both sides of the bait, with a shooting lane three feet wide where the bait was placed. The deer ran a good ways farther in the woods. They tracked it and then dragged it back into the field, where Deputy Coughenour found them. I instructed both hunters to gather their gear and meet us at the deer processor's in Boynton. That is where they were planning on taking the deer when they were discovered. While they were gathering their gear I asked Bo for the videotape. He opened his camera and handed it to me.

After Jeremy and I processed the crime scene by taking measurements, gathering bait samples and taking photos, we arrived at the deer processor. The owner, who we'll call Uncle Jessie, is related to Bo and Luke, and was standing on the porch with them.

In the haste of the morning's events I forgot to attach my deer rack to my vehicle, so I phoned PGC Law Enforcement Supervisor John Smith, who was aware of the morning events and lives near the area where the violation took place. John said he would come over with his deer rack on his truck. John met us at Uncle Jesse's shop and we loaded the deer. After confirming Bo and Luke's information, I informed them that multiple citations would be filed in District Justice Douglas Bell's office in Meyersdale. After answering some basic questions John, Jeremy and I left. I delivered the deer to a family and kept the head and hide as evidence.

Within two weeks Bo and Luke pled guilty to their charges, which included hunting through the use of bait and unlawful taking of big game. They were fined more than \$1,000 each and lost their hunting and trapping privileges. And the story doesn't end here.

Shortly after archery season ended LES Smith and I visited Uncle Jesse. We informed him that he was going to be cited for his involvement in buying and selling big game, unlawful taking and possession of game and wildlife, and unlawful devices and methods. He faced 19 charges. Uncle Jesse was selling gall bladders and bear paws and deer meat out of his processing

shop. He also was engaged in roadhunting for deer with a crossbow. Luke also was involved and received citations for unlawful taking and possession of big game, and buying and selling big game. Luke killed two deer in closed season and shot a grouse during spring gobbler season and bartered and sold deer.

When I delivered the news to Luke he understood what he did was wrong and said he would take care of the additional charges when he got notice from District Justice Bell's office. Luke was good to his word and pled guilty to the additional charges and was fined \$2,500 and lost his hunting and trapping privileges for seven more years. Uncle Jesse took a hearing in March 2008 and pled guilty to buying and selling big game and paid a fine of \$3,500 and lost his hunting and trapping privileges for 45 years.

Cases such as these are extremely satisfying, because the efforts bring justice for wildlife crimes. This case also illustrates the need for increased penalties for poaching violations, repeat violators and offenses of selling and buying of game and wildlife. If penalties were strong enough to deter these crimes then the resource would stand a greater chance of surviving the greed and unethical behavior of the poaching community, and the people of the commonwealth would see the value of their wildlife resources and the enforcement efforts of wildlife conservation officers who dedicate their lives to bring those who unlawfully abuse these resources to justice.

## Making a Difference

I NOTICED two mature bald eagles flying above us as my wife and I drove south on Route 62 into Tionesta. They did not stay in sight long, though, disappearing up a small valley on the east side of the Allegheny River. As I admired the pair, I wondered if one of the eagles might be one I helped rescue in August 2007.

The day of the rescue started uneventfully, but by mid-afternoon it turned very interesting. I was patrolling SGL 24 and the Collins Pine Property in the morning with Deputy Rob Cochran, and then planned to head over to the Tionesta Indian Festival to man the PGC display in the afternoon.

After I dropped Rob off at his house, dispatcher Jake Dingel from our Northwest Region Office called me over the radio. Dingel had received information from Tom Stunkard about an immature bald eagle possibly entangled in fishing line along the Allegheny River near President Village in Venango County. I called Tom and he gave me directions to his camp and I headed that way.

After arriving at Stunkard's camp, Tom and I hopped in his boat and drove across the river. As we approached the opposite shoreline, Tom explained that the bird should be up ahead. Expecting to see the eagle tangled in a bush or a small sapling along the riverbank, I began to scan the area. Surprisingly, Tom pointed to the top of a maple tree overhanging the river. When I looked up I was able to see the immature eagle dangling 30 to 40 feet above the water's surface. My first thought was how the heck was I going to take care of this. Although the eagle was alert, it was clearly exhausted and stressed, both of which can be detrimental to animals, so I felt an extreme sense of urgency.

I quickly brainstormed and thought that my portable climbing treestand might get me to the bird, but the long bend in the tree wouldn't allow it. Getting a cherry-picker from a local utility, construction or fire company wouldn't work, because of the soft riverbank, and although I had several ladders at my disposal, there was no way of setting those up on the boat to reach the eagle. The only option seemed to be to tie several ropes to the tree, cut a small notch and slowly lower the tree to the water. The tree was not that large, and with the bend in the tree, I thought this might be my best bet.

Luckily, landowner Courtland Gould was at his camp with his family. I introduced myself and explained my dilemma. He graciously agreed to allow me to cut his tree and said he had some rope and pulleys in his barn I could use. Unfortunately, he did not have a chain saw. I told him I would return and asked if he could get all the ropes gathered.

Tom and I hopped back in his boat and we sped off to locate a chainsaw. I stopped at Jim Meagher's house. Mr. Meagher graciously lent me his saw and wished me luck.

When we arrived back at the site, I was happy to see Courtland had the ropes and pulleys tied to the tree, and several others to act as anchors. I looked over all the ropes and pulleys and they appeared to be in good shape and ready to go.

Three fishermen saw what we were trying to do and joined in our effort to lower the tree. I told Tom to get in his boat and be prepared to pick me up once the tree was lowered, or to cut the bird loose if the tree fell and trapped the bird in the water.

I started the saw and let it warm up. I had to make several cuts, but eventually the tree started to slowly teeter. The fishermen loosened their grip on the rope and continued to gently lower the tree. As I continued cutting, the tree began to snap from all the stress. As the tree continued to slump, I thought that my plan was actually going to work.

My hopes were soon dashed, however, as things quickly unfolded. *Snap! Crack! Splash!* One of the ropes broke and the tree plummeted into the river. I ran to the water and began wading to find the bird.

Fortunately, the river was low and I had no problem wading. I was up to my waist and frantically looking for the bird when I could hear Tom shouting, "There it is." I looked down stream and the eagle was 20 feet away from the tree, floating like a duck.

I eventually caught the bird as Tom motored over in the boat. I placed the bird in a carrier, quickly thanked everyone and told them I had to leave to take the bird to the Tamarack Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Crawford County.

Originally thought to have been caught in fishing line, evidence from the bird's foot proved otherwise. The area where the leg meets the foot was severely rubbed, but no indication of fishing line was present. Somehow the foot became wedged in the crook of the tree, and when the tree fell, the foot dislodged.

After three weeks of rehab, I released the eagle across the river from where it had been trapped. The eagle flew from the transport box to a nearby island, where it appeared to gather its bearings. Shortly after, it took flight again and appeared no

worse for wear.

Although the rescue plan did not transpire exactly as I hoped, everything worked out in the end. This rescue would not have been achieved if not for the concerned campers and fishermen. Their desire to help is one of the more rewarding aspects of being a WCO.

When I see true concern for wildlife from citizens, it always makes for a great day. Tom Stunkard and the three fishermen could have kept fishing, Courtland Gould could have turned down my request to cut down his tree, and Jim Meagher could have denied my request for his chainsaw, but they didn't. They took the time to make a difference. Thanks again, gentlemen.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

#### The Rat Hole

IT WAS WINTERTIME and I was busy with the late hunting seasons, a few ongoing investigations and some routine responsibilities. I received a call from a guy who has tipped me off to valuable information in the past.

He told me about coming across a bloody drag mark in the snow on a country road and was certain that a deer had been gutted in the woods and dragged out to be loaded. He didn't mention whether there was any obvious evidence that the deer had been shot, instead of perhaps being a road-injured deer, but that's what investigations are for.

I had previously agreed to meet my neighboring officer, Mark Fair, to conduct some patrols that afternoon, but when I asked if he wanted to check out a possible illegally taken deer, he jumped at the chance. We drove to the area described by my friend and found the blood trail easily. Mark walked up the road, looking for tire tracks, empty shell casings, boot prints or basically anything that could be used to piece together a case.

I took a parallel path to the blood trail and followed it back into the woods, staying far enough to the side to avoid destroying any evidence. About 60 yards off the road, I came to a gut pile, situated very close to a deer bed. There was evidence of the deer walking in and lying down but no sign of the deer ever exiting that bed, at least not under its own power. This appeared to be a case of a healthy deer being shot from the road during the closed season, in other words, a poaching case.

I called out to Mark and he advised me that there was nothing obvious along the road, and that what few vehicle tracks were present showed nothing of real value. At that point, Mark came back into the woods with me and we took a bit more time looking over the gut pile, the deer bed and the blood trail out of the woods. What we surmised was that the deer died immediately after one well-placed shot, and that a single individual gutted and dragged the deer out of the woods. What seemed odd was that the single set of boot tracks appeared to be from a smaller woman, a child or a very small man. One wouldn't think that a child or small woman would be able to easily gut and drag the animal alone, and whoever it was didn't appear to slow down or take any breaks; he or she was in a hurry to get that deer out of there.

I asked Mark if he was comfortable playing a hunch and he said, "Hey, it's your district and you know these people better than I do. What do you have in mind?" I explained that there was a fellow who lived nearby that I was well acquainted with, as I had previously cited him a few times for killing deer unlawfully. Because of the time of year, the nature of the killing and the rural nature of the road where this animal was taken, I felt sure that a local resident that was looking to fill his freezer had probably killed it. What didn't quite match up with the evidence was that my suspect was normal in size, and the boot tracks in the snow were those of a much smaller person.

It was worth a try, anyway. In my recollection, my suspect, Jasper Holtz, was usually confrontational and less than honest for only a short time before caving in and confessing to whatever his game violations were. I also had the benefit of being generally friendly with his whole family and thought that I might get a confession or some valuable information if I played my cards right.

Mark and I pulled into Jasper's driveway just before dark. As we exited the vehicle, I pointed out what appeared to be fresh blood smeared on the garage door, and Mark noticed a small plastic shopping bag covered in blood hanging from the back steps. We smiled at each other, knowing that even if Jasper wasn't responsible for the deer in question, something of interest was going on at the house.

I knocked hard on the door of the farmhouse and thought I heard someone moving about inside. No answer came and I knocked again, harder. Anyone within the home would have easily heard my pounding. Still, nobody came and Mark and I decided to back off, think things over, and regroup.

At this point, I called Tom Sabolcik, a neighboring officer in McKean County. Tom's always willing to help and readily agreed to suit up and meet us as quickly as he could get there. We figured that we might be forced to get a search warrant that evening and we wanted plenty of manpower to conduct the search and, more importantly, to watch the Holtzs' place to prevent anyone or anything from escaping the premises. At my suggestion, Tom contacted Deputy Gordon Liezert and picked him up on the way. In situations like this, it's hard to have too much manpower, and Mark and I were pleased to have the extra help.

Mark and I drove away from the house to a nearby hill overlooking the spread, from where we could see anyone coming or going or any other activity around the house. After 15 or 20 minutes we got a call from Tom that he and Gordie were on the way and would be there within 10 or 15 minutes. At the same time a light went on in the kitchen of the Holtz household. We found it odd that nobody was there to answer the door but someone was turning lights on in the house.

We immediately drove back to the house and rapped on the door again with the same response — none. Shortly, a car pulled into the drive and a pleasant, petite woman asked what we needed. I introduced myself and asked her who she was. She explained that she was Jasper's sister-in-law and that she lived next door. I gave her a quick rundown of the circumstances, without filling in too many details, and asked if she could go inside and speak to Jasper or place a phone call and influence the occupant of the house to answer the door, as we had no intention of leaving until some questions were answered. She agreed to do so, and within minutes, Mark and I were inside the house speaking to Jasper. He explained that he had been sound asleep inside and must not have heard our knocking. Knowing that Jasper's not averse to the occasional beer, I thought his explanation might have been plausible, although I doubted it.

We took seats in the living room. He politely asked what brought us, and I asked if he could enlighten us about the deer that had been killed nearby the previous night. He feigned ignorance and I asked him about the fresh blood on the garage door and the bag hanging on the back porch that formed the shape of a deer heart. We still weren't able to get a rise from him, so I explained that another officer was on the way and that he'd be making the drive into town to apply for a search warrant. Ernie offered to allow us to search the place if we liked, and Mark went to my patrol vehicle to retrieve a "consent to search" form while I stayed and chatted with Jasper.

At this point, I didn't want him to become confrontational so I switched gears and talked about his family, asking specifically about his teenage nephew, who happened to be a rather slight lad. Jasper explained that his nephew, Spider, was still in the area and that he'd be leaving soon for a guide's school in Colorado. When asked where Spider was staying, he said that Spider lived at home, with his sister-in-law, but that he was out partying on that particular evening.

I looked up to see Mark, Tom and Gordie enter the living room together. We got the consent form signed by all parties and went to work. It didn't take long before we found packages of fresh, unfrozen deer meat in the bathroom, upstairs hallway and bedrooms. Strange places to store legally taken venison, wouldn't you think? I was still looking at packages of meat in the bathroom, trying to determine if only one deer was taken, when I heard loud shouting coming from the basement. Knowing that Tom and Mark had made their way to the basement, I took off running, taking basement steps three at a time, conscious all the while that my partners may have been in danger. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but Gordie was right behind me.

When I got to the bottom of the steps, I saw Tom on high alert. Mark was close at hand and they were both giving loud, repetitive verbal commands. "Come out of there! Let me see your hands!"

When I looked to the area that held their interest, I was surprised to see young Spider crawling out of a very small hole in the basement wall; you could have most easily described it as a rat hole. Not in a million years could I have gotten my 180-pound frame into that hole and, although Spider is smaller than I am, I was a bit surprised that he could even wedge his frame into the hole. His small body was contorted, and the look on his face was a combination of fear, pain and sheer relief, knowing that he'd soon be able to feel his arms and legs again.

Apparently Mark had made the discovery of the teen in the wall and quickly gave Tom a signal that he had found something of importance. That young man could have had a firearm in there and clearly wasn't hanging out in that tiny hole for reasons of personal enjoyment. Tom was quick to rush to Mark's aid, and I was glad to have some alert and quick thinking officers on the scene.

We got Spider to his feet and gave him a quick pat down for safety's sake before walking him upstairs where he admitted to killing the deer the previous evening. When asked how long he had been hiding in the hole, he admitted that he panicked and crawled in there immediately when he heard us knocking and saw the marked patrol vehicle in the driveway; that kid had been in that tiny hole for more than an hour before being discovered.

The episode ended well enough, but it was way after dark before we gained entry to Jasper's home that night. We were on his turf and were unaware what weapons may have been available and totally unaware of Spider's presence for most of our visit and search. It all could have turned out very differently. Looking back over 20 years of conservation law enforcement,

I've had many similar scenarios play out throughout my career, and I was glad to have caught one more poacher. Not much physical evidence was present on the scene, but my history in the area and one conservationist's phone call helped catch another game thief.

By WCO William C. Ragosta, Potter County

## Right Place at the Right Time

I HAVE TO ADMIT, watching all those hi-tech CSI programs using DNA, fingerprints, lasers and a multitude of other gadgets to solve crimes is neat. But, alas, it doesn't always work that way for a WCO. Sure, we have a few labs at our disposal. The State Police and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have facilities we can use, but these are usually used for larger cases such as Hunter Related Shooting Incidents, large scale poaching cases, or those involving endangered or threatened species.

Most of our cases are solved through use of our interviewing and investigation skills learned at the Ross Leffler School of Conservation and improved over the years with on the job experience. We also rely on attentive hunters and other citizens to inform us of possible violations.

Many violations, however, are encountered simply by being at the right place at the right time (at least for the officer) and catching the violator red-handed. I always find it amazing as large as our districts are, we officers can just happen upon a violation. Sure, we learn likely places people frequent, especially violators.

For instance, if I sat all day at one of the PGC's rifle ranges during a nice summer day, I would undoubtedly encounter violations. These aren't the infractions I'm referring to. I'm talking about patrolling back roads leading to nowhere or just driving along with no plan and, low and behold, a violation occurs. The following three instances are just a few of my most memorable occurrences.

During my first archery deer season I was driving home from Erie County. It had been a long day and I picked up a pizza from a shop in Titusville for my dinner. I was only 15 minutes from home, with the pizza smelling so good I thought about eating a slice in my truck. But as it turned out, the pizza would have to wait.

It was dark out and at least two hours after legal hunting hours. As I drove along Route 227 I could see a set of small red taillights ahead of me. The vehicle hugged the edge of the road, and as I got closer I could see it was an ATV. I also noticed there was a 6-point buck on the back rack. I pulled closer, and the deer's head and ears were easy to see. The tag, however, that was supposed to be attached to an ear, was not there. I turned on my rotating red light and the machine came to a stop. As I approached, the driver got off his quad and approached. I was correct; the deer wasn't tagged. The individual explained that he had just returned from tracking the deer and his license was at his house, but he could not find it. I followed him to his house and told him I needed to see his license. He eventually produced the license and tag, but I explained he would still be receiving a citation for not tagging his deer. The defendant pleaded guilty.

If I would have been there five minutes earlier the hunter would have still been in the woods, and if I would have shown up five minutes later, he would have been in his barn or house. Unfortunately, my pizza was cold by the time I got home, but the microwave worked fine.

On a snowy day in Erie County, near the town of Albion, I patrolled a snow-packed dirt road during the late flintlock muzzleloader season. The snow quickly covered all tracks in short order. I noticed a small pull-off up ahead and noticed a set of reasonably fresh car tracks back in the pull out. I also noticed a fresh set of boot tracks. The funny thing was, the tracks never got back in the vehicle; they just disappeared into the woods.

I parked my truck and called the region office in Franklin on my radio and informed the dispatcher I would be out of my vehicle. I grabbed my binoculars and struck out. The fresh tracks were easy to follow, as I slowly picked my way through the woods. After following for about 15 minutes I noticed the edges were more crisp and the tread very distinct. I knew I was getting closer.

With the tracks as fresh as they could be, I knew the hunter should be just ahead. I stopped behind a large tree and scanned my surroundings. I caught a slight movement ahead and pulled up my binoculars. The hunter was about 100 yards away and stealthily hunting through the woods. He was dressed in a white camouflage outfit and carried a bolt action rifle.

Maybe he was coyote hunting, I thought. I made my approach and got within 25 yards of him before I whistled. He turned my way, and as soon as he realized I was a uniformed officer, he slowly and gently grabbed the gun sling from his shoulder and lowered the rifle into the deep snow.

I introduced myself and asked him what he was hunting. He denied hunting until I retrieved his rifle. He then sheepishly admitted he was hunting deer. This hunter also pled guilty and paid his fines. Once again, timing played a key role in this

incident. Fifteen minutes on either end and I would have undoubtedly missed this opportunity.

My third memorable lucky encounter occurred during the last day of the 2006 deer season. Legal hunting hours had come and gone, but there was still some ambient light remaining. I drove along a back road in southern Clarion County and saw several deer standing in the middle of a farm field. I continued on the road, looking for a place to hide my vehicle when I encountered a parked truck. I exited my vehicle and went to talk to the two occupants. Deputies Gary Guntrum and Will King sat in the truck, also watching for late hunters.

We spoke a few minutes and discussed our day's happenings. At 5:20 p.m. (29 minutes after legal hunting hours) we heard a lone shot just over the hill. I hopped in my truck and told Gary and Will I'd go down the first dirt road and they could take the second. I was at the scene within minutes.

As I approached I spotted two people dressed in fluorescent orange walking across a field. I hopped out of my vehicle and approached what turned out to be a grandfather and grandson. I introduced myself and asked if they just shot. The young man admitted to the shot. We found a blood trail of the deer and followed it to the field's edge. The doe was still alive, so I had to put it down.

The 15-year-old and his 65-year-old grandfather admitted the young man hunted alone and not only shot after hunting hours, but also shot across the road while his grandfather sat in his Jeep, waiting for his return.

These are just a few cases of me being lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time. I guess it's better to be lucky than good sometimes. Unfortunately, there are many more instances that WCOs are not at the right place at the right time nor lucky.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

# Congratulations it's a Deer

# Life & Times of the Whitetail Biologist Congratulations, it's a deer!

MAY GREETS US with the return of many joyful visions: scarlet tanagers that set the treetops ablaze, daffodils swaying in the breeze, does lumbering along with bellies as big as barrels. Well, that last one may be a joyful sight to us, but the doe might have a different opinion. After a long winter and 200 days, she is about to grace the world with a new life, or two, or maybe three — it's fawning season.

But these miracles will enter the world without baby showers, cigars or fanfare. In fact, it is just the opposite. Discretion and secrecy are top priority to any doe about to give birth. In preparation for the big event, a doe begins to avoid contact with members of her social group. If this is the first time she is giving birth, she will seek out a secluded birth site, usually outside of her core area. If she is an experienced mom, she will return to the same area every year to give birth. Labor lasts 12 or more hours. However, if disturbed, a deer may be able to stop the labor process — a definite plus for a prey species. After the little bundle(s) of joy arrive, mom licks them dry, nurses them and remains close-by for the first 24 hours. A doe and her fawns share a bond that helps her to distinguish them from all the other ungulate bundles of joy being born.

Whether a doe has one fawn or more depends on age and nutrition. Most yearling does, if they conceive at all, give birth to a single fawn. Twins are common among adult does. Deer herds in balance with the area's forage have the highest reproductive rates. Overstocked ranges produce few fawns. In Pennsylvania, 80 percent of yearling does that become pregnant produce single fawns, while 74 percent of does three years old or older produce twins, and only 3 percent of adult does produce triplets.

Like any mother, a doe gets better at parenting over time. Research has shown that fawns of experienced does (four years old or older) have lower mortality rates than those of younger does.

Older does are more dominant and can stake out better areas for fawn rearing. Single parenting is a full-time job for does. Between nursing, grooming and hiding her fawns, the summer flies by and her white-spotted baby is soon all grown up. But she has little time to reminisce, May will be here soon enough and another baby will be on the way.

By J. T. Fleegle, PGC Wildlife Biologist

## Forestry & Wildlife

## Forestry & Wildlife

By Don Garner

Southcentral Region Information & Education Supervisor

THE Game Commission's Southcentral Region recently hosted a tour of SGL 322 for members of the Rothrock Chapter of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) — a group of commercial, government and university foresters.

PGC field forester Roy Bucher coordinated the tour and started it with a history of the 2,864-acre tract, locally known as the Suppes Estate, and explained how logging under a previous owner, a large fire in 1952, and other long-forgotten events affect current forestry practices on the Game Lands.

An active, 109-acre commercial timber cutting on the Game Lands provided tour members first-hand looks at how the Game Commission uses forest management to enhance wildlife habitat. Bucher also explained that individual management plans are being developed for each Game Lands, based upon particular wildlife habitat conditions on each tract. As an example, Bucher told the group that when the Suppes Estate was acquired, in 2001, it lacked early successional habitat — the thick, lush vegetation that springs up the first few years after a forest is cut. Early successional habitat is important for many species of wildlife, so a commercial timber cut on SGL 322 included a regeneration cut specifically targeted to create early successional habitat by stimulating the growth and expansion of the extensive stands of scrub oak.

Scrub oaks are low, dense trees that can produce tons of acorns per acre. Deer, bears, turkeys and many other species gorge on the protein-rich nuts in the fall. Scrub oaks are also excellent nesting and foraging trees for songbirds such as the golden-winged warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, brown thrasher and eastern towhee.

Justin Vreeland, Wildlife Management Supervisor in the Southcentral Region, pointed out that the Game Commission is responsible for all our state's wild birds and mammals, not just game animals, and that the needs of those species are considered when developing State Game Lands plans.

"The golden-winged warbler is a good example," said Vreeland. "A neotropical migrant, this colorful bird spends fall and winter thousands of miles away, in tropical and subtropical forests, but comes north to Pennsylvania for a brief nesting season. On the Suppes tract, the management plan benefits both high profile species such as deer and bears and, also, the 'silent majority' of wildlife such as warblers. Volunteers from a local Audubon chapter monitor golden-winged warbler numbers.

"I fully expect to see deer, grouse, bears and turkeys to increase here, as a result of our forest treatments, and I'm hopeful golden-winged warbler numbers increase as well."

Brad Myers, PGC Land Management Group Supervisor, explained that managing a Game Lands is a collaborative effort among agency foresters, biologists and land managers, and also the private sector. Like many Game Lands, SGL 322 is traversed by a utility right-of-way (ROW) corridor.

"Penelec is an electrical service company that requires ROWs to be open enough for maintenance vehicles to maneuver, and I work closely with them on corridor management," Myers said. "Like most utility companies, Penelec works closely with the Game Commission to maintain these corridors while minimizing chemicals and other practices detrimental to wildlife. Scrub oak stands on Penelec's Suppes ROW are excellent for wildlife yet do not interfere with towers and high voltage

transmission lines." Myers also discussed how log landings, after a sale, are turned into herbaceous openings, conifer cover and other beneficial wildlife habitat that lasts long after a timber sale.

Elsewhere in the Game Lands, Vreeland pointed out the importance of vernal ponds and their sensitivity to improper logging and road building practices. "Often thousands of years old," Vreeland mentioned, "vernal pools generally hold water for only a portion of the year, usually during important wildlife breeding seasons. They are fishless and are normally fed by snowmelt and rain. Because vernal pools are not always easy to identify, they can be easily disturbed or destroyed by haul roads, logging skid trails and improper tree felling in and near the pool.

A healthy forest environment, though, benefits from vernal pools, due to their importance to frogs, amphibians, salamanders, rare plants and invertebrates, along with ducks, deer, bears, bats and a host of other species." Vreeland explained how to spot vernal pools during the dry season and offered many alternatives for relocating roads and log landings to protect the integrity of these important wildlife areas while not affecting a logger's profit margin.

Roy Bucher concluded the tour by saying, "What goes on in State Game Lands management is not always apparent to the casual observer. But trained forestry personnel can, likewise, miss some real opportunities to benefit wildlife while working for a landowner or company to get a maximum profit. As I hope we've demonstrated here today, helping wildlife and making a profit do not have to be exclusive of one another."

## **Raccoon & Beaver Tales**

RACCOONS, beavers, opossums, skunks, groundhogs, bats and other small animals create many incidents for WCOs to handle throughout the year. Sometimes education is all it takes to remedy these encounters, but sometimes it's not that easy. Sometimes a trap is needed to remove an animal. There are box or cage traps, snares, footholds and Hancock traps.

The Hancock trap is a large clamshell-shaped trap made of fencing and used to catch a beaver so it can be removed unharmed. Many times traps are set and within days, if not overnight, the offending animal is caught and removed without much drama. However, on occasion, some animals make things a little more interesting. Here are two instances of less than routine trapping experiences.

A township supervisor from Clarion County had a beaver clogging a medium-size culvert running under a dirt road. When the water backed up and crested the road, it eroded the road, causing thousands of dollars in damage. The supervisor and I met at the culvert one morning and discussed the problem. I told him I would set a few beaver snares near the culvert. He and his crew cleaned out the culvert and the water level receded. Usually when this happens the beavers waste little time repairing their dam.

I put on my waders and got my wire, stakes and snares out of my truck. The area was slick with mud from the flooding. I eased my way across a small flat and found a nice little run the beavers were using to get from the lodge to the culvert. I placed a snare on the small mud flat and double staked it. I set a second snare in a ditch running parallel to the dirt road leading to the culvert. I placed a few aspen saplings behind the snare in hopes of enticing one of the rodents through it. Both sets seemed perfect. I used a minimum amount of guide sticks to funnel an animal through the snare and only a few inches of water flowed, so the risk of drowning the trapped animals was low.

I left the site feeling confident I would have the animals trapped in a few days. I put away my equipment, took off my muddy waders and went back to my office where I sprayed the mud off of everything and hung it to dry.

That evening I had a sportsmen's club meeting. I went to the meeting dressed in a clean and pressed uniform, including a pair of highly polished boots. I figured I would check the snares after the meeting, as they were on my way home, but I didn't really expect to catching anything. As I pulled next to the culvert I could see the snare in the ditch was undisturbed but, peering out the window, I could not find the second snare. I got out of the vehicle, turned on my flashlight and immediately made out the round shape of a 35- to 40-pound beaver sitting on the mud flat.

Good, I thought, that's one. I opened the back of my truck to get my waders and realized I'd left them back at the house. Not wanting to leave the beaver in the snare any longer, and not wanting to drive an hour roundtrip to get my waders, I grabbed my catch pole and animal crate and went after him. As I slowly slipped and slid my way toward the beaver, it watched calmly until I got about five feet away — then it released its fury.

It reminded me of the Tasmanian Devil in the old Bugs Bunny cartoons. It splashed in the mud and water and showered me with the murky mess. That lasted about a minute, until it decided to find shelter in a multiflora rose patch bordering the small run where I had set the snare. Once it got situated in the thorny patch he just sat there, caked in mud, looking at me with those little beady beaver eyes of his as if to say, "If you want me, come get me."

Already muddy and wet, I went in with my snare pole. The thorns from the brush tugged and pulled on my uniform and skin as I wrestled the pole through the thick brush to loop it around the beaver. I pulled the fire hydrant of an animal out and pinned him to the ground so I could use my pliers to release the lock on the snare. The entire time the beaver didn't put up a fight; it was waiting for me to release the snare. Once I did, the "mini-tornado" erupted once again. I quickly grabbed its tail

and the snare pole and raised it up to place it in the waiting animal carrier. It spread all four legs and refused to go in that carrier. I carried it back to the truck and found an old burlap feed sack. I laid it on the ground and lifted the top and gently led the beaver through the opening. He went in without complaint. I released the noose and took him to the nearby Clarion River where he was released. I hopped back in my truck, covered with and smelling of swamp water, blood and beaver castor. I'm glad I checked the snare after the meeting and not before. Two days later I caught the mate in the other set and released her at the same location on the river.

Another incident occurred in Crawford County when I covered WCO Mark Allegro's district while he was on vacation.

A lady called our region office to report that she and her children were unable to leave the house because a raccoon would chase them around until they went back inside. When I spoke with her, I could hear her screaming at the kids to stay in the house and to not open any of the doors leading outside. I got directions and headed her way.

As I drove down the long driveway leading to the isolated old farmhouse, I noticed several children running around the outside of the house. They saw me pulling down the lane and ran up to me with frightened looks on their faces.

"Hurry up, officer, my mom's inside and so is the raccoon."

I grabbed my snare pole and ran into the house. When I got inside the mother was holding the door knob of the door leading to the kitchen.

"Where is the raccoon?" I asked.

"It's in the kitchen. It came in the back door when I went outside to see if it was still in the area. I'm holding the door closed because the latch doesn't work and the coon is trying to get through."

Just then I noticed a pair of paws reach from under the door and grab the bottom edge of the door. As the animal grabbed and pulled on the door it let out horrible blood-curdling screams. The lady could barely hold the door closed as the raccoon pulled. I asked her to hold the door while I ran back out to my truck to get a cage trap and my .22 rifle. She told me to hurry because she didn't know how much longer she could hold the door.

I came back with my cage trap and quickly set it, baited it with some cookies and then placed it on the floor next to the door. I loaded my .22 rifle and laid it behind me at my feet and then grabbed my snare pole. I told the lady that when I grabbed the door knob she could let it go. I told her to take all her kids, go outside and wait for me. During the entire time that raccoon kept pulling on the door and screaming.

My plan was to release the door knob and hope the raccoon would find the cookies and enter the trap. If it didn't and decided to take an alternate route I would try to lasso it with my pole or, as a last resort, shoot it with the .22.

As soon as I released the door knob the raccoon pulled the door open. As it exited the kitchen it noticed the cookies and started eating the small pieces. Eventually, its entire body was in the trap but it was not stepping on the pan to spring the trap door. As it munched on the last cookie piece I slowly and quietly stepped toward the trap and released the trigger, closing the door. Surprisingly, the animal never paid attention to me until it ate the last piece of cookie. At that point it went crazy. I put on my leather gloves and took it where it wouldn't be causing any more problems.

Although these animals were relatively small, they created a lot of excitement for me, but, in both cases, it worked out well in the end. As for me, the drycleaners managed to get the muddy stink out of my uniform, and my boots cleaned up fine, but, I still have nightmares about that crazy raccoon.



## The Bender Fields

FOR A FEW WEEKS I had been hearing about a group of individuals that was driving through clover fields and jacklighting deer. Following up on the leads I found several deer that had been shot. Some had just the backstraps removed, while others were simply left whole to rot. I spoke with the farmer who rents the fields to see if he could provide any details, but all that he could tell me was that it had been going on for about a week. It was October 8, 2002 when I spoke with the landowner and received permission for my deputies and me to drive on the fields to try and catch the poachers. From October 8 on, my deputies and I kept the fields under surveillance, and while we observed regular spotlighting activity, we didn't hear any shooting or see any vehicles in or around the fields.

On October 26 I picked up Deputy Louis Fisher in the morning and explained to him that we were going to check out the area known as the Bender Fields, near Listonburg. We noticed vehicle tracks coming out of the fields and onto Mt. Davis Road, and I decided to stop and speak with the landowner to see if he could shed any light on the poaching problem.

As we spoke he informed us that the problem seemed to be continuing, but not necessarily in those fields. He had noticed vehicle tracks in the fields, and again offered his blessings to drive onto the property and conduct nightly surveillance. I informed him that we had been working the area and would continue to do so.

We scouted the area and decided that when night fell we would make a concentrated effort, with Deputies Boyce and Marteney, to patrol the Bender Fields and the area around Listonburg. Deputy Boyce sat in the fields near the woods, and Deputies Fisher and Marteney spread out nearby while I took a position several miles away. During the night we watched several spotlights work the mountain and valleys, but there was no unusual activity.

Around 10:30 my radio crackled and Deputy Boyce said that a vehicle entered the fields, turned off the headlights and was driving to the rear of the corn and clover fields. I started my patrol vehicle and headed to his position. Officers Fisher and Marteney took a position at the field's entrance. While we repositioned, officer Boyce radioed that a light was working in the back field. I rapidly approached the location and was rolling to a stop as Boyce radioed that a shot just went off. I actually heard the shot as I arrived where Marteney and Fisher were positioned.

Three more shots sounded and the flash of a spotlight beam zipped across the sky. An eager Deputy Boyce asked if we were near. He was relieved that backup was in position. I instructed him to remain in position until the suspects came out of the back field, then to follow the vehicle with his lights out when they traveled to the main road. By proceeding this way, we'd box in the culprits and reduce their chance of fleeing. We could feel the anticipation building. Lady luck seemed to be on our side; we were poised to finally confront the ones responsible for these destructive deeds. Seconds seemed like minutes and minutes passed like hours while we waited for a shot or a flash of a light. After 10 long minutes Boyce advised us that he could hear a vehicle coming, but that it seemed to have its lights off. I instructed him to wait for the vehicle to pass and to then follow behind.

We had the field entrance blocked and we waited. It didn't take long for us to hear the faint idle of a vehicle approaching; with only its parking lights on, it was creeping out the tractor path that went between two fields toward Mt. Davis Road. We held our positions in our vehicles, and when the suspect vehicle neared the entrance to the main road we hit our emergency lights and headlights. The look on the faces of the three individuals was priceless. Before they could even think about throwing it into reverse Boyce flared his vehicle's lights from behind; they were boxed in by four vehicles, with officers at every angle.

The three individuals were all related and two were brothers whom I'd addressed before for game law violations. After securing the still-stunned occupants, a quick search with a flashlight revealed a freshly killed 7-point buck in the rear cargo area of their SUV. Consent to search the vehicle was

granted and turned up a 20-gauge shotgun stashed underneath the rear passenger seat. Fresh spent shotgun hulls littered the floor, along with several live rounds of ammunition. There were also two cordless spotlights inside and the lens of one was still warm to the touch.

While my deputies secured the evidence and information from those involved, I noticed that the West Virginia license plate on the vehicle did not come back to the name of the driver. As a matter of fact, the VIN number also did not reveal anything when it was run through the database. The two brothers had Confluence addresses, and we knew they were valid because I had encountered both of them several months prior. However, the driver from West Virginia didn't have much luck with his vehicle information and his legal residence address. Based on the evidence present I made arrangements for the vehicle to be towed to the Pennsylvania State Police barracks in Somerset, and I placed the driver in custody and notified Somerset County control that I would need to meet the on-call district court judge to process a nonresident offender.

When I arrived at District Magistrate Cooks' office in Somerset it was around 1:30 a.m. The driver was unable to provide the fines and court costs in cash at the justice's request, so I was ordered to transport him to the Somerset County jail where he spent several days, until his fines and court costs were paid. Charges were filed on the two brothers in Confluence and both pled guilty and were set up on time payment plans. All three individuals lost their hunting and trapping privileges for several years.

Things cooled off in those fields for the remainder of that fall. The following year we again received information of unlawful activity there. The last several years have been productive with my deputies and me addressing several late spotlighters and people driving through fields. In October 2008 a similar event took place where a vehicle and its occupants were at the back of the property, spotlighting, drinking and shooting deer when I caught them. That's another story, but on that October night in 2002, the guys in green finally caught up to one source of reckless disregard for wildlife. The dedication and commitment of the deputies and the landowner to catch those responsible was rewarded that evening.

By Brian Witherite, Somerset County WCO

# Wetlands for Wildlife—Every Acre Counts

MR. PETER BALUNEK called the Mercer County Ag Service Center in early spring 2005 inquiring about the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Specifically, Peter wanted to know if this program could help him restore wetlands on his property, so he was referred to me, the PGC Wildlife Habitat Biologist. On a field visit I observed crop fields that were wet and getting wetter as the underground drainage system of clay tile broke down. Because it had recently been farmed, Peter's property was a good candidate for CREP, so I suggested he stop by the US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency office to sign up to have his property evaluated. After additional field review and discussions with Peter about his goals for the wetlands, plans were developed to restore the wetland habitat. With technical and financial assistance from the Game Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency, these fields are now wetlands providing improved water quality and wildlife habitat for a host of species. On top of that, the Farm Service Agency will pay Peter an annual land rental payment for the next 15 years.

In a similar situation, a landowner had some idle land that he wanted to restore to wetlands. After visiting the site, I recommended the Wetland Reserve Program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This program provides the technical and financial assistance to restore wetlands on areas that were previously drained for agriculture, whether or not they are currently being farmed. Many Wetland Reserve Program wetlands are also eligible for permanent easements that provide significant financial incentives to landowners interested in long-term protection of their restored wetland.

Many areas of Pennsylvania that were historically wetlands have been destroyed or drastically modified. This is unfortunate, because wetlands provide flood control, water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. Fortunately, wetlands can be restored.

Agricultural production and development have been the dominant reasons for wetland destruction. In agriculture, it was once common to install underground tiles to drain wetlands so they could be farmed. There are millions of feet of drain tile under the land in Pennsylvania. Even dynamite was used routinely until the 1960s to drain wetlands and straighten streams. Wetlands have also been lost to development for housing, roads and other uses. The acreage of wetlands drained in recent years in Pennsylvania has slowed, but drainage is still occurring.

The Game Commission works with the US Department of Agriculture, specifically the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency to restore wetlands on private land.

The restoration of a wetland may start with a landowner who wants to enjoy the special landscape. Wetlands are not manicured and tend to have a wild look; they are great places for landowners to enjoy a variety of wildlife oriented activities such as bird watching and hunting. For those who enjoy observing unusual plants, wetlands are a bonanza.

An area that was once a wetland but has been converted to other uses can be restored. Your site may look dry, but the soils can tell a different story. The county soil survey may indicate that a site has wetland (hydric) soils. The soil survey is available on the internet at: websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov. Visiting the Natural Resources Conservation Service office for your county can provide detailed information on the soils found on your property. But you don't have to be a soil scientist to find an old wetland; field observations may also indicate a drained wetland. Look for: wet spots in the field, areas that are wet all spring, tile drain outlets on field edges, ditches, water bubbling out of unusual holes after a heavy rain, or scattered spots of wetland plants.

If you have the desire and a potential site, the next step is to determine what type of wetland could be restored to your site. A Game Commission biologist or the Natural Resources Conservation Service county office can help determine a realistic goal for your site. Wetland restorations can be simple or quite complex depending on the site and the goal of the property owner. All types of wetlands, from wet meadows to complex dike systems, provide benefits for people and wildlife. Some restored wetlands are small while other sites are quite large, but all provide habitat for wildlife. Every acre counts.

Once you have an idea of what you want to accomplish, the next step is a financial one. Restoring a wetland can be very inexpensive or extremely costly. Some wetlands can be restored simply by plugging a ditch or breaking old tile, while other sites and landowner goals might require extensive water management. Fortunately, there are several programs that provide financial assistance. The US Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Wetland Reserve Program are potential sources of funding.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service often provides technical assistance to restore and enhance wetlands. Other organizations and private consultants also provide this on-the-ground assistance. Having a good design based on a topographic survey of your site can maximize the value of your restoration efforts. There are site contractors who specialize in wetland restoration. Most people can dig a hole or plug a ditch, but doing it properly can make all the difference. Some areas can be planted with wetland plants, but often, nature will revegetate an area with species well suited to the site.

After your wetland is restored, it will require some maintenance to achieve maximum potential. Invasive plants can reduce the value of a wetland for wildlife, so controlling them is sometimes necessary. Controlling undesirable plants begins in the planning and construction stages. By thinking about the desired plant community early in the process, much of the invasive plant control can be accomplished up front. Over time you may want to manage the water level, add desirable plants or remove undesirable plants.

As I walk around Peter's restored wetlands, interrupted occasionally by the noise of young wood ducks scurrying for cover, I think of the day we first discussed this project. I keep a mental checklist of the wildlife that now use this restored habitat. I have found that walking around a newly restored wetland is most rewarding and, I hope, you will, too. If you have the desire and an appropriate site, wetland restoration is a realistic goal. Assistance to achieve this goal is available.

By Richard Voytko, Wildlife Habitat Biologist

## The Five for Nine Gang

THE BIG BUCK'S nose pointed upward, testing the wind, its massive shoulder muscles rippling, cautiously it inched forward. The buck's heavy wide-beamed rack swayed back and forth, enough to make any deer hunter's heart pump faster. This bruiser had lived his entire life in the prime farmland of northern Crawford County. His tines reached skyward, gleaming in the sunlight as Willy settled the crosshairs of his scope on the buck's shoulder. At the shot, the deer lurched forward and dropped ten steps from where it had stood.

Willy had just harvested his second buck in less than two days. His excitement was paramount as he called his hunting partners, Buford and Jed, on his radio to tell them. Running to the downed buck 80 yards away, he recalled the handsome 7-point he had shot the day before, the opening day of the '06 deer season. What a season he and his four hunting companions were having on the farm. The group had traveled from their home state of Tennessee to hunt deer on a friend's farm.

Upon reaching his downed buck, Willy's radio buzzed from Buford and Jed calling to find out his location. Soon they were jumping up and down around the large buck, giving Willy the high five. Buford commented on how good the group had done. They had taken three bucks, two button bucks and two does. Jed boasted, "And we still have all of our buck tags left and never bought any doe licenses." Buford and Jed then helped Willy field-dress the deer and get it back to the farm with the other deer they had killed.

It was Thursday afternoon about 3:15 p.m. on November 30, when Ken Clark, Northwest Region dispatcher radioed for me to call him. He had information he didn't want to put out over the air. I called him promptly. He stated, "Mario, a person who wants to remain anonymous called about a group of five hunters from Tennessee killing multiple deer off of Gooseneck Road, on the Codger Farm. He left his number for you to call; I think it would be worthwhile to call as soon as you can." Ken then gave me vehicle descriptions and locations on the farm where the hunters had been shooting deer. I thanked him and called the informant immediately.

"Hello, this is Officer Piccirilli from the Pennsylvania Game Commission." The individual breathed a sigh of relief and thanked me for calling so soon. He told me that the group from Tennessee had been driving around in their red pickup trucks, shooting multiple deer. They did not care about antler point restrictions, having anterless licenses, or tagging their deer.

He said, "I saw the guys yesterday. They were all at the farm posing for pictures with their deer and bragging about how many they had killed. It made me sick and it's not right. Can you do something about it?"

I stated that I could, but that I needed more information about the location and the violators. I jotted down some more notes and thanked him for his timely information and for his help in protecting our wildlife resources.

After the call, I realized that I hadn't asked if he knew how long the hunters would be on the Codger Farm. When I called him back he said that the group was planning on returning to Tennessee on Saturday morning. I thanked him again and started making plans to apprehend the individuals and confiscate the illegally killed deer.

I thought about driving up in the morning but decided to not wait. It would be getting dark in about an hour or so and I could slip in under the cover of darkness to observe. Then I'd have time to assemble a group of officers for a late Friday night or early Saturday morning raid. Proceeding to the farm immediately turned out to be the best decision I made.

The temperature was hovering at 50 degrees with a light drizzle as I drove to the Codger Farm. I checked my maps but drove right by the farm. The farm is large, more than 1,200 acres. I went to

the end of the road, turned around and was headed back when I noticed a large tanker truck spraying the fields just below the farmhouse. The tanker continued toward several farm buildings and parked.

It was getting pretty dark as I crept down the main farm driveway and scanned the area to make sure the two red pickups allegedly involved were not there. Not seeing the suspects' trucks, I eased down the long farm lane past the house and farm buildings.

Continuing back to where the tanker had parked just moments before, I observed two camo-clad workers walking over to a large building housing farm equipment. I pulled my vehicle up to the workers but thought it odd they were dressed in hunting attire. Stepping out of my truck I introduced myself and informed the workers I needed to speak to Mr. Codger and asked if they knew where he was.

Their response that Mr. Codger wasn't around didn't bother me, but their heavy southern accents revealed I had a problem. These were the guys I was looking for and now they'd made me. I could tell they knew they were in trouble.

The pair identified themselves as Willy Crooks and Buford Cheater, both from Tennessee. About 10 feet to their right I noticed two hunting coats and two scoped rifles. I asked if they'd been hunting and Buford started to get nervous, avoided eye contact and said, "Ya, we been huntin'."

The hunting licenses on their coats had the deer tags torn out, but nothing was printed on the tags. I checked their rifles to make certain they were unloaded and I asked Buford if he killed any deer. He started shifting back and forth apprehensively and said, "No, nuttin' et all."

"Did you shoot at any deer this week?"

Buford's immediate response was, "No, neva tuk a shot."

I said, "No shooting at all?"

"Nope."

Willy was getting nervous and began to walk into another part of the building when I asked him to return. I asked Willy the same questions and his responses were identical. I had the pair stand in front of my truck headlights as I wrote down their information. I didn't want them to alert their buddies on their cell phones.

I informed the pair that I had information suggesting they'd been shooting deer illegally and that, in fact, a witness saw them yesterday posing for pictures at this very farm with the deer. When I asked them where the deer were, I thought Buford was going to fall over from trembling. He started to stutter and nervously blurted out, "We ain't kilt no deer." Willy stood motionless with a blank look on his face and said he didn't know what I was talking about. I informed the pair that I had probable cause to believe the deer were on this farm and that we would find them in a matter of time.

Now it was well after shooting hours, dark and raining. I radioed the Northwest Region Office to round up some assistance. WCO Mike Wojtecki answered immediately, headed my way and said he would call when he got closer for a more precise location.

Knowing that Mike was 15 to 20 minutes away I called LMO Jerry Bish, who was familiar with the area, and left a message. "Jerry, it's Mario. I'm a little jammed up and need help. I have two nonresidents in custody and three more out in the field, all of them have killed deer illegally. Officer Wojtecki is on his way and needs specific directions. Call me as soon as possible." I couldn't take my eyes off of Willy and Buford.

Jerry called within four minutes and informed me that there were three different parcels of the

Codger Farm. I told him there were three big blue silos behind me and he said, "I'm on my way."

As soon as I hung up with Jerry, Willy walked out a door into another building. I asked Buford where he'd gone and he just shrugged his shoulders. When Willy walked toward another door I saw he was going to make a call on his cell phone and I instructed him to get back over to my truck.

I received calls from Keith Harbaugh, Northwest Region Director, and my deputy, Lawrence Hergenroeder (now a WCO), asking if I needed help. I gave them both my location and they eventually keyed in on the three big blue silos.

While doing paperwork in my truck and waiting for assistance, I looked in my rearview mirror and saw two more hunters approaching from the rear. I stepped out and met them before they reached my truck. As it turned out, Jed Poker and Rufus Hobo, other members of this Tennessee hunting party, also stated that they hadn't gotten any shooting and didn't know anything about any illegally taken deer.

I was checking their hunting licenses and rifles when WCO Wojtecki pulled in. I breathed a sigh of relief, filled Mike in and we started to collect all of the Tennessee group's information.

The fifth member of the group finally showed up. Lukey Drool also denied any knowledge of multiple deer kills. It was obvious that these individuals were not good storytellers; their body language belied them.

Within minutes LMO Bish pulled in, followed by Deputy Hergenroeder, then Director Harbaugh with Deputy John Ittel. Mr. Codger, the owner of the farm, came out from an adjacent farm building with a very perplexed look on his face. I explained to him what was going on and asked him if he knew this group. He said that his son knows Lukey Drool from college.

I read the five suspects their Miranda rights and again asked them if they shot any deer. Again, they denied shooting any. I looked at the group, "Gentlemen, I'm going to apply for a search warrant and search every building and vehicle on Mr. Codger's farm for the deer you allegedly killed. You fellows need to decide whether or not you want to inconvenience Mr. Codger and his son, after they've extended you their hospitality to hunt on their farm."

I asked Mr. Codger if he knew anything about the deer and he threw his arms up saying, "I don't want any part of this, you do whatever you want with these guys, keep me out of it." WCO Wojtecki then asked Mr. Codger if he would sign a consent to search form, giving us permission to search his farm for the illegal deer.

Willy spoke up then and said, "Could ya'll give us boys a minute o' two to talk bout dis?"

I said, "Yes, go ahead," and the five assembled about 30 feet away in a hurried discussion.

Within a minute Willy broke away from the group, approached me and said, "Ya. We dun it. We shot a bunch of deer just like ya'll sed."

"Where are the deer now?" I asked.

Willy replied, "Dey in da walk-in coola cross from da farm house."

I asked them who shot what. Willy killed two bucks. Buford shot a half-rack buck and a doe. Jed shot a doe and a button buck, Rufus said he killed two does and Lukey alleged he didn't kill any deer, just helped everyone else. The group admitted to killing eight deer, not tagging any of them and not having any antlerless licenses.

Director Harbaugh, WCO Wojtecki and Deputy Ittel searched the walk-in cooler. Director Harbaugh returned, drenched from the rain, and stated, "These guys have nine deer in the cooler. Find out who killed the ninth deer."

I approached the group and asked who killed the ninth deer. They looked at one another silently. When I informed them that they would all be charged with possession of the deer Willy and Lukey claimed it, saying they were skinning deer behind the walk-in cooler when a hunter in a white pickup pulled up and asked if they wanted another deer. The deer was illegal, not meeting the antler restrictions. I asked Willy and Lukey if that's what really happened and explained that the fine would be the same whether they possessed the deer or shot it, but they were sure the deer came from another hunter.

After a call to Law Enforcement Supervisor Jim Egley concerning a legal question, we started writing citations. I explained the citations to each member of the group and they acknowledged them with their signatures. Willy received four citations for killing and possessing three deer and shooting over the limit. Buford, Rufus and Jed were cited for killing two deer apiece and shooting over the limit. Lukey was issued citations for possessing a deer and for aiding and abetting. I explained that they also could have been charged with not tagging their deer, not having antlerless licenses, aiding and abetting one another and more.

I asked when they planned on leaving for Tennessee and Willy replied, "We's all gonna leave early in the mornin'." If I had waited, the criminals would have fled with a cargo load of illegally shot deer. Because I had responded immediately to the dispatcher's call, and by using the anonymous witness's information, these lawbreakers did not get away.

Inside the cooler the deer were skinned and quartered with backstraps and tenderloins neatly separated. I had to take four consecutive photos of the deer in the cooler to get them all. It was obvious that these guys were not neophytes when it came to killing deer illegally. We filled two state trucks with the meat, racks, hides and heads.

We left the farm at 9:30 p.m. and drove the five defendants to Saegertown.

At the Crawford County jail we met Lincoln Zillhaver, the on-call magistrate. Once in the courtroom, I provided the magistrate with the defendant's citations and Justice Zillhaver commenced the arraignment. He verified their names and addresses and asked them if they had any prior arrests. Willy and Buford shamefully raised their hands indicating they had previous arrests and convictions in Tennessee for the same thing they were presently in court for.

Justice Zillhaver set their bond at \$500 apiece and the group breathed a little sigh of relief. Then the Justice said, "Gentlemen. That will be \$500 for each citation. Mr. Crooks," the Justice continued, "this court needs \$2,000 in bond from you; Mr. Cheater, Mr. Hobo and Mr. Poker, this court requires \$1,500 from each of you; and Mr. Drool, this court needs \$1,000 bond from you." A flurry of conversation erupted.

Jed said, "I jus can't stay here, I got to goes home!" His face turned so red I thought he was going to explode. The group tried to convince the magistrate to allow them to go and return with the bond later, but the magistrate directed us to take the defendants to the booking area. When the magistrate left the courtroom, Jed asked, "What's gonna happen to us now?"

WCO Wojtecki said, "You're going to jail until you come up with money for your bond."

Lukey Drool said he had a plane to catch, but the corrections officer just handed him a plastic box and told him to remove everything from his person.

The Tennessee gang spent that night and the following day in jail. They also had their rifles and scopes seized as evidence. They all pled guilty and paid their fines (after numerous calls home) in front of District Justice Rita Marwood in Linesville. Their fines in aggregate were \$7,500, plus court costs — and Lukey had to reschedule another flight.

I met with Willy and Lukey after they were released to return some of their belongings. They said

that they plan on never repeating this stunt again and that they resolved to abide by the law in the future. Willy commented, "You know we paid a lot of money for a hunting license and we wanted to bring something back."

I replied, "I understand, Willy, but all you had to do was purchase your antierless licenses, tag the deer you killed and obey the law and you never would've had a problem."

Two weeks later I received a call from an anonymous individual who knew the defendants in Tennessee. The caller thanked us for apprehending the group and said, "I'm glad somebody finally caught up with these guys; they've been shooting deer in Tennessee for a long time and even have their own makeshift butcher shop to process the illegal deer."

I once heard that outlaws have to be lucky 100 percent of the time to avoid being caught but WCOs have to get lucky only one percent of the time to apprehend them.

It all started with a phone call from a concerned sportsman. Am I glad that I decided to check it out right away? You bet I am!

By Mario L. Piccirilli, Crawford County WCO

## On Trapping Turkey

I WAS ATTEMPTING to locate some tom turkeys for a cooperative multi-state study sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation on gobbler harvests during the spring seasons. The Game Commission's role was to trap and band 300 gobblers a year for five years. The responsibility was divided among the six regions, with each region responsible for 50 birds. It sounds simple, but many factors, including weather, equipment and the animals themselves, can make it difficult.

WCOs play a valuable role in the trapping process. Leading up to mid-January, we keep an eye out for turkeys and turkey sign in our districts. If we know where some birds are hanging out, we begin baiting sites after the late archery and muzzleloader deer seasons close.

If the weather is mild and not much snow is on the ground, luring the birds consistently can be difficult. Turkeys seem to have little problem finding food during the mild weather. However, when the snow is deep and temperatures fall, they readily come to bait, and usually early in the morning after a cold night on the roost. This scenario often creates an easy opportunity for trapping.

Another factor is equipment. We typically use a large net stored in a wooden box. The top of the box is open, allowing the large net to be pulled out by the three rockets electronically ignited by the trappers. Recently, our newer net configuration has proved to be highly successful. It's deployed with one corner leading the way, flying in a shape more like a diamond than a square.

We've also had problems with weak rocket charges and tangled nets. On one occasion we waited all day and finally had five nice gobblers show and present a clean shot. But we deployed the net only to have a small piece of wire tangle the net. We're still not sure how the small piece of wire got in the box, but it did spoil our efforts.

The most important factor of trapping turkeys is the birds. They can be the most frustrating of all the variables in trapping. I'm sure most hunters can relate to the quirkiness of these wild animals.

During the winter of 2007, I was monitoring several bait sites. One location had a large flock showing on a routine basis, but there weren't any gobblers in the flock. I kept baiting the site in the hopes of gobblers showing, but none ever did.

Another site I was watching was on a small peninsula along the Tionesta Creek. I had five beautiful long-beards showing, but they never showed at the same time or on consecutive days. One day I checked and the birds hit the bait early in the morning. Then they didn't show for two days, and when they did show up again, it was at 4 p.m. Eventually, the birds were showing on consecutive days, but at different times. When I finally decided to get the team together to plan a trapping date, I checked the site one more time, only to find that a recent snow melt and some rain caused the creek to rise and flood the peninsula.

I had birds coming into several other sites, but where there just was not enough room to place and deploy the net. I was running out of hope, because I would soon be on leave. My wife was pregnant and she was to be induced on March 6. I was running out of time, and the opportunity would not present itself for another year as we typically stop trapping at the end of March. I exerted all my options and had nothing to show for it.

Then one morning I left to check a new site close to my house. I traveled south along the west side of the Allegheny River, toward Jamison Run Road. I checked a couple possible areas with no luck and headed back north. When I reached the mouth of Dawson Run Creek I caught a shimmer of black out of the corner of my eye. Low and behold, a large group of gobblers was pecking away at a corn feeder in the yard of a local residence.

I turned around at the next pull off, returned to the site and parked far enough to not frighten the birds. Using my binoculars I saw twelve nice mature gobblers. They eventually ate their fill of corn and disappeared back into the surrounding Allegheny National Forest.

I visited the property owners and they filled me in on the turkeys' activities. They informed me there

were actually 16 birds showing every morning, and sometimes a couple times a day. I informed them about the study and how we capture them. They happily granted us permission to set up and use their feed station. I also told them I would be providing the corn, so they would be saving some money on their corn bill.

I quickly placed out more feed and also a large bail of straw where the wood box holding the net would be placed. I believe conditioning the turkeys to the sight of the bale relieves tension when the actual box is set.

I was at the site early the next morning, and sure enough, the birds showed on schedule. Only eight came in, but the sight of those birds was encouraging. I called my neighboring WCOs, Dustin Stoner and Frank Leichtenberger, and told them I would watch the site a couple more days to verify their feeding time. Sure enough the birds did not disappoint.

March 1 was the date, and Dustin, Frank and I decided to meet at the site shortly after 7 a.m. Dustin brought a high school student from his district for a job shadowing project. We quickly set out the box holding the net and laid out the weights and ropes used to anchor and prevent the net from flying into the neighboring county. We then covered the ropes with some of the straw. We re-baited the site with corn and sunflowers seeds in a tight pattern. Our goal was to have the birds concentrated in the center of where the net would land. We finished by setting the three explosive charges in their rockets and launching brackets and then ran a wire connecting the charges to our vehicle. This wire is then connected to a trigger device that sends an electrical charge to the rocket charges, which ignites the powder that, in turn launches the rockets.

We were all set. We settled into our vehicles and were rewarded with a short wait. We could hear birds gobbling on the wooded hemlock hillside. We thought we heard some birds fly off their roost and soon we saw some movement in the forest. A line of birds weaved down the hillside toward the bait. Our senses peeked and our bodies prepared for a quick exit from the vehicles. When the net is deployed trappers must get to the birds as quickly as possible, to keep the birds from flopping and escaping, and also to prevent the birds from possibly injuring themselves.

The eight mature birds approached without hesitation and entered the site. We patiently waited for all the birds to lower their heads to feed, and then Kaboom! The powder charges ignited and three WCOs exited their vehicles in a sprint to reach our trapped turkeys. The eight gobblers flipped and flopped, but the net deployed perfectly and the long-beards weren't going anywhere until released by their captors.

Dustin prepared the leg bands while Frank, the student and I untangled the birds and prepared them for Dustin. Along with banding the birds we also removed several feathers for DNA testing and measured both the spurs and beards before releasing them back into the wild. All this information, along with the band numbers, were recorded for the biologists.

Some may ask why we didn't wait for more birds to show. Remember the old saying? "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." This definitely holds true for turkey trapping.

As we removed debris from the net and repacked it, we could still hear birds on the hillside, talking up a storm.

Deciding to try for the other gobblers on the hill, we repeated our procedure in setting the charges, rockets and wire and headed back to the vehicle. Eventually we had more birds show. All seemed to be working in our favor until the birds entered the bait site. Five birds entered and nervously exited our site, not presenting an opportunity to deploy the net. A couple birds even reentered the site only to quickly depart in nervous fashion.

We figured that the birds were nervous because of the feathers the previously trapped birds had lost during their capture. In effect, the baited area looked like the scene of a turkey kill, and we thought the birds figured the same thing.

Soon, however, three different turkeys entered the site. They, too, were very nervous and we

deployed the net at the first opportunity we had. All three were caught and we quickly banded and released them.

The day was a success. We trapped eleven mature gobblers on two nettings and all birds appeared healthy when released. While I was on leave, Frank and Dustin trapped eight more birds and my son was born on March 7.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

# From Refuse to Refuge

### From Refuse to Refuge

By Jamie Flickinger

APPROXIMATELY 300 acres of land in southeastern York County, Hopewell Township was purchased by the York County Solid Waste Authority (YCSWA) in 1974 and became the YCSWA Sanitary Landfill. The landfill operated from 1974 to 1997. After its closure, a farmer leased some of the YCSWA land to produce hay.

In the summer of 2004, I received word that an avid, local birder, Randy Phillips, had documented a sedge wren nesting in one of the YCSWA hayfields. The finding was significant because during Pennsylvania's first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA), 1984-1989, when literally thousands of birders combed the state documenting breeding behavior for each of our state's bird species, sedge wrens were found to be nesting in only three of Pennsylvania's 4,928 atlas blocks. Today, the sedge wren is one of the rarest species in the state and, though in 2004 it was listed as state threatened, its status has been determined to be more critical and it is now listed as state endangered. Randy discovered the sedge wren when he was monitoring the hay fields as part of the second BBA.

The rare sedge wren began nesting in the tall, unmowed grasses in late spring or early summer when the field was too wet to mow. As the field dried and became suitable for haying, Randy approached the farmer and offered to pay for the losses the farmer would face for not taking hay from a 2-acre patch of grass surrounding the sedge wren nest. While this was a great temporary solution, a long-term approach was needed.

There is little time to waste when working with a species experiencing steep population declines. In Pennsylvania, large grasslands have become a critically rare habitat over the past few decades. Urban sprawl and development are replacing our agricultural lands by approximately 200 acres every day in Pennsylvania. As urban sprawl consumes more land, agricultural land use intensifies. Hay fields are mowed from May through November — during the bird nesting season. Pastures are intensively grazed, and cropland is double-cropped. Idle, fallow and retired fields, which once were common, are now rare.

As a result, grassland bird populations have declined more than any other group of bird species in the past 30 years. For example, in the past three decades, northern bobwhite quail have declined by 95 percent, upland sandpiper by 90 percent, grasshopper sparrow by 80 percent and eastern meadowlark by 80 percent.

Randy knew the Hopewell Township managers and the YCSWA folks and put me in touch with them in hopes of protecting this rare grassland bird, its habitat and other grassland wildlife. The YCSWA already had plans to develop the area into a community recreation facility but they worked enthusiastically to modify their plans to include the wildlife community. Then, in 2006, they asked me to visit and develop a wildlife habitat management plan for the property through the PGC's Private Landowner Assistance Program. I was impressed by the YCSWA's Operations & Environmental Programs Coordinator, Richard Hazenstab's enthusiasm for wildlife and genuine desire to provide quality wildlife habitat on the site. The wildlife habitat plan was shepherded by Dave Vollero, Executive Director, who fully supported the plan and viewed it as a valuable enhancement to the site and the community. Once the final plan was complete, it was presented to the YCSWA board of directors, and they accepted it.

The result is a comprehensive plan that provides grassland habitat for wildlife right along side a recreation complex for human residents. Mowing was curtailed so the grassland could begin to develop and a picnic pavilion, playground and walking trails opened in March 2008, a baseball/softball field and multipurpose field opened in September 2008.

Jim Gillis, Wildlife Biologist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), reiterates how important the former landfill property is for grassland birds, "The YCSWA site is unique for a number of reasons. First, in terms of publicly accessible, unfragmented grasslands in Southcentral Pennsylvania, I think it may be second in size only to the grasslands associated with the Gettysburg National Military Park. Second, as a permanent grassland, it represents a very rare habitat type. And third, it's a great example of recycling a retired landfill into a facility that benefits the community citizens as well as the environment. It showcases the YCSWA's commitment to preserving the environment and serving the residents of York County."

Although the wildlife habitat management plan for YCSWA mentions native grass, wildflower and shrub plantings, the most important management recommendation to adopt was conservative mowing practices —a fancy way of saying stop mowing. Now, different areas of the property's grasslands are mowed during different years so there is always a mosaic of grasses available. Not only is this providing incredible habitat, but it also requires far less maintenance, time and expense.

This past summer Rich invited Dan Mummert (PGC Wildlife Diversity Biologist), Jim Gillis, Randy Phillips, myself and others to visit YCSWA to see how the plan is working. We were astounded at what we saw. Native grasses and wildflowers such as milkweed, black-eyed Susan, goldenrod, and many others are naturalizing in the fields. A bluebird box trail has been developed. A barn owl box and kestrel box have been erected. Three miles of trails have been established through parts of the grassland for people to enjoy. Pheasants Forever has planted native wildflowers near the playing fields. And Rich's enthusiasm has been infectious to the rest of the YCSWA staff. Instead of mowing, YCSWA staff members spend time monitoring and managing invasive species such as multiflora rose and Canada thistle, and they are truly enjoying the results of the new management strategies — more wildlife. As Frank Kovacs, Groundwater Technician, mentioned, "We just love being out here seeing the wildlife. I even bought an Audubon book to keep in my pocket so I can identify the birds I see while I'm battling the thistle —we've never seen birds like this here before!"

In just the couple of hours we were visiting that day, we documented more than 30 species of birds. Randy has been keeping an ongoing bird list for YCSWA and the BBA, which includes grassland species such as grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, bobolink, savannah sparrow, horned lark, bluebird and American kestrel. Last winter there were even short-eared owls and northern harriers hunting the fields.

Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Who says a few people cannot make a big difference? Not Margaret Mead. And not Randy Phillips or the YCSWA, for it is through their efforts that some of the state's most valuable wildlife habitat was created from a retired landfill.

# **Unsung Heroes**

I COULD SEE a shimmer of fluorescent orange through the trees as I pulled my truck off Rudd Road in Erie County.

"George, is that you?" I muttered over the radio.

"Yes," he replied.

"Is Jack with you?"

"He's here."

"Did you catch the guy?"

"We have him."

"Good job, I'll meet you at the road."

This was a conversation I had with Deputy George Wilkosz from Erie County during my first deer season back in 2002. I was assigned there to cover for WCO Mike Wojtecki while he recovered from a medical procedure.

At a later date, I covered WCO Darin Clark's district for a while on the east end of Erie County while he was in Harrisburg training his new K9 partner, Sarge. Mercer, Jefferson, Forest, Venango, Butler, Lawrence and Crawford counties all found me patrolling their borders at one point or another in the first few years of my Game Commission career. I was classified as a floater when I graduated from the PGC's Ross Leffler School of Conservation. My class had 23 students graduate, but there were only 15 vacant districts. Those of us that weren't assigned a district were assigned to one of six region offices throughout the commonwealth. I was assigned to the Northwest Region and covered districts where the WCO was on military, sick, annual or training leave.

Sometimes the district WCO was available for some advice before they went on leave, but for the most part I had to figure things out on my own. The first thing I did was put to use my copy of that district's deputy phone list. Deputies, along with HTE instructors are the unsung worker bees of the district WCO. They are volunteers helping the PGC complete its mission. Deputies are a great asset to a new WCO, as you'll soon read.

About 30 minutes prior to the conversation above, a call came from the Northwest Region office. The radio relayed, "Franklin to 113."

"Go ahead." I replied.

"We have an anonymous report from a deer hunter stating he saw another hunter dressed in a white coverall carrying a scoped rifle on State Game Lands 314. It is the wood block bordered by Rudd, Old Lake, Ellis and Lynch roads."

"10-4, Franklin. I'll head in that direction," I answered.

Luckily, I was about 10 minutes away. Deputy Wilkosz was even closer and responded over the radio, "Dan, I'm not far away; I'll meet you there."

Deputy Jack Kasony was also in the area. "Dan, this is Jack, I'll be there in minutes."

When I arrived both George and Jack were in the woods rooting around like two bird dogs. They entered the wood block from Rudd Road on the west side and I skirted around the south side in my Bronco following the railroad tracks to the east side of the block. I doubled back and soon heard George over his portable radio telling me they found the violator and were heading back to their

vehicles.

The culprit was from Ohio and staying at his girlfriend's trailer just up the road. He was carrying an old lever action rifle that was also his girlfriend's. He didn't have a hunting license, wasn't wearing fluorescent orange and had no identification. We escorted him back to the trailer to get his identification. The day was very cold and there was a stiff wind blowing off Lake Erie. As I gathered the violator's information and wrote his citations, George and Jack stood in that freezing cold weather without hesitation or complaint. I wrote as fast as I could to shorten their exposure to the elements. After I finished the citations, we handcuffed and transported the man to the local District Justice Office. There I filed four charges against him to which he pled guilty. He called his girlfriend and she eventually showed to pay his fines.

This is a classic case of how deputies benefit not only the WCO, but also the Game Commission and ultimately sportsmen and other citizens of the state. Law enforcement, however, is not the only aspect of the PGC mission they support. Most deputies partake in many facets of a salaried WCO's post. Educational programs, injured or deceased animal pick-up and nuisance animal calls are some of the other duties deputies take on.

Another benefit to having good deputies is their knowledge of the people and geography of the district. Most have lived in the area for many years and know both quite well. People may sometimes hesitate to call a region office for help, preferring to call the local deputy, instead.

When I was assigned to southern Clarion County my first day was quite an experience. I had planned to spend the day driving around the area to collect my bearings in my new district and possibly find a place to live. I drove south on Route 68 near the shopping area just south of the borough. As I drove over the I-80 overpass, Deputy Chuck Deitz passed me heading back into the borough.

"118E to 118," Chuck called as I passed him.

"Go ahead," I answered, surprised anybody new I was in the area.

"Dan, this is Chuck Deitz, there's a bear running around in the borough near the McDonald's."

"10-4, I'll turn around," I responded.

Chuck previously heard the Clarion Police talking on their local frequencies about the bear and he quickly headed that direction, by coincidence he passed me on his way.

When I arrived, Chuck and I met with fellow police officers. Eventually the 300-pound bear found refuge from the hot summer sun in a patch of pine trees on the Clarion University Campus. Shortly thereafter, Deputy Brian Miller from the northern Clarion District arrived. He told me he was in the area and heard there was a bear running around, so he stopped to help out. I posted him near the bear with my shotgun as a precaution. I had plenty of help from the local police and deputy WCOs, but all of my tranquilizing equipment was at my office in Forest County. Several calls thankfully tracked down WCOs Richard Cramer (now a LMO) and Roger Hartless to assist with the necessary equipment.

Rich and I approached the bear and I managed to dart it, though inefficiently. As I reloaded, the bear ran down a small hill and Roger calmly used his jab pole to administer a dose of tranquilizer. The bear ran several hundred yards before piling up in the woods on the north side of campus.

As I approached the animal, another Clarion County deputy, Bill Hepler, showed up to help. Bill is a paramedic with Clarion Hospital and quickly gathered a stretcher and help from fellow paramedics. The bear had a broken leg and the medics concluded it was an old break.

We processed the bear and carried it by stretcher to an awaiting culvert trap. Rich Cramer hauled

and released it in Forest County. Needless to say, that first day was an exciting one. With the help of three deputies, I was able to coordinate, tranquilize and remove a large bear from Clarion Borough. Without the help of Chuck, Brian and Bill, the situation may not have gone so smoothly. Even though I had very little experience working with those deputies, I had confidence in every one of them. Chuck has been a deputy since 1988 (the year I graduated high school), and although Brian and Bill were rookies, I had confidence in the training they had received from their WCOs Rod Bimber and Al Scott (now retired).

These two incidents are clear indicators of how valuable deputies are to every district in the commonwealth.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO

# Maaynard Sembower

He was born in Markleton and later moved to Rockwood where his dad was the Justice of the Peace. "The best J.P. Rockwood ever had," he nods.

Maynard Sem-bower attended high school in Rockwood then ran a bakery truck 120 miles a day all over Somerset County for 20 years before scoring a job with the Game Commission. "I had the best job in the county then," he smiles.

He started with the agency on September 21, 1941, as a Deputy Game Protector, under Game Protector John Shuler. Eventually he was hired as a Food & Cover employee and was promoted to Farm Game Manager when the positions originated in the early '70s. Maynard says he's done everything and anything that the agency needed him to do. He's even been to jail a few a times, but I'll get to that later.

On the Food & Cover Crew he placed NO HUNTING signs and metal STATE GAME LAND REFUGE signs around the farmstead refuges (now called safety zones). He did browse cuttings with chainsaws, mowed around the refuges and erected and maintained single strand fences around them for the farmers. He did deer browse cuttings of small trees and edge cuttings in the winter on those private farms. He picked up dead deer along the roads, kept the hides and salted them, leaving the carcasses, covered in lyme, in deer pits on state game lands. He mowed, plowed and seeded clover, corn and oat food plots on game lands, and kept the game lands roads in shape. He drove to Harrisburg to pick up equipment loads, too. "We had 4WDs even then," he emphasized.

Maynard became a foreman and remembers working under land managers Bill Cox, Ray Dorsenbacher, Gilly Bowman and Nick Rugh. He worked with a crew of five or six, sometimes seven other guys (today, a crew of that many is rare). "We used to help out the Fayette County crew a lot," he remembers.

Later, as a Farm Game Manager, he spent countless hours visiting with landowners over a cup of their coffee at their homes; it was often with the wives because the farmers were working their fields.

Maynard delivered ringnecks to holding pens for farmers who'd raise them with food provided by the Game Commission. The bird's wing feathers were brailed to keep them from flying off, and there were four to five hundred in the pens. They also had birds in pens up at New Florence where they crated them and sent them to other counties. "The farm game managers knew where to put them," he states, "for put – take hunting." Then he adds, "They also raised turkeys up there in New Florence then, in holding pens like pheasants. They used to catch those turkeys with a rocket net and the district man knew where to send them."

Back then the office was on the same property as it is now. The old wooden building is still there but a newer building now houses the offices. Maynard didn't care much for office work: the monthly reports about how many contacts he'd made with farmers and what he'd done on which property, the seedling orders, the frequent truck and tractor maintenance and fuel reports and so on. He preferred to be working outside in the field.

He traveled all over the state but he knew everyone in town and they knew him, too. Once he and a few officers headed into the field, dressed as hunters, in hopes of tracking down some violators they had a lead on. They recognized him half-way across the field and welcomed him by name.

"Once I came upon a family of young kids with guns and no licenses. They were all under age. I took them back to their home and had a chat with them and their parents. I gave 'em a warning instead of pinching. You gotta give and take, I don't care who you are or what you do," Maynard nodded.

"The last guy I pinched just up the road here," he pointed. "He was shootin' deer. I took the car up

and parked. Two guys came up carrying a white sack. I said, 'What's in the sack?' The guy had just gotten a new gun and wanted to try it out. He'd taken only its hind quarters and that made me mad."

"One time a landowner called me to take care of a dead buck lying in his field and starting to smell. He said he was tired of the stink, so I dropped two tires on it with some gasoline and set it a fire, then lymed it," he said matter-of-factly. "It was all about providing a service.

Maynard reminiced, "Bob Parlaman got called to serve for a year and he called me to take over as District Game Protector while he was gone, so I moved to Washington County for a while. I had my picture in *Game News* then, in 1946. And, once I had to drive to State College to pick up a biologist, I think it was John Blair, from the university and take him to the training school to teach the officers in training.

"I went for trainings at the school, especially for undercover training. The FBI and other feds and the state police would come to teach us about waterfowl and other stuff.

"We had special undercover badges. Our guys used to call me poker face."

He went by Bud, the bread salesman back then. "You have to know what you're talking about undercover or you'll get busted. An outlaw from the pipeline busted one of the other guys once because he didn't have his cover all right."

Maynard had some pretty exciting times undercover, often with Jerry Kirkpatrick. On more than one occasion he went to jail along with whatever outlaws he was cavorting with in pursuit of a bust. "I just did whatever needed to be done." That included carrying a .38 in case of emergency.

He says he broke his last case for Dave Titus. "I spent the night in the Warren County jail. Jerry was tied to a tree, drunk and singing, hollerin' all night long," he laughed. "Dave got us out of jail that night; we busted the guy we were after." The two had held their cover all the way to the jail cell and it wasn't the only time they did it. "Down east, once they sent us to jail for shootin' rabbits out of season. We didn't do it, of course, but we had to get in there with some criminals we wanted to get talkin' and get a story out of. We busted a poacher that time. We had a lot of fun."

Despite all of the adventures he had undercover, he says he's always been a good boy. And he said his mother would agree. "I never got in any trouble, I was a good guy. But one time when we were all staying at a place up north, the girls that worked there put rice in our beds."

He's got lots of memories from the job. "The last Land Manager I worked with was Dennis Jones. He was good with bears. He was a good worker." Maynard retired in 1973, under Glen Bowers and George Norris. He says the best thing about working for the PGC was retiring. All kidding aside, what he really liked best was interacting with the people, drinking coffee with the farmers while going about business, chatting with folks at county fairs and other public events. "It was the best job in the state."

Maynard's son-in-law, Roger, started with the agency in 1970 as a Food & Cover Corp employee in the same office, and when Maynard retired, Roger took his place as the Farm Game Manager until he, too, retired in 1999.

Scott Tomlinson, the current Land Management Supervisor for Maynard's old management area joined us that day and took the opportunity to ask Maynard some questions about the area. "There are chestnut orchards on SGLs 111 and 82," he began.

Maynard interrupted, "Yeah, we planted them. There used to be a fence around them."

That triggered a memory. "I got a call one Sunday that someone was shooting turkeys by the chestnut orchard," Maynard reminisced. "I got around and followed the tracks. I found a gun stock

and a crippled turkey. The guy had crippled the turkey and then tried to beat it to death with his gun. The broken stock led me back to the owner and he paid the fine."

"Who's taking care of those chestnuts now," he asks.

"The fence is long gone. They get mowed. People know where they are and gather them up pretty quick. But we go there to gather chestnuts and sawtooth oak acorns for the agency's Howard Nursery to grow," answers Tomlinson.

The laws have changed a bit since Maynard worked for the agency. There are less pheasants than there used to be and farm game cooperators get *Game News* over the internet now. There have been changes in land use ethics and the use of POSTED signs, and there seem to be fewer deputies and fewer food and cover employees, and perhaps less frequent communication with landowners, but Maynard is still very proud to have worked for the agency. "I always did like the Game Commission."

Now Maynard is a trail ambassador for the Great Allegheny Passage. He operates a visitor's center along the rail trail in Rockwood. He says, "It's the best job in the country."

That positive attitude has gotten him a long way. He's been running the bike trail visitor center for more than 16 years. He started it out of the back of his car. Now he has a nice shed and he commutes via golf cart. The Casselman River flows beside that part of the trail to Confluence, and in the '70s it was the Western Maryland Railroad and loaded with coal cars.

The trail runs from Pittsburgh to D.C., more than 600 miles. Pedal bikers, black snakes and deer now frequent the path that freight trains used to ride. Once, Maynard even spotted three bear cubs on the trail. On a tour down the trail in the golf cart Maynard pointed out different spots – a new shelter for trail travelers, a spring where the former farmer used to bring his animals to water, gorgeous expanses of blooming rhododendron and a bench where he used to visit with a tame grouse. For three years the grouse would welcome bench sitters. "It used to eat cracked corn from my hand. You could talk to it and it would purr back to you," he remembered.

"A guy sat down to rest on the bench one day with his dog. I guess the grouse came out to the bench like it always did. The dog got it. It was a sad, sad day."

There was a nice breeze the day we visited with Maynard. The porch rocker was a squeekin' as he pointed out the bird feeder where the deer come to enjoy the corn. He showed us his Mason ring and said, "Ya know, you learn a lot at the Game Commission. I had the best job in the world."

Maynard's words of wisdom: "Do your job and keep your mouth shut. Business is business and the best business is your own business."

During the months of November through April Maynard lives in Florida. "He cleans up on the baked goods down there," says his daughter. "The ladies all bring pastries and cakes and cookies to Pap." But Maynard says those gals are all too old for him. He turned 100 on Christmas Eve.

"We're planning a big shindig for my birthday," he told me when we spoke this summer. His grandson, granddaughter, more family and friends intended to celebrate with him.

I'd say he's got the best job in the universe.

By Lori Richardson, Wildlife Education Specialist

# **Untagged Traps**

IN THE FALL, once the early archery season begins, a whirlwind of additional seasons quickly follows. Week after week different hunting and trapping opportunities begin leading to the peak: firearms deer season. Coupled with Christmas shopping, parties and family commitments, it's a hectic time of year.

The post-Christmas seasons seem to signify the downward slide of the year's hunting and trapping activities, and for me I can start to relax somewhat at this time of year. Don't get me wrong, there are still hunters and trappers to check, but the numbers are much lower and everything seems to move at a slower pace.

Although I continue to check hunters, I focus on checking beaver trappers and their sets for several weeks. Time, ice and fluctuating water levels seem to dictate how long sets are maintained at this time of year. Some trappers take advantage of the holidays and take vacation just to trap between Christmas and New Years. Some continue trapping through most of the season, checking their traps before or after work. Cold temperatures can freeze beaver ponds, and sometimes rivers and streams, or heavy snow or rain can create ever changing water levels, sometimes exposing or flooding sets. All of these obstacles make beaver trapping challenging.

Fortunately, the season is three months long. Usually this generous season presents trappers with a window of opportunity when the weather breaks. Warm spells at the beginning and end of the season create great opportunities for trappers.

Beaver trapping has many unique laws and regulations compared to other furbearers. These help protect this large furbearer from over harvest. With most furbearers there are no bag limits or limits on the number of traps allowed. With beaver trapping there are strict limits, not only on the number of traps but also the types of traps allowed. Unfortunately, some people ignore these regulations by not tagging their traps, or they tag them with a family member's tag so they can set more traps than allowed. Also, they use more traps than allowed. These practices not only violate fair chase, but are also unfair to other trappers.

Of course, most traps I check are set for the highest regard of the law and fair chase, but occasionally I find trapping violations. These violations require proactive law enforcement techniques and a lot of foot patrol. And although most violations are classified as summary violations, with a penalty ranging from \$75-\$200, finding them is rewarding to me. In the end, I know I helped promote fair chase not only to the animal but also to lawful trappers. The following is an account of a violation I encountered a while back.

Reenergized from the two weeks between deer season and Christmas, I was anxious for the beaver trapping season to begin. I knew the location of several dams and knew the Allegheny River and Tionesta Creek supported many beavers. Instead of donning my winter boots that morning, I slid on my hip boots before I left the house. There was some snow on the ground, but it was patchy. A fresh layer of snow is always welcome, making it easier to find the path of trappers. Beaver dams provide countless places to set traps, and a well-dyed trap can be hard to find in the water.

I don't start checking traps too early on the first day. It takes time for trappers to make sets, so I usually start in the late morning. The first dam I checked appeared to have been washed out from rain we had received several weeks before. I didn't notice any sets, or for that matter, any fresh beaver sign. I left the area and drove up the road to the next location.

This site was active — beavers had even flooded the road earlier that year. I'd be happy to see some trapper activity at this site, as would the township supervisor. There were beaver dams on both sides of the road, and I noticed a set of human tracks paralleling the water on the downstream side of the road. I followed and found a #330 conibear (body gripping) trap set in the channel of the small

creek. It was tagged properly and well beyond the required 15 feet from any beaver dam or lodge. The tracks continued on and I followed farther, but did not find any more traps or snares. I backtracked to the road and followed the stream on the other side of the culvert. Although I didn't find any human tracks, I found beaver sign and wondered why there weren't any traps set. I planned on returning later to see if other trappers showed up. I left the area and traveled down the road several more miles to the next location.

This spot was on private property and had beaver damage to timber and the spring used for drinking water. I spoke with the landowner several weeks before and he mentioned the problems he had. He knew some trappers that had committed to helping him during the season, and I figured if they didn't have any luck, I might try and set a few traps myself.

As I drove down the lane I noticed a vehicle had already been there and gone. I got out and found boot tracks. With the warming of the day, there was less snow here than probably earlier in the morning, and it was tough following his trail. I noticed several nice set locations, but didn't find any traps. I continued on and eventually found a large foothold trap.

I tried to prevent any damage to the set; the majority of sets are legal, and the last thing I want to do is disturb a legal set. I could see the anchor in the water and followed the drowning wire to the bank where it was staked. I also located the one-way drowning swivel attached to the trap. I had no luck finding the required trap tag that should have been attached to the drowning wire and stake. Unlike tags for trapping other furbearers, which may be attached to the trap chain, the tag for beaver trapping must be above the water or ice line on an extension wire for easy inspection by an officer. I checked the trap chain for a tag but didn't find one, which is a violation.

As simple and benign as this may seem, you'll soon see why it's important to tag traps. Sometimes trappers forget to attach the tag, so I left the trap and continued my search. I found another foothold with the same problem. I also let it in place. A pattern was developing with this trapper.

I picked my way across the dam and noticed a snare in a run oozing from the small structure. I examined the snare and found it was not tagged. I measured the distance from the dam and found it was only seven feet away. In WMU 2F a distance of 15 feet is required.

I scoured the area and found one more foothold trap without a tag. Four traps, five violations. I took photos of the sets and wrote some additional notes. The only problem was that I didn't know who owned or set the traps. The next morning would be an early one; I would be there before daybreak to wait out the trapper.

I hopped in my truck to check a spot along the Allegheny River but found no evidence of anyone trapping. I returned to the second dam on the township road to see if anyone set traps on the upstream side. I pulled off the road and decided to eat lunch, and was there for only a few minutes when three trappers pulled up in a pickup. I introduced myself and conducted a license check. All three had the required license and we began talking about trapping. I mentioned the beaver sign I saw upstream and told them nobody was there but somebody was trapping downstream.

Before I left they mentioned they were new to beaver trapping and thought they needed trap tags above the water or ice on an extension wire. I told them they were correct. They then told me they saw a trap earlier without the required tags. I asked them where and sure enough it was on the private property I had been at earlier. They described sets I didn't find, including a #330 conibear that was not tagged and a smaller mink trap that was tagged, but they didn't read it as to not disturb the trap. They didn't set any traps in that location, because of the presence of the other trapper. I thanked them and wished them luck.

Upon returning to the site I found the #330 conibear that was not tagged and the mink trap. This trap did have a tag, so I removed it and read the name. "Trapper John." Oh, great, I thought, disappointed in reading the name of my neighbor and friend for more than two decades. I had to

make sure the other traps were his before I jumped to any conclusions. Why would he tag the mink trap but not the others? I would soon find out.

I left the mink trap but photographed and seized the #330 conibear. I'd stop by Trapper's house on my way home and ask a few questions.

When I arrived Trapper came out to greet me. I explained why I was there and he admitted that they were his traps. He elaborated that he didn't tag them because he set more than the legal number of traps. He said they were the only traps out that were not tagged, and he set them to help the landowner. I thanked him for his honesty and told him I would be checking more trapping sites in the area, and if I found more infractions he would be cited again and recommended for license revocation. He assured me I would not find anymore violations. Trapper was issued a citation, pleaded guilty and paid his fine.

Although this story is not as exciting as a big deer or bear case, it still needs to be told. Every year thousands of summary game law cases are prosecuted by WCOs and deputies. Fair chase, equal opportunity and protection of property and people are the reason game laws and regulations exist. If we turn a blind eye we are not promoting these principles.

By Daniel P. Schmidt, Forest County WCO