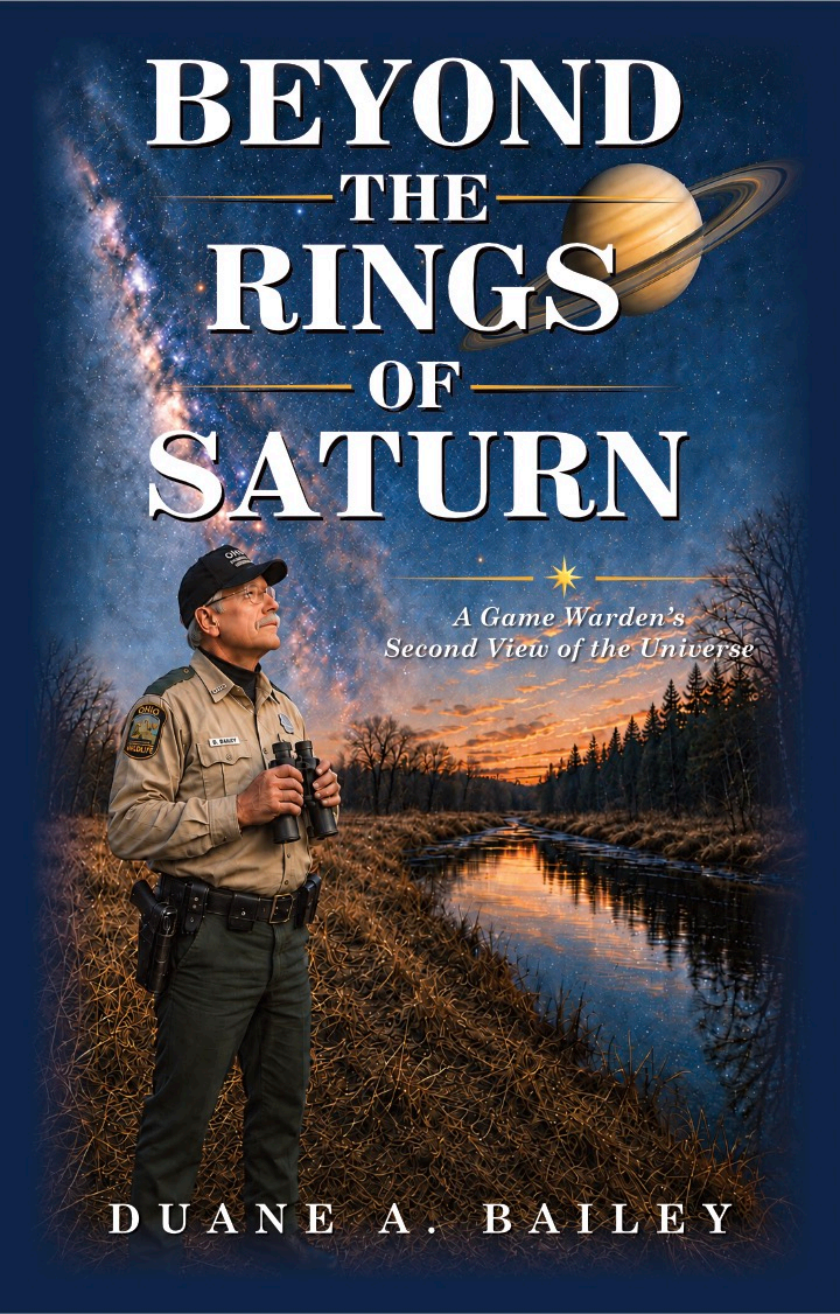
BEYOND THE RINGS OF SATURN

A Game Warden's Second View of the Universe



DUANE A. BAILEY

BEYOND THE RINGS OF SATURN



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DEDICATION

For my wife, Sharon.

Throughout my career as a wildlife officer, Sharon was there through the long hours, weekends, holidays, and the many demands that came with wearing the badge. She understood the commitment because she had a career of public service herself as Clerk of the Paulding County Court.

But beyond understanding the work, she shared my love of the outdoors. Over the years, she became more than my wife—she became my favorite fishing partner and someone with whom I could share the simple pleasures of being outside.

This book is also dedicated to our five wonderful great-granddaughters—Ashlynn, Audrina, Alana, Kinslee, and Everlee.

They did not know me as a wildlife officer. To them, I have simply been Grandpa.

And that may be the title I cherish most.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

—Psalm 119:105

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Every book has a story behind the story, and this one is no exception.

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Writing the stories was one thing. Getting them into a form that others could hold in their hands was another. I am grateful to both Jim and Bryce for helping make that happen.

To both of you, thank you.

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The Church Lady

Every game warden has a story that starts with, "Something didn't smell right." And, this one came from a deer check station in Paulding County.

The station owner called me and said, "You might wanna take a look at this one." That's usually not followed by anything boring.

A local landowner had just brought in a really nice buck for permanent tagging. He was decked out head-to-toe in bowhunting gear, hands still bloody — looked like he'd just walked straight out of a hunting catalog. But here's the catch: he said his wife shot the deer.

Now, that alone isn't unusual. But when the station owner asked where the wife was, the guy says, real casual, "Oh, she couldn't make it. She was running late for church."

But somehow he made it there just fine. Covered in blood. Carrying her deer.

The check station operator filled out the harvest record, smiled

politely, and then called me the second the guy left.

The next day I went to talk with the wife. Nice lady, but the moment I started asking questions, she got nervous. You know the look — eyes drifting everywhere except at you, like she's trying to read invisible cue cards on the wall.

She tells me she shot the deer while bowhunting with her husband. Says he field dressed it and took it in for her because she was late for church.

Then came the pause.

The long one.

The kind where you can almost hear gears grinding.

All of a sudden, she just deflates and says, "I can't do this." Then the whole story comes out. Turns out he shot the deer. He had her write out a landowner tag so it would look legal, slapped it on the buck, and hauled it to the check station.

And the reason she didn't go with him?

Because she really was at church.

At that point I just nodded and thanked her for being honest. No sense piling on — she'd already been through the wringer.

I told her we'd send it over to the prosecutor and let the chips fall where they may.

In the end, her husband got charged with failing to properly tag a deer and providing false information at the check station. He pled guilty, paid $420 in fines and costs, and probably had a few interesting conversations at home afterward.

Moral of the story?

If you're gonna drag church into your hunting story, you better pray nobody calls the game warden.



The Ad That Waited Three Years

Some wildlife cases begin with a tip from an informant. Others start with a late-night phone call. This one began with the classified ads in the local newspaper.

It was November 1995 when a small advertisement caught my eye. It was only a few lines long, but it immediately raised a red flag.

"Live raccoons for sale — $25 each."

The ad included the seller's name and address.

I recognized the name immediately.

The young man was the son of a well-known businessman in Paulding County. His father owned a carryout and gas station that served as a deer check station and also sold hunting and fishing licenses. I had known his father for years and respected him. His son, however, had earned a different reputation. He had been in trouble with the law on several occasions, although this would be my first wildlife-related encounter with him.

Curiosity—and duty—sent me to the address listed in the advertisement.

Behind the rented house, I found exactly what I expected. A homemade wire enclosure contained several young raccoons, just as the ad had promised.

Later that day I contacted the young man. He admitted the raccoons belonged to him, but he had no permit to possess or sell them.

When I asked how he had acquired them, his explanation was surprisingly candid.

He had been helping a tree-trimming crew remove a large tree. After the tree was cut down, several young raccoons were discovered inside. Rather than contacting wildlife authorities or leaving the animals where they belonged, he gathered them up, took them home, built a pen behind the house, and decided to turn them into a business venture.

Ohio law prohibited possessing wild raccoons taken from the wild in that manner, and it certainly prohibited offering them for sale. I issued him citations for the violations and confiscated the raccoons.

Fortunately, there was a nearby wildlife rehabilitator who accepted the young raccoons. After they were cared for and became capable of surviving on their own, they were released back into the wild where they belonged.

The raccoons were fortunate.

The young man wasn't.

When his court date arrived, he failed to appear. The judge promptly issued a warrant for his arrest.

Then he disappeared.

Even his father didn't know where he had gone.

Many cases would have quietly faded away at that point, but arrest warrants have a way of patiently waiting.

Three years later, the young man resurfaced in the area. Law enforcement discovered the outstanding warrant, arrested him, and held him in jail until he could appear before the court on my original charges.

He requested a court-appointed attorney, which was granted, and the case eventually went to trial before the judge in January 1999.

The evidence was straightforward.

The newspaper advertisement spoke for itself.

The raccoons had been found in his possession.

His own statement explained exactly how he had obtained them.

The court found him guilty.

The wildlife fine itself amounted to only $125, but that was just the beginning. Court costs, local fees, and sheriff's expenses pushed the total amount he owed to $721.84.

What had begun as an attempt to make a quick $25 selling each raccoon turned into a very expensive lesson.

Looking back, what still makes me smile is how the investigation began. There was no undercover operation, no confidential informant, and no lengthy surveillance.

The suspect placed the evidence in the local newspaper himself.

Sometimes the easiest wildlife cases arrive folded inside the morning paper.



Two Geese, Three Shots, and One Very Short Trip to the Bar

Friday, December 27, 1985, was winding down when I received a complaint from a Paulding County landowner. Darkness was settling in, and he had just watched someone turn what should have been a peaceful evening for about 300 Canada geese into an ill-advised shooting exhibition.

The landowner had been about a half-mile away near one of his farm buildings when he heard the first shotgun blast. Looking toward the field, he saw a man standing on the roadway firing two more shots into the flock. The geese exploded into the air while the hunter sprinted into the field, picked up two dead Canada geese, hurried back to his black Chevrolet stake-bed pickup, and drove away.

Fortunately, the landowner wasn't about to let the story end there.

He followed the pickup into the nearby village of Oakwood, copied down the license plate number, and then called me. Ironically, he knew the young hunter personally and wasn't especially upset that he had retrieved the geese from his field. His real complaint was that the shots had been fired from the roadway.

That's a violation—and a dangerous one.

I met the landowner at the scene shortly before 6:00 p.m. He handed me the license number and mentioned that the pickup was now parked a few miles away in front of what was then Pat and Mike's Bar in Oakwood.

Before leaving the scene, I found one more piece of evidence: an empty 12-gauge shotgun shell lying right in the roadway.

That was a good start.

A few minutes later I pulled into Oakwood and there sat the black stake-bed pickup exactly where the landowner said it would be.

Sometimes investigations don't require much detective work.

Looking into the bed of the truck, I found two freshly killed Canada geese. Looking through the cab window, I spotted a 12-gauge shotgun.

Now I had a choice. I could stand outside in the December cold waiting for the hunter to come out of the bar—whenever that might be—or I could simply go introduce myself.

I chose the warm option.

The bar was busy with the usual Friday night crowd. After asking one customer where I could find the young man, he pointed toward the far end of the bar.

"That's him."

I walked down, tapped him on the shoulder, introduced myself,

and said, "Let's step outside for a minute. I'd like to talk with you."

That sentence has probably ruined more evenings than any other phrase a game warden can utter.

Standing beside his pickup, I explained why I was there. I also told him the landowner had decided not to pursue a charge for retrieving the geese from his property. The only issue the landowner wanted addressed was the shooting from the roadway.

The young hunter admitted exactly what had happened.

It was his first season hunting geese. He had never harvested one before. Seeing hundreds of geese in the field had apparently overwhelmed his better judgment, and he fired from the road.

His first successful goose hunt also became his first lesson in wildlife law.

I issued citations for the violations, confiscated the two geese, which were later disposed of, and he eventually posted and forfeited a $250 bond in court, accompanied by a written guilty plea.

Case closed.

For a first-year goose hunter, those were two very expensive birds.

If there was a silver lining, it was that he learned an important lesson early in his hunting career. There are right ways to hunt and wrong ways to hunt. Shooting from a public roadway isn't just illegal—it's unsafe.

I doubt he ever forgot that December evening… or the game warden who came looking for him inside a crowded bar.



The Wrong Tag

One of the things I learned early in my career was that wildlife violations don't always come from the people you expect. Most hunters are honest, ethical sportsmen. But every so often, someone who should have known better made a decision that put them on the wrong side of the law.

In the fall of 1986, I received a call from a man who had witnessed something that didn't seem right. Earlier that day, he had watched a hunter drag a buck deer from a small woodlot in Paulding County and load it into the bed of a pickup truck. Nothing unusual about that—except the deer had never been tagged with an Ohio deer permit before it was moved.

Later that same day, purely by coincidence, the caller ran into the hunter again. The buck was still lying in the truck, but now there was a Michigan deer tag attached to one of its antlers.

During their conversation, the hunter claimed he had spent the

morning bowhunting in Michigan, harvested the deer there, and legally tagged it.

The caller knew that wasn't true. He had personally watched the deer being dragged from an Ohio woodlot just hours earlier. He contacted me and reported the violation.

The case became even more surprising when I learned the hunter was employed by one of the local law enforcement agencies. That certainly wasn't what I expected to hear.

Because the case involved the possible misuse of a Michigan deer tag, along with Ohio wildlife violations, I completed a violation report and requested that the investigation be assigned to one of our district investigators. Cases involving another state often required additional follow-up that went beyond the responsibilities of a county wildlife officer.

The investigation was assigned to Investigator Jim Rhome.

During his interview, the hunter admitted exactly what had happened. He had harvested the buck in Ohio but intentionally attached a Michigan deer tag to it.

His reasoning was simple. He still wanted to continue hunting deer in Ohio for the remainder of the archery season. Since Ohio law allowed only one buck, using the Michigan tag made it appear he hadn't yet taken an Ohio buck and could keep hunting.

It was a calculated decision—and an illegal one.

The hunter signed a waiver, forfeited bond, and paid the required fines and court costs. The buck was seized as evidence and ultimately forfeited to the State of Ohio, where it was later donated to a charitable organization. More importantly, his deer season was over.

Some people wondered whether the fact that he was a law en-

forcement officer should have made any difference.

It didn't.

If anything, those of us who wear a badge should be held to a higher standard, not a lower one. The public places its trust in law enforcement officers to enforce the law fairly and honestly. That trust means nothing if we expect special treatment when we're the ones who violate it.

The badge doesn't excuse misconduct. It demands accountability.

That case served as a reminder that wildlife laws apply equally to everyone. Whether you're a first-time hunter, a lifelong sportsman, or a fellow law enforcement officer, the standard is the same.

And that's exactly the way it should be.



A Murder Scene in the Woods

In November 1992, I received a phone call from a resident of Crane Township in Paulding County. He told me his twenty-year-old neighbor, whom I'll identify only as Robert B., had come to his house asking for help dragging a deer out of a nearby woodlot.

According to the caller, Robert admitted he had shot the deer with a shotgun, covered it with leaves, and wanted another pair of hands to help remove it.

The caller wanted no part of it.

That decision wasn't made lightly. I had dealt with him over wildlife violations in years past. He had previously lost his hunting privileges for two years and had only recently gotten them back. He wasn't about to risk them again by helping conceal someone else's violation. Instead, he picked up the phone and called me.

Before contacting Robert, I decided to see the scene for myself.

Following a narrow trail into the woods, I soon found what I

was looking for.

It reminded me of a homicide investigation.

The deer had been hastily covered with leaves and woodland vegetation, as though someone had tried to hide the victim until they could return later. It looked remarkably like the way detectives sometimes discover a body that has been dumped in a secluded area and concealed from view.

As I pulled the leaves back, the reason for the cover-up became obvious.

The doe had been shot in the face at extremely close range.

Then I noticed something even more unusual.

An ear tag.

Wild deer don't wear ear tags.

What I thought would be a routine poaching case had suddenly become something very different.

I left the deer where it lay and contacted Robert. He admitted everything.

He told me he had gone into the woods squirrel hunting with a shotgun when the doe appeared. Because it had once lived in captivity, it had little fear of people. Instead of running away, it calmly walked to within about five feet of him.

From that distance, Robert raised his shotgun and fired directly into the doe's face.

He then covered the carcass with leaves and went to his neighbor's house looking for help dragging it out of the woods.

During my investigation, I also learned Robert didn't have a hunting license. The reason was simple. He had never completed Ohio's mandatory hunter education course. Since he had never previously held a hunting license and couldn't produce proof that he

had completed hunter education, no one could legally sell him a hunting license.

I charged him with taking a deer with a firearm during the closed season and hunting without a license.

The ear tag eventually led me to a licensed deer propagator about sixteen miles away. Several weeks earlier, one of his deer had escaped from its enclosure.

To reach the spot where it was killed, the deer had somehow traveled roughly sixteen miles, crossing both the Auglaize River and the Maumee River along the way. Once it escaped and began living free, it became a wild deer under Ohio law and was entitled to the same protection as any other deer.

Because I wanted the judge to hear all of the facts, I required Robert to appear in court rather than simply paying the citations through the mail.

Robert entered a plea of no contest.

Judge Erwin Bandy found him guilty on both charges and imposed fines and court costs totaling $320.

During the hearing, I introduced a photograph I had taken of the deer where it lay in the woods. The close-range shotgun blast had left a gruesome wound to the doe's face. I believed it was important for the court to see exactly what had occurred, and Judge Bandy carefully examined the photograph before imposing sentence.

In addition to the fines and costs, Judge Bandy sentenced Robert to two concurrent thirty-day jail terms, suspending twenty-six days of each sentence on the conditions that he complete a hunter education course within the next twelve months and commit no similar wildlife violations during the following two years. Robert ultimately served four days in jail.

Judge Bandy also ordered him to pay $400 in restitution to the Ohio Division of Wildlife for the unlawful taking of the deer.

The weather had been unusually warm, and the deer had remained in the woods long enough that the carcass had begun to spoil. Rather than salvage it, I left it where it lay and allowed nature to reclaim it. I also notified the licensed deer propagator that his missing deer had finally been found, although not in the way he had hoped.

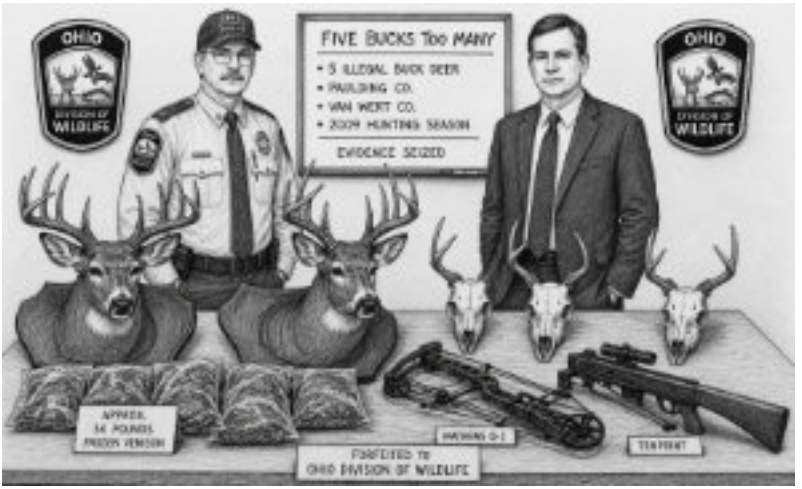
When I first uncovered those leaves, the scene reminded me of a murder investigation.

By the time the case was over, I realized it wasn't just another poaching case.

It was the story of a doe that had escaped captivity, crossed two rivers, survived for weeks on its own, and finally found the freedom every wild animal deserves.

In the end, the very thing that made its escape possible never changed. It still trusted people.

That trust brought it within five feet of the wrong man.



Five Bucks Too Many

Not every wildlife investigation ends with a hunter being caught in the act. Some begin with nothing more than a tip from someone who knows something isn't right. Those cases often require months of interviews, checking records, examining evidence, and patiently fitting the pieces together.

During the 2009 deer hunting season, we received information that a Van Wert County man, whom I'll refer to simply as D.L., had illegally killed five buck deer while hunting in Paulding and Van Wert counties.

As our investigation progressed, it became apparent that D.L. was obsessed with bowhunting deer, especially mature bucks. Taking trophy bucks had become more important than following Ohio's deer hunting regulations. That obsession ultimately led him to make a series of poor decisions that would eventually catch up with him.

Wildlife Investigator Mark Weihrauch and I spent months in-

vestigating the allegations. As we followed leads and gathered evidence, the case slowly came together. By the end of the investigation, we had enough evidence to file charges in both Paulding and Van Wert counties.

One discovery was especially telling. During the investigation, we learned that D.L. had used the permanent deer tag from a doe he had legally harvested and attached it to one of the illegally taken buck deer.

The tag allowed him to present the buck to a taxidermist for mounting, making it appear that the deer had been legally taken. Like many attempts to cover up a wildlife violation, the deception eventually unraveled.

D.L. ultimately entered guilty pleas to four wildlife violations in Paulding County Court and five wildlife violations in Van Wert Municipal Court.

Combined, the courts ordered him to pay $1,630 in fines and court costs. In addition, he was ordered to pay $5,618 in restitution for the five illegally taken buck deer.

He was also placed on three years of probation and received a 300-day suspended jail sentence, provided he remained on good behavior during that period. His Ohio hunting privileges were revoked for three years.

As evidence, we seized two mounted buck heads, three skull mounts, approximately 34 pounds of frozen venison, a Mathews Q2 compound bow, and a TenPoint crossbow. All were forfeited to the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

The case finally came to an end with the court proceedings in the spring of 2011.

As wildlife officers, we never measured success by the number

of citations we wrote or the number of trophies we seized. The greatest satisfaction came from knowing that we had protected a resource held in trust for everyone. Most hunters are honest men and women who respect the law and appreciate the privilege of pursuing Ohio's wildlife. They deserve to know that those who deliberately cheat the system will be held accountable.

Looking back, this investigation reminded me that patience is one of a wildlife officer's most valuable tools. Good cases aren't built overnight. They are built one interview, one piece of evidence, and one fact at a time. In the end, it wasn't an obsession with trophy bucks that defined this case—it was the persistence of a thorough investigation and the reminder that no set of antlers is worth sacrificing your integrity or your hunting privileges.



Last Night Out Before Basic Training

By late November 1994, the deer rut was winding down, but spotlighting complaints were still keeping me busy. On one particular night, my unit supervisor, Bob Radcliff, joined me for a patrol in northern Paulding County.

Our destination was the county-owned Jacob Eaton Farm, a large tract of woods and farmland bordering the Maumee River. The property was rented to a local farmer, with the income helping support the Jacob Eaton Acres Children's Home. Over the years, I had investigated and made several arrests there for illegal spotlighting, making it a place worth watching.

Shortly after midnight, we tucked my patrol vehicle into a concealed spot along the edge of a wooded field and settled in to observe passing traffic. It was quiet for quite a while.

Then headlights appeared.

A passenger car eased slowly down the road that passed

through the Jacob Eaton Farm property. As it rounded a bend, it stopped. The headlights swept across an open field, illuminating part of the ground ahead.

Suddenly, several shots shattered the silence.

The rapid succession of gunfire came from the passenger side of the vehicle. After a brief pause, the car accelerated and continued down the road.

Bob and I pulled out from our hiding place and followed.

I activated my pursuit lights, and after a short distance the vehicle turned into the driveway of a nearby residence. I immediately recognized the home. It belonged to a longtime Hunter Education instructor affiliated with the Paulding County Fish and Game Club—a man who had spent years teaching safe and responsible firearm handling to young hunters.

The driver was his nineteen-year-old son, whom I'll identify only as M.T.

There were two other young men in the car, all about the same age.

The front-seat passenger, S.M., was holding an AP-9, a 9mm semi-automatic handgun equipped with an extended magazine. Empty cartridge cases were scattered across the front seat, leaving little doubt about what had just happened.

I explained that we had watched the vehicle stop and fire into the field and asked what they had been shooting at.

After a few moments of silence, S.M. admitted they thought they had seen the glowing eyes of what might have been a raccoon in the headlights. They weren't sure what it was, but they fired anyway. Fortunately, it appeared they hadn't struck anything.

The back-seat passenger added another interesting twist to the

case. He happened to be the teenage son of the sitting Paulding County sheriff.

It didn't take long for the seriousness of the situation to sink in.

The driver was especially nervous. He had recently enlisted in the United States Army and was scheduled to leave for basic training in only a couple of weeks. The three friends had gotten together for one final night before he reported for duty, and now they found themselves stopped by two wildlife officers after firing a handgun from a vehicle.

Legally, the incident could have been handled several different ways.

A criminal charge for improperly handling a firearm in a motor vehicle would have been considerably more serious. Instead, after considering that none of the young men had prior records and determining that S.M. alone had fired the weapon, I charged only him under the wildlife code with hunting from the aid of a motor vehicle, a third-degree misdemeanor. Under Ohio wildlife law, the act of hunting includes shooting, pursuing, or attempting to take wildlife, whether or not an animal is actually killed.

The firearm was seized as evidence, and S.M. was ordered to appear in court.

Before leaving that night, I told the sheriff's son, "You might want to tell your dad what happened tonight, because I'll be calling him tomorrow."

The following day, I also contacted the driver's father—the Hunter Education instructor—to explain what had occurred. While disappointed, he was grateful his son had not been charged since he had not fired the weapon. I also notified the sheriff, allowing him to handle matters involving his own son as he saw fit.

When the case came before Judge Bandy, S.M. entered a guilty plea. The judge imposed a $250 fine plus court costs, ordered the AP-9 forfeited to the Division of Wildlife, revoked S.M.'s hunting privileges for one year, and imposed a suspended jail sentence conditioned upon his future good behavior.

The forfeiture carried an additional consequence. The AP-9 had been a gift from S.M.'s parents, who had purchased the handgun for him to use in target shooting. Because he was under twenty-one years of age, he could not legally have purchased the handgun himself. With the judge's forfeiture order, the firearm—a gift from his parents worth about $300—was permanently lost.

The AP-9 was an unusual firearm to encounter in a wildlife investigation. During my career, I had dealt with countless rifles and shotguns used in spotlighting cases, but this remains the only time I encountered someone using a semi-automatic AP-9 handgun with an extended magazine while illegally hunting from the aid of a motor vehicle.

Three young men set out to enjoy one last night together before one of them left for Army basic training. Before the night was over, one had lost a prized handgun given to him by his parents, another had learned how close he had come to facing far more serious criminal charges, and all three had discovered that a few reckless seconds can leave consequences that last far longer than the sound of gunfire.



Bringing Back the Wild Turkey

Looking back over more than three decades as an Ohio Wildlife Officer, there are many cases I remember, many violators I caught, and countless hours spent enforcing wildlife laws. But this was one of those things I was most proud of having a role in.

It wasn't making a major poaching case or writing a record number of citations.

It was helping bring the wild turkey back to Paulding County.

When I first arrived in Paulding County, wild turkeys simply didn't exist there. Like much of northwest Ohio, they had disappeared generations earlier as forests were cleared and settlement expanded across the landscape.

In early 1994, after years of planning by the Ohio Division of Wildlife, we began reintroducing wild turkeys into northwest Ohio. Paulding County was selected as one of the release areas because of its excellent habitat along the Maumee River and Flat Rock Creek.

Those wooded stream corridors provided everything the birds needed to establish themselves.

That winter, forty-eight wild turkeys were released in Paulding County as part of a larger effort that saw 243 birds released throughout northwest Ohio. These weren't pen-raised birds. They were truly wild turkeys trapped in eastern and southern Ohio, where healthy populations already existed, and carefully relocated to give the species a fresh start.

As the Paulding County Wildlife Officer, I was fortunate to play a role in that historic project. I worked with landowners, answered countless questions from the public, encouraged people to report turkey sightings, and stressed the importance of protecting the birds. At the time, there was no turkey hunting season in northwest Ohio. Every bird was valuable, and it would take years for the population to become established.

The reports gradually began coming in.

"I saw three turkeys along the Maumee."

"There was a flock crossing Flat Rock Creek."

Every report was exciting because it meant the birds were surviving.

The success of the initial release was so encouraging that in 1996 we released additional wild turkeys at two more locations in Paulding County, expanding the restoration effort and giving the growing population an even stronger foothold.

The birds did exactly what we had hoped they would do. They spread naturally along wooded river corridors and into neighboring woodlots. Year after year, the population continued to grow.

Eventually, something that had once seemed almost impossible became reality.

The wild turkey had returned to Paulding County.

In fact, the reintroduced population grew and expanded to the point that Ohio was able to establish an annual wild turkey hunting season in Paulding County—something that would have been unimaginable when those first birds were released.

Knowing that I had a small part in restoring a native species to the landscape is something no citation book, arrest, or courtroom victory could ever equal. Long after the cases have been forgotten, those wild turkeys—and their descendants—are still out there, living proof that conservation isn't just about protecting wildlife.

Sometimes it's measured by the wildlife that returns to the land and remains there for generations to come.



The Turkey Release and the D-Day Veteran

One of the greatest rewards of spending more than thirty years as an Ohio wildlife officer wasn't just the wildlife or the places I visited. It was the people I met along the way. Some I knew only briefly. Others left an impression I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

One of those people was Jim Smiley.

Very early in 1994, the Ohio Division of Wildlife was preparing to restore wild turkeys to Paulding County. After decades of conservation work, wild turkeys were making a remarkable comeback across Ohio, and our county was selected as one of the release locations. These weren't pen-raised birds. They were true wild Eastern wild turkeys that Division of Wildlife personnel had live trapped in southern Ohio and transported to northwest Ohio for restoration, including those that would be released in Paulding County in February 1994.

Part of my responsibility was selecting suitable release sites. We

concentrated on wooded riparian corridors along rivers and streams where the birds would have food, cover, and excellent habitat to establish themselves and expand naturally.

One release site was along the Maumee River.

Another was on a beautiful stretch of private property bordering Flat Rock Creek that belonged to Jim Smiley.

Jim was a long-time resident of Paulding County. Besides farming, he operated a repair garage and towing service. Over the years, I had taken state vehicles to his shop for repairs and maintenance, so we knew each other as friendly acquaintances. His wooded property along Flat Rock Creek was exactly the type of habitat we were seeking, and it became one of the county's first turkey release sites.

Several months later, as our nation observed the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, I happened to read an article in the Paulding Progress. It was part of a series recognizing local World War II veterans.

Until then, I had no idea Jim had served in the war.

The article revealed that he had been a member of the U.S. Army's 147th Engineer Combat Battalion and had landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. The 147th Engineers had one of the most dangerous assignments of D-Day. Their mission was to clear beach obstacles, mines, and other barriers under enemy fire so infantry, tanks, and supplies could move inland. Although they were engineers, they often found themselves fighting as infantrymen while carrying out their mission.

After reading the article, I felt compelled to stop by Jim's repair shop.

I simply wanted to thank him for his military service.

He genuinely seemed to appreciate my stopping by.

"Do you have a few minutes?" he asked.

"I sure do," I replied.

He invited me into his home and led me down a hallway. At the end was what had once been a double-door closet. The doors had been removed and replaced with curtains.

Jim slowly pulled the curtains aside and switched on a light.

I was completely caught by surprise.

The closet had been transformed into a small prayer room.

Inside was a beautifully painted mural or mosaic, created by a local artist whom Jim knew. A Bible rested on a simple altar beneath it. The artwork portrayed scenes from Jim's wartime experiences, but one image immediately drew my attention.

It depicted the invasion of Omaha Beach.

Looking down upon the landing craft and the struggling American soldiers was an image of Jesus Christ watching over them.

Jim quietly explained that when he came ashore on Omaha Beach following the first waves of the invasion on June 6, 1944, he believed he saw that very image.

He described the confusion, the deafening explosions, and the relentless machine-gun fire sweeping the beach. Men were falling all around him. He told me the water was red with the blood of American soldiers.

Against incredible odds, he survived.

Only a few days later, Jim's engineer battalion was moving equipment inland to support the advancing Allied forces when his convoy suddenly came under attack by German troops. The driver of the truck Jim was riding in swerved into a ditch, where the vehicle became hopelessly stuck. Unable to move forward or backward, they were trapped while the firefight continued around them.

Combat engineers were trained to clear obstacles, build bridges, remove mines, and keep the Allied advance moving. But in Normandy they often had to fight like infantrymen while carrying out those dangerous assignments.

Eventually the gunfire subsided.

When Jim looked around to get his bearings, he realized their disabled truck had come to rest directly in front of an ancient Norman village church known as Église Saint-Vigor.

For the second time in just a few days, Jim believed the Lord had protected him.

He never claimed to understand why he survived when so many others did not.

He simply believed that God had watched over him.

Those two experiences—surviving Omaha Beach and surviving the firefight near the little village church—shaped the rest of his life.

The small prayer room in his home became a place where he regularly knelt to thank God for bringing him safely through the war.

After returning home, Jim married, raised a family, built a successful business, and became one of those dependable people every small town is fortunate to have. Most people knew him as the local mechanic or the man who operated the tow truck.

Very few knew the extraordinary story he carried within him.

As I left his home that day, I couldn't help but think how unlikely it was that our paths would have crossed beyond routine vehicle repairs. Yet because of a wild turkey restoration project and a beautiful piece of property along Flat Rock Creek, I had been given the privilege of hearing the remarkable story of one of Paulding County's true hometown heroes.

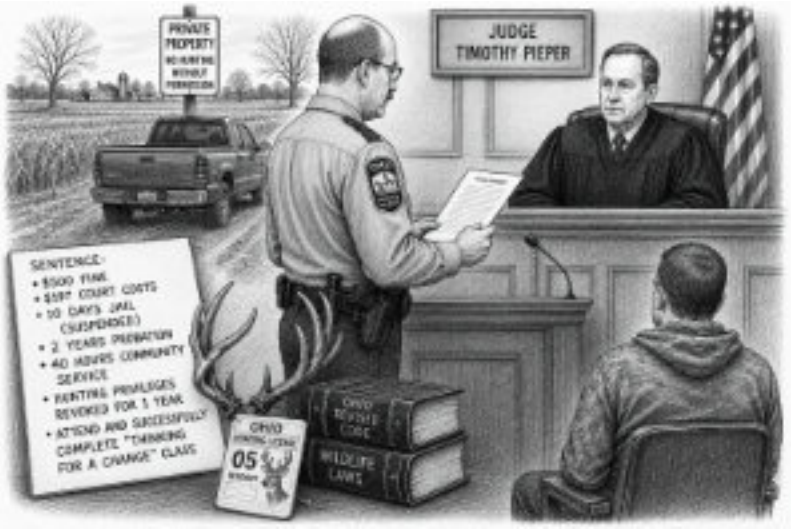
My career as a wildlife officer introduced me to thousands of people over the years.

Many have faded from memory.

Jim Smiley never has.

Whenever I think about those first wild turkey releases in Paulding County, I also remember the small prayer room hidden behind those curtains, the illuminated mural of Omaha Beach, and a humble combat engineer who believed with all his heart that God had watched over him on the beaches of Normandy and in front of a centuries-old village church.

Looking back, I realize that one of the greatest privileges of my career wasn't simply helping restore wildlife to northwest Ohio. It was the opportunity to meet extraordinary people like Jim Smiley, whose quiet faith, humility, and courage left an impression that has remained with me ever since.



Thinking for a Change

One of the more satisfying parts of a wildlife officer's career isn't writing citations—it's seeing someone finally change their behavior.

During Ohio's 2005 deer gun season, I received a complaint that someone was hunting deer without permission on private property in Paulding County. I happened to be nearby and responded immediately. As I arrived, I spotted the hunter walking across the field toward the road where his vehicle was parked.

I recognized him immediately. I'll refer to him only by his initials, KT, a Paulding resident I had encountered on previous occasions.

Several years earlier, I had charged KT with having a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle, a criminal offense for which he was convicted. Because of that prior history, I was familiar with him before this latest complaint.

When I contacted KT, he admitted he had been hunting the

property. His explanation was one I've heard many times over the years. He said he had hunted there before and assumed it was still acceptable.

The problem was that the property had changed hands.

The new owner was much more protective of the land and had never granted KT permission to hunt there. Rather than asking first, KT simply assumed the old permission still applied. It didn't.

I charged him with hunting without permission from the landowner, a third-degree misdemeanor carrying a maximum penalty of a $500 fine and up to 60 days in jail.

Because of KT's prior record, I requested a mandatory court appearance rather than allowing the matter to be handled by mail. I wanted the court to hear the circumstances firsthand.

At his arraignment on December 12, 2005, KT entered a no contest plea before Judge Timothy Pieper. I explained the facts of the case and also informed the court of KT's prior criminal convictions, including the earlier loaded-firearm-in-a-motor-vehicle conviction and a 2002 conviction for menacing.

Judge Pieper considered both the current offense and KT's history before imposing sentence. The judge assessed the maximum $500 fine, along with $197 in court costs. He also imposed a 10-day jail sentence, suspended on the condition that KT commit no further violations. KT was placed on two years of probation, ordered to perform 40 hours of community service, and had his hunting privileges revoked for one year.

There was one additional requirement that caught my attention.

Judge Pieper ordered KT to successfully complete a probation department program called Thinking for a Change, a course designed to help offenders examine the decisions that lead them into

trouble and develop better judgment.

As wildlife officers, we often wonder whether our efforts make any lasting difference. We write citations, testify in court, and move on to the next complaint, rarely knowing whether anything has truly changed.

In KT's case, I believe it did.

From that day forward, I had no further complaints involving him.

Through the remainder of my career, until I retired in 2012, I never again cited KT for a wildlife violation.

Sometimes the greatest success isn't measured by the number of tickets written, but by the number that never have to be written again.



The Softball Glove Defense

One warm evening in June 2007, I pulled into the Paulding Reservoir to check anglers for fishing licenses. The adjoining park featured several ball diamonds, and on that evening multiple softball games were underway. It was a popular place where people could enjoy both fishing and summer recreation.

As I watched from a distance, I noticed several people fishing along the shoreline. One man, however, caught my attention. The moment he realized I was approaching, he quickly laid his fishing rod and reel on the bank and headed toward the parking lot.

That alone wasn't enough to prove anything, but years of experience had taught me to pay attention to the little things.

The man walked to his vehicle, retrieved a softball glove, slipped it on, and turned his attention toward one of the nearby ball fields. He was waiting for his own softball game to begin and had decided to fish while passing the time. When he saw me coming, however, he

hoped the glove would make it appear he had never been fishing at all.

I continued checking the other anglers first. There was no need to rush. Before approaching fishermen, I always spent a few minutes observing the area. That allowed me to identify who was actually fishing, what equipment they were using, and whether anyone was trying to avoid contact.

When I finally walked over to the man with the softball glove, I asked to see his Ohio fishing license.

Without hesitation he replied, "I wasn't fishing. I was just waiting for my softball game."

I smiled.

I explained that before contacting anglers, I routinely observe the area and make mental notes about who is fishing and the equipment they're using. I told him I had watched him fishing only minutes earlier with the rod and reel he had left behind on the bank before retrieving the softball glove from his vehicle.

There was a long pause.

The softball glove had been a creative prop, but it couldn't erase what I had already witnessed.

Finally, the man admitted he had been fishing and confessed that he did not have a valid Ohio fishing license.

I issued him a summons for fishing without a license. Rather than appear in Paulding County Court, he waived his court appearance and paid the fine and court costs before his scheduled court date, totaling $160.

During my career, I heard every excuse imaginable. Some were amusing, some were unbelievable, and a few were surprisingly inventive.

But this was the only time I ever met someone who thought a softball glove could make a fishing rod disappear.



The Oil Slick of 1986

In early July 1986, a major oil spill occurred at the Standard Oil Company (SOHIO) refinery in Lima, Ohio. What began with a series of heavy thunderstorms and the overflow of the refinery's retention ponds quickly became a major environmental incident in northwest Ohio.

The heavy rains caused the refinery's retention ponds to overflow, releasing an estimated 42,000 to 50,000 gallons of partially processed and waste oil into the Ottawa River. A second release reportedly followed the next night, adding to the amount of oil already moving downstream.

The Ottawa River is a winding stream, and the oil began working its way downstream toward the Auglaize River and ultimately the Maumee River system. What followed was a massive cleanup and environmental investigation involving several state and federal agencies.

The U.S. Coast Guard and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency concentrated much of their efforts on containing and removing the oil. Thousands of feet of containment boom were deployed, barriers were established near bridges, and vacuum trucks and skimming equipment worked around the clock to recover the oil from the river.

For the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife, however, there was another important responsibility: determining what had happened to the wildlife living in the river.

As the Wildlife Officer assigned to Paulding County, I became directly involved in that effort.

I worked with other wildlife officers and Division of Wildlife personnel along the Auglaize River, particularly in Paulding and Defiance counties, documenting dead fish and other aquatic wildlife affected by the oil. Our investigation wasn't limited to walking the riverbanks. We used watercraft to survey the river, traveling stretches of the Auglaize and examining areas where the oil had accumulated and where aquatic wildlife had been affected.

We also conducted surveys from the air. The Division of Wildlife utilized one of its pilots and a helicopter to survey the affected river system from above. The aerial perspective gave us an entirely different view of the spill, allowing personnel to see the extent and movement of the oil and identify areas that needed closer examination by crews on the ground and on the water.

So the investigation was conducted from three different perspectives: on foot, by boat, and from the air. Each provided information that helped biologists and wildlife officers determine the extent of the damage.

It was not glamorous work. We weren't chasing poachers or

checking fishing licenses. We were walking riverbanks, traveling the river by boat, and examining affected areas from the air, looking for dead fish and other evidence of what the oil had done to the river's living resources.

The information we collected was important because the state wasn't simply interested in knowing that fish had died. The Division of Wildlife had to document the losses by species and determine the monetary value of those losses under Ohio law.

The first assessment of the wildlife mortality produced a figure of $14,249.20. That, however, was only the beginning.

As state biologists continued their work and conducted a more comprehensive assessment along the affected portion of the river, the documented wildlife losses increased dramatically. More than 135,000 fish, freshwater mussels, amphibians, and other aquatic organisms were ultimately included in the biological assessment.

The final wildlife restitution owed by SOHIO was $131,241.53. That figure was strictly for the wildlife that had been killed and the environmental degradation. It was separate from the enormous cost of cleaning up the oil itself. SOHIO reportedly spent more than a million dollars on cleanup operations, contractors, containment equipment, skimming operations, and improvements to the refinery's wastewater retention system.

For those of us in the Division of Wildlife, the dollar amount was only part of the story. The real significance was in the sheer number of living creatures that had been lost and the effort required to document that loss.

The oil spill also became much bigger news than anything I normally encountered in my work as a Wildlife Officer.

Local television crews from northwest Ohio and northeast Indi-

ana came to the river to cover the unfolding story. I was interviewed on site by television stations from both Toledo and Fort Wayne, answering questions about the spill, the wildlife mortality, and the investigation that was still underway.

The story even reached the national news. CBS Evening News with Dan Rather reported on the oil spill, bringing the environmental disaster in the Ottawa and Auglaize river system to viewers across the country.

For a county Wildlife Officer, being interviewed by television news crews was certainly not an everyday occurrence. Usually, our work was conducted quietly and away from cameras. This time, however, what was happening in our part of northwest Ohio had attracted attention far beyond Paulding County.

Eventually, the oil was cleaned up, the investigators finished their work, and things along the rivers gradually returned to normal.

But the incident left behind one unexpected reminder.

After the excitement had died down, some enterprising person apparently recognized that the oil spill had created an opportunity to sell a few souvenirs. They began going around to local offices and businesses taking orders for T-shirts.

The shirts carried a simple message:

"I Survived Oil Slick 1986."

My wife, Sharon, was the Clerk of the Paulding County Court at the time. When the person selling the shirts came into the courthouse taking orders, Sharon decided she needed one.

She bought a shirt. And, she wore it quite often.

In fact, that shirt became something of a regular part of our fishing trips. I can still remember seeing Sharon wearing her "I Survived Oil Slick '86" shirt while we were out fishing.

It was a fitting souvenir from an event that had been anything but funny when it was happening.

For those of us who worked the rivers during the spill, it had been long days of documenting dead fish and wildlife, following the movement of the oil, and trying to determine the extent of the damage. For the people living along the river, it was an environmental disaster happening in their own backyard.

But years later, the T-shirt became a reminder that even some of the most serious moments in a game warden's career eventually become stories to tell.

And in our case, Sharon had the shirt to prove she had survived the Oil Slick in '86.



A School Bus Driver's Watchful Eye

Every year, around the beginning of the school year, I made it a point to visit the school bus garages throughout Paulding County. I would take along copies of the new hunting regulations and my business card, with my telephone number on it. I would give them to the school bus supervisors and ask that each driver receive a copy of the regulations.

Whenever I had the opportunity, I would also talk directly with the drivers. I would explain some of the things they might see along their routes during hunting seasons—things such as someone shooting from a roadway, a hunter trespassing in a field, or other activities that might indicate a wildlife violation.

I encouraged them to call me if they saw something suspicious. I told them that they didn't have to know for certain that a violation had occurred. If they could give me a description of the person, a vehicle license plate number, and the location, I would investigate it

and determine whether a violation had actually taken place.

Over the years, some of those school bus drivers became pretty good sources of information.

One of them was Norma. Her bus route took her just west of our house, where she had a turnaround and picked up several students.

Norma was especially observant. If she saw something along her route that she thought might be a violation, she would give me a call. Not every tip turned out to be a violation, but she understood that it was better to pass along the information and let me check it out.

On Monday, April 30, 2001, Norma called me about something she had overheard on her bus. Two boys had been talking, and one of them was bragging to the other about having a live raccoon in a cage in his backyard. The raccoon, he said, was being used to train coon dogs.

Later, when Norma dropped the boy off at his home, she was able to see the cage herself. Sure enough, there was a live raccoon inside.

I went to the residence the following day, May 1.

When I pulled into the driveway, I didn't have to look very hard to find the evidence. The raccoon was still sitting in a cage in the backyard. Nearby was another, much smaller cage. This one had four little wheels attached to the bottom, and a long rope was tied to it.

I asked the boy's father about the raccoon.

He told me that he had found it in a barn several weeks earlier and believed it had been orphaned. He said he had brought it home, had been feeding it and planned to return it to the wild once it was old enough to survive on its own.

Then I asked him about the little wheeled cage and the rope.

He admitted that he had been using it to pull the raccoon around the backyard while training his coon dogs.

He also admitted that he knew it was against the law to possess the raccoon during the closed season. However, he insisted that he intended to keep it only until it was old enough to survive on its own.

I thought about that for a moment.

Then I said, "Or until you get your dogs trained?"

That pretty much ended the conversation.

I issued him a citation for possessing a live raccoon during the closed season. I also took possession of the raccoon and transported it to a wildlife rehabilitation facility, where it could be properly cared for and eventually returned to the wild.

The man entered a plea of guilty and ultimately paid $160 in fines and court costs.

The raccoon case was one of several occasions when Norma's observations along her bus route proved valuable. She continued to keep an eye on the countryside as she went about her daily route, and I appreciated the fact that she was willing to call me whenever she saw something that didn't look quite right.

Several weeks later, that same willingness to pay attention resulted in a situation of a completely different kind.

I was pulling out of my driveway when I saw Norma's school bus stopped just west of our house. The bus was facing west, with its red warning lights flashing and its stop arm extended as Norma was letting a child off the bus.

At the same time, a semi-truck was traveling eastbound toward the bus.

The driver had a clear view of the stopped school bus, its flashing red lights and the extended stop arm. There was no question that

he should have stopped.

But he never slowed down.

The semi came barreling eastbound right past the stopped school bus.

It was an extremely dangerous situation, and I witnessed the entire thing. Norma even stuck her arm out the bus window and waved toward the truck as it continued down the road.

I immediately thought, I've got to do something about this.

I pulled out behind the semi and followed it. The truck continued east into Defiance County and eventually got onto U.S. Route 24.

I contacted the Ohio State Highway Patrol post in Defiance and explained what had happened back in Paulding County. The dispatcher told me it would be several minutes before a trooper could get into the area. I was then put in contact with the trooper by radio.

The trooper asked if I could make the stop for him.

Since he was requesting assistance, I activated my emergency lights and pursuit lights and stopped the semi.

When I approached the truck, I obtained the driver's license and information. The driver turned out to be Canadian.

Within a few minutes, the highway patrol trooper arrived. I gave him a written statement describing exactly what I had witnessed. Although the trooper had not personally seen the violation, he was able to use my statement as the basis for the citation.

He cited the driver for failing to stop for a school bus.

Because the driver was Canadian, the trooper took him into custody and transported him back to Paulding County, where he was required to post a bond before being released.

As I thought about what had happened, I couldn't help but see a little bit of irony in it.

A few weeks earlier, Norma had done me a favor. She had heard something on her school bus, paid attention to it, and called me. That phone call led me to a live raccoon being illegally held in a backyard and ultimately resulted in a citation.

Then, not long afterward, I happened to be in the right place when Norma's school bus was endangered by a driver who ignored her stop arm.

This time, I was the one who was able to return the favor.

It was a good reminder of why I made those annual trips to the school bus garages in the first place. I wasn't simply handing out copies of the hunting regulations. I was building a network of people who cared about what was happening along the roads and in the countryside.

Sometimes those people saw things that I didn't.

And sometimes, as it turned out, they needed someone to look out for them, too.



Daniel Boone

There were a lot of interesting characters living in Paulding County during my 32 years as a wildlife officer, but few were as unique as a wiry old fellow everyone knew as Daniel Boone.

Daniel Boone wasn't his real name, but that was what he wanted everyone to call him. So that's what I called him.

He lived in the Oakwood-Grover Hill area and was an old-fashioned outdoorsman. He loved to hunt and fish, and when it came to deer hunting, he preferred a straight bow. He also enjoyed fishing for catfish and bullheads in the small creeks around the county.

Daniel was a character in every sense of the word.

He lived in a small camping trailer parked beside the house where his wife and adult children lived. They wouldn't let him in the house because Daniel had a strong aversion to bathing. His personal hygiene—or lack of it—had become a family issue. They told me

that, every now and then, they would have to take him outside, hold him down, and hose him off while trying to convince him to change his clothes.

It was apparently quite a battle.

But Daniel didn't seem particularly bothered by any of it. He was perfectly content living in his little trailer, hunting, fishing, and doing things his own way.

One day, Daniel called me about a deer.

He told me that he had shot a deer with his bow and had tracked it for some distance. Eventually, the fall rains came, the blood trail disappeared, and he lost the deer.

About a week later, while squirrel hunting, Daniel happened to come across the dead deer.

By then, the carcass was badly deteriorated. But Daniel wasn't particularly interested in the condition of the meat. He was interested in the rack.

He called me and asked if he could keep the deer.

I met him, and we drove down into a section of woods just across the road from where the deer was lying. When I saw the deer, I understood why he had called me. It had a pretty nice rack, but the deer itself was well on its way to becoming part of the forest floor.

Daniel wanted the antlers.

I told him that since he had shot the deer, it was his deer if he wanted to keep it. But there was one condition.

He would have to tag it.

Daniel was perfectly willing to do that.

We tagged the deer and then loaded it onto the back of my four-wheel-drive Chevy Blazer, which had a deer carrier mounted on the back.

I thought that was the end of the matter.

It wasn't.

Daniel looked at the deer and told me that he thought it was probably still good enough to eat.

I strongly disagreed.

The weather had been fairly warm, and the deer had been dead for about a week. I discouraged him from eating it, but Daniel wasn't easily discouraged. I helped him get the deer back to his place, and that's when he decided to show me some of his other accomplishments.

Daniel told me he used to do taxidermy.

He had an old semi-trailer parked near his property, and he wanted to show me his work. He opened the doors, got a ladder, and we climbed inside.

What I saw was quite a collection.

Daniel had mounted all kinds of animals, although his taxidermy methods were definitely unconventional.

He had mounted a mallard duck, for example, but the neck had been stretched out so long that the duck looked like it had borrowed a neck from a Canada goose.

Daniel was proud of it.

He had also taken a moose he had shot in Canada and an elk he had taken out west. Apparently, Daniel thought the elk antlers would look better on the moose mount, so he put the elk antlers on the moose head.

Then he put the moose antlers on the elk.

Why?

Because he thought they looked better that way.

Then there was the jackalope.

Daniel had taken a rabbit and attached a small set of antlers to its head. He was particularly proud of that creation.

The old semi-trailer was like a private wildlife museum—only this was a museum where the exhibits didn't necessarily resemble the animals they were supposed to represent.

Daniel was proud of his work, and that's what mattered to him.

Nobody was lining up to have him do their taxidermy, but he wasn't doing it for customers anyway. It was his hobby, and he enjoyed it.

Then Daniel showed me something else.

He had been collecting freshwater mussels from Middle Creek. He took me over to a little plastic child's swimming pool—probably four or five feet across and about a foot deep.

Inside were roughly 120 freshwater mussels.

At the time, the regulations provided that a person could not possess more than 15 freshwater mussels per day for use as bait.

Daniel had approximately 120 of them in that little swimming pool, and he wasn't keeping them for bait. He intended to eat them.

There was no question that he was in violation of the regulations.

I looked at that little swimming pool and thought, "Well, this is going to be interesting."

Daniel told me how good the mussels were to eat.

I didn't agree.

I also knew Daniel well enough to understand that he wasn't intentionally trying to thumb his nose at the law. He simply had his own way of looking at things, and his understanding of wildlife regulations was sometimes a little different from mine.

I had always believed that if I was going to lose a case, I'd rather

lose it in the field than lose it in the courtroom.

A wildlife officer can make a mistake in the field. But if you take a weak case before a judge and have it dismissed, you can damage your credibility with the court.

I wasn't about to bring Daniel into court over a pile of freshwater mussels when I believed there was a better way to handle the situation.

So I explained the regulations to him.

I told him he couldn't possess that many mussels and that, since they were still alive, he needed to return them to the creek.

He agreed.

I also told him that I wouldn't recommend eating them. There were health concerns associated with eating freshwater mussels, particularly ones collected from local waters.

Daniel wasn't convinced.

He told me he'd eaten plenty of them and thought they were good.

I just looked at him and said, "Don't be eating any more, Daniel."

That seemed like the best way to handle it.

Over the years, Daniel and I had other encounters. Eventually, he wanted to raise and sell pheasants, and we worked through the process of getting him properly permitted to do it.

For all of his eccentricities, Daniel had a genuine love for wildlife and the outdoors. He simply operated by his own set of rules.

Eventually, age caught up with him.

Age-related health problems forced him into a nursing facility, and Daniel Boone passed away in 2011, about a year before I retired.

Looking back over 32 years as a wildlife officer, I met plenty of people I will never forget.

Some were memorable because of the cases I wrote against them. Others were memorable because of the things they said or did.

Daniel Boone was memorable for all of it.

He hunted deer with a straight bow, fished for catfish and bullheads, collected freshwater mussels, raised pheasants, mounted animals in ways only Daniel could imagine, and lived life according to his own rules.

He was certainly one of the more unusual characters I encountered during my years as a wildlife officer.

And whenever I think about the colorful collection of people, places, and experiences that made up my career, I can't help but smile when I remember the old fellow who insisted on being called Daniel Boone.



The Toledo Water Intake Case

Some wildlife cases are routine. Others stay with you because of the people involved, the circumstances surrounding them, or the unexpected turns the investigation takes.

Then there are cases that seem almost too strange to be true.

The Toledo Water Intake Case was one of those.

It was the spring of 1984 when the Division of Wildlife received an anonymous complaint concerning employees of the City of Toledo Water Department. The caller alleged that employees were illegally taking walleye and yellow perch from the city's water intake pump station located in Jerusalem Township in Lucas County.

At first, it sounded like an unusual complaint. The Toledo water intake was located out in Lake Erie, and the caller explained that fish were entering the pump station through a three-mile-long, 108-inch-diameter underwater pipe that originated at the intake crib in the lake.

According to the complaint, once the fish made their way into the pump station, some of the employees would take advantage of the situation.

They used baskets, nets and snag poles to catch the fish by hand—sometimes taking thousands of live fish from the pit. The fish were then reportedly taken home for personal use, and some were even sold to others.

There was another allegation that made the complaint even more troubling.

The caller claimed that employees would sometimes provide fish for dinners hosted by local politicians.

If true, this wasn't simply a matter of someone keeping a few fish for supper. The fish were capable of returning to Lake Erie through the intake pipe, and taking them was clearly a violation of Ohio's wildlife laws.

The anonymous caller also said it had been going on for years.

Because of the nature of the allegations, Wildlife Investigator Terry Sunderhaus was assigned to conduct an undercover investigation. Terry began working his way into the situation, eventually gaining the trust of one of the pump station employees.

The undercover work proved successful.

Terry and another undercover officer were eventually invited inside the pump station. They were able to see firsthand how easily the employees could catch the fish and how the fish were being handled.

By then, the investigation had developed enough that surveillance was needed to document exactly who was coming and going from the facility.

On April 27, 1984, six Wildlife Officers, including me, were as-

signed to conduct a twenty-hour surveillance operation.

Our job was simple: document the activity at the pump station.

Our location, however, was anything but glamorous.

The pump station's access road was North Yondota Road, near its intersection with Poachers Highway. We positioned ourselves along the road, pretending to be anglers fishing for bullheads in a ditch.

It was a believable cover.

At least we hoped it was.

Poachers Highway was still a narrow two-lane road, and its name wasn't accidental. During the market-hunting era, commercial market hunters had used the surrounding Lake Erie marshes to pursue waterfowl. By 1984, the road's name had become a bit of local history.

Now we were sitting along that same road, pretending to be ordinary fishermen while conducting a wildlife investigation.

To help us see what was happening around the pump station after dark, we used a Vietnam-era Generation 2 Starlight Scope.

The technology was pretty impressive for its time. It allowed us to see activity at night that would have been impossible to observe with the naked eye.

For twenty hours we watched.

Vehicles came and went from the pump station, and we carefully documented the activity.

There is nothing particularly exciting about sitting beside a road for hours on end watching vehicles.

But surveillance work isn't about excitement.

It's about patience.

You may spend hours seeing nothing, waiting for the one thing

you need to see.

In this case, the surveillance helped complete the picture that Terry and the undercover officers had already begun putting together.

Finally, on May 5, 1984, the investigation reached its conclusion. A raid was conducted and a search warrant was executed at the pump station.

Wildlife officers seized the equipment that had been used to catch the fish, along with a smoker that employees had reportedly used to smoke fish at the site.

Charges were ultimately filed, and convictions were obtained.

The case didn't end with the convictions, however.

The City of Toledo conducted its own internal investigation into the misconduct of the employees involved. Several received suspensions, while others were reassigned.

There was also a practical conservation problem that needed to be addressed.

The fish were getting into the intake system because they could enter the underwater pipe at the intake crib. To prevent the problem from happening again, a barrier was designed and installed at the intake crib to impede walleye and yellow perch from entering the intake pipe.

Looking back, the Toledo Water Intake Case was one of the more unusual investigations I was involved in during my career.

It started with an anonymous phone call and led to an undercover operation, a twenty-hour surveillance, a search warrant and ultimately convictions.

But what made the case especially memorable wasn't just the unusual location or the number of fish involved.

It was the realization that sometimes a wildlife officer's job takes us places we never expected to go.

On this particular assignment, we weren't sitting in a deer stand, patrolling a river, or checking fishermen along the shoreline.

We were sitting beside a ditch on Poachers Highway, pretending to catch bullheads while watching a city water intake station through a Vietnam-era night-vision scope.

And somewhere inside that strange little operation was a lesson that applied to every wildlife case I ever worked:

Wildlife laws only work when someone is willing to enforce them—even when the people involved aren't the ones you would expect to find on the wrong side of the law.



Plywood Bucky

The first time we used deer decoys was sometime around 1983 or 1984. They were a far cry from the realistic, full-bodied decoys hunters can buy today.

Our first decoys were homemade silhouettes cut from plywood. The body was hinged so it could be folded up and carried in the trunk of a patrol vehicle. To make them look a little more realistic, brown burlap was glued over the plywood. A little black paint was sprayed here and there to give the impression of legs, shoulders, and hips.

Two stakes were attached to the bottoms of the legs so we could push the decoy into the ground. For antlers, we used a small set of real deer antlers clamped to the head with a couple of C-clamps.

It wasn't exactly state-of-the-art wildlife enforcement equipment, but it was what we had.

The first time I put one of those decoys to use was during gun

deer season. I set it out in a field near the end of legal hunting hours. At the time, legal shooting hours ended at 5:00 p.m. I parked my patrol vehicle in a nearby barn where I could stay concealed and watch the field.

My plan was simple: put out the buck decoy, hide nearby, and wait for somebody to try to shoot "Plywood Bucky."

It didn't take long.

A pickup truck carrying a couple of hunters came down the road. They spotted the decoy and immediately hit the brakes. I thought for sure they were going to get out and shoot.

Instead, they just sat there.

Then they started laughing.

They laughed and laughed, apparently finding the sight of that flat, hinged deer far more entertaining than I had intended. Eventually, they drove away.

As I sat there watching them leave, I thought, What a joke this is.

I could only imagine the story they were going to tell their buddies about the stupid, flat, hinged deer the Game Warden had put out in the field.

Needless to say, I never again used Plywood Bucky.

A couple of years later, the powers that be purchased some much better equipment—full-bodied, three-dimensional deer decoys with remote-controlled heads and tails.

Now those were something to work with.

They looked like real deer, and we made a lot of cases involving hunters shooting from vehicles and spotlighting deer with the new decoys.

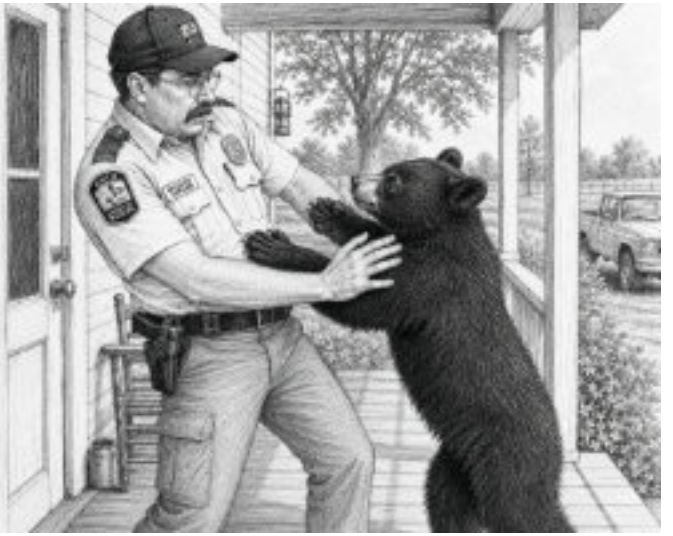
I don't have a photograph of Plywood Bucky.

Just a bad memory.

But there's a postscript to the story.

Several years later I cited the very same driver of that pickup truck—the one who had laughed at Plywood Bucky—for hunting deer without permission.

I guess Plywood Bucky and I got the last laugh.



The Bear On The Porch

Jocko was one of those characters you didn't soon forget. Jocko was his nickname, but it was the name he preferred to use and the name nearly everyone called him.

He was a well-known hunter in the Paulding and Defiance County area. I would occasionally hear that Jocko was up to something—sometimes a complaint that he was involved in some kind of poaching or other wildlife violation.

What made it interesting was that, at about the same time, Jocko might be telling me that the very person making the complaint was doing some poaching of his own.

That put me in the middle of a lot of "he said, he said" situations.

Whenever I received information like that, I would follow up on it. But most of the time, I couldn't find enough evidence to establish that either side was doing anything wrong. It was simply one person's word against another's.

Then, one summer day in 1997, I received some information I certainly wasn't expecting.

Our rural mail carrier pulled into my driveway. Coincidentally, she was also the mail carrier for Jocko's residence, several miles away.

She told me that while delivering mail one day, she had noticed something unusual in a tree in Jocko's front yard.

There was a black bear.

That certainly got my attention.

A black bear in a tree in somebody's front yard in Paulding County wasn't exactly an everyday occurrence. Naturally, I decided I needed to check it out.

I drove to Jocko's house and pulled into the driveway. His pickup wasn't there, so I assumed he was at work. I walked up to the front porch and knocked on the door.

There was no answer.

As I stood there on the porch, I suddenly heard a low growling sound.

I turned around.

Standing there was a black bear cub.

Before I had much time to process what was happening, the cub walked toward me. It came right up to me, stood on its hind legs, and put its front paws against my waist.

My first thought was that this was definitely not how I had expected this investigation to go.

I began backing away and pushed the cub away from me. Its claws were surprisingly sharp, and as I pushed it away, the claws scratched my forearms and wrists.

I kept backing away, yelling, "Get down! Get, get down! Get!"

The bear, however, didn't seem particularly impressed by my au-

thority.

It followed me.

I continued backing toward my vehicle, and the cub followed right along behind me. When I reached the vehicle and opened the door, the bear came right up to me and appeared as though it might even try to climb inside.

At that point, I decided I had gotten about as close to this bear as I needed to get.

I quickly got inside the vehicle and closed the door.

The bear remained outside.

I documented the encounter and later returned that evening to talk to Jocko.

This time he was home, and I had a chance to find out exactly what was going on.

Jocko had the bear cub in a pen over in the barn. Unfortunately, the enclosure wasn't as secure as it needed to be. The bear had managed to get out of the pen, find an open door, and make its way outside.

Jocko explained that he had purchased the bear cub from a person who was licensed to sell the animal. So, the bear itself had been legally acquired.

The problem was what happened after Jocko took possession of it.

Jocko knew that he was required to obtain a permit to keep the bear. He also knew that the bear was required to be kept in an enclosed, secure pen.

He told me that he had simply been too busy with work to contact me about getting the permit. He admitted that he was wrong for failing to do so.

Unlike some of the other information I had received about Jocko over the years, this wasn't a case of one person's word against another's. I had personally found the bear in his yard, and Jocko acknowledged that he had not obtained the required permit.

I cited Jocko for possessing the bear without the required permit. I also had the office mail him the appropriate permit application, along with instructions for completing it and taking care of the permit requirement.

I suggested that he take care of the permit before his court appearance.

Jocko elected not to appear in court. Instead, he entered a written guilty plea in lieu of appearing before the judge. He posted the court's bond for the violation, and when his written guilty plea was entered, the bond was forfeited.

He also complied with the permit requirement and obtained the necessary permit to keep the bear.

I understood why the permit requirement existed. Keeping a black bear in captivity wasn't exactly like keeping a dog or other domestic animal. There were obvious safety and liability concerns.

What if a neighbor's child had wandered into the area and been scratched or bitten?

That could have turned into a much more serious situation.

Jocko eventually complied with the requirements, and as far as I knew, the matter was resolved.

The whole incident was a little ironic.

Over the years, I had heard plenty of accusations about Jocko, and Jocko had made his share of accusations about others. Most of those situations never amounted to much more than one person's word against another's.

Then, one summer day, a rural mail carrier told me there was a black bear in a tree in Jocko's front yard.

I went to investigate.

I didn't find a poacher.

I found a bear cub that was being kept without a permit and was outside of a secure enclosure.

And before I ever got around to asking Jocko a single question, the bear had already introduced itself to me, scratched my forearms and wrists, followed me to my vehicle, and nearly climbed inside.

I suppose that's one way for a wildlife investigation to get your attention.



The Other Side Of The Badge

Most people probably think of a game warden's job in terms of the excitement—the boats, the guns, the arrests, the wildlife, and the occasional chase. And there was certainly plenty of all of that. But there was another side of the job that didn't make for nearly as good a story: the physical discomfort that sometimes came with simply doing the work.

One of my first lessons came shortly after I graduated from the training academy and was still a fairly new Game Protector. I was assigned to a three-day law-enforcement project around the Port Clinton area along Lake Erie. We were checking fishermen around the marinas and along the shoreline and stopping boats as they came in, checking fishing licenses, walleye limits, and other regulations.

On the first day, I made a rookie mistake.

I forgot my Division of Wildlife ball cap.

At the time, I was already getting pretty thin on top, and spend-

ing an entire day along Lake Erie in the summer sun without a hat was not a good combination. By the time the day was over, I had one tremendous sunburn on the top of my head. The skin blistered badly.

I drove home that evening, got my hat, and returned for the remaining two days of the assignment. But the damage had already been done.

My scalp eventually peeled, and that sunburn is something I have never forgotten. Over the years, I have had numerous actinic keratoses and some skin cancer on the top of my head, and I have often wondered how much those early years of working outdoors contributed to it. These days, I see a dermatologist regularly.

That experience taught me a lesson that should have been obvious: when you work outdoors for a living, a hat isn't just part of the uniform. It is protection.

Cold weather could be just as miserable.

Working the walleye run on the Maumee River in late March and into April was often a test of endurance. It seemed like it was always cold, and when the wind was blowing, it could be downright brutal. You could put on a heavy coat, but sooner or later that cold wind seemed to find its way through everything.

Many times, we would be tucked back into the woods along the riverbank with a spotting scope, watching fishermen from a distance. We might sit there for quite a while, trying to identify anglers and determine whether they were following the regulations. Eventually, the cold would get the best of you.

You'd find yourself sitting there shaking with the chills, trying to concentrate on the fishermen while your body was telling you it was time to get warm.

Finally, you'd give up, walk back to the vehicle, climb inside, and

turn the heater on high. We'd sit there for a while, thawing out enough to feel our fingers again, and then head back to the riverbank and start watching again.

Summer brought an entirely different kind of misery.

During the summer months, particularly when we were called to investigate a pollution-related fish kill, the heat could be oppressive. We wore our uniforms, body armor, gun belts loaded with equipment, and often hip boots. By the time you added everything together, it seemed like you were carrying fifty pounds of gear.

Standing in the summer heat wearing all of that equipment and a pair of hip boots could make you feel like you were standing inside an oven. You tried to drink plenty of water and stay hydrated, but there were times when the heat was simply overwhelming.

Then there were the insects.

Mosquitoes were a constant problem, particularly when working at night during the summer or when we were in the marshes during the early teal or early goose seasons. No matter how much insect repellent you put on, it seemed like a mosquito could always find the one little spot you missed.

We were once issued a supply of military-style insect repellent that contained 100 percent DEET. It worked, but it came with its own warnings. The stuff was so strong that it could actually affect the rubber on your binoculars and leave the steering wheel of a patrol vehicle feeling sticky. You learned quickly to wash your hands before handling anything after applying it.

Ticks were another part of the job. You could spend a day walking through brush, woods, or tall grass checking hunters, come home that evening, sit down and relax—and suddenly feel something crawling up the back of your neck.

But of all the insects I encountered during my career, none left a more lasting impression than the chiggers.

One Fourth of July weekend, I was working with my partner from Defiance County, Wildlife Officer John Hoschak. John and I frequently teamed up during holiday assignments, working both Paulding and Defiance counties together.

That particular assignment took us to the Auglaize River below the Defiance Power Dam. The dam was a working small hydroelectric facility owned by a local power company, and the water below it was a popular fishing location.

We parked at our usual spot, stepped over the guardrail, and walked toward the edge of the high ground overlooking the river. From there, we could use our binoculars to see the fishermen below and determine who was fishing. Once we had identified them, we'd make our way down to check fishing licenses and make sure everything was legal.

To get to a good observation point, we had to walk through some tall weeds and grass that were nearly waist high.

I didn't give it another thought.

That was a mistake.

The next morning, I woke up and discovered that I had been attacked.

I was covered with chigger bites—around my waist, on my legs, around my wrists, and in places where you could only imagine a chigger could find its way. I counted easily seventy-five or more bites.

And every one of them itched.

I was absolutely miserable.

When I met up with John again, I told him what had happened.

He started laughing.

Then he told me he had the same problem.

We had both walked through that same tall grass, and apparently the chiggers had been waiting for us.

For the next several weeks, we were both miserable, scratching and itching and wondering how something so small could cause so much aggravation.

After that experience, I never went into tall grass or brush without thinking about insect protection. I made sure I carried repellent with a high percentage of DEET and used it whenever I thought I might encounter chiggers, ticks, or mosquitoes.

The chiggers taught me another lesson about being a wildlife officer: sometimes the things that make a lasting impression aren't the things you expect.

It wasn't always a dangerous suspect, a difficult arrest, or a poaching case that you remembered years later.

Sometimes it was a blistered scalp.

Sometimes it was sitting in the cold until your teeth chattered.

Sometimes it was standing in hip boots in the middle of a hot summer fish-kill investigation.

And sometimes—long after the guns, boats, and wildlife cases had faded into memory—it was seventy-five chigger bites from a patch of tall grass along the Auglaize River.

Even today, whenever I get an insect bite—especially a chigger bite—I think back to that Fourth of July weekend and remember John laughing when he told me that he was just as miserable as I was.

Some lessons in the game warden business were learned in the classroom.

Others were learned the hard way.

And a few of them itched for weeks.



The Unusual Training

Wildlife officers go through a great deal of training. Before ever putting on the uniform, we attended a pre-service academy, completed basic peace officer training, and then followed that with several weeks of specialized instruction in wildlife law enforcement. But the training didn't stop when we graduated from the academy. Throughout our careers, we continued to attend in-service training on a variety of subjects—legal updates, self-defense techniques, changes in wildlife laws and regulations, investigative procedures, and anything else that might help us do our jobs more effectively and safely.

Some of that training, however, was a little more unusual than the rest.

One of the more memorable sessions featured a guest instructor named Robert Vanderhorst. Mr. Vanderhorst had spent many years as an investigator with the Ohio Department of Liquor Control be-

fore retiring. He was also a Navy veteran and had become a criminal justice consultant specializing in cults, gangs, the occult, and mind-control groups.

At the time, I had no idea just how relevant some of what he was going to teach us would be.

Not long before that training session, I had been on routine patrol in Paulding County. There was a county-owned property in Crane Township known as the Jacob Eaton Farm. The property consisted of 365 acres of farmland and woods along the Maumee River. At some point in the past, the property had been gifted to Paulding County, with the proceeds from farming the land designated to help fund the Paulding County Children's Home.

The property also had considerable recreational value. People were allowed to hunt there under a cooperative hunting agreement, and there was a fishing access area with a trail leading down to the Maumee River. It was the kind of place where, on any given day, you might encounter hunters, fishermen, or other people simply enjoying the outdoors.

There was also an old Eaton family cemetery on the property.

The grave markers were set flat with the ground. That made it possible to mow over the area without damaging the markers, but they were still clearly recognizable as graves.

One day, while I was parked near the fishing access, I walked past the cemetery and noticed something unusual. There was melted wax on both ends of several of the grave markers, along with what appeared to be remnants of candles.

I noticed it, but I didn't think much about it at the time.

Then we attended Mr. Vanderhorst's training.

As he talked about various cults and occult practices, he de-

scribed some of the signs that officers might encounter in the field. Among them was the use of cemeteries and graves as places for rituals, including the burning of candles.

I immediately thought about the Eaton cemetery.

What I had seen there was remarkably similar to what he had just described.

Of course, I had no way of knowing who had placed the candles there or what they were doing. It could have been teenagers experimenting with something they didn't really understand. It could have been someone seriously involved in the occult. There was no way to know from a few melted candles and some wax on a gravestone.

The location itself added another layer to the story. The county road bordering the property was officially identified by a county road number, but locals had long called it Coffin Road. There were stories about the area being haunted, and the name had become part of the local folklore.

Whether any of those stories had any basis in fact, I couldn't say.

But somebody had apparently been using those old graves for something other than remembering the people buried there.

The training with Mr. Vanderhorst also covered another subject that would prove useful to us—gang activity. He discussed gang symbols, graffiti, and especially hand signals that could be used to communicate between gang members.

That information was particularly useful when some of us worked in the larger urban areas, including projects along the Maumee River in Toledo. Unlike the rural areas of Paulding County, some of those assignments put us in places where street gangs were a much more obvious presence.

Gang symbols could appear painted on concrete walls, build-

ings, railroad cars, or even signs. Those markings could indicate territory or association. Hand signals could be even more important. During an enforcement action or arrest, officers needed to remain alert to the possibility that one person's seemingly innocent gesture toward another might actually be a signal communicating what was about to happen.

That kind of information wasn't necessarily something you expected to use as a wildlife officer.

But that was one of the things I learned during my career: the job could take you into places and situations you never anticipated when you first put on the uniform.

Most of the time, the person standing along a riverbank was exactly who you thought he was—a fisherman. The person walking through a woodlot was probably a hunter. The person checking a trap was probably a trapper.

But not always.

The unusual training we received from people like Robert Vanderhorst reminded us that there could be much more going on around us than what initially met the eye. In rural Ohio, you could encounter people involved in things you would never have associated with the quiet countryside. In an urban setting, you could find yourself dealing with gang activity that had little to do with wildlife law enforcement but could still affect your safety.

A wildlife officer's job was never simply about knowing the wildlife laws.

It was about knowing your surroundings, paying attention to what didn't look quite right, and understanding that you could never be completely certain about the person you were dealing with—or what might happen next.

Sometimes, the most valuable training was the kind that taught you to simply keep your eyes open.



The Lost Revolver

There was a time when raccoon hunting was extremely popular in northwest Ohio. When fur prices were high, people hunted a lot of raccoons, and there was considerable money involved in raising, training, buying, and selling good coon dogs. Around Paulding County and the surrounding area, there was almost a fraternity of coon hunters. They knew one another, talked about their dogs, and spent countless nights in the woods listening to their hounds work.

For game wardens, that also meant plenty of nighttime activity to keep an eye on.

Even during the summer, particularly in late summer and early fall before the season opened, hunters would be out training their dogs. We called some of our nighttime enforcement projects "coon sweeps." Several game wardens would work different areas, looking for trucks parked along the roads, dog boxes in the back, lights moving through the woods, and, occasionally, the sound of a .22 rifle.

A shot in the woods while dogs were running usually meant someone had just shot a raccoon out of a tree to reward a young dog.

Scott Blattert was the Game Protector assigned to Van Wert County at the time, and he and I often teamed up on these nighttime patrols. One night we were working in Paulding County near the Auglaize River, a little south of the small community of Charloe.

I knew of a lane that ran back along the edge of a cornfield and eventually toward the woods. Most of the time, a small chain gate was stretched across the entrance. That night, however, the chain was down.

It was around one o'clock in the morning, and that was enough to get our attention.

I drove my vehicle down the lane a short distance and stopped. Scott and I got out and stood quietly, listening.

We soon heard the unmistakable bawling of coon dogs somewhere off to the west. Then, in the distance, we could see the sweep of a hunting light along the far edge of the cornfield.

We started walking back toward the woods, keeping our flashlights off. There was just enough moonlight to make our way along the lane.

Then we heard two shots.

The sound of the .22 rifle, followed by the excited barking of the dogs, told us pretty much everything we needed to know. Someone had shot a raccoon out of a tree.

Rather than walk all the way back into the woods and make contact with them there, we decided to return to my vehicle. There was only one way in and one way out of the lane. If they were parked farther back, they eventually had to come back toward us.

We turned around and started walking.

A short time later, we heard the pickup truck start.

"Come on, Scott," I said. "We've got to hurry."

We started moving faster. Then faster still.

I was ahead of Scott when I looked back and said, "Come on, Scott. Let's go!"

That's when he gave me some news I really didn't want to hear.

"I lost my gun."

"What?"

"My gun's not in my holster."

At that time, we were still carrying Smith & Wesson Model 64 stainless revolvers. We hadn't yet transitioned to the semiautomatic pistols that would come later.

I didn't have much time to think about it.

"Come on," I said. "We've got to get to the car. We'll stop there and figure it out."

I made a mental note of approximately where Scott had realized his revolver was missing, and we hurried on.

We reached my vehicle just as the pickup came up out of the lane.

My vehicle at the time was a Ford Fairmont, still equipped with the small magnetic-mounted red pursuit light we used. I turned the red light on, and we stopped the pickup head-on.

There were two men in the truck, along with a young boy. The two men were brothers. One was local, from Oakwood, Ohio, while the other lived in West Virginia.

We advised them of the violation. We knew they had shot a raccoon while training their dogs, and at that time it was unlawful to possess a firearm while training dogs during the closed season.

As we talked with them, we began looking closely at the pickup.

Coon hunters who wanted to shoot a raccoon while training their dogs often carried what was commonly called a "throw gun"—usually an inexpensive .22 rifle. If a game warden showed up, the idea was that the hunter could simply throw the gun into the woods and claim he didn't have one.

We suspected these men had done something similar.

I looked around the truck and eventually raised the hood.

There, tucked down beside the engine and tied in place, was a .22 rifle.

They hadn't thrown it very far at all.

They had hidden it under the hood.

We proceeded with the appropriate citations for possessing a firearm while training dogs during the closed season. Because one of the brothers was a nonresident from West Virginia, we placed him under arrest and took him to the sheriff's office, where he could post bond before being released.

Once the West Virginia man had posted bond, the two brothers left.

Scott and I, however, had another problem to deal with.

We still had to find his revolver.

We headed back toward the area where we thought he had lost it. By then, however, fog had settled in.

And this wasn't just a little fog.

Visibility was almost zero.

The trip from Paulding to the location would normally have taken perhaps fifteen minutes. That night it took us nearly forty-five. We were creeping along so slowly that at times we were practically hanging our heads out the windows trying to see where the road was.

When we finally reached the lane, we got out and began searching with our flashlights.

We looked along the road, along the edges of the cornfield and anywhere else we thought Scott might have dropped the gun. We searched for another half hour or so without finding anything.

By then it was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

We finally decided there wasn't much more we could accomplish in the darkness and fog.

"We'll come back in daylight," we agreed.

The next morning we were up bright and early with plans to return to the area. Before we left, though, we decided to call our investigator, Don Carter, and tell him what had happened.

Don listened to the story and came up with an idea.

"Let's get Al Kalfus," he said.

Al Kalfus was the Game Protector assigned to Erie County. He also served part-time with the Milan, Ohio, Police Department. But perhaps more importantly for us that morning, Al was a K-9 handler for the Milan Police Department.

And Al had a dog named Ranger.

Ranger was a nationally recognized German Shepherd police K-9 with a reputation for finding firearms. He had been involved in a number of firearm recoveries for the Milan Police Department.

Al agreed to come to Paulding County with Ranger.

By the time Al arrived with Ranger, it was around noon. Don Carter, Scott, Al, Ranger, and I met up and headed back to the lane where Scott had lost his revolver.

As we approached, I immediately noticed something.

The chain gate was down again.

We had closed it behind us when we left during the night, so I

knew it hadn't been left that way by accident.

Then I heard something else.

A tractor.

It was coming from farther back along the lane that bordered the cornfield and the woods.

As it got closer, I recognized the sound of a bush hog.

Someone was mowing.

I could see where the tractor had already made a pass along the lane and was now coming back toward us.

My first thought was, Oh no.

If that tractor and bush hog had run over Scott's revolver, it could have thrown that gun a considerable distance into the woods or the cornfield.

We might never find it.

The tractor continued toward us.

We stopped and waited.

It turned out to be the landowner. He wasn't aware of what we were doing there, and we certainly weren't about to tell him we were looking for a Game Protector's lost revolver.

Instead, we explained that we were looking for evidence related to some people who had been in the area the previous night with a firearm they weren't supposed to have.

The farmer shut off his tractor and climbed down.

Then he walked over to a small toolbox mounted on the side of the tractor.

He opened it.

"Do you mean this one?" he asked.

He reached inside and pulled out a stainless-steel Smith & Wesson Model 64—Scott's revolver.

For a moment, we just stared at it.

"Yeah," we said. "That's the one we're looking for."

The farmer handed it over.

Then he added something that made the whole situation even better.

"It shoots, too."

Apparently, after finding the revolver, the farmer had decided to see whether it worked.

So he had fired it.

Fortunately, it had worked just fine.

Scott finally had his revolver back.

After all the searching, the fog, the nearly impossible drive back to the area, the flashlight search in the middle of the night, and then bringing in a police K-9 to help find it, the lost gun had apparently been found by the one person we hadn't expected to find it—the farmer who owned the property.

And he had found it before any of us did.

The incident did lead to some changes in our equipment. It wasn't long afterward that we were issued more secure holsters for our Model 64 revolvers. Eventually, we transitioned to semiautomatic 9mm pistols and later .45s, all carried in holsters with secure thumb breaks.

Looking back, I suppose we were fortunate on several counts. We caught the coon hunters with the rifle, nobody got hurt, and Scott eventually got his Model 64 back. But after spending a night searching in the fog, driving almost blind, and then bringing in a police K-9 to help find a lost revolver, it was the farmer who solved the mystery for us.

He had found the gun, put it in his tractor toolbox, and, just to

satisfy his curiosity, fired it.

"It shoots, too."

I guess that was one way to make sure we got our evidence back.



The Marijuana Cigarette That Wasn't

Nighttime patrols of a wildlife area can be pretty quiet. Sometimes, however, quiet is exactly what you need if you're trying to figure out what somebody else is doing.

One night I slowly drove into the Paulding Ponds Wildlife Area and parked in a corner with my headlights turned off. Over in the opposite corner was a passenger car. Its windows were slightly fogged, and I could make out two people sitting in the front seat.

I settled in and watched them through my starlight scope.

After a few minutes, I saw something being passed back and forth between the two occupants.

It looked like a marijuana cigarette.

Every time one of them took a puff, the glowing end became bright enough to see clearly through the scope. Then it was passed to the other person, who took a puff and passed it back.

Well, I thought, this could be interesting.

I watched for a while before deciding I had seen enough. While they were still passing the cigarette back and forth, I started my vehicle, turned on my red pursuit light and drove across the parking area. I pulled up beside their car and illuminated it with my spotlight.

I got out, walked up to the driver's door and told the driver to roll down the window.

That's when the situation became considerably more complicated than I had anticipated.

The occupants were a young man and woman, both in their twenties. And neither one was wearing a stitch of clothing. Their clothes were lying on the back seat.

The man looked absolutely mortified.

The woman, on the other hand, seemed remarkably unconcerned about the situation. She appeared to have decided that being caught in a wildlife-area parking lot without clothes was simply one of those things that happened occasionally.

I tried to maintain my professional demeanor.

After all, I was there as a wildlife officer, not as a judge of poor choices in parking locations.

I told them to get dressed and take their activities somewhere else. A public parking area on a wildlife area wasn't exactly the appropriate place for what they had in mind.

They quickly got dressed.

And then came the final surprise.

That suspicious-looking marijuana cigarette I had watched them passing back and forth?

It wasn't marijuana.

It wasn't even a joint.

It was an ordinary tobacco cigarette.

So after all that careful observation through my starlight scope, I had correctly identified the glowing object but completely misidentified what it was.

I had gone into the encounter expecting to make a marijuana case and instead found two people who apparently had confused a wildlife-area parking lot with a private getaway.

I never wrote them a citation for the cigarette. There wasn't one to write.

But I did give them some advice they apparently needed:

There are plenty of places to enjoy a cigarette.

And there are plenty of places to enjoy each other's company.

A wildlife-area parking lot in the middle of the night isn't necessarily the best choice for either one.

That incident reminded me of something I learned many times during my career: what you see through a starlight scope isn't always what you think you're seeing.

Sometimes it's marijuana.

And sometimes it's just a cigarette.

And sometimes, if you're really unlucky, it's something you wish you hadn't seen at all.



Catching More Than Crappie at Six-Mile Creek

The Six-Mile Creek Access Area was one of those Division of Wildlife properties that didn't look like much from the road, but it provided anglers access to Six-Mile Creek, a tributary of the Auglaize River. The fishing could be good, particularly for crappie, and the small parking area was occasionally busy with fishermen.

One afternoon, I noticed two vehicles parked side by side in the lot. Something about the situation caught my attention, so I drove my patrol vehicle to a place where it couldn't easily be seen and parked. I got out and walked down a path until I had a position where I could observe the vehicles without being noticed.

What I saw was not what I had expected.

An adult man and woman were sitting in the back seat of one of the vehicles. It was pretty obvious they weren't wearing any clothes, and they were drinking beer. I watched as each of them finished a beer and tossed the empty can into the weeds beside the parking

area.

Eventually, they got dressed. They hugged and kissed, and then the woman got out and walked over to the other vehicle. The man climbed into the driver's seat of the vehicle they had been using.

It appeared they were about to leave.

I hurried back to my patrol vehicle and reached it just as both vehicles pulled out of the parking area. I followed them a short distance down the road and stopped them.

I explained that I had observed them throwing their empty beer cans into the weeds. I also explained that each of them would be receiving a litter citation. I then proceeded to write the citations.

As I was doing so, I recognized the woman. She was a waitress at a local restaurant where I occasionally stopped for a cup of coffee. The man was a local businessman. Neither was married to the other.

Once they realized who I was and that I knew who they were, their concern shifted from the litter citations to something else.

They wanted to know if there was any way to keep the incident out of the newspaper.

At the time, the local newspaper regularly published court cases, and they were understandably worried about seeing their names in the paper.

I told them I had nothing to do with that.

Their case was now between them, the court and the newspaper. My responsibility was to enforce the law, and that was what I had done.

I didn't take any pleasure in making the situation more embarrassing for them than it already was. But I also couldn't overlook the litter violation simply because I happened to know one of the people involved.

I cited each of them into court, giving them different court dates. Neither wanted to appear, and eventually each posted and forfeited a bond in lieu of appearing in court.

That might have been the end of it, except for the fact that I continued to occasionally stop at the restaurant for a cup of coffee to go.

I never mentioned the incident to the waitress.

She never mentioned it to me.

We both seemed to understand that there were some things better left unspoken.

I continued to get my coffee, she continued to wait on me, and neither of us ever brought up what had happened at Six-Mile Creek.

It was awkward, to say the least.

But that was part of being a wildlife officer. The job wasn't always about deer, ducks, fish or hunting violations. Sometimes it was simply about being in the right place at the right time—and occasionally seeing far more than you ever expected to see in a public fishing access parking lot.



When Two Laws Collided

Two hawks had started it all.

In December 2000, the Division of Wildlife received information through our TIP hotline that two hawks had been shot and killed on a commercial hunting preserve in the county. Investigator Carl Webb and I began looking into the complaint.

Our investigation led us to the owner of the preserve. When we interviewed him, he acknowledged that he probably had shot the hawks. He explained that he believed Ohio law gave him the right to do so because the hawks were causing problems with the game birds on his property.

At the time, Ohio law contained language that appeared to support his interpretation. It allowed the owner of domestic animals or fowl to kill hawks or owls that were causing damage while the damage was occurring.

Carl and I presented our investigation to the county prosecutor.

Because of the wording of the Ohio statute, the prosecutor declined to pursue state charges.

But there was another law.

The hawks were protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Federal law did not recognize the Ohio exception. If a landowner wanted to kill protected birds because they were causing damage, a federal depredation permit was required. No permit had been obtained.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Agent Dan LeClair subsequently brought the federal case.

The matter eventually went before U.S. Magistrate Vernelius Armstrong in federal court in Toledo. The defendant represented himself, with his wife assisting him. His defense centered on the same argument he had made to us—that Ohio law gave him the authority to protect his property.

I testified about our investigation and the statements he had made to me. Carl Webb also testified. One important piece of evidence was a written statement the defendant had signed in which he acknowledged that he probably had shot the hawks in question.

Carl further testified that the defendant had said he had been shooting hawks on the property ever since the hunting preserve first opened. That suggested this wasn't simply a one-time incident but something he believed he had been entitled to do for years.

On November 6, 2001, Judge Armstrong found him guilty of violating the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. His reliance on the Ohio law did not provide a defense to the federal charge. Without a federal depredation permit, the shooting of the protected hawks was unlawful.

He was fined $1,000.

What I found most frustrating about the case was that it probably could have been avoided. During all the years he operated the preserve, he never once contacted me to report that he was having problems with hawks. Had he done so, I would have directed him to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether he qualified for a federal depredation permit.

Instead, he relied on the Ohio statute and believed he was acting within the law.

The Aftermath

The case also helped expose the problem created by the conflicting state and federal laws. After the case, Ohio revised its law and removed the provision that had allowed a landowner to kill hawks or owls while they were causing damage to domestic animals or fowl.

Under the revised Ohio Revised Code Section 1533.07, hawks and other nongame birds are protected. The law prohibits catching, killing, injuring, pursuing, or possessing protected nongame birds or their parts, and it also protects their nests, eggs, and young. Each bird or part taken in violation of the law constitutes a separate offense.

The change eliminated the state-law exception that had been at the center of our investigation. The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act continued to provide an additional layer of protection.

Looking back, the case taught me that wildlife law isn't always as simple as finding a violation and writing a citation. Sometimes the difficulty is determining which law applies when two laws appear to say different things.

In this case, the county prosecutor couldn't pursue the matter under Ohio law, but the federal government could—and did.

The case began with a TIP complaint, passed through a state in-

vestigation, and ultimately ended in federal court. It also contributed to a change in Ohio law that removed the provision that had created so much confusion.

Two hawks had started it all.

And, in the end, they brought two different laws, one a state law and one a federal law, into alignment.



Not Exactly Fishing at Oxbow

Memorial Day weekend in 2002 found Defiance County Wildlife Officer Jay Abele and me paired up for a special law-enforcement assignment. We were working together in both Paulding and Defiance counties, checking the usual holiday-weekend activities—fishing licenses, litter violations, protection of state property, and whatever other problems might arise on the wildlife areas.

One of those stops was Oxbow Lake Wildlife Area in Defiance County.

We were driving along the access road toward a couple of parking areas overlooking the lake when we noticed a full-size van parked along the edge of one of the lots. All of the windows were down, but we couldn't see anyone inside. A curtain had been pulled across the van behind the front seats, and additional curtains covered portions of the side windows.

There was, however, one thing we could detect without seeing

anyone.

As we approached the van, I could smell the unmistakable odor of marijuana.

We identified ourselves and instructed whoever was inside the van to show himself. After a moment, the curtain behind the front seats suddenly slid open. A man's head appeared, and it was immediately apparent that he wasn't fully dressed.

We told him to come out of the van.

"I've got to put my clothes on," he said.

"Get dressed and step outside," we told him. "And keep your hands where we can see them."

A short time later, he emerged from the van. The odor of marijuana was even stronger, and there was little doubt that marijuana had recently been smoked inside the vehicle.

Jay stayed with the man while I checked the van. Inside, we found several things that explained what had been going on. There were open beer cans, rolling papers, marijuana, and a small tin containing several portions of the drug along with the remains of marijuana cigarettes that had already been smoked. The rolling papers constituted drug paraphernalia.

Then there were the magazines.

Several adult magazines were scattered across the floor of the van, some of them open.

Whatever the man's original plan had been when he told his wife he was going fishing at Oxbow Lake, fishing clearly wasn't the only activity he had in mind.

There was fishing equipment in the van, so technically he hadn't lied about having fishing gear with him. But it was becoming increasingly obvious that he wasn't there simply to enjoy a quiet after-

noon beside the lake.

We also conducted field sobriety testing to get a better indication of whether he was impaired. He didn't appear to be significantly intoxicated, but he had been drinking and had marijuana in his possession. Under the circumstances, we weren't comfortable allowing him to drive away from the wildlife area.

The man was married, and he told us his wife was at home. He had a cell phone with him, so we had him call her and explain what had happened. She eventually came to pick him up. The van was dealt with later that day, but the important thing was that the man wasn't going to get behind the wheel and leave Oxbow Lake himself.

We cited him for possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, and having an open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle.

The case required a mandatory appearance in Defiance Municipal Court. He entered guilty pleas to all of the charges, and the judge imposed fines and court costs totaling $545. He was also placed on probation.

The dollar amount was one part of the outcome, but it wasn't the part that mattered most to Jay and me.

Oxbow Lake Wildlife Area was public property. On a holiday weekend, it was being used by families, including parents who had brought their children there to fish and enjoy the outdoors. Whatever a person chose to do in the privacy of his own home was one thing. Doing it inside a van parked in a public wildlife area—complete with marijuana, open beer cans, and adult magazines spread across the floor—was another.

We had gone into Oxbow that day expecting to check fishing licenses, litter, and the usual Memorial Day weekend violations.

Instead, we found a fisherman who apparently had a very different idea of what constituted a day at the lake.

He just wasn't doing much fishing.



The Marine Band Deer Hunt

During the primitive deer season in January 2011, we conducted a special enforcement project in Paulding and Defiance Counties. We had received complaints in the past about hunters using motor vehicles as an aid in hunting deer. We also had information that a group of hunters in the area was using marine-band radios in their vehicles to communicate with one another while hunting.

Apparently, the hunters believed the marine-band frequency was somehow private or secure and that we wouldn't be able to hear their conversations. That assumption would prove to be a mistake.

The project involved several officers and investigators. Working with me were Defiance County Wildlife Officer Matt Smith, Putnam County Wildlife Officer Jason Porinchok, our unit supervisor, Bob Radcliff, and investigators Steve Thompson and Mark Weihrauch.

The two investigators were the key to the operation. They

worked in unmarked vehicles and wore plain clothes, appearing much like any other hunters who might be out during the primitive deer season. Each had a radio capable of scanning multiple frequencies, including the marine-band frequencies the hunters were using.

The rest of us stayed farther away in marked patrol vehicles.

As the investigators monitored the radio traffic, they listened for conversations involving deer hunting. When the hunters began discussing deer, their locations, or plans to move deer through a particular area, the investigators could begin narrowing down where the group was operating.

It didn't take long to discover that the radios were being used for much more than casual conversation.

The hunters would communicate with each other about where deer were located and which direction the deer were moving. They would then try to position themselves ahead of the deer, sometimes racing their vehicles around to cut the deer off so they could get a shot from a vehicle or along a roadway.

Both were illegal.

But even more importantly, the use of the voice-transmitting devices themselves as an aid in hunting deer was a violation. The hunters had essentially turned their radios into another hunting tool, using them to coordinate their movements and increase their chances of getting a deer.

The investigators continued gathering information and documenting what they heard and observed. Once they had established enough probable cause, they contacted the rest of us.

We gathered up and moved in.

There were six hunters involved, and we made six arrests. Each hunter was charged with hunting with the aid or use of a voice-

transmitting device. Investigator Thompson also removed two of the marine-band radios from two of the hunters' vehicles. The radios were held as evidence while the cases worked their way through court.

All of the violations had occurred in Paulding County. Rather than appear before the judge, each of the six hunters posted and forfeited a bond. The combined fines and costs from the six bond forfeitures totaled $960.

Eventually, we obtained a court order allowing the two marine-band radios to be returned to their owners, and they were.

I have to believe the hunters learned an important lesson from the experience. The radios they thought would give them an advantage—and that they apparently believed we couldn't hear—had actually provided us with the information we needed to find them.

They hadn't found a secret hunting frequency.

They had simply been broadcasting their plans.



Days Off, Rods and Guns

Some of my best memories from my career as a game warden didn't necessarily involve an arrest, an investigation, or some particularly memorable law-enforcement case. Some of the memories I cherish most came from days when I wasn't working at all.

Game wardens spent their working days dealing with people who hunted, fished, and trapped. To do that job well, I always believed you needed to be able to walk the walk and talk the talk. You needed to understand the outdoors, not just from a law book or a regulation manual, but from personal experience.

Most of us were avid hunters and anglers, and some were accomplished trappers as well. I had started fishing when I was barely old enough to remember, with a fishing pole in my hands at maybe three years old. I was given a shotgun at a young age and developed a lifelong love of hunting and fishing. Those interests eventually became part of my profession, but they were never just part of the job.

I genuinely enjoyed being outdoors.

I remember one district meeting at our office in Findlay, Ohio, when Dick Pierce, who was then chief of the Division of Wildlife, was there along with some of the central-office staff. I don't remember what prompted the comment, but Chief Pierce made a statement that stuck with me.

He said you weren't much of a game warden if you didn't have a fishing rod and reel in the trunk of your car or in the back of your truck.

There was a certain amount of truth behind that statement.

Of course, we weren't going fishing while we were supposed to be working. But there were times when an opportunity presented itself. On a day off, we could get together with another officer and spend the day hunting or fishing. Occasionally, during a lunch break, we might sign off, put on a pair of hip boots or waders, and make a few casts for smallmouth bass along a river. Then we'd put the fishing gear away, get cleaned up, and get back to work.

Chief Pierce understood that being a good wildlife officer also meant understanding and appreciating the things we were asking the public to enjoy and protect.

I had plenty of opportunities to do just that.

One of my favorite activities was float hunting the Maumee River with Carl Webb. Carl was the officer assigned to Defiance County and later became an investigator. I worked with Carl on many occasions, and we enjoyed hunting together when we had the opportunity.

We would take a canoe and spend the better part of a day floating the river, hunting squirrels and ducks. One of us would paddle from the back of the canoe while the other sat in the front with the

shotgun. Then we'd switch positions. It wasn't a hurried kind of hunting. We were outdoors all day, drifting down the river, watching the woods and the water, and enjoying the experience as much as the hunting itself.

I also hunted ducks with Investigator Don Carter and George Morrison, who was the wildlife officer assigned to Mercer County. We did some field hunting for mallards, another completely different kind of waterfowling experience.

On one occasion, I applied for a controlled-hunt permit at Magee Marsh and was fortunate enough to be drawn. Don Carter went with me, and we hunted ducks together there.

When John Cody was the wildlife officer in Van Wert County, he was an avid waterfowler. One summer, before duck season opened, John and I built a duck blind on an island in Six Mile Bay, a backwater area of the Auglaize River in Paulding County. We spent the season hunting ducks and geese from the blind we had built ourselves.

Jay Abele, who was assigned to Defiance County, was another officer I hunted with. Jay and I hunted turkeys and squirrels together. We also made a memorable trip to Cold Creek at Castalia to fish for trout. We brought several good-sized trout home with us from that trip.

Then there was Bob Hesterman, the wildlife officer in Henry County. Bob and I hunted pheasants and rabbits together on property owned by Dick Altman. Dick had been the assistant prosecutor in Paulding County but lived in Defiance County, where he owned considerable acreage that he devoted to wildlife. He raised pheasants and released them on the property, creating some excellent habitat and hunting opportunities.

Bob and I also fished with John Hoschak. During the winter, the three of us—Bob Hesterman, John Hoschak, and I—did some ice fishing from a shanty on a fairly large pond near the Henry-Defiance County line. Bob had permission to put the shanty on the pond, and we took advantage of it whenever we could.

Another favorite was smallmouth fishing in the Maumee River. Bob, John, and I would wade the river below Independence Dam. It was classic smallmouth water—rock bottom, current, and plenty of places for smallmouth bass to hold. We spent some great days working our way along the river, casting for bass and enjoying the camaraderie.

Don Carter and I also made a trip to Lake Erie and stayed on South Bass Island. I had a bass boat and a pickup truck with a camper cap, so we loaded everything onto the ferry and headed for the island. We fished for smallmouth around Put-in-Bay and South Bass Island, and at night the back of my pickup served as our accommodations.

Don and I also hunted grouse together in Athens County. That was another one of those trips where the hunting was only part of the experience. The time spent traveling, talking, walking the woods, and sharing the day with another officer was what made it memorable.

Some of the most memorable fishing came with Don and Mel Weiss, when he was the wildlife officer assigned to Williams County. We fished for bluegills on the property that would eventually become Lake La Su An Wildlife Area.

At the time, the property had been owned by Ed Brodbeck and was originally known as Dreamland Acres. It contained several lakes, and the bluegills were enormous. The property had been sold

to the Division of Wildlife, but it had not yet been opened to the public.

We had the opportunity to fish there before the general public did.

And we took advantage of it.

We caught so many big bluegills that we filled five-gallon buckets with them.

Those kinds of memories stayed with me.

They weren't investigations. They weren't arrests. There were no citations, court appearances, evidence bags, or case reports involved. They were simply wildlife officers enjoying the same outdoors they spent their careers protecting.

I wrote in my first book, The Rings of Saturn, about several of us who were Cleveland Indians baseball fans and attended a ball game together. We talked sports, shared stories, and enjoyed each other's company away from the job.

The same thing happened when we put the fishing rods and shotguns in the truck.

There was something special about spending a day with another wildlife officer when neither of you had a case to work. You could talk about hunting, fishing, sports, family, or just about anything else. Sometimes you talked about work, but you didn't have to.

For a few hours, you were simply two friends enjoying the outdoors.

Looking back now, I realize those days were an important part of my career. The job could be demanding, and there were plenty of difficult cases and unpleasant situations. But mixed in among all of that were days on rivers, lakes, marshes, fields, and woods with people who shared the same passion.

Chief Pierce's comment about having a fishing rod in the trunk of your car wasn't really about the fishing rod.

It was about understanding the resource.

It was about knowing what it felt like to stand in a river and cast for a smallmouth. It was about sitting in a duck blind before daylight, walking through a pheasant field, drifting down a river in a canoe, or sitting over a hole waiting for a bluegill to take the bait.

We were asking the public to appreciate and protect those experiences.

We appreciated them ourselves.

And on our days off, we got to enjoy them together.

Those memories are every bit as much a part of my career as the cases I worked.

Sometimes, being a wildlife officer wasn't about catching somebody.

Sometimes it was simply about catching a fish, taking a shot at a squirrel or duck, walking a field with a friend, and enjoying a little bit of the outdoors we had spent our careers trying to protect.



Paulding County Outdoors

For many years, I wrote an outdoor column for the Paulding County Progress called "Paulding County Outdoors." The column covered a variety of subjects, but most often it dealt with things happening in and around Paulding County and nearby areas involving hunting, fishing, wildlife, and other outdoor recreational opportunities.

The following is one of the columns that I wrote in March 2002 in which I answered the kinds of questions that people commonly asked a Wildlife Officer: When is the best time to fish? Where are the opportunities? What should I use? How should I go about it?

Where Is a Good Place to Go Fishing?

Wildlife Officers are asked questions. Lots of questions! These questions range from, "When is the next hunter education course?" to "How do I get rid of a skunk that's under my house?" to "Is it legal to well, do anything?" And one of the most frequently asked ques-

tions is, "Where is a good place to go fishing?"

Well, since its time to get the fishing gear out of the closest, spool some new line, sharpen hooks and buy a new fishing license I'll answer that last one.

OK, so Mr. Game Warden where is a good place to go fishing? Well, the Paulding Reservoir is a good place to start. The reservoir holds excellent populations of saugeyes and walleyes. How do you catch them? Try using a 3- to 4-inch minnow as bait on a number 6 hook below a slip bobber. A leach is an excellent alternate bait. You can also cast leadhead jigs with twister tails along the shorelines.

In any case, concentrate your efforts in and along wave-washed shorelines and during low light periods. The Paulding Reservoir is also home to good numbers of panfish, including bluegills, crappies, and yellow perch.

Additionally, there is a good population of channel catfish for the taking. For catfish try using cut bait, or a scented bait fished near bottom. Again, concentrate your effort during early morning or late evening. Traditionally, the better catches are made during those times.

Well, that sounds good. Is there anywhere else Mr. Warden you might suggest?

Yes, in fact there is. Head for the waters of the Auglaize River. This water harbors an excellent population of crappies. Tip a 1/16 oz. jig with a small minnow and work it in and around submerged brush and downed trees. Also, try fishing near bridge abutments and pilings. In early spring, crappies will be found near these structures. Boat anglers will have better access to these areas than shore anglers.

There are a couple of river backwaters that can be productive to those fishing from shore. These can be accessed from the Six-Mile

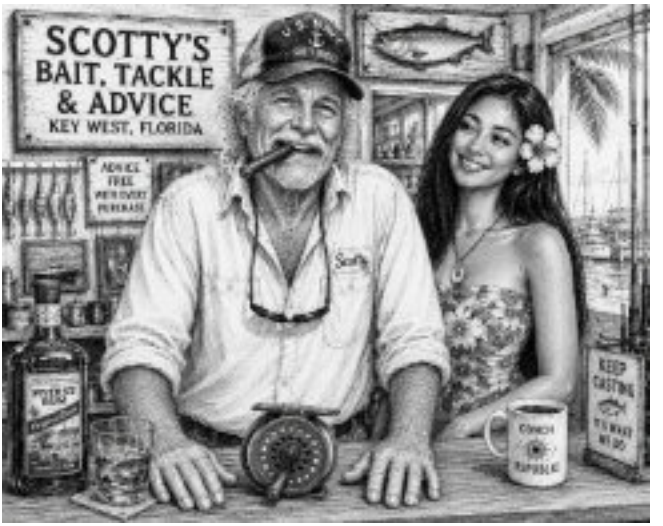
Creek Access Area and the Flat Rock Creek Access Area both in Auglaize Township. There is also a fair population of largemouth and smallmouth bass in the Auglaize River. Try casting spinner baits in and around downed trees or boat docks.

Hey, Mr. Warden I like what I'm hearing. Is there anywhere else I might try?

Well, for something you may not have done before head to the Maumee River and try your luck fishing for flathead catfish. The Maumee has a good population of these hogs, many weighing in excess of 20 pounds! Use heavy tackle. Fifty pound test line is not too heavy. Flatheads prefer live bait … and big! A 6-inch sucker minnow or even a 4- to 5-inch live bluegill is a bait of choice. Use enough weight to hold the bait near bottom.

Fish at night below a riffle or near the mouth of a feeder creek. Be patient. Eventually, you'll hook one of these big boys and have the fight of your life. A sturdy, long-handled landing net will be a great asset in bringing one of these cats to shore.

So, there you have it, the answer to a question I'm often asked. I hope I've steered you in the direction of angling success. But, just to cover all bases I can't make the fish bite if they don't want to. A game warden told me that once. Enjoy Paulding County outdoors!



Scotty's Bait, Tackle, and Advice

Over the years, while writing my Paulding County Outdoors column for the Paulding County Progress, I occasionally included a little advice from an old friend I had come to know during our fishing trips to Key West, Florida.

His name was Ellis Scott, a retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer. To the folks around Key West, he was simply "Scotty," the owner of Scotty's Bait, Tackle, and Advice. The name of his business was a pretty good reflection of the man himself. You could buy bait and tackle from Scotty, but if you stuck around long enough, you were almost certain to get some advice thrown in for free.

Scotty looked the part. He was a weathered, colorful character who had traveled much of the world during his Navy career. There was almost always a cigar clenched between his teeth, and he enjoyed a little rum along the way. He had the relaxed, easygoing manner of a man who had spent enough time in enough places to realize

that life wasn't meant to be taken too seriously.

During his travels, Scotty had fallen in love with a beautiful younger woman that he had met on an island somewhere in the South Pacific. When he retired from the Navy, he married her and brought her to Key West, where they made their home. Her name was Keilani.

Scotty's life had taken him a long way from his starting place, West Virginia and he seemed perfectly content to spend his later years fishing, telling stories, dispensing advice, and enjoying the unique lifestyle of Key West.

I always enjoyed talking with Scotty. He knew I was a game warden from up north and he never seemed to have any shortage of advice. Some of it was serious, some of it was humorous, and some of it was difficult to tell which was which.

Here are a few of the bits of wisdom I borrowed from Scotty over the years and included in Paulding County Outdoors.

"Luck affects everything we do, including fishing. Let your hook always be cast. In the water, when and where you least expect it, there will be fish. Keep that in mind the next time you go fishing, whether or not you're after a world record."

Another time, Scotty pointed to a sign over the door behind me. It read:

"Think like a fish and look for the slack tides, pools, and eddies in life where you can catch your breath and enjoy the moment … before something bigger comes along and eats you."

That seemed like pretty good advice, whether you were fishing or simply trying to make your way through life.

Scotty also had a fondness for Latin, apparently because, as he put it:

"Quid quid Latine dictum sit, altum videtur."

His translation was simple:

"Anything said in Latin sounds profound."

When I asked Scotty for advice about fishing—and perhaps a little more than fishing—he offered this:

"After you hook a fish it's too late to retie a broken knot. Same rule applies to marriage. Tie that knot well and tight."

That was good advice from a man who had apparently learned a thing or two about life.

On another occasion, after we hadn't caught as many fish as we had hoped, Scotty offered this bit of encouragement:

"Some days the fish aren't biting, and no angler on earth can make them take the bait. That's when an optimistic spirit is more valuable than a box full of high-priced tackle."

When I asked him if there was some universal secret to catching fish—something that might improve the odds for anglers everywhere—Scotty took a puff from his cigar, blew a couple of smoke rings, and simply answered:

"Yeah, keep casting."

I have tried to follow that advice ever since. It may be the surest way to catch a fish yet.

Scotty also believed in beginning the day with the proper attitude. He liked to shout:

"O diem praeclarum!"

It was his way of saying:

"Oh, what a beautiful day!"

He recommended that all of us do likewise.

And then there was Scotty's advice for staying healthy. During one conversation, he recommended plenty of exercise and fresh air,

along with:

"A special tonic of dark Jamaican rum—in moderation, of course."

He also offered this bit of wisdom:

"As pretty as they might be, don't kiss a pig."

And, just to make certain I understood his prescription, he again stressed the importance of consuming the tonic:

"In moderation."

That was Scotty. Retired Navy Master Chief, world traveler, fisherman, cigar smoker, rum enthusiast, philosopher, and owner of a bait shop in Key West where the tackle wasn't necessarily the only thing you could take home.

His advice may not have always been found in a textbook, but it was usually worth remembering. And whenever I included one of Scotty's observations in Paulding County Outdoors, I knew I was giving my readers something a little different—some fishing wisdom seasoned with a healthy dose of Key West humor.

Over the years, a few readers have asked me a simple question:

Was Scotty a real person?

My answer has usually been a smile and a reference to one of my favorite Jimmy Buffett songs, Semi-True Story. The song captures the idea rather well: some things are made up, some things are forgotten, but the life and the telling of the story can both be real to the person telling it.

That pretty much sums up Scotty.

Whether every detail of every Scotty story happened exactly as I told it isn't nearly as important to me as the fact that Scotty became real in the telling. He was a composite of people I had known, places I had been, conversations I had enjoyed, and perhaps a little imagi-

nation thrown in for good measure.

But the cigar, the Key West setting, the fishing, the Navy Master Chief, the bait shop, the rum, and especially the advice—that's my semi-true story of Scotty as I remember him.



Nothing Runs Like a Deere

One day I was checking anglers along the Auglaize River near the Five Span Bridge. It was one of those routine patrols where you expect the usual—people fishing, a few kids skipping rocks, maybe someone trying their luck a little too close to posted property lines. Most days on the river are predictable.

This one wasn't.

As I made my rounds along the river access points, I noticed something that immediately stood out. A man was driving a John Deere lawn mower straight into a riverfront parking area. That alone wasn't the strangest part. What caught my attention was that he had a beer in one hand and a six-pack riding along on the mower like it was part of the equipment.

He pulled into the lot, shut the mower off, and climbed down as casually as if he had just parked a pickup truck. He cracked open the beer, took a long drink, and stood there looking out over the river

like he was enjoying a quiet afternoon at a picnic table. When he finished, he set the empty bottle down, climbed back onto the mower, and drove a short distance along Ohio 111 to another small parking area.

There, he got off again and started mowing weeds along the riverbank.

And then he opened another beer.

At that point, I decided it was time to have a conversation with him.

As I walked toward him, I could see him notice me. His movements changed immediately. He took a quick look around, then suddenly tossed the second beer bottle into the weeds. A moment later, I watched him shove the rest of the six-pack out of sight as well, trying to make it disappear into the brush.

When I reached him, I asked a simple question about the beer bottles. He immediately denied having any alcohol at all. He also denied throwing anything into the weeds. According to him, he was just out mowing and minding his own business.

I asked him to come with me back to the riverbank.

We walked a short distance, and I pointed out the area where I had seen him toss the bottles. After a brief search, I recovered them from the weeds. Faced with the evidence, his story changed. He admitted he had thrown them away, but said he was afraid he would be arrested for drinking while operating a lawn mower.

I explained that while I appreciated the honesty after the fact, littering was still littering. I issued him a citation for stream litter.

While I was there, I also asked him why he was mowing weeds along the riverbank in the first place. It wasn't a maintained area, and it certainly wasn't part of any public mowing contract.

He told me, quite matter-of-factly, that some of his neighbors liked to fish there. So, in his words, he had decided to "help them out" by clearing the area so they would have a better place to cast their lines.

It was an unusual explanation, but not the most unusual I had ever heard.

I finished up the contact and continued my patrol.

A couple of hours later, I found myself back in the same area. Curiosity got the better of me, so I stopped to see if anything had changed.

Sure enough, the freshly mowed stretch of riverbank was now occupied. Several people were fishing exactly where the man had cleared the weeds. It was as if he had prepared a little unofficial fishing spot just for them.

Among the group was a woman sitting near the water's edge. She, too, had a beer in hand.

I watched for a while as the group fished, talked, and enjoyed the afternoon. Eventually, they began packing up their gear. As they left, I noticed the woman walk a few steps away from the group and casually place her empty beer bottle into a clump of weeds.

I contacted her before she reached her vehicle and issued her a citation for littering as well.

As it turned out, she and the man on the lawn mower were indeed neighbors. They apparently shared more than just a fishing spot—they also shared a similar attitude toward empty beer bottles and where they belonged.

Rather than appear before a judge, each of them chose to forfeit their bond, totaling $220.

Driving away from the river that day, I couldn't help but reflect

on the whole situation. It was one of those cases that was almost humorous in its sequence of events, yet still grounded in the same simple violations I saw far too often.

Over the years, I learned that most enforcement work isn't about dramatic confrontations or major cases. More often, it's about small decisions people make when they think no one is watching—decisions that usually end up costing more than they expect.

And if there was a lesson tucked into that day along the Auglaize River, it was a simple one.

First, it is always cheaper—and easier—to take your litter home with you than to leave it behind and pay for it later.

And second, while the old saying goes, "Nothing runs like a Deere," it's worth remembering that operating one under the influence can lead you down a path that runs straight into trouble, just like any other vehicle.



The Umbrella

Some wildlife enforcement cases begin with a complaint. Others begin with a tip. And then there are those that begin with something that simply doesn't look right.

Field Supervisor Bob Radcliff and I were checking anglers at Paulding Reservoir when something caught our attention.

A fisherman was sitting along the shoreline beside a large, opened umbrella.

There was nothing particularly unusual about someone sitting under an umbrella. It was a sunny day, and an umbrella could provide some welcome shade. But this particular umbrella was doing more than keeping the sun off the fisherman.

Using a spotting scope, we watched the man closely.

We soon discovered that the umbrella was being used as a makeshift windbreak. The man was holding something in his hand and using the umbrella to shield it from the breeze while he tried to

light what appeared to be a marijuana cigarette.

Bob and I decided it was time to take a closer look.

We approached the fisherman from behind and walked to within just a few feet of him before he finally turned and realized that two wildlife officers were standing there.

His reaction was immediate.

He quickly tried to conceal the burning cigarette by closing his hand tightly around it.

That probably seemed like a good idea to him at the time.

It wasn't.

We ordered him to hand it over, and, to his credit, he did so without arguing. After examining the cigarette, we confirmed that it did, in fact, contain marijuana.

A subsequent search turned up three additional marijuana cigarettes in his possession.

At that point, the man seemed to realize that the large umbrella hadn't done much to conceal what he was doing. In fact, it had probably made him easier to spot.

He commented that, being forty-four years old, he should have known better than to think wildlife officers weren't likely to be watching.

I couldn't have put it better myself.

He was issued a citation for the violation and ordered to appear in Paulding County Court.

When the case came before Judge Tiffany Reighter Beckman, the man pleaded no contest and was found guilty. He was ordered to pay $187 in fines and costs, and his driving privileges were suspended for six months.

But the best part of the story came at the end of the hearing.

Judge Beckman ordered the Division of Wildlife to destroy the marijuana.

The man smiled.

Then he offered to help.

That brought a round of laughter from everyone in the courtroom.

His offer was appreciated for its entertainment value, but unfortunately for him, it didn't earn him any consideration from the judge. The punishment remained exactly as ordered.

I suppose there are some lessons that take a little longer to learn than others.

One of them is that if you're going to sit at a public fishing area and light a marijuana cigarette, an umbrella probably isn't the best piece of camouflage.

And if two wildlife officers are watching you through a spotting scope, trying to hide the evidence in your clenched fist probably isn't going to work either.

The fisherman had apparently forgotten one of the most important rules of wildlife enforcement:

Just because you can't see the game warden doesn't mean the game warden can't see you.



The Deer, the Pickup, and the Shot

The 2007 deer gun season was underway, and as usual, I spent plenty of time driving the back roads of Paulding County watching for hunters who might be tempted to bend the rules.

One day during the season, I was driving north on a county road in Emerald Township when I came upon a pickup truck stopped in my lane of travel. There were two hunters inside, and it quickly became apparent why they had stopped.

To their right, a group of deer stood nervously in a field.

The hunters weren't simply watching the deer. They were watching them with a purpose. Their eyes were fixed on the animals, and I had a pretty good idea what they were hoping would happen next.

I pulled my vehicle off the road and parked beside some trees. I wanted to get out of sight while still maintaining a good view of the hunters and the deer. From where I was sitting, I could watch without letting them know I was there.

It didn't take long.

One of the deer suddenly bolted toward the road.

The hunters reacted immediately.

Their pickup accelerated down the road in what appeared to be an attempt to intercept the fleeing deer. They narrowly missed hitting it as the animal crossed the road directly in front of them.

Instead of giving up, they continued down the road.

The remaining deer had turned and were running toward the northeast. The hunters quickly traveled to the next road, turned east, and headed toward the deer again.

At that point, there wasn't much question about what I was witnessing. This was no longer simply a couple of hunters watching deer from a parked vehicle. They were using the pickup to pursue them.

I continued to watch.

The hunters were eventually able to intercept one of the deer as it reached the edge of the road. Their truck struck the animal, knocking it to the ground.

For a moment, I thought the deer might have been killed.

But it wasn't.

The animal managed to get back on its feet and ran into the field.

The pickup skidded to a stop.

The passenger jumped out, grabbed a shotgun, and fired one shot at the fleeing deer.

That was enough for me.

I pulled out onto the road and drove toward the hunters. By the time I arrived, they had gotten back into the pickup and were preparing to leave.

I stopped them before they could drive away.

I explained that what they had just done was not hunting deer in any legitimate sense of the word. They had used a motor vehicle to pursue the deer, had struck one with their truck, and then had attempted to shoot it as it fled.

I admonished both hunters about their actions and issued each of them a citation for hunting deer with the aid or use of a motor vehicle.

Neither hunter tried to argue the point. They subsequently entered guilty pleas to the charges.

The fines and court costs totaled $520.

I often wondered afterward what had been going through their minds as they chased those deer from one road to another. Maybe they were simply determined to get a deer at any cost. Maybe they thought nobody was watching.

But somebody was.

That's one of the things about being a wildlife officer. You never really know what you'll encounter when you turn onto the next county road. Sometimes you find a hunter sitting quietly in a tree, waiting patiently for the right opportunity. Other times, you find someone who seems to have forgotten that there are rules to the hunt.

The hope, of course, is that the $520 lesson was enough to make these two hunters think twice the next time they saw a deer.

If it wasn't, perhaps Ohio's restitution and violator-compact laws would give them something else to think about.

Either way, that deer had a wildlife officer on its side that day.

And the hunters had a pickup truck that turned out to be a very expensive hunting tool.



The Walleye, the Rod, and the Wife

The spring walleye run on the Maumee River always brought its share of fishermen—and, unfortunately, its share of violations.

It was a Saturday morning in early April, near the peak of the run. The walleyes were in the river in good numbers, and fishermen were lining the banks wherever they could find a place to cast. I was working the Wood County side of the river that morning and had chosen the Buttonwood access area as my location.

Buttonwood was a Wood County Park District property with a maintained parking and camping area available to anglers. Along the river was a wooded stretch that offered enough concealment for me to watch fishermen without being immediately noticed. From there, I could observe the action with my spotting scope.

It wasn't long before one fisherman caught my attention.

He was wading out in the river, wearing chest waders, and was some distance from shore. I watched him through my spotting scope

as he reeled in a fish. He wasn't making much of an effort to conceal what he had caught.

As he reeled the fish directly to himself, I could clearly see that it had been snagged. A jig was plainly visible on the side of the walleye's head. There was no question about how the fish had been taken.

He unhooked the walleye while still out in the river, put it on a stringer and continued fishing.

I watched him for a few minutes before making my way closer to the edge of the water behind him. Then I called out and got his attention.

I identified myself as a wildlife officer and told him to come into shore and bring his fish with him.

He did.

Once we were on the riverbank, I explained why I had called him in. The walleye had been taken by snagging. Under the law, a fish taken by snagging was required to be immediately released. The violation wasn't that he had accidentally snagged the fish. The violation occurred when he decided to keep it.

I obtained his information and learned that he was from Indiana.

That created another problem.

At the time, the judge handling these cases had established a procedure for nonresident violators. Because the fisherman was from out of state, I couldn't simply issue him a summons and send him on his way. He had to be taken into custody and brought either to the court or to the police department to post bond before being released.

The purpose was fairly simple. If he didn't want to return to Ohio for court, he could sign a waiver with a written guilty plea, pay

the established fine, and be on his way.

At the time, the amount required was $107.

I explained all of this to him.

He was probably in his mid-to-late twenties, and it was obvious that this was not how he had envisioned his Saturday morning.

He told me it was his first time ever fishing for walleyes on the Maumee River. He lived in Indiana and had heard about the famous spring walleye run. He had gotten up very early that morning, driven approximately three hours to the river and gone fishing.

And the walleye I had just taken from him was the first fish he had ever caught on the Maumee River.

Unfortunately, it was also the first walleye he would lose.

Then he told me something that made the situation even more complicated.

He didn't have $107.

He had brought his wallet with him, but he had only about $33 in cash. He didn't have a credit card.

I told him we'd go up to the parking lot and discuss his options there.

We walked back toward the parking area, and I explained again that I couldn't simply release him. He would have to post the required bond. Since it was Saturday, the Perrysburg Police Department had a holding facility where we could go. He could make some phone calls and try to come up with the money. If he couldn't, he would have to remain there until court was in session Monday morning.

He wasn't particularly happy with that prospect.

Then he looked down at the fishing rod and reel he was carrying.

It was a pretty nice outfit.

He told me his wife had recently bought it for him as a birthday present.

Then, after thinking about his predicament for a moment, he said, "I wonder if I could get somebody to buy this."

I looked at him.

He explained that he might be able to sell the rod and reel right there in the parking lot and get enough money to make up the difference.

I thought about it for a second.

"Well," I told him, "if you can get enough money for it, I suppose you can."

Apparently, that was all the encouragement he needed.

There were several other fishermen coming and going in the parking lot. He made an announcement loud enough for everyone nearby to hear that he was trying to sell his fishing rod and reel because he had received a ticket, had to come up with $107 to post bond and didn't have enough cash or a credit card.

A couple of fishermen wandered over.

They looked at the rod and reel.

One of them apparently decided it was a pretty good deal.

"What do you want for it?" he asked.

The Indiana fisherman offered it at a discounted price—just enough to get the money he needed.

The other fisherman counted out the cash.

Deal.

Just like that, the rod and reel that had been a birthday present from his wife had a new owner.

The fisherman now had enough money to post his bond and

even had just enough left over for gasoline for the three-hour trip back to Indiana.

But the loss of the fishing outfit wasn't what bothered him most.

He was worried about what his wife was going to say.

He kept talking about the fact that she had just bought him the rod and reel for his birthday.

"She's going to be pretty upset," he told me.

Then he had another idea.

He asked if I would talk to her.

I had to laugh.

He had his cell phone with him, so he called his wife and explained that he had been stopped by a wildlife officer and had received a ticket. Then he said, "Here, the officer here will explain what happened."

Before he even handed me the phone, I could hear his wife's voice coming through the other end.

"You did WHAT?"

I couldn't help but laugh.

I took the phone and explained the situation as calmly as I could. I told her that her husband had been observed keeping a walleye that had been taken by snagging and explained why, because he was a nonresident, I was required to take him into custody so he could post the bond.

I also explained that he wasn't going to jail or prison. Once the bond was posted and the necessary paperwork was completed, he would be free to go.

She wasn't particularly happy with him.

I understood why.

By the time we finished our conversation, though, I think she

had a better understanding of what had happened—and, more importantly, why it had happened.

I took possession of the walleye as evidence. The fisherman asked if he could at least have the fish to take home with him.

I told him no.

The fish had been illegally taken and had to remain in my possession as evidence of the violation.

But I also explained what would happen to it afterward.

During the walleye run, fish taken as evidence were placed in a freezer. At the conclusion of the run, those fish were donated to a local homeless shelter and food bank.

That seemed to make him feel a little better.

At least the fish wasn't going to waste.

He had caught his first walleye on the Maumee River that morning.

He had also lost his first walleye.

He had lost the fishing rod and reel his wife had just given him for his birthday, and he had received a $107 ticket.

But, in the end, he could tell himself that the fish would eventually help somebody who needed it.

I let him follow me in his own vehicle to the Perrysburg Police Department rather than riding with me. Once there, he would be able to post his bond and complete the necessary paperwork before heading home.

As I watched him drive away, I couldn't help but think about how differently he must have imagined his first walleye trip to Ohio.

He had driven three hours to experience the famous Maumee River walleye run.

He caught his first Maumee River walleye while wading in the

river.

And before the morning was over, he had lost that first walleye, sold his birthday present to a complete stranger, called his wife and had a wildlife officer explaining the situation to her over the phone.

And somewhere along the way, his first Maumee River walleye became a charitable donation.

It probably wasn't the fishing story he had planned to tell when he got back to Indiana.

But I'm guessing it was one he—and his wife—remembered for a long time.



The Young Amish Hunter and the Deer Permit

Deer gun season always brought plenty of activity to Paulding County. Most hunters knew the rules, and most knew that before they could hunt deer, they needed to have both a hunting license and a deer hunting permit.

One particular evening, I received a call from a deer-check station concerning an eighteen-year-old Amish hunter who had killed a small buck.

The young man had a hunting license, but there was one problem—he didn't have a deer permit.

He had apparently taken the buck while hunting on a local farm and, rather than trying to hide what he had done, had headed directly toward the deer-check station. He wanted to have the deer properly checked and tagged.

The check station operator called me.

I had just gotten home, but I turned around and headed back

toward the station to see what was going on.

When I arrived, I talked with the young hunter and looked over the circumstances. There was no question that he had taken the deer without first having the required deer permit. Technically, that was a violation.

But there was something important to consider.

He wasn't trying to get away with the deer.

He hadn't hidden it, abandoned it, or attempted to avoid having it checked. Quite the opposite. He had taken the deer to the check station because he wanted to have it properly checked and tagged.

After considering the totality of the circumstances, I decided there was a better solution than writing him a citation. I allowed him to purchase the required deer permit, and then we had the deer properly checked in.

Sometimes wildlife enforcement isn't simply a matter of looking at a violation and automatically reaching for the citation book. Circumstances matter. Intent matters. And sometimes the most important thing an officer can recognize is the difference between someone deliberately trying to break the law and someone who has simply made an honest mistake.

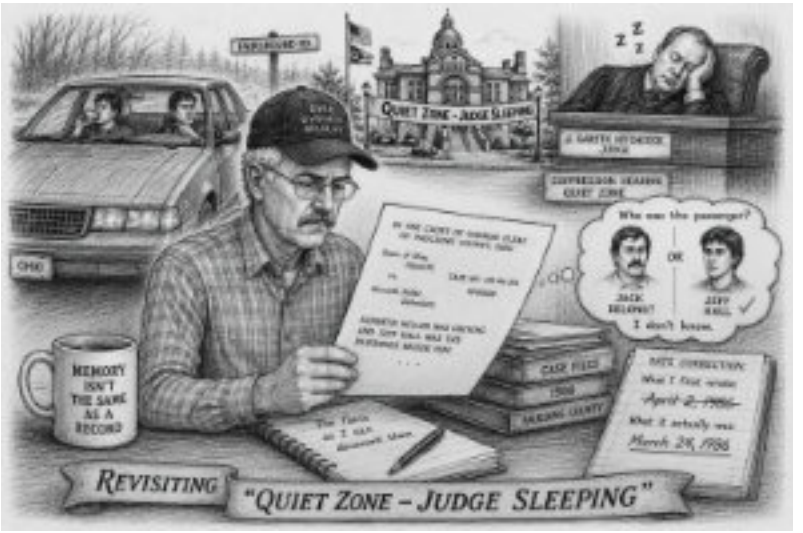
That young man had made a mistake.

But when he realized something wasn't right, he did exactly what I hoped a hunter would do—he went to the check station and asked to have everything made right.

There was no citation that day.

Just a properly tagged deer, a young Amish hunter who learned an important lesson, and one more reminder to me that enforcing the law sometimes requires more than simply knowing what the law says.

It requires knowing when to use good judgment.



What I Remember—and What I Know

In my first book, The Rings of Saturn, I wrote a story titled "Quiet Zone – Judge Sleeping." It told the story of a suppression hearing involving Kenneth Miller in the Paulding County Common Pleas Court. The hearing remained particularly memorable because Judge J. Gareth Hitchcock appeared to fall asleep during the proceedings.

Since writing that story, I have discovered that two details need to be corrected, and one of them has caused me to take another look at someone I remembered being involved.

My first encounter with Jack DeLong came on February 11, 1982. On that day, I cited Jack and Homer Zartman for killing six rabbits and a fox squirrel during the closed season, along with a protected hen pheasant. I wrote about that incident in my first book in the chapter "A Truck Bed Full of Trouble."

That wasn't the end of my encounters with Jack. Over the years

that followed, I would occasionally have contact with him while working as a wildlife officer. What stands out to me now is that I never again found Jack in violation of a wildlife law.

That, in itself, says something.

People sometimes make mistakes, especially when they are young or when they don't fully understand the consequences of their actions. But what matters is what they do afterward. In Jack's case, after those violations in 1982, I never again found him violating a wildlife law. As far as my experience with him was concerned, he went on to become a law-abiding citizen.

That brings me back to the story "Quiet Zone – Judge Sleeping."

When I originally wrote that story, my recollection was that Jack DeLong was present with Kenneth Miller when I stopped Miller's vehicle on what I originally identified as April 2, 1986.

I now know the date was wrong.

I recently found the original written opinion by Judge J. Gareth Hitchcock concerning Miller's motion to suppress. The opinion clearly establishes that the incident occurred on March 24, 1986. It also identifies Jeff Hall as the passenger in Miller's vehicle.

That caused me to reconsider my own memory.

Was Jack DeLong actually there?

I honestly can't be certain.

The court opinion specifically identifies Kenneth Miller as the driver and Jeff Hall as the passenger. Jack DeLong is not mentioned. It is possible that my memory has confused Jack with Jeff Hall after nearly forty years. It is also possible that Jack was present but simply wasn't relevant to the matters addressed in the court's opinion.

What I do know is that Jeff Hall was there, and Jack DeLong was not charged with any violation arising from that incident.

The court opinion describes what happened after I stopped Miller's vehicle. Hall was holding an open container of beer, and during the investigation I observed what appeared to be the remains of a marijuana cigarette held in a pair of needle-nose pliers. Hall handed the pliers to Miller, which led to further investigation.

Marijuana was subsequently discovered in the vehicle, including ten small bags in the trunk that the laboratory determined contained 281 grams.

Miller's attorney filed a motion to suppress the evidence, arguing that the stop and subsequent search were unlawful. Judge Hitchcock denied the motion, finding that the investigation and seizure of the evidence were lawful.

Miller eventually pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to one and one-half years in prison.

Finding the original court opinion after all these years gave me the opportunity to look back at a story I had already published and separate what I remembered from what I could now document.

The date can be corrected.

Jeff Hall's presence can be confirmed.

Jack DeLong's presence remains uncertain.

But one thing about Jack is not uncertain in my memory. After I cited him in 1982, I never again found him violating a wildlife law. Whether or not he was with Kenneth Miller that day in 1986, he was not charged with any violation, and my subsequent encounters with him gave me no reason to believe he had returned to the behavior that had resulted in those citations in 1982.

Looking back after nearly forty years, I suppose this is one of the things that happens to all of us. We carry memories with us for so long that they begin to feel like facts. Then, every once in a while,

something—a photograph, an old letter, a newspaper clipping, or in my case, a court document—comes along and makes us look at one of those memories a little differently.

It doesn't necessarily mean the memory was wrong. It simply reminds us that memory is our personal version of the past, while the written record is another version. Sometimes they match perfectly. Sometimes they don't.

I can't go back to that March morning in 1986 and see exactly who was standing there. I can only look at the evidence I have today and compare it with what I remember from nearly forty years ago.

Maybe that's true for all of us. The older we get, the more we realize that some things we once knew with certainty are better described as things we remember with certainty.

I know what the record says. I know what I remember. And I also know that sometimes people change. Jack DeLong's actions in 1982 were one part of his story, but they were not the whole story. What I saw in the years that followed was a man who, as far as I knew, obeyed the wildlife laws.

As for whether Jack was sitting beside Kenneth Miller that day in 1986, I simply can't say for certain.

That's the way I remember it.



The Fence Row Buck and the Long Wait

The call came from a local trapper one fall during Ohio's deer archery season.

He had been checking traps on the Jacob Eaton Farm, a 365-acre tract of woods and farmland along the Maumee River in Crane Township. The property was owned by Paulding County and enrolled in our cooperative hunting program. Hunting was allowed there only with written permission from the county or its authorized agent.

While checking traps along an old, overgrown fence line, the trapper discovered a young buck lying dead in the brush. The deer had been field dressed but wasn't tagged. Someone had covered it with brush and leaves, making it look as though they intended to return for it later.

The trapper called me.

I contacted Investigator Mark Weihrauch, and we agreed to

check it out. I met Mark in Paulding, where he left his vehicle at the sheriff's office and climbed into my patrol truck. Before we headed to the Jacob Eaton Farm, Mark gathered the things he thought he might need for surveillance: his portable radio, flashlight, binoculars and his familiar bucket to sit on.

We arrived around noon and found the deer exactly where the trapper had described it.

It didn't take long to decide that somebody had killed the deer, hidden it and planned to come back for it. So we set up surveillance.

I parked my patrol truck in a secluded location where I could watch the area without being obvious. Mark put on his camouflage and took a concealed position across the field, closer to the deer. He settled in with his binoculars, radio, flashlight and bucket.

I routinely tried to keep some snacks and a bottle of water in my patrol truck for just such situations. You never knew when an enforcement call might turn into an all-day affair, and it was nice to have something to eat if you got tied up somewhere. That day, I had some snacks and water with me.

Mark, unfortunately, had nothing.

Then we waited.

And waited.

During the afternoon, three men came through the field near where I was parked. They were rabbit hunting, but none had the required written permission to hunt on the county property. I checked them and ended up writing each of them a citation for hunting without written permission.

Meanwhile, Mark continued watching the deer.

We were probably a quarter mile apart, and we tried to keep in touch by radio. Eventually, however, Mark's portable radio died. As

daylight faded, communication became more difficult, and I moved to a position where I could watch the road and the area around the fence row.

Finally, after dark, headlights appeared from the east.

A pickup truck turned into the field and headed directly toward the area where the deer was hidden.

I pulled out, drove into the field and timed it just right. As I approached, Mark was coming out of his concealed position. I illuminated the pickup with my lights, spotlight and emergency lights.

We had our hunter.

He was from Michigan and wasn't a local resident. He explained that he had shot the young buck that morning while hunting from a tree stand on an adjoining private woodlot owned by a friend he had previously worked with at General Motors in Defiance.

The deer was wounded and ran onto the county property. He followed it, found it in the fence row, field dressed it and covered it with brush. Then he went back to the adjoining property and continued hunting.

His reason for not tagging the deer was simple but self serving and knowingly wrong. He said it was a small buck and he wanted to keep hunting in hopes of getting a bigger one.

He had not counted on us waiting for him.

Because the property line wasn't clearly marked and he had apparently shot the deer from the adjoining property, I gave him the benefit of the doubt regarding hunting without permission on the county land. But there was no question that he had failed to immediately tag the deer.

I cited him for that violation.

We had him follow us back to Paulding, where he posted a $260

bond at the sheriff's office. By then it was well after dark. The deer was seized as evidence and later provided through our local program to help feed hungry families.

It had been a long day.

We had started with a tip from a trapper, spent the afternoon conducting surveillance, dealt with three hunters who didn't have permission, and finally watched our suspect drive into the field after dark to retrieve his hidden deer.

And through it all, Mark had done the hard part.

While I was able to remain in the relative comfort of my patrol truck, with the heater available and some snacks and water within reach, Mark spent hour after hour concealed across that field. He sat on his little bucket in the cold, watching the deer and waiting patiently for someone to return.

By the time the hunter finally arrived, Mark was cold, hungry and joking that he was suffering from near starvation and hypothermia. But he never complained while we were doing the job. He stayed in position and stuck with the surveillance until the case came together.

Wildlife investigations often require patience, but sometimes they also require someone to put up with a good deal of discomfort to get the job done. Mark Weihrauch did exactly that.

He went the extra mile that day—and his dedication helped turn a suspiciously hidden deer into a successful case.



The Oldest Kid in Class

When I was assigned to Paulding County as a game protector in 1981, it didn't take long before I became acquainted with a fellow I'll call Old Joe.

At the time, Joe was already 69 years old. He was a lifelong hunter who loved deer hunting, but his real passion seemed to be hunting raccoons. He had raised a couple of good coon dogs, and hunting with them was almost an obsession.

Joe also had an adult son who had recently returned to Paulding County after spending several years working on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. About the time I arrived in the county, there was some information in my files from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the son. He had reportedly been suspected, along with others, of illegally taking Alaskan wildlife for the black-market trade. Nothing ever came of it as far as I knew, but the correspondence was essentially an FYI to keep an eye out for him.

Back in Paulding County, I began receiving reports that Joe's son was hunting raccoons on Flat Rock Creek from a small fiberglass canoe. According to the reports, he would paddle the creek late at night, shine a light into the trees, shoot raccoons, and skin them out. The allegation was that he was taking far more than the legal limit and selling the hides.

I followed up on some of those complaints. One day I hiked along Flat Rock Creek near where the son lived and found a small canoe chained to a tree. Not far away was a sizable pile of skinned raccoon carcasses.

It certainly looked suspicious.

The problem was that a pile of raccoon carcasses doesn't tell you when the animals were taken. They could have represented several weeks of legal hunting, or they could have been the result of someone exceeding the daily limit. I never was able to gather enough evidence to make a case.

I did eventually cite the son one night while he was hunting foxes and coyotes with a predator call. At that time, the law required a continuous light while hunting those animals at night. He had been turning his light off, so that became the violation. He signed a waiver and paid the fine.

Old Joe, meanwhile, had his own reputation.

He was a grumpy old man who wasn't particularly fond of game wardens—or, for that matter, many of the regulations we were charged with enforcing. If there had ever been a movie called Grumpy Old Men of Paulding County, Joe could have auditioned for the lead.

But one day during deer season, Old Joe's attitude toward the law suddenly became more than just complaining about it.

I received a call that a house had been struck by a shotgun slug fired by a hunter who had been shooting at a deer. The caller had obtained a description of the vehicle and part of the license plate number.

I went to the scene and began looking for evidence.

Several empty Federal High-Shock 12-gauge shotgun slug shells were found along the roadway. The evidence indicated that the hunter had been standing on or along County Road 123 when he fired.

Another investigator, Carl Webb, and I examined the area carefully. We eventually found something particularly important—a shotgun wad. Several wads in fact out in the field.

A wad can be a very useful piece of evidence in a shotgun case.

When we put everything together, we could draw a fairly straight line from the place where the hunter had reportedly been standing, to the location of the wad, and on toward the house.

The evidence told a story that was considerably different from the one Old Joe eventually told me.

When I interviewed him, Joe denied shooting in the direction of the house. But the physical evidence certainly indicated otherwise. While shooting at a running deer he had hit indeed hit the house. I presented the case to the prosecutor and received approval to file charges.

Old Joe ultimately appeared in court with an attorney and pleaded guilty to two violations.

The first was shooting from, on, or along a public road or highway while hunting deer. The second was a more serious charge: while hunting, pursuing, taking, or killing a deer, he had acted in a negligent, careless, or reckless manner so as to injure persons or property.

In this case, the property was somebody's house.

Judge Erwin Bandy found Old Joe guilty and imposed fines and costs totaling $446. He also imposed a 30-day jail sentence, but suspended it on the condition that Joe successfully complete a hunter-education course.

Joe also received a two-year revocation of his hunting privileges.

Needless to say, Old Joe wasn't particularly happy about any of it.

The hunter-education requirement was interesting because those courses were primarily designed for people just starting out hunting. Most of the students were young people learning the basics of firearms safety, hunting laws, and responsible hunting practices.

I had helped instruct hunter-education courses in Paulding County along with our certified instructors, and one of those classes was being held at the Paulding County Fish and Game Club.

That's where I saw something I'll never forget.

The students in the class were mostly kids—roughly 12 to 16 years old. Some were accompanied by their parents.

Then there was Old Joe.

He was sitting among them, somewhere toward the middle and back of the classroom.

If you didn't know the circumstances, you might have thought somebody had accidentally wandered into the wrong classroom.

The other students were kids.

Old Joe was 69 years old.

He was also considerably taller and bigger than everyone else in the class.

There he sat, surrounded by a roomful of young hunters, looking for all the world like the biggest kid in class.

And, in a way, that's exactly what he was.

Old Joe had spent most of his life hunting. He had probably forgotten more about hunting than many of those young students had ever learned. Yet here he was, sitting in a hunter-education classroom because a deer, a shotgun, a public road, and a house had gotten him into trouble.

To his credit, Joe completed the course and passed the test.

That meant he didn't have to serve the suspended jail sentence. He later petitioned the court, and his hunting privileges were eventually restored. He was able to go hunting again the following year.

But completing hunter education didn't change Old Joe's opinion of game wardens.

Whenever I encountered him in the field afterward, he was still Old Joe—grumpy, argumentative, and never particularly pleased to see me.

I suppose I shouldn't have expected anything different.

Some people take a hunter-education course and come away with a whole new appreciation for hunting laws and firearm safety.

Old Joe took the course, passed the test, got his hunting privileges back—and went right back to being Old Joe.

But I'll always remember him sitting there in that classroom at the Paulding County Fish and Game Club.

A room full of young hunters.

And right in the middle of them, the biggest kid in class.

Old Joe.



The Juveniles

The Ohio Division of Wildlife had a written policy for dealing with juveniles who were caught violating the law. In general, when the offender was under eighteen, we were encouraged not to immediately issue a citation and send the youngster into the formal court process.

Instead, we were supposed to gather the necessary information—particularly the names and addresses of the parents—and notify them by letter. The letter would explain what their child had done, what law had been violated, and why it was important to correct the behavior.

I thought that approach made sense for a simple first-time violation.

If a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old was caught fishing without a license, for example, there wasn't necessarily much to be gained by dragging the youngster into court. Explain the law, explain why li-

censes were required, give the youngster an opportunity to correct the mistake, and make sure the parents knew what had happened. Sometimes a letter from the Division of Wildlife was enough to get everyone's attention.

But there was another side to juvenile violations that I felt was important.

I learned that sometimes the wildlife violation wasn't the whole story.

When I encountered a juvenile who had committed a more serious violation, I would often contact the juvenile division of the Common Pleas Court and provide the probation department with the information I had gathered. Juvenile records weren't something I could simply look up in the field, and a youngster standing in front of me certainly wasn't required to tell me everything that had happened in his past.

The juvenile probation officer could.

There were times when the probation officer would say, in effect, Yes, we know this youngster. We want him back in court.

That made my decision much easier.

One case in particular occurred in 1994.

I was dealing with a seventeen-year-old who was with several other people along the Maumee River in Paulding County. At some point, he tossed an empty pop can into the river.

That alone was a violation of the stream-litter law.

But then he took a .410 shotgun and began shooting at the can floating in the river.

He was using the pop can for a target.

The problem was that once he started shooting it, there wasn't much chance of recovering the evidence from the river. It was one

thing to throw a can into the water. It was another thing entirely to use a shotgun to blast it apart.

I contacted the young man and began asking him some questions. During the conversation, I learned that he had been in juvenile court before.

That caught my attention.

The young man lived in Defiance County, so even though the violation had occurred in Paulding County, his juvenile case would ultimately be handled in the county where he resided. I contacted the juvenile probation officer in Defiance County and explained what had happened.

The probation officer was already familiar with the young man.

In fact, he had what the probation officer described as a rather extensive juvenile record. There had already been admissions involving a curfew violation and obstructing official business.

The probation officer wanted him back in court.

So I filed the stream-litter charge.

The case was transferred from Paulding County Juvenile Court to Defiance County Juvenile Court, where the young man eventually admitted the violation.

The judge imposed a $50 fine, but the court costs came to $403.

That wasn't the part of the sentence that mattered most.

The judge ordered the young man to spend fifteen days at the Correction Center of Northwest Ohio and to undergo counseling while he was there.

A pop can in a river had turned into fifteen days in juvenile detention and counseling.

That was exactly why I believed it was important to contact juvenile probation officers. Sometimes the violation I had just discov-

ered was only another piece of a much larger problem.

Another case involved a seventeen-year-old I encountered at the Six-Mile Creek access area.

He was with several other people, and I noticed that he was drinking from a bottle that was inside a brown paper bag.

That was enough to make me suspicious.

As I approached the group, the paper bag mysteriously disappeared.

I asked him what he had done with it.

He denied having it.

I continued asking questions, and eventually he admitted that he had thrown the bag into the weeds.

I went over and found it.

Inside was a bottle of Jack Daniel's sour mash whiskey.

When I asked where he had gotten it, he told me he had found it along the road.

That was about as much explanation as I was going to get.

Again, the violation occurred in Paulding County, but the young man lived in Defiance County. I contacted our juvenile probation office, which in turn contacted Defiance County.

Once again, they wanted the case.

This youngster already had a juvenile record that included an earlier underage-consumption violation and a criminal-trespass violation. This was not simply a kid who had made one bad decision and needed somebody to explain the rules to him.

He admitted the violation in Defiance County Juvenile Court and was found delinquent.

The judge took away his driving privileges until he reached eighteen. There were also court costs of $110.56 on each of the two

charges.

Once again, the wildlife violation had become part of something much bigger.

Then there was the deer case at Cooper Farms.

It happened late in the afternoon one November day in 2005. I received a call from Cooper Farms, which had several facilities in Paulding County.

A sixteen-year-old boy was working part-time at one of the farms. While working around one of the barns, he had apparently been seeing a deer coming out of the woods on a regular basis and brought a shotgun with him to work.

He decided to shoot it.

The problem was that it was archery season.

And he was carrying a shotgun.

He stepped outside the barn, shot the deer and killed it.

The farm manager wasn't amused.

When I arrived, the deer was still lying there. I investigated the circumstances and contacted the boy's parents that evening.

The farm manager took care of one consequence immediately.

He fired the boy.

That sixteen-year-old had lost his part-time job before I ever had a chance to tell him what the court might do.

Because he was a Paulding County resident, I contacted our juvenile division. They wanted the case brought before the court.

There were three violations.

He had taken a deer with a firearm during archery season. He didn't have the required 2005 Ohio special deer permit. And he didn't have a hunting license.

I could have concentrated on one violation, but there really

wasn't much reason to do that. He had committed three separate violations, and each one was part of what had happened.

He eventually admitted all three.

The judge found him delinquent and placed him on community control until he reached eighteen. He was also committed to the juvenile detention facility at CCNO for thirty days, although that commitment was suspended as long as he stayed out of trouble.

He was ordered to obey the law, with particular emphasis on hunting laws, attend school as required, and behave at home and at school.

But one of the most immediate consequences had already happened.

He no longer had a job at Cooper Farms.

That consequence probably had as much impact on him as anything the court could impose.

Over the years, I handled a lot of juvenile violations, and I never believed every young person needed to be marched into court. A kid who made a simple mistake while fishing didn't necessarily need a judge, a probation officer and a court docket to teach him a lesson.

Sometimes a letter to the parents was enough.

But I also learned not to assume that the youngster standing in front of me was simply a youngster who had made one mistake.

The wildlife violation might be the first time I had encountered him.

It might not have been his first encounter with the law.

That was why I made it a practice to contact juvenile probation when I felt the circumstances warranted it. I wasn't trying to punish every kid I encountered. I was trying to make sure the response fit the situation.

And more than once, the probation officer on the other end of the telephone knew something about that youngster that I didn't.

Sometimes the answer was, "Handle it with the parents."

Other times the answer was immediate:

"Yes. We want him back in court."

When I heard those words, I knew I had made the right call.

Because being a wildlife officer wasn't always about writing a ticket. Sometimes it was about recognizing that the violation in front of you might be only the visible edge of a much larger problem—and knowing when it was time to let someone else take a closer look.



A Breastbone and a Few Tail Feathers

There was a time when Paulding County was known as the pheasant capital of the Midwest.

That reputation reached its peak decades ago, particularly during the 1950s and into the early 1960s. In those days, pheasants seemed to be everywhere. Farm fields provided the kind of habitat they needed, and the landscape was dotted with fence rows, grassy areas, hayfields, and other cover that gave pheasants places to nest and raise their young.

But farming changed, as it had to.

Agriculture became more efficient and more specialized. The old hayfields and alfalfa fields that had once provided excellent pheasant habitat were replaced by larger fields of corn, wheat, and soybeans. Alfalfa was often cut more frequently, which could destroy nests and young birds. Fence rows were removed so farmers could work larger fields more efficiently. Land that had once been left idle

was put into production.

Those changes made economic sense for farmers trying to remain profitable, but they weren't good for pheasants.

Over the years, pheasant numbers declined dramatically. By the time I was working as a wildlife officer, seeing a wild pheasant was no longer an everyday occurrence. The hunting opportunities that remained often involved licensed shooting preserves or public hunting areas where the Division of Wildlife released pheasants during the season.

That made the few wild birds that remained even more valuable.

On Saturday, November 15, 2003, at about 4:20 in the afternoon, I received a telephone call from the owner of a shooting preserve in Paulding County. He reported that someone had just shot a pheasant along County Road 60, east of County Road 177.

The shooting preserve was located on both sides of the road in the area where the shooting had occurred. The preserve owner had contacted the person who had shot the bird and obtained the license number of the pickup truck he was driving.

That gave me something to work with.

I followed up on the complaint the next day.

My investigation led me to the residence of the man who had been identified as the shooter. When I talked with him, he admitted that at about 4:00 p.m. the previous afternoon, he had been driving his father's pickup truck along County Road 60.

He told me that he saw a ring-necked pheasant standing approximately four and a half feet off the edge of the roadway. The bird was about thirty yards away.

He stopped the pickup.

Then he got out with his 12-gauge shotgun.

Standing near the edge of the road, he fired one shot at the pheasant and killed it. He retrieved the bird, put it in the truck, and drove away.

He had been followed by the preserve owner after the shooting.

There was one other important detail.

He admitted he did not have permission to kill the pheasant.

By the time I contacted him the following day, there wasn't much left of the evidence. He and his girlfriend had already eaten the pheasant.

When I asked what remained of the bird, he went to the trash can and came back with what was left. There was a breastbone with virtually no meat remaining on it and a few tail feathers.

It wasn't exactly the kind of evidence you would expect to see displayed in an evidence locker.

But I didn't need much more.

The important evidence was his own admission. He acknowledged that he had stopped along the roadway, gotten out of the truck, fired his 12-gauge shotgun at the pheasant, killed it, and retrieved the bird.

I wrote down his statement and read it back to him. He acknowledged that it was true and accurate and signed it.

I advised him of the violation and issued him a summons for shooting from or along the roadway.

He was cooperative throughout the investigation and had no record of any similar offenses.

The case was eventually resolved without him appearing in court. He posted a $160 bond that the court had established for that type of violation and entered a written guilty plea. The bond was forfeited, and the case was closed.

It was a relatively minor case compared with some of the wildlife violations I encountered during my career. There were no stacks of illegally taken deer, no elaborate scheme, and no dramatic confrontation.

Just one pheasant, one shotgun blast, and one decision to shoot a bird from the side of a public road.

Still, it was worth investigating.

When a county has lost most of the wild pheasants that once made it famous, every remaining bird seems a little more important. And sometimes, enforcing the law means following a truck license number, talking to a cooperative suspect, and examining the breastbone and tail feathers of a pheasant that had already become dinner.

It wasn't much of a bird left.

But it was enough to tell the story.



The Story That Didn't Make the First Book

When my first book, "The Rings of Saturn, A Game Warden's View of the Universe" was published, a man stopped at the office of West Bend Printing and Publishing Company and noticed a copy of the book sitting on the counter.

He knew Bryce Steiner, the owner of the company, and asked him a question.

"Am I in the book?"

Bryce told him that he wasn't sure.

The man thought about it and replied, "Well, there's a pretty good chance I could be. Me and my dad have done some things over the years that might be in there."

As it turned out, neither he nor his father was in the book.

But they certainly could have been.

Over the years, I had dealt with both of them on several occasions. They happened to share the same first name, a name that, as I

recall, had been passed down through several generations of their family. I'm going to leave their names out of this story, but the circumstances surrounding our final encounter are worth remembering.

The son had been a police officer in Paulding County for many years and eventually rose to the rank of chief. I respected him in that position. He was a good police officer and, as far as I knew, did a good job for the department.

But over the years, when he and his father were hunting, there were occasions when it seemed they had a little trouble remembering that the hunting regulations applied to them just as they did to everyone else.

By January 2011, there was already some history.

The father had three previous convictions in Paulding County for hunting without permission, dating back to 1997, 1998, and 2005.

The son had a previous conviction from the 1986 deer-gun season for hunting deer with the aid or use of a motor-driven conveyance.

Then came January 8, 2011—the first day of the muzzleloader deer season.

That day, Investigator Mark Weihrauch and I were working together in Paulding County because we had received complaints about hunters shooting from county roads. We had a plan. Mark would work in plain clothes in an unmarked vehicle, acting as a covert observer. I would be in uniform and available to make contact with hunters if Mark observed a violation.

Fresh snow had fallen that day, making the countryside particularly useful for anyone trying to follow what hunters had been do-

ing.

At about 2:30 that afternoon, Mark was watching a group of hunters near County Road 163 and Charloe Trail when he saw deer emerge from the woods and run northwest across the open fields.

A buck and a doe crossed the field and then crossed County Road 151.

Mark saw a gray or silver Chevrolet Suburban traveling along the roadway.

As the vehicle approached the deer, it stopped.

The passenger-side door opened.

A man got out.

Mark saw him with a muzzleloading rifle, heard the report, and saw the unmistakable black-powder smoke from the muzzle.

The man had fired from the roadway.

The deer continued across the field and disappeared into the woods.

Mark immediately contacted me by radio and gave me a description of the vehicle. It was a gray or silver Chevrolet Suburban with a registration that he had obtained. There were also school stickers on the rear window, including the name "Wayne Trace."

I ran the registration through my mobile computer and learned who owned the vehicle.

It belonged to the father.

A short time later, Mark advised me that the Suburban had turned onto County Road 138 and was heading west.

I positioned myself along the route.

When I saw the Suburban approaching, I pulled into a driveway and allowed it to pass. I then pulled back onto the road and followed.

The vehicle eventually turned onto another county road and

headed north. About a half-mile later, it pulled off the road and stopped.

I stopped behind it.

I walked up to the passenger-side window and could see a muzzleloader inside the vehicle.

The man sitting in the passenger seat was the son.

I asked him if he had just shot at a deer over on County Road 151.

"Yes," he answered.

I told him I had been called to investigate a complaint of someone shooting from the road and asked whether he would show me where he had shot.

He agreed.

I followed the Suburban back toward County Road 151. Wildlife Officer Brad Buening, who was also working in Paulding County that day, came to assist me.

When we arrived at the location, the father pointed south toward an area where several vehicles and hunters had been gathered. He said he had been standing in a field near them and had shot at a deer.

That wasn't what Mark had seen.

Mark had watched the entire event from his covert position.

He had also marked the location where the shooter had stood by placing an empty Coke Zero bottle next to the boot prints in the fresh snow.

I told the father and son that I had been advised they had been on County Road 151 and that Mark had observed the shot from the roadway.

I then asked the father to show me where he had actually stood.

He agreed.

We followed him north on County Road 151. He stopped at the same location Mark had marked with the Coke Zero bottle.

The father got out of the Suburban and pointed to the boot prints in the snow.

He said that was where he had gotten out and looked for deer tracks.

I told him that another wildlife officer had watched him shoot from that exact location.

At that point, the conversation ended.

The son said they weren't going to answer any more questions and that we were, of course, free to leave.

Before leaving, I photographed the muzzleloading rifle, the boot prints in the snow, and the location. The photographs showed exactly what Mark had described.

There were deer tracks crossing the field and road.

And there were the boot prints of the shooter standing in the roadway.

The evidence was pretty hard to argue with.

On January 11, I filed the complaints.

The father was charged with shooting at, taking, or attempting to take a wild quadruped—specifically a white-tailed deer—along, on, from, or across a public road.

The son was charged with hunting deer with the aid or use of a motor-driven conveyance.

Both were personally served with summonses to appear in Paulding County Court.

The son's case was ultimately handled by bond forfeiture. His records show a $185 fine and $77 in court costs.

The father's case was different.

He elected to take his case to trial.

On March 17, 2011, the matter came before Judge Suzanne Shuman Rister for a bench trial.

The father represented himself.

Mark testified about what he had seen that afternoon—the deer crossing the road, the Suburban stopping, the passenger door opening, the man getting out, the muzzleloader firing, and the black-powder smoke coming from the area where the man was standing.

I testified about my subsequent contact with the father and son, the location where the father showed us he had stood, and the physical evidence we had documented.

The State introduced the photograph showing the boot prints in the snow.

The father's explanation was that he had been hunting with his son, that he was the only person in the group with a gun, and that although he had fired his muzzleloader while on County Road 151, he claimed he had done so farther south, where other hunters were present.

He also testified that when they drove north on the road, he had gotten out only to look for tracks.

But the physical evidence didn't support that explanation.

The judge specifically noted that the photograph showed the boot prints in an isolated spot in the roadway. They weren't part of a set of tracks indicating that someone had been walking along the road looking for deer tracks.

They were simply the boot prints where the shooter had stood.

And Mark had seen him standing there.

Judge Rister found the State's evidence more compelling and

sufficient to establish the violation beyond a reasonable doubt.

The father was convicted of shooting at a deer along, on, from, or across a public road.

He was fined $300 and ordered to pay $95 in court costs.

There was no arrest drama.

There were no handcuffs.

Nobody was hauled off to jail.

There were wildlife violations, citations, a court case, testimony, photographs, fresh boot prints in the snow—and a judge who ultimately decided that the evidence told the story better than the defendant's explanation.

Somehow, though, word of the case eventually reached Ohio Outdoor News.

The editor contacted me because he had apparently been told a somewhat different version of what had happened.

He had been led to believe that the son, who was a police chief, had been arrested by wildlife officers, put in handcuffs, and taken to jail.

That would certainly have made for a more sensational newspaper story.

I explained that it simply wasn't true.

The son had been cited. He posted his bond, and that case was resolved by bond forfeiture. The father had taken his case to trial and had been convicted.

That was the story.

Nothing more dramatic was necessary.

Years later, when I think back to that conversation at West Bend Printing and Publishing Company, I have to smile.

The man had wondered whether he was in my first book.

He wasn't.

But he had been right about one thing.

There was a pretty good chance he could have been.

Because over a career spanning more than three decades, I encountered a lot of people who occasionally forgot that the hunting laws applied to everyone.

Even a police chief.

Even his father.

And sometimes, those are the stories that stay with you—not because the violation itself was extraordinary, but because of the people involved, the circumstances surrounding it, and the simple fact that the evidence in the snow told the story better than anyone else could.

A story worth sharing while looking "Beyond The Rings Of Saturn, A Game Warden's Second View of the Universe."



Boots on the Ground — Real Game Warden Work

I suppose you could say I was headed toward becoming a game warden long before I ever knew what a game warden was.

I grew up with a fishing pole in my hand and, at a fairly young age, a shotgun in my hands as well. My dad and my brother and I hunted squirrels, rabbits, pheasants and quail together. Those hunts were about more than putting game in the freezer. They were time spent together in the woods and fields, learning where the animals lived, how to read the countryside and, perhaps most importantly, developing an appreciation for the outdoors.

Fishing naturally went along with it.

By the time I was in high school, I had developed such an interest in hunting, fishing and wildlife that I sometimes carried an Outdoor Life magazine to school along with my textbooks. During study hall, I'd quietly open the magazine and become engrossed in one of those great outdoor adventure stories.

Before I knew it, the bell would ring.

Study hall was over.

I had completely forgotten about whatever I was supposed to be studying.

Those stories only reinforced something I already knew: I wanted to work outdoors. I wanted to spend my life around wildlife and the places where wildlife lived.

That wasn't immediately what I did.

Within a couple of weeks after graduating from high school, I went to work at Port Columbus International Airport for an air freight company. I eventually became a dock foreman and later served as acting night operations manager. I was even offered an opportunity to become station manager in Dayton.

It was a good career opportunity.

But it wasn't my career.

I had that nagging feeling that if I accepted the promotion and continued down that road, someday I'd look back and wonder why I hadn't followed the other path—the one that had been in my mind since I was a kid.

I still wanted the outdoors.

I wanted wildlife.

I wanted hunting and fishing to be more than something I did on my days off. I wanted to do something that would help preserve those opportunities for other people.

I discovered that The Ohio State University offered a degree program in wildlife management and fisheries. Wildlife management caught my attention, and after being out of high school for four years, I entered The Ohio State University.

I went thirteen straight quarters and earned my degree in

wildlife management.

After graduation, I worked as a field research assistant for The Ohio State University's Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. From there, I went to work for the Ohio Division of Wildlife as a wildlife conservation aide at the Resthaven Wildlife Area work unit in northwest Ohio, in Wildlife District Two.

About a year and a half into my wildlife career, an opportunity came along to apply for a position as a state game protector, which was what the position was called then.

I applied.

I was accepted into the game protector training academy.

When I graduated from the academy in September 1981, I eventually found myself assigned to Paulding County, where I took over the reins from retiring game protector Dan Griffiths.

And that's when my real career began.

It was a very different world.

When I started, game protectors worked directly under the district manager. There were no field supervisors or unit supervisors as there would be later. The district manager conducted our evaluations, approved our vacations and handled much of the administrative paperwork.

Our equipment reflected the times.

We carried revolvers.

We carried large canisters of mace.

We wore Stetson hats—a straw hat in the summer and a felt hat in the winter. There were no Division-issued ball caps.

We didn't have body armor.

We didn't have cell phones.

We didn't have portable radios.

Our patrol cars didn't have air conditioning, and there was no four-wheel drive. If you were lucky, there might be an AM radio in the car.

And when it came to paperwork, there were no computers or printers. Reports were typed on typewriters or written by hand. If you needed a copy, you used carbon paper.

You learned to make that second sheet count.

Over the years, nearly everything changed.

The revolvers eventually gave way to semi-automatic pistols. We were issued shotguns and, later, rifles. Body armor became part of our equipment. Communications evolved from virtually nothing to sophisticated statewide radio systems.

First came the bag phones, then flip phones, and eventually smartphones.

We went from handwritten reports and carbon paper to computers in the patrol cars.

The MARCS radio system—the Multi-Agency Radio Communication System—allowed us to communicate with virtually every level of law enforcement across Ohio. We could work with county, municipal and state agencies in ways that simply weren't possible when I started.

The computers in our cars gave us access to databases. We could check licenses, look up previous violations and receive information about wanted vehicles or people with outstanding warrants.

Near the end of my career, I was even issued a body camera.

When I think about how much changed during those years, it almost seems like I worked in two different professions.

But I didn't.

The technology changed.

The equipment changed.

The training changed.

The title changed from game protector to wildlife officer.

The law-enforcement training became much more comprehensive, eventually incorporating the same basic peace-officer training required of other Ohio law-enforcement officers, followed by specialized wildlife-law training.

And the training never really stopped. There was continuing in-service training, new equipment to learn, new laws and new techniques.

But underneath all of that, the job remained remarkably simple.

Get out of the car.

Walk into the woods.

Walk along the river.

Check the hunter.

Check the fisherman.

Look for violations.

Talk to people.

Protect the resource.

That's what I came to think of as boots-on-the-ground game warden work.

I used to joke with my friend and fellow wildlife officer Brad St. Clair, who was assigned to neighboring Van Wert County, that I wasn't a cyber warden.

"I'm boots on the ground," I'd tell him. "This is old-school game warden work."

Brad always seemed to enjoy hearing me say that.

Brad and I worked together on some good cases over the years, and I always enjoyed working with him. He was one of those officers

who took great pride in his equipment. His patrol car was always clean, polished and waxed. His uniform was always neat. His equipment was spotless.

I was a little different.

If I needed to walk through a muddy field to check a hunter, I walked through the muddy field.

If I needed to walk along a riverbank to check fishermen, I walked along the riverbank.

My boots got muddy.

That didn't bother me in the least.

In fact, I was kind of proud of it.

To me, muddy boots meant I had been where the people I was checking were. I had walked the fields, woods and riverbanks. I was, in the truest sense of the phrase, boots on the ground.

Brad, on the other hand, had a solution for everything.

If we were checking hunters in wet or muddy conditions, he'd often wear rubber boots. When we got back to his car, he could remove those boots before climbing inside.

I generally just walked back in whatever I had been wearing.

Brad would look at me.

It was a look that didn't require any explanation.

I knew exactly what he was thinking.

Then there was Brad's cat.

Brad had a pet cat at home that he liked very much. But apparently, his affection for cats didn't prevent him from having a very specific superstition about them.

If we were driving down the road and a cat crossed in front of us, Brad would immediately take off his hat, spit into it, put the hat back on and continue driving.

The first time I saw him do it, I looked over at him.

"What was that about?"

"Cat crosses your path, you spit in your hat," he explained. "It's for good luck."

He went on to explain that the tradition was supposedly intended for a black cat, but Brad wasn't taking any chances. He did it regardless of the color of the cat.

He was covering all the bases.

The next time a cat crossed the road, I figured I might as well do the same thing.

After all, why take chances?

That little ritual somehow stuck with me.

Even today, if my wife Sharon and I are riding in the car and a cat crosses the road in front of us, I'll take off my hat, spit in it and put it back on.

"Cat crosses your path," I'll say. "Spit in your hat. It's for good luck."

I suppose I'm afraid not to do it.

Brad wasn't the only young officer I had the opportunity to work with. As a field training officer, or FTO, I was assigned to work with new cadets after they graduated from the academy.

That was one of the parts of my career I enjoyed the most.

I could share with a new officer the things I'd learned through years of experience—how to approach a situation, how to talk to people, how to read a field, how to recognize something that didn't look quite right and how to handle the many little situations that never appear in an academy textbook.

But the funny thing about being an FTO was that the learning went both ways.

Those new officers came out of the academy with a better understanding of technology than many of us old-timers had. They understood computers, phones and new electronic systems.

When I couldn't quite figure out how to make some piece of technology do what I wanted it to do, I could call Brad.

"Brad, how do I get this thing to do this?"

He'd explain it.

And usually, it worked.

Officers like Brad went on to have very successful careers. Some transferred to other parts of the state. Some eventually moved into supervisory positions. I've watched several of the young officers I helped train develop into highly respected wildlife officers and leaders within the Division.

That makes me proud.

Maybe that's another part of what a career is supposed to be about.

You start out learning from those who came before you.

You gain experience.

Then, if you're fortunate, you get the opportunity to pass some of that knowledge along to the people who come after you.

And somewhere along the way, they teach you a few things, too.

Looking back now, I am particularly glad I began my career when I did.

I got to see the old way of doing things.

I got to experience the transition.

And I got to see wildlife law enforcement move from revolvers, Stetson hats, carbon paper and primitive radios to computers, MARCS, body cameras, sophisticated communications and modern law-enforcement technology.

The equipment became better.

The training became more extensive.

Officer safety improved tremendously.

The job became more connected and more high-tech.

But through all of those changes, one thing never changed.

We were game wardens.

The official title might have been game protector when I started and wildlife officer later on. The equipment might have changed. The uniforms changed. The vehicles changed. The technology changed.

But to the people we encountered in the woods, fields, marshes and along the rivers, we were still the game warden.

And when I look back beyond the rings of Saturn and take that second view of my career, that's what stands out most.

Not the computers.

Not the radios.

Not the body cameras.

Not even the guns or the patrol cars.

It was the boots.

The muddy boots walking through a field.

The boots along a riverbank.

The boots in a marsh before daylight.

The boots following a trail through the woods.

The boots that carried me from one case to the next for more than three decades.

Technology may have changed the way we did the job, but it never changed why we did it.

We were still out there, boots on the ground, protecting Ohio's wildlife and the opportunities that had meant so much to me since I was a boy with a fishing pole, a shotgun and an Outdoor Life maga-

zine tucked inside my schoolbooks.

That's what real game warden work was—and, in its own way, always will be.



There Are No Fish Under the Ice

During more than three decades as a game warden, I heard a lot of fishing stories.

Some were about big fish. Others were about the ones that got away. Some involved unusual catches. Some were about strange things that happened on the water. And every once in a while, one would come along that was just too good to forget.

This is one of those stories.

In fact, it may be one of the best I ever heard—and one worth retelling.

An ice fisherman cut a hole in the ice to catch some fish.

When he put his fishing line into the hole, he heard a loud voice say,

"THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE THERE!"

So he got up, moved a short distance away, cut another hole in the ice, and lowered in his line.

Once again, he heard the loud voice say,

"THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE THERE!"

So he got up again, moved a little farther away, cut another hole, and lowered in his line.

The voice said, even louder,

"THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE THERE EITHER!"

"Who is that?" the ice fisherman asked, looking around. "Is that you, God?"

"NO," said the voice. "THIS IS THE MANAGER OF THE ICE RINK!"

BEYOND THE RINGS OF SATURN



What does a game warden remember?

Beyond the laws enforced and the miles traveled lies a lifetime of stories—stories about people, places, unexpected encounters, and moments that leave a lasting impression. In this second collection of true stories, Duane A. Bailey looks beyond the badge to revisit the experiences that helped shape his more than three decades with the Ohio Division of Wildlife. From the fields, woods, wetlands, and waterways of northwest Ohio come tales of humor and heartbreak, challenges and surprises, kindness and human nature. Reflective, entertaining, and rooted in a lifelong love of the outdoors, these stories offer another glimpse into the life of a wildlife officer and the memories that remain long after the career ends.

Duane A. Bailey spent more than three decades as a Wildlife Officer with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife. During his career, he worked the fields, woods, wetlands, rivers, and back roads of northwest Ohio, where he encountered far more than wildlife. His work brought him face-to-face with people, unexpected situations, humor, challenges, and stories that stayed with him long after the badge was set aside.

Now retired, Bailey continues to enjoy the outdoors with his wife, Sharon, and remains a keen observer of the world around him. In this second collection of stories, he takes another look at the people, places, experiences, and lessons that shaped a life in wildlife law enforcement.

With a storyteller's eye and a game warden's perspective, Bailey shares memories as they happened—sometimes serious, sometimes humorous, but always drawn from real life.

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