

# NOTES *from the Streams*

## Instructing the youth

When people think of the duties of a Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO), most would envision law enforcement related duties such as enforcing fishing license regulations, boating-under-the-influence regulations, and boating safety regulations. One of the responsibilities we have that most people may not realize is education. Every WCO is a certified boating safety instructor, and we hold classes on safe boating every year. We also educate the public on laws, fishing techniques, fish identification, reptile and amphibian identification, and more.

Recently, WCO Scott J. Christman and I attended the Annual Monroe County Youth Field Day, which hosts about 150 to 200 children at the Trexler Scout Reservation. Children ages 8- to 14-years-old were invited to attend and learn about a variety of outdoor activities including trapping, firearms safety, fishing,

and boating. WCO Christman and I were stationed at one of the lakes to assist in teaching the children how to paddle a canoe. We started with a brief overview of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), then moved to paddling safety and why a proper fitting life jacket is important, and finished with instructing them how to paddle a canoe. Then, we fit each child with a life jacket, went to the beach, and assigned them to canoes in groups of two or three.

We had a wide range of experience from the kids, from never paddling before to going on kayak trips with their parents. It was a lot of fun to see the kids that had no experience try to navigate a canoe and watch them gain confidence. Throughout the day, we had 10 groups of 10 to 20 kids paddling around the lake without anyone tipping or getting wet. We had a few canoes run into the docks, which resulted in a lot of laughter from the parents watching from

shore. All in all, it was a great day with lots of smiles. I hope we brought a new generation of boaters into the sport of paddling.—*Alec S. DeLong, Southern Monroe and Northern Carbon counties.*

## It's like fish in a barrel

Being a WCO has its challenges at times. However, every now and then, there are moments that stand out and make the challenges all worth it.

Earlier this year, I attended an event called "Fishin Frenzy." This event was put together by Greene County Parks and Recreation, and it allows children to fish for stocked trout at the county-owned water park. When I heard about the opportunity I thought, "Where can I find a better opportunity to promote catching fish to young anglers than a stocked swimming pool full of trout?"

When I first arrived at the event, everyone was excited. As I started to walk around the pool, I saw children of all ages. Many children were taking photos with their first fish catch, then their second, third, and so on. I brought my tape measure to measure the fish they caught. I was lucky enough to measure numerous fish caught by one 9 year old boy whose smile got bigger every time I told him he beat his personal best.

After taking several laps around the pool, I felt slightly jealous, because, like most, the first time I fished I was not able to catch such beautiful fish—let alone several. It was a great environment for first time anglers. I will never forget the moment "like shooting fish in a barrel" came to life watching young anglers catch trout out of a public swimming pool.—*WCO Brian T. Guenin, Greene and Southern Washington counties.*



photo-WCO Alec S. DeLong

## Searching for Brook Trout

One of the enjoyable things we get to do as WCOs is tag along with biologists and offer some help as they sample streams for Brook Trout. In August, we spent a few days in Schuylkill County sampling streams that were never (to my knowledge) electrofished. While the habitat looked great on a few of the streams, the low pH was a limiting factor for Brook Trout survival and reproduction. Unfortunately, we did not find a healthy population where I was hopeful we would.

This changed on the second day as we sampled an extremely small stream that ran nearly parallel with a power line. The stream had little overhead cover to provide shade and small pockets that held little water. Yet to my surprise, we found a thriving Brook Trout population existing in the entire stretch we sampled.

You never know what the water holds, whether it looks like a drainage ditch or a pristine mountain stream. I would like to thank the PFBC's team of biologists who invest their time and effort to find these streams and populations, so we can protect the waterways and develop a better understanding of the trout reproduction occurring in Pennsylvania's streams.—*WCO Troy W. Merrell, Eastern Schuylkill County.*

## Raining snakes

I get several calls every year from people complaining that a snake or a family of snakes have taken up residence under their porch or somewhere in the yard. Occasionally, the complaint is about a snake that is inside the house. My most memorable snake call came from a frantic woman who said that there were several giant snakes residing in her bedroom. I am not afraid of snakes, but I could empathize with the woman since I also prefer a snake-free environment while sleeping. I arrived at the woman's house to find her sitting on the porch waiting for me. The woman immediately led me into the

house to the bedroom, but she refused to enter the room herself and stood just outside the door. It looked like a normal bedroom. I asked her where she last saw the snakes. She pointed to the ceiling. I looked up and noticed a typical white painted drywall ceiling. However, just above the bed, a section of drywall was missing and was replaced by a 4x8 transparent piece of plastic. Sometime in the recent past, the roof above the bedroom leaked, allowing rainwater to drip onto the bedroom ceiling, destroying that piece of drywall. The landlord repaired the roof, removed the damaged drywall, and stapled the piece of plastic there until proper repairs could be made. So, essentially, the plastic acted as a 4x8 window into the attic. Unfortunately, for him and his tenant, not only was the attic dark and scary, but was also a favored hangout for about a six large Eastern Ratsnakes. This poor woman was in bed, looking directly up at the snakes slowly crawling across the piece of plastic directly above her, terrified that at any moment, the plastic would tear allowing the snakes to fall through onto her and her bed, literally raining snakes.—*WCO Scott D. Opfer, Fayette County.*

## Oh yeah?

While on patrol at one of the local state parks, I was conversing with park staff in the park office when I heard an individual enter the outer office and ask the Administrative Assistant at the desk what type of fish were in the lake. She answered his question and asked if he had a Pennsylvania fishing license.

"No, and I am not getting one. I tried to get one on my phone, but I guess I do not have a good enough signal from here," said the man.

"Well sir, you do need a license to fish in Pennsylvania," said the Administrative Assistant.

"You only have to 'attempt' to buy a license. The attempt is good enough," said the man.

"That is not true, sir," said the Administrative Assistant.

"It is. I know the law," said the man.

It was at this point I opened the door separating us, revealing my presence. "I assure you she is correct," I told the gentleman.

"What are they going to do if they catch me?" he asked, shrugging.

"Well, they is me, and if you insist on fishing without purchasing a license, I will be issuing you a citation."

"Yeah? How much is the fine?"

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Queens," replied the man.

"\$227.25 with court costs and, quite possibly, your fishing gear being seized as evidence," I replied.

"Where can I buy a license?" the man asked.

I directed him to the nearest place just a few miles down the road.—*WCO T. Curt Tereschak, Southern Pike and Northeast Monroe counties.*

## Be sure before you jump overboard

While working as a WCO along the Delaware River, you never know what the next call is going to be. One day during the summer, a call came across the radio for a marine rescue. This is not an unusual occurrence, but the cause for this particular rescue turned out to be quite interesting. A boater floating down the river claimed to see an alligator swimming in the river next to him. He was so shocked and scared that he jumped out of the boat and tried to swim away. Not being a strong swimmer, the boater clung to the boat and continued to float downstream. While all of this was occurring, a local Fire Department had launched their rescue boats and continued upriver to the location of the boater. The "alligator," which caused the man to jump out of his boat, turned out to be just a tree. Luckily, the man was rescued and the day turned out to be a good training exercise.—*WCO Peter N. Labosh, Northern Bucks County.*