

Notes from the Streams

Mole tale

While on boat patrol at Lake Arthur, I was flagged down by an excited family who proudly stated that they had rescued a baby beaver from the middle of the lake. I pulled alongside and discovered that the drowning baby “beaver” was actually a large mole that had obviously wandered off course. When I pointed this out, the family’s excitement turned to confusion and then to embarrassment. Some people really do need to spend more time outdoors. They would be amazed at the remarkable efforts of some of nature’s smallest creatures.—WCO Joseph Waskin, Butler County.

Unbelievable story

On a recent day off, I took a canoe trip down the Youghiogheny River. I observed three men in rain gear and yellow gloves spraying a black substance on the stream bank. I canoed over to them and asked what they were doing. The man holding the hose told me he was spraying his bank with human fecal material and asked if I sprayed my stream bank.

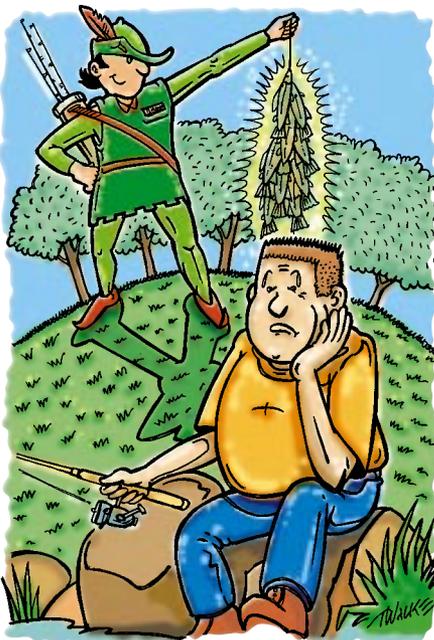
When I informed him that I was a waterways conservation officer, he told me he was having trouble with his septic system and asked, “You don’t think I was going to put it into the sewage system, do you?” I told him I would return in a few days to let him know how to handle the violation.

When I returned two days later, he told me (in front of witnesses) that a fish was stuck in the hose and he was only trying to return it to the river. Even the witness told him to pay the fine because his story was too unreal to believe.—WCO James Ansell, Fayette County.

New math

As a DWCO trainee in the lower Montgomery County, I learned the difference

between our Title 58 Pennsylvania Code for Fish and Boat Commission Rules and Regulations and the real world of field work. I have discovered that some anglers who have physical contact with the waters of Skippack Creek are afflicted with amazing short-term neurological and cognitive disorders. Counting creel limits for trout for some has become a thesis for new combinatorial algorithms. Here is axiom #1 (good neighbor corollary): Eight legal-sized trout can be counted as the 16 that you caught with eight on your stringer and eight that you gave to your friend for his stringer. Axiom #2 (Robin Hood corollary):



Catch any amount more than eight of legal-sized trout and give the balance to the poor anglers who have not caught any yet. Axiom #3 (Biblical loaves and fishes corollary): Counting to eight becomes harder to achieve when in the presence of a uniformed WCO or DWCO. Somehow that ninth trout, or maybe tenth or eleventh trout, surprisingly appears on the stringer or in the creel when asked to count your claimed “seven” trout. I know that I’m “wet” behind the ears, but I’m sure that my colleagues will show me how to catch on to the new math. There’s got to be something in that water.—DWCO Chris D’Ascenzo, Southern Montgomery County.

No license

Before my assignment to Lackawanna County, I was in Cameron County. Seconds after stocking a portion of the Por-

tage Branch of the Sinnemahoning, an osprey swooped down and snatched a trout from the stream. DWCO Colwell and I were unable to determine if the culprit had a fishing license. We waited a few minutes to see if it would return, but it never did.—WCO Walter A. Buckman, Lackawanna County.

“The Sleepy Old River” poem

The sleepy old river is full of fun,
but it can be a silent killer of everyone.
The old saying “It is better to be safe than sorry” is true,
because if you don’t heed this warning,
you will surely turn blue.”—DWCO Terry Bowersox, Union/Snyder counties.

Highlight of their day

Early in January last year, I was conducting a boat inspection at the Falmouth Access on the Susquehanna River. After completing my inspection of one particular boat, the two gentlemen and I engaged in some small talk about the walleye fishing/stocking on the river. Both fishermen praised the Fish and Boat Commission’s efforts with the walleye stocking program as they displayed their seven walleyes. Most of these fish were over 18 inches, with a few reaching the 22-inch mark.

Suddenly, my attention was drawn to what appeared to be the sound of heavy raindrops hitting the pavement. I felt something hit the top of my right hand, then my left shoulder. As I glanced at my hand, to my surprise it wasn’t water, but droppings from a seagull. While trying to keep my composure, a smile came to my face as both men looked toward me with a straight face. One of the gentlemen handed me a rag and joked about his father having the same experience while walking on the boardwalk at Atlantic City. As I thanked the men for the use of their towel, I ended my conversation and proceeded to leave the area, knowing that this incident would be the highlight of their day, not the seven walleyes they caught.—WCO Terrance L. Kane, Lebanon/Southern Dauphin counties.

Improvised tackle

Since I started this job, one of the things that amazes me is the vast array of improvised fishing equipment that I find people using along our waterways here in the Southeast Region. One of the most common is the “Philly Fly Rod,” simply a length of monofilament wrapped around a beer

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or soda can, with a weight and hook at the end. An angler proficient with one of these can cast it nearly as far as his counterparts who use conventional tackle. One evening while off duty, I was fishing for channel cats in the Schuylkill River with DWCOs Roger and Fran Lauderback, and I decided to see for myself how well the “Philly” would work. To Roger and Fran’s great amusement (and disgust), I managed not only to outfish them, but also to catch the largest fish of the evening, a 23.5-inch channel catfish!—WCO Robert W. Croll, Delaware County.

Thick ice?

I was patrolling a local lake in late February during unseasonably warm weather. The ice on the lake had melted away from the shoreline and was turning to slush. I saw two fishermen taking ice fishing equipment out of their vehicle. I told them that I thought the ice was unsafe and that it wasn’t a good idea to go out on the ice. One fisherman told me that he had been ice fishing since before I was born, and that he was a better judge when the ice was thick enough to go ice fishing. I again recommended that they not go out on the ice, and was again told that they knew better. Five minutes later, I heard someone shouting for help. Both fishermen had gone through the ice about 25 feet from shore. I contacted the police dispatch center and requested assistance, and they dispatched the local fire department and an ambulance. The fire department arrived and used a ladder to rescue both anglers. The anglers were checked by the ambulance crew and needed no treatment other than dry clothes and a warm-up. Once I knew that they were in good condition, I couldn’t resist asking

them when they thought I would know as much about ice conditions as they know.—WCO Gregory A. Jacobs, Northern Beaver County.

Unusual bass story

When on my way in to check licenses at a local lake, I encountered two fishermen walking out to the parking lot. I stopped to ask them for their fishing licenses, and as one of them turned to show me the license pinned to his hat, the tail of a bass swung around from behind him. I took the fish and the person’s license and told him that I would meet him at his vehicle to settle. They left and I got a bag out of the trunk of the car and tried to put the fish into it. It was dry and would not go in, so I grabbed a bottle of spring water and pored it over the fish. As I did this, the gills started to work, so I jumped into my car and took the fish back to the lake.



I tried to revive the fish, but it only floated on its side. Another fisherman was watching me do this and asked if he could try. I said that he could, and he went out on a rock and retrieved the fish, and started to move it gently back and forth to force water through its gills.

After several minutes, another bass swam by and turned to look at the fish. It then swam up to the injured fish and touched its nose to the back of the man’s hand. It then swam a short distance away, and when the fisherman let go, the bass began to swim away. The other one accompanied it toward deeper water.—WCO Raymond J. Borkowski, Northern Washington/Southern Beaver counties.

Strange calls

At the regional office we receive some strange calls throughout the year. Recently

one caller asked if it is true that peacocks would chase away rattlesnakes from his property. Other calls have concerned alligators in the Ohio River and piranhas in Lake Rowena. The calls may be strange, but they sure keep things interesting.—Emil Svetahor, Assistant Supervisor, Southwest Region.

Missed the “Point”

Over the years, we as an agency have been pressing the point about boating and alcohol use. Our publicity campaigns have stressed the point that drinking and boating are a major factor in many boating accidents.

Recently, I investigated a boating accident that occurred in the Three Rivers area of Pittsburgh. A man and his girlfriend had spent the day boating and ended up at a recreational complex on the Monongahela River. After partying there for two to three hours, he and his girlfriend left the park to head home. Home was on the Allegheny River. He proceeded down the Monongahela River, missed his turn at The Point in Pittsburgh (probably the largest intersection in the state), and continued down the Ohio River until he collided with the Lock and Dam at Emsworth.

Yes, he missed *both* points!—Michael B. Wheale, Northern Allegheny County.

Give it a try

I was recently shown a picture of a large channel catfish held for the camera by personnel at Marsh Creek State Park, Chester County. One employee was holding the 33-inch, 22-pounder in the photograph, taken in July. While working near the main boat launch, employees found the fish floating. Although the fish was found dead, it should provide incentive to anglers at the 535-acre state park lake looking for its big brother. Commission research has shown that the lake is doing well and is growing some very large fish. Give it a try!—WCO Donald I. Lauver, Jr., Northern Chester County.

Squirrely details

Going home from patrol I usually pass through a wooded park in the center of Waynesburg College. The park contains many oak trees that must be 80 to 100 years old, which produce a lot of acorns and therefore attract a lot of squirrels. On this particular day I noticed three boys, each with a fishing rod in hand and each standing behind an oak tree trying to conceal him-

self. I decided that this needs further observation because there was no waterway around for at least two miles. After observing for a while, one of the “anglers” spotted me. The boys reeled in their lines and walked to my vehicle. I asked the boys what they were fishing for, and one boy replied, “We weren’t hunting for the squirrels; we were using acorns as bait and fishing for them.” Just about the time the boy finished explaining this new method of fishing, one of the other boys read the decal on the state vehicle and turned to the others to say, “It’s the fish warden, not the game warden, and we don’t have fishing licenses.” As the boys stood there in awe, and after I gathered my thoughts, I explained to them that they might find that fishing for fish might be safer for them and for the squirrels.—WCO Erik P. Shellgren, Greene County.

Magic bait

While fishing on a small lake in the Northeast Region, we ran into a slight problem. The fish simply would not bite. Neither I or the dozen or so anglers around were able to catch a single fish. Drastic action was required, so I broke open a can of whole-kernel corn. Quickly I landed two fine trout. As I looked around, they turned out to be the only two fish taken so far that day. Being a courteous angler, I offered some of the magic bait to a gentleman fishing next to me. He accepted a handful and asked if it was any good. I replied that I had just landed two trout with it. He then smiled and proceeded to eat the handful of corn. All I could do was smile.—WCO David G. Kanaski, Northern Wayne County.

Positive identification

The Fish and Boat Code states that, in addition to a fishing license, the holder of the license must produce other positive means of identification. In some cases, fishermen have saved old drivers’ licenses, employee identification cards, and high school or college identification cards with their photos. This has eased their fears of losing current and valid identification while fishing. In addition, it has also minimized the amount of time I take from their fishing while checking their identification.

Not everyone carries verifiable identification. I have been presented with parole and probation papers, one tattoo, three phone calls to a local county prison (“Call

them. They know who I am.”), and one bill of sale from an auto parts dealer in Decatur, Alabama. The identification in these cases did not assure me that the fines would be paid, so further investigation was required.—WCO David R. Keller, Adams/Northern York counties.

Water we doin’ in a canoe?

Two weeks and two canoe patrols later, here’s the score: Water, 2, WCOs, 0. There are times when it seems that if I didn’t have bad luck, well, then I’d have no luck at all. Here’s a thumbnail sketch; you decide.

French Creek, Crawford County: While checking canoeists, my Southcentral Crawford/Eastern Mercer counties counterpart innocently maneuvers our canoe in such a manner to soak my field glasses, flashlight, and me. Additionally, my quick exit caused not only my clothing to get wet, but also my sinking thigh-deep into the creek’s bottom. Muddy WCOs get no respect. Trust me on this!

Tionesta Creek, Forest County: While orienting our new Forest County officer, the officer attempts to drown his guide (me), and apparently himself, by capsizing our canoe after hitting an “almost”



submerged tree. Casualties were, again, my just dried and cleaned field glasses and a camera, pager, paperwork, law books, lunch, and other relevant items. All items were found and returned to service, and lunch was still edible. Guess not all my luck is bad.—WCO Mark T. Kerr, Western Crawford County.

Best-kept secret

I was on foot, walking the 2 1/2 miles to patrol a remote reservoir in Cambria County. About a mile from where I had to leave my patrol vehicle, an unusual reflection of sunshine caught my eye. I made my way through the woods and down to the stream. When I got to the stream, I found a lone fly fisherman. He was startled when I made my introduction. When I asked him if he was having any luck, he asked me not to talk so loudly. He told me, “This stream is the best-kept secret in Cambria County.” I checked his license and whispered, “Good luck.”—WCO Christopher D. McDevitt, Cambria County.

Rush hour

After experiencing rush-hour traffic through several previous jobs in New York, Miami, and Philadelphia, it is an experience I just as soon leave to others. I must be getting spoiled as a WCO in Northcentral Pennsylvania. I recently caught myself complaining about the rush-hour traffic one afternoon in the northern tier of my district along Pine Creek. A grand total of two pickups, a Jeep, and three cars had passed by in that hour, and all of them waved hello. You can’t see it, but I am smiling as I write this.—WCO Tom Nunamacher, Clinton County.

Overdue thanks

It is the middle of winter, and I am planning my spring trout stocking in Franklin and Eastern Fulton counties. For several stockings, I receive two or more trucks in a single day. Almost all sections of the approved trout streams open to the public will receive some trout. This enormous undertaking is possible only through the unselfish assistance of many volunteers. Some of the regular helpers in my district are Crawford Eberly, Bruce Eckenrod, Wilbur Armstrong, and Glenn Bricker. These staunch men are there every stocking day and know all the stops (sometimes with a little more precision than my memory allows). They also endure the necessity of keeping inseason dates confidential as Commission policy requires, often causing fishing acquaintances much anguish. With this stream note, I am extending a long-overdue thank-you to all the helpers, bucket carriers, float-box operators, and road safety guards who make trout fishing more interesting and rewarding for all the trout anglers of these streams.—WCO Jan C. Caveney, Franklin/Eastern Fulton counties.