



Just when you think you've seen it all

As a Waterways Conservation Officer for the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, I spend a lot of time patrolling the Commonwealth's waters by vehicle, boat and on foot. These patrols, depending on the district, are often conducted in urban areas, rural settings and remote wooded locations. As a result, I never know what I may encounter during these patrols. Just when you think you've seen it all, something else happens and takes that thought away.

Such was the case when I was recently patrolling the northern part of Clarion County. Did you ever see a Siamese tree?—WCO Gregory A. Pochron, Clarion, Butler and Armstrong counties.

photo—WCO Gregory A. Pochron



Siamese tree, Clarion County

Listen to your friends

As a Waterways Conservation Officer, we are always checking with anglers to make sure they have a current and clearly displayed Pennsylvania fishing license. Sometimes, we have to use our binoculars for a closer look. One day, I observed several anglers wading and fishing underneath the Mifflin Bridge

on the Juniata River, Juniata County. I could see several anglers fishing. As I approached by vehicle, one angler went from fishing to instantly becoming a swimmer. He didn't have shorts or swimwear on, but he was no longer holding a fishing rod when he stood up from the water. I got out of the vehicle and asked everyone to hold up a fishing license and all did except for my swimmer. He said he wasn't fishing, and I asked him if he always goes swimming wearing jeans. He came to shore and I explained to him that if I had to go get his rod out of the water, he would be getting some additional fines. After knowing the jig was up, he waded out and got his rod. His friends had warned him to get a license. "Listen to your friends," I told him.—WCO Richard D. Morder, Perry and Juniata Counties.

Slip sliding away

While patrolling the Schuylkill River alongside Valley Forge National Park, Chester County, I experienced an embarrassing situation. As a new Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO), I pride myself on always wearing a clean, sharp looking uniform. On this particular day, soon after Hurricane Irene and record rains had hit the area, I found myself patrolling alongside the Betzwood Bridge boat access area. Earlier in the week while on boat patrol, I saw several kids fishing for smallmouth bass under the old bridge. I decided to check out the spot from the riverbank. I parked my patrol vehicle alongside the trees and thick underbrush lining the river bank and hiked into the woods along the river toward the old bridge. Dry river mud lined the entire riverbank. At least, I thought it was dry. I no sooner took a step toward the river's edge, when my boots flew out

from under me and I slid 6 to 10 feet down the river bank on my back. My slide was neither graceful nor smooth. Fortunately for this WCO, there was no one to see my slip, fall and slide. After recovering from my spill, I stealthily approached my parked patrol vehicle, quickly surveyed the surrounding access area, saw the coast was clear, grabbed a plastic trash bag out of the vehicle to cover the seat and quickly slid my muddy self into the patrol vehicle without a single witness. What lesson did I learn on this particular patrol? Always carry a spare uniform and plastic trash bag, and remember that the nature of river mud is always slippery.—WCO Daniel J. Sharer, Southwestern Montgomery, Western Philadelphia and Northern Lancaster counties.

A grand day out

I was observing anglers after stocking a local waterway, and I began focusing on two particular individuals. Both were in their later years and enjoying a day out fishing in a small boat. Then, I observed the angler nearest to the back of the boat set his hook and start working his catch.

After working the line 10 to 15 minutes, the other angler in the boat was able to land a big trout in a small trout net that they had in the boat. It was funny to watch, because the trout was twice the size of the net and was hard to get into the netting. I was happy that neither of the elderly men fell overboard in their excitement. I will never forget their laughter and boyish grins.

When they came in, I spoke with these two anglers, and a small crowd began to assemble to see the big trout. You could tell that both men were having a good time and enjoying a great day of fishing.—WCO David W. Decker, Tioga County.



I'm just practicing

Recently, I was patrolling an area where there is a constant litter problem and no-license violations. As I was driving down the road, I passed an angler who turned and waved at me, then turned back to his fishing. I returned his friendly wave. Then, I realized I didn't see this individual's license displayed, so I turned my vehicle around and parked it. I walked up to the gentleman and asked how the fishing was. He said it wasn't very good yet, but he was only practicing his "catch-and-release" technique until he could get his license. I informed the man that he couldn't practice without a license.

Although this was a new excuse for me, I thought I would practice my penmanship, so I issued a citation for fishing without a license.—WCO Chad E. Doyle, Southcentral Crawford and Eastern Mercer counties.

I just can't be certain anymore

Over the years, I have occasionally encountered anglers and swimmers who claim that they had to flee from their favorite fishing or swimming holes due to copperheads or rattlesnakes swimming in the water near them. My response has always been the same. "Copperheads and rattlesnakes do not like to swim. What you probably saw was a northern water snake which does look a lot like a copperhead and would be aggressive enough to approach you but is not poisonous." Unfortunately, I can no longer respond this way due to a recent fishing trip with Deputy

Waterways Conservation
Officer (DWCO)

Brian Miller.

DWCO
Miller was
maneuvering
his boat from

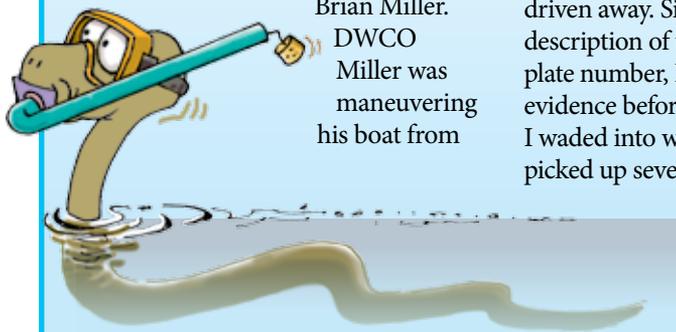


illustration-Jeff Decker

one fishing spot to another when he noticed what appeared to be a large snake swimming along the surface of the water, approaching the center of the channel. At this point, the lake we were on was about 300 yards wide. When we got close enough, we were able to identify the swimming snake as a 36-inch black phase timber rattlesnake. The snake seemed perfectly at home in the water and continued to swim to the opposite shore where it exited the water and crawled off into the underbrush. In light of this recent educational experience, I offer my sincere apologies to all those anglers and swimmers whom I unintentionally may have misled over the years.—WCO Scott D. Opfer, Fayette County.

Not my fault

While patrolling on the first day of trout season before the opening hour of 8:00 a.m., I was flagged down along the stream by some anglers who told me there was a guy fishing since 7:00 a.m. When I walked up to the angler in question, he said, "Officer, I know I'm fishing a little early, but my wife said I have to be home by 8:30 a.m." When I gave him a copy of his citation, he informed me that he is making his wife pay the fine, since it's all her fault.—WCO Douglas L. Deppen, Lebanon and Southern Dauphin counties.

A big mistake

While patrolling the lower portion of the Yellow Breeches Creek, Cumberland County, I observed a female throwing debris into the creek from the Popular Road Bridge. By the time I was able to reach the location, she had already driven away. Since I had a good description of the suspect and the license plate number, I decided to secure some evidence before it drifted downstream. I waded into waist-deep water and picked up several pieces of discarded

debris, including a very large pink eraser with the phrase, "For Big Mistakes" printed on it.

The following day,

I was able to track the suspect to her residence, and I explained to her what I had witnessed the previous afternoon. At first, she denied being on the bridge and throwing the trash. I then pulled the eraser from my back pocket, and said to her in an empathetic voice, "Right now, I think you made a big mistake. I want to help you erase it." The young women began to sob and admitted to dumping her ex-boyfriend's belongings off the bridge. I cited her for scattering household trash, and she paid fines in excess of \$250.—WCO David A. Hurst, Cumberland County.

Fashion conscious

We hear many excuses for not displaying a fishing license. The one told to me by a young lady may make sense for the fashion conscious. She said that the yellow license would clash with her bright red blouse.—WCO Bruce A. Gundlach, Western Armstrong County.

If you say so

A few days before the regional opening day of trout season, I was patrolling Antietam Reservoir, Berks County. Like all approved trout waters, Antietam Reservoir is closed to all fishing from March 1st until the opening day of trout season. On this particular morning, I arrived to find two older gentlemen fishing from the bank in a popular spot. I explained to them that the reservoir was closed to all fishing until the opening day of trout season. They looked at me surprised. Then, they looked at each other and started laughing, because they knew they were in trouble. I explained that everyone I catch fishing preseason receives a citation and they would be no different. The one gentleman looked up at me and replied, "Well, you better give us a citation," as though he would accept nothing less. They both accepted responsibility for what they had done and joked how they were going to be in trouble when their wives found out.—WCO Chase D. Rhoades, Northern Montgomery County.