

NOTES FROM THE STREAMS

Take a better look

As Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs), we learn to adapt to our surroundings and blend in to monitor our districts without being in plain sight.

One day while patrolling Conneaut Lake, Crawford County, I was watching the Beach Club area from my marked patrol vehicle in the park. I noticed three individuals fidgeting with a Jet Ski® on shore, trying to get the vessel to run correctly. One of the males looked up and down the lake, apparently scanning the water for something. After about five minutes, the man jumped onto the Jet Ski® without wearing a life jacket, launched out onto the lake approximately 200 feet from shore and started doing figure eights with the Jet Ski®. The man drove the Jet Ski® for about two minutes, then headed back to the shore and jumped off the Jet Ski®.

I exited my vehicle and walked down to their location. When the man noticed me, he immediately started to laugh and said, “I never thought to look for you on land. I was scanning the lake to make sure your boat wasn’t on the water.” He was more than willing to take the ticket for not wearing a life jacket while operating a Jet Ski® and even joked that next time he would have to “take a better look.” I laughed and said, “Why not just put on your life jacket?”—WCO Chad E. Doyle, Southcentral Crawford and Eastern Mercer counties.

Equine assistance

During the period of stocking our waterways, we are often dependent on volunteers to help carry buckets of fish. Sometimes, there is an abundant amount of help, and other times, there is next to no help. One day, I found myself with very little help stocking, and by the time I got to Mahoning Creek, Schuylkill County, it was just the



Photo: WCO Richard D. Daniels Jr.

Emma and Breaker

stocking truck driver, one volunteer and myself. As we were starting to unload fish, a young lady came by on horseback, so I took the opportunity to ask if she would mind stocking some fish for us. She agreed to take some fish, so I looked for a place that she could tie off her horse. When I turned around, she had ridden her horse alongside the stocking truck to receive a bucket, then took the bucket down to the stream on horseback. She thanked us for letting her help, and rode off down the road, leaving the three of us in amazement. So, thanks again to Emma and to her horse, Breaker.

—WCO Richard D. Daniels Jr., Eastern Schuylkill County.

Loon stocking

One would not expect strange looks while working on opening day of trout season. WCO Erik P. Shellgren and I had received a report from campers at Kellettville Campground along Tionesta Creek, Forest County, of an injured loon lying in a shallow puddle in the parking lot. A call to local Pennsylvania Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officers found them busy in other parts of the county. After approaching the loon several times, we realized

she wasn’t injured but trying to fly. I remembered that loons can only take off from water, not on land. After a couple of stabs from her sharp beak, grabbing the loon proved out of the question. WCO Shellgren broke out a piece of equipment every WCO should have—a large plastic bin. The bin was placed over the loon. Then, we slide the lid under her and turned over the bin with the loon inside. We carried the bin down to Tionesta Creek, which was full of opening day anglers. As we poured the large loon into Tionesta Creek among the anglers, I realized that I would probably field some phone calls in the office on Monday as to why the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission was stocking loons.—Captain Robert R. Nestor, Northwest Region.

Caught in the cookie jar

During trout season, I’m always reminding anglers that the limit is 5 trout per day. One angler who helps me with trout stockings decided that he would try beating the system. His plan was to help stock fish at a few locations, stay after the stocking truck would leave, fish a little and then catch up with the stocking truck when it would reach his area of the stream near his house. This individual fished at two different locations, catching 5 trout at the one hole and 4 at another hole, then met me back at his residence. When he approached me about helping put fish in again, I politely asked him to see his fishing license. He looked a little confused. Then, I asked him if he remembered getting caught taking extra cookies out of the cookie jar when he was told by his mom to only take one. “Yes,” he said, with a confused look on his face. I told him he got caught with his hand in the cookie jar again and reminded him that the limit was 5 and not 9. A citation was issued.—WCO Richard D. Morder, Perry and Juniata counties.

A Lesson in geometry

While patrolling with WCO Robert A. Plumb, we came across two ice anglers on Shohola Lake, Pike County. They proudly showed us three Largemouth Bass, measuring from 17 to 19 inches in length. They then explained the extraordinary efforts taken to keep these fish in their possession.

They brought out a lid from a five-gallon bucket to which an eye bolt had been attached in the center. This centered anchor point was used to secure their metal chain stringer and allow the fish to remain alive in the water while they continued to fish. As it was early in the season, the ice was not exceptionally thick and the bass were quite lively when placed on the stringer. However, imagine their surprised reaction when the anchored fish had worn away the augered 9-inch hole wide enough for the entire hook-up to fall through the ice and into the water.

Luckily these anglers were fishing in shallow water with submerged vegetation. They were able to spot the lid, stringer and fish on the bottom. An improvised retrieval hook was quickly constructed and the fish were caught again.

For the mathematically-inclined, if the lid of the bucket was 12½ inches in diameter, what was the area of the ice the fish had to wear through, with the caveat that the lid remained flat on the ice?—*Sergeant Bryan C. Bendock, Northeast Region.*

Passive or aggressive?

Recently, I observed an individual along one of our lakes fishing while wearing boxing gloves on his hands. While the fishing pole was resting on a forked stick, he would punch the air aggressively, bouncing back and forth. Then, he would remove the gloves, reel in the line and check his bait, then resume punching the air again. After several minutes, curiosity got the best of me. Not seeing a fishing license displayed, I walked down to question his actions. He told me his fishing license was in his car. When asked about the odd combination of fishing



rod and boxing gloves, he explained that he had just come from meeting with his wife's divorce attorney. I guess the combination of fishing and boxing was his way to calm his nerves and, at the same time, release his frustration. Enough said.—*WCO Leon E. Creyer Jr., Lehigh County.*

An eagle and an iPhone

It was a cold, windy day, and I was inspecting a boat containing two adults and four young anglers. The boat's registration had expired, so the boat's owner pulled out an iPhone and a credit card to renew the registration on the spot. It took only 15 minutes to validate the registration. As the boat backed away from the launch, a mature bald eagle appeared 50 yards from the access. I pointed it out to the young men. It took a few minutes for the bird to get his bearings in the strong wind. He then dived towards the choppy surface of the lake and emerged with a Rainbow Trout that was at least 18 inches. After struggling to get into the air, it flew low over the lake to a nearby beaver hut and ate his lunch. It was a good day for fishing.—*WCO David G. Kaneski, Northern Wayne County.*

Good safety advice

I often hear complaints from boaters who receive citations for not having the proper life jackets onboard while canoeing and kayaking. The primary complaint I hear from operators is that, because they are operating an unpowered craft, the only people they are hurting are themselves if something were to happen. That's not necessarily so. Rescue personnel and others are put at risk trying to save capsized boaters and endure hardships and risks during the often long and costly process of trying to recover drowning victims. Please keep this in mind and show your consideration by always wearing your life jacket.—*WCO Robert V. Dunbar, Clearfield County.*

The bandit

Recently, I was set up to observe a trout stream near a bridge. Expecting to make a day of it, I packed a lunch and brought a chair. After selecting my spot and getting set up, I realized I could not see as well as I had expected, so I began looking for another location. Leaving my lunch and chair behind, I crossed the bridge and found a better vantage point on the other side of the creek.

After about an hour, I noticed a raccoon had climbed up the stream bank and crossed the bridge, turning into the woods where I had originally set up. I expected to see him come shooting out of there once he caught my scent, but he didn't. After about five minutes, the raccoon reappeared with my bag of BBQ potato chips. He stopped on the road, tore the bag open and began his feast. At first I wanted to chase him away and reclaim my chips. But, once he opened the bag, he seemed to be enjoying himself too. Believing he would never get another chance to eat BBQ potato chips, I did not disturb him. When he was almost finished, a car came through and he left the near-empty bag on the road. I knew he was a bandit by the mask he was wearing, but I wouldn't have guessed he was a litter bug as well.—*Captain Larry L. Bundy Jr., Northeast Region.*

Indefensible

While at a preliminary hearing for a Boating Under the Influence (BUI) charge, the Judge called the defendant, his lawyer and me to the bench. The first question the Judge asked the defendant was, "How did you get here today?"

"I was driving my Jet Ski®," the defendant began, "and I was drunk, and I guess it was after sunset." Before he could incriminate himself further, the Judge interrupted him, saying, "No, no, no. How did you get here today?" The defendant looked at his lawyer, then at me, then said to the Judge, "I drove." I had to bite my lip to hold back the chuckle. The defendant ended up pleading guilty to BUI.—*WCO Jeremiah D. Allen, Beaver County.*