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## PFBC officers earning their paychecks

The Intelligencer

Critics of the state Fish and Boat Commission and/or the state Game Commission usually agree on at least one thing. That the officers wearing the badges of the two agencies should maintain one primary function and that would be to protect the wildlife resources in their charge.

They are officers of the wildlife laws and sometimes have the unenviable tasks that come with all law enforcement. In other words, they are just like any other officers of the law. They are very much involved in crime and criminal investigations.

Recently I spoke with Bucks County Waterways Conservation Officer Brendan Ryan, who has recently been involved with 16 open investigations - investigations that involved partnering with the State Police still searching for the cause of the tragic drowning of the man that appeared to have fallen from his johnboat on Lake Nockamixon.

Investigations ranging from illegal pet dealers selling reptiles to stolen boats are common. Sometimes investigations involve terrible tragedies such as PFBC officers pulling drowning victims from the Delaware River.

Writing this column brings me in regular contact with our wildlife officers from both departments. Trust me when I tell you that Bucks County's wildlife resources are currently in great hands.

Ryan's counterpart at the agency responsible for protecting the wildlife resources for the Game Commission is Officer John Papson.

From doing crowd pleasing "critter shows" for our local 4-H and scouting groups to attending hostile hunting club meetings with members demanding answers to encounters with people blaming him for every deer that gets hit on our roads and knucklehead that fires a gun irresponsibly.

Both of their jobs require many personal qualities if they are to be performed well. As any officer of the law, they have to be prepared to face danger. They also have to face people that demand their time at every turn. Among the qualities they must have is a love of the outdoors, primarily because their remuneration certainly does not cover every hour of personal time required doing their jobs. Like many of us, these guys spend plenty of what is supposed to be their free time doing their jobs.

Another absolutely required quality they must possess is a healthy sense of humor.

Papson told me a story a few years ago where he stopped traffic in both directions during rush hour on the area's worst stretch of highway - Route 309 in Upper Bucks - while a mallard and her babies waddled their way across four lanes to safety. He was heckled and applauded at the same time. He laughed about it when he told me the story.

Each week the PGC and PFBC issue tips and updates from their officers in the field from across the state. They are good reading with worthwhile topics on wildlife resources ranging from where they're biting to how the spring turkey hatchlings are progressing by region.

Last week I read a classic entry from our very own Officer Papson, who reported that, other than bat complaints, great-horned owls flying into soccer nets, ospreys getting caught on fishing line, a "bald eagle" being hit by a car (turned out to be a goose), training at Harrisburg headquarters, HTE (hunter trapper education) programs, injured deer, groundhogs, raccoons and opossums, a "young hawk" that turned out to be a starling and three different bears stopping by to visit the county, it has been a fairly quiet month.

Unsold doe tags go on sale today and Tuesday at the county courthouse in Doylestown.

There are plenty left (56,794 for #5C, 15,609 for #5D and 55,969 for #2B) and there is no need to crash the gates at the Treasurer's offices. This first round are only here in the "special regulation" counties that make-up units #5C, #5D and suburban Pittsburgh #2B.

One note here about how things are handled in other counties: Unlike the staff here in Bucks County, some counties will stubbornly wait until the last drop dead date they MUST mail their issued tags. I had a lengthy conversation with the Bradford County Treasurer last week. An otherwise wonderfully accommodating and friendly woman who made it clear her staff had zero intention of mailing tags until the deadline date of Sept. 14.