KENTUCKY FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSIONER'S NEWSLETTER

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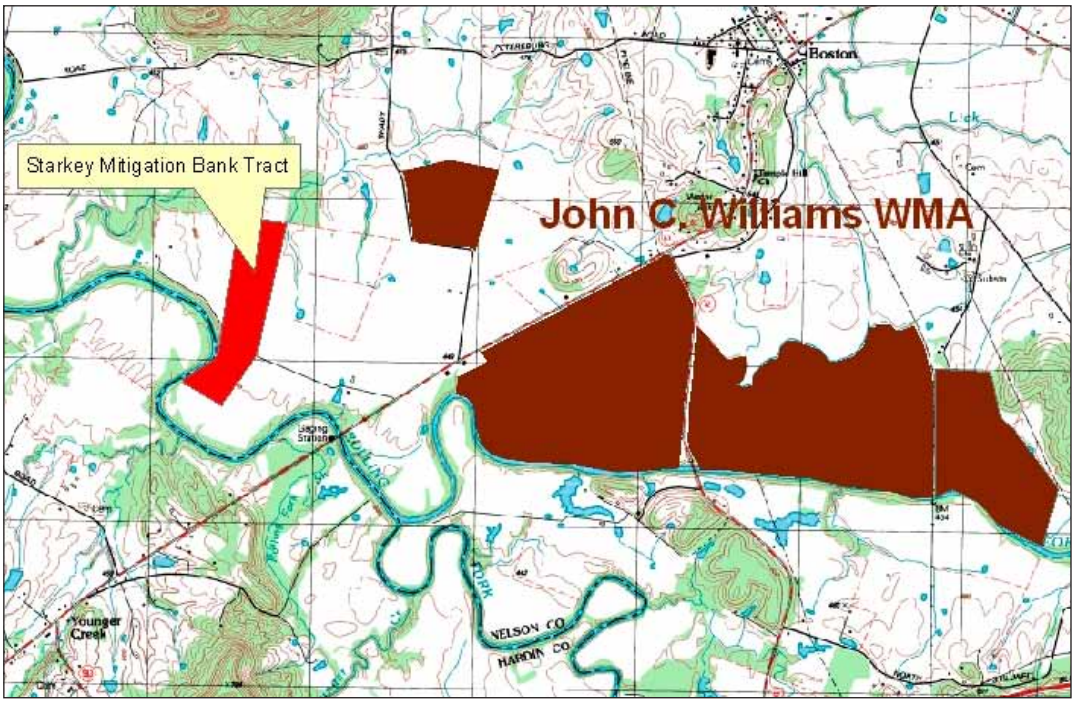
John C. Williams WMA in Nelson County gains 75 acres



An additional 75 acres has recently been added to the John C. Williams WMA in Nelson County. This property was donated to the Department by Outer Loop Company, LLC for long term ownership and management of wetland habitat.

Wetlands were restored on this property to mitigate wetland losses regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Kentucky Division of Water. The property was donated to the Department in order to protect and manage the wetland habitat.

The Department thanks the Outer Loop Company, LLC and their consultant, Redwing Environmental, Inc. for making this donation, which will increase the amount of wetland acreage available to anglers, hunters and outdoor recreationists from the major population centers of Lexington and Louisville.

The John C. Williams WMA is approximately 10 miles east of Elizabethtown, 25 miles south of Louisville, and 65 miles west of Lexington.

The Department's Environmental Section and land acquisition coordinator (**Tony Wheatley**) worked closely with the owner and their environmental consultant, Redwing Environmental, Inc., the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Kentucky Division of Water to help facilitate this donation.

The John C. Williams WMA covers approximately 800+ acres, including 680 acres of wetland mitigation tracts donated to the Department. Currently, the Environmental Section is working with other private mitigation interests that have expressed interest in donating mitigation properties around this WMA.

These existing donated tracts are equally beneficial for their potential match requirement on any future federal grants. For example, this WMA could be potentially expanded up to 2,700 acres requiring no license funds by using federal grants and the value of the donated tracts.

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WE GET MAIL

Letters to the Commissioner's Office

Appreciative elk hunter Jim Dicke

We never know when some small act of kindness will make a big impression on a child or an adult. The following letter reinforces just how important these small acts of kindness can be:

Rebecca Robbins and her five-year-old son, Jackson, frequently stop at the gas station on the corner of C. Michael Davenport Drive and Cardwell Lane.

She tells how fascinated Jackson was with the patches on one of our employee's uniform who was also at the gas station. Ms. Robbins said as they were checking out, she asked the young man if he would show her son the patches on his sleeve. He let Jackson see the patch and went out to his vehicle and came back with a KDFWR pen. He apologized for not having anything more appropriate to give to young Jackson but, Jackson was ecstatic about the gift.

A few weeks ago, Ms. Robbins and Jackson were visiting the same gas station once again and saw the same employee who recognized Jackson and went back to his vehicle and returned with a more age appropriate gift this time. He presented Jackson with a Scooby Doo fishing set. Jackson was thrilled with the set.

Ms. Robbins regretted that she did not think to ask the young man's name to personalize her letter. Marc Johnson identified this young man as **Zac Campbell** who is one of our seasonal CEPLs working as an Aquatic Education Specialist.

Ms. Robbins closed her letter with the following statement, "Far too often people take the time to complain but not to compliment. I am taking the time to do the opposite. Thank you. Thank you for all that you do, your extraordinary service and exceptional Fish & Wildlife officers. My son and I are eternally grateful and appreciative."

This letter came from Dr. Bob Grueninger and Diana S. Lockridge with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UK in Morehead. They wrote, "On behalf of the OLLI at UK and the Leadership and Curriculum Councils in Morehead, we want to thank **Steve Bonney** for serving as Guest Faculty during the Fall 2010 Semester."

"We appreciate the time and efforts Steve offered in preparing for and presenting the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, the Backyard Habitat and Current Events in the Daniel Boone National Forest as part of The Forest Around Us course.

"It was an excellent presentation and we are so pleased to have been able to offer this educational opportunity on these very important topics. Thanks again to Steve for sharing his expertise and experience on these topics with our OLLI scholars."

The following is a thank you letter to wildlife biologist **Wes Hodges** from Jim Dicke. He wrote, "Thank you for meeting with me yesterday morning to collect the head of the cow elk that I harvested on Sunday. I hope that it is of some benefit the elk management program. If it is possible, I would very much like to know the age of the animal and a rough estimate of the live weight that would correspond to her age."

"Thanks again for your effort not only yesterday but also the phone calls that you returned to me. I've lived in five states over the past 25 years and hunted and fished in all of them. I can honestly say that Kentucky operates the best conservation and wildlife management of any. The elk hunt was something that I never thought that I would have the chance to experience, especially without having to travel beyond the state. Even if I never am fortunate enough to draw another tag, I will be back to see the elk. They are magnificent."

Prather returns to head Fisheries public access program

The Fisheries Division would like to welcome back **Kerry Prather** as the new Program Coordinator of the new Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP).

This is a new program to the Department that will seek to offer private landowners financial incentives to open up their lands for the purpose of fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

In his new role, Kerry will help oversee the Fisheries Division's implementation of the VPA-HIP program by coordinating stream bank fishing access, private boat ramp access, and farm pond access. Kerry will also help with the coordination of contractual agreements with landowners taking advantage of the dove field and CREP portions of VPA-HIP.

Kerry Prather has quite a long history with the Department and was first hired in 1977 as the fisheries district biologist in Prestonsburg (Eastern Fishery District). In 1984, Kerry transferred positions to serve as the district fisheries biologist in the Central Fishery District where he stayed until August of 2008 when he retired from the Department.

During his 31-year career with the agency, Kerry can be credited with a significant number of accomplishments that speaks volumes about his passion and dedication to the fishery resources of the Commonwealth. During his time in eastern Kentucky, Kerry conducted many of the pioneering studies and evaluations of brook trout as part of the Wild Trout Program. He also was instrumental in completing some of the first muskellunge surveys throughout the Kentucky River drainage.

As the district fisheries biologist in the Central Fishery District, Kerry helped develop the hybrid striped bass population at Taylorsville Lake, in addition to some of the first evaluations of the use of triploid grass carp to improve sport fish populations in Kentucky.

Those who know Kerry well, understand that he has an amazing understanding and knowledge base when it comes to managing and manipulating farm ponds and small impoundments.

Kerry helped compile, develop, and implement several brochures, including the famous "A Management Guide for Ponds and Small Lakes in Kentucky." This brochure is currently in its third edition and continues to be one of the most utilized brochures that the Department provides to the public in order to properly manage farm ponds.

Professionally, Kerry has served on numerous committees throughout his career including chairing of the Trout Committee and Small Impoundments Committee in the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society.

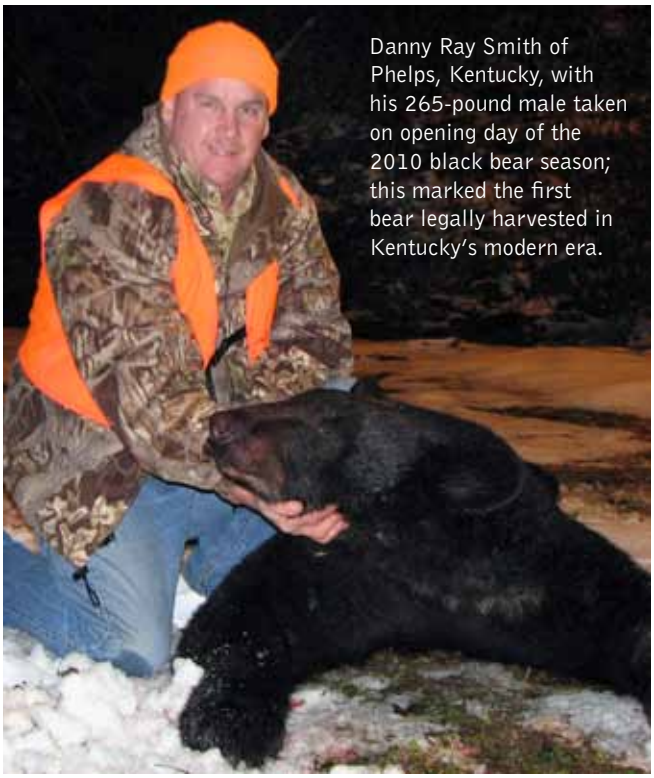
Originally from Harrodsburg in Mercer County, Kerry currently resides in Frankfort with his wife and four boys. In his spare time, Kerry enjoys waterfowl, turkey, and deer hunting, as well as fishing for blue catfish at Taylorsville Lake.

New deer biologist selected

Gabe Jenkins has been selected as the new Statewide Private Lands Deer Biologist in the Deer and Elk Program. Gabe has worked for the program for the last 3 years as the Chronic Wasting Disease/Captive Cervid Program biologist.

Gabe received both his Bachelor's and his Master's degrees from Eastern Kentucky University. Both originally from Ohio, Gabe and his wife Brook live in Frankfort with their 2 dogs (including a Lab who wishes dad spent more time duck hunting!)

Gabe's experience with the deer and elk program as CWD biologist has allowed him to hit the ground running in his new position. Gabe officially started December 16, and has been kidnapped to do elk work for the next couple of months, but will start working with the private lands staff developing a deer management plan very soon.



Danny Ray Smith of Phelps, Kentucky, with his 265-pound male taken on opening day of the 2010 black bear season; this marked the first bear legally harvested in Kentucky's modern era.

Billy Joe Dixon of Cumberland, Kentucky, posing with his new state record 280-pound black bear taken on day two of the season.

Kentucky records first successful black bear hunt

By Steven Dobey

Danny Smith of Phelps carved his name in the record books Dec. 18, when he claimed Kentucky's first legally harvested black bear in modern history.

A fresh blanket of snow played a big part in Smith's ability to successfully track and take the 265-pound Pike County male bear on opening day.

"What I had done didn't really set in until the next day," explained Smith. "It is a pretty thrilling thing, and I feel blessed."

But Smith's record for Kentucky's largest bear was short lived. Billy Joe Dixon of Cumberland, Kentucky, harvested a 280-pound adult male bear in Harlan County on Sunday afternoon.

This year's hunt contrasted sharply to last year's inaugural hunt. That hunt produced no bears after an early season snowstorm hit southeastern Kentucky the afternoon before the hunt. The storm dumped more than three feet of snow in some of the higher elevations of the three-county bear zone and temporarily paralyzed roadways.

In contrast, both Smith and Dixon said this year's snow provided a huge advantage in their hunts and greatly enhanced their abilities to take bears.

While late-season weather can be unpredictable in the mountains, Kentucky scheduled its initial bear seasons in December to gauge hunter participation and success rates, and to focus the harvest on male bears. Most female bears in Kentucky enter dens by mid-November. In addition, the late-season hunt allows the maneuverability to move the season earlier in future years.

Collectively, the KDFWR sold 335 bear permits in 2010, down slightly from the 377 sold in 2009. It is possible that last year's snowstorm may have chilled license sales this year. We hope this year's success will increase participation in future hunts.

Black bears are a resource that the KDFWR has been studying intensively for almost a decade in Kentucky. As that research now indicates population numbers can sustain harvest mortality, it is our hope that hunters will take advantage of this new big game opportunity by giving it a try.

In the eastern U.S. there are very few states in which hunters can pursue wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, elk and black bears. In Kentucky, that is now a reality, and it truly makes this a special place for sportsmen and women.

"That hunt was about the most nervous I have ever been shooting at something," said Smith. "But I will certainly do it again. It was the best opportunity."

Billy Joe Dixon, now record holder for Kentucky's largest bear, was quick and even more direct about future bear hunts. "Definitely."

KDFWR inventories and manages Kentucky's barn owls

The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) is a nocturnal raptor found in open habitats where it preys primarily on rodents and other small mammals.

Although the species is one of the most widely distributed birds in the world (found on all continents except for Antarctica), in Kentucky, records of nesting Barn Owls have been quite rare in modern times.

The infrequency of Barn Owl reports in Kentucky is somewhat surprising because much suitable habitat in the form of pastures, hayfields, croplands, reclaimed surface-mine lands, and restored grasslands is present.

In fact, 38% of the state is composed of undeveloped, open land. With such an abundance of suitable habitat, it seems Kentucky should host an abundance of Barn Owls.

Barn Owls have gained conservation concern throughout most of North America in recent years due to noticeable population changes. Severe declines have been recorded in several Midwestern states. Due to local conservation concern, the Barn Owl has been listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Kentucky's State Wildlife Action Plan.

Conservation actions for declining species are usually best implemented when the status of the population is known. In the case of the Barn Owl, so little was known about its status in Kentucky that KDFWR decided to conduct a statewide inventory in 2010. The goal of this effort was to document as many resident Barn Owls as possible.

Twenty-six confirmed Barn Owl nest locations were documented during the 2010 inventory. Most nests were found on privately owned land, although three were in nest boxes on WMAs. Nests were found in a variety of structures including nest boxes, silos, grain bins, barns, hollow trees, chimneys, and even shooting houses. Nests were scattered throughout much of central and western Kentucky, but none were reported in southeastern Kentucky (Figure 1).

Once located, the productivity of each nest was monitored where possible. Nests contained two to eight young. Nesting was typically initiated during spring (March–April) and most young fledged by the end of July. Unexpectedly, nesting activity continued into late summer and fall/winter with five nests documented with young after September!

Surprisingly, "double-brooding" or attempting to raise two nests of young in one year was documented at two of these late nests which continued into December! This is the first time nesting during fall/winter and double-brooding have been documented in Kentucky.

Suitable nest site availability in the proximity of areas with a large prey base is assumed to be a major limiting factor for Barn Owl populations. KDFWR established a program to install nest boxes in suitable habitat on WMAs and other public lands in 2006. Since 2006, 37 nest boxes have been installed on public lands.

Although several nest boxes on public lands have already become active, in 2010 our nest box efforts switched to maximizing the productivity of existing Barn Owl nests – whether they are on public or

See "Owls," page 6

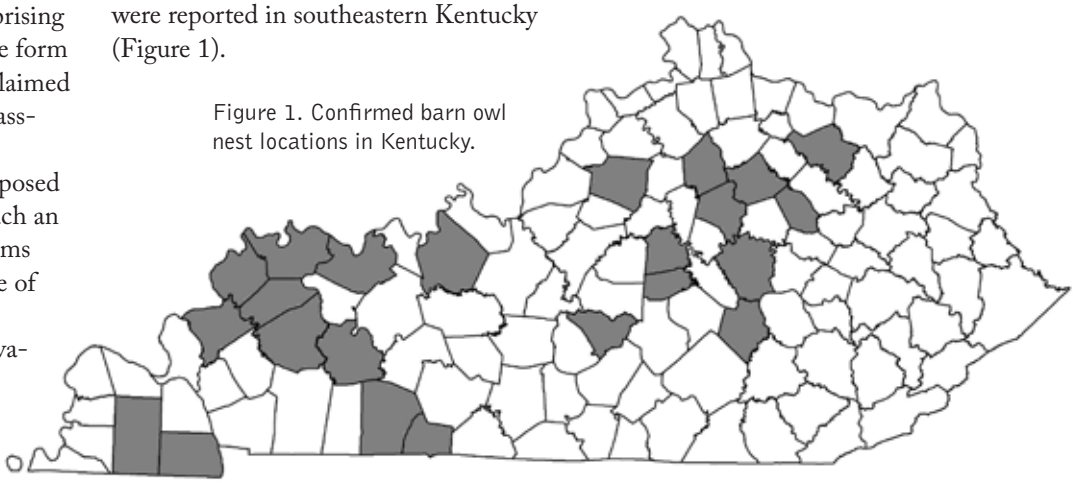


Figure 1. Confirmed barn owl nest locations in Kentucky.

KDFWR wins eight Tourism Council Traverse Awards

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife received eight awards in the 2010 Kentucky Tourism Council Traverse Awards for Excellence in Tourism Marketing competition.

Fish and Wildlife received its awards Tuesday, October 19, during the Traverse Gala held at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center in Covington as part of the 2010 Kentucky Tourism Industry Annual Conference.

Kentucky tourism businesses and marketing organizations vie for awards in 20 categories during the annual competition produced by the Kentucky Tourism Council. A panel of out-of-state experts judged more than 240 entries from across the state for this year's presentation of awards.

Michael Gray, with the Department's awards.

Traverse Awards for Excellence in Tourism Marketing are open to Kentucky Tourism Council and Kentucky Hotel and Lodging Association members marketing a tourism product or service in Kentucky. All entries must have been published or distributed within the past year. Each entry is judged for concept, creativity, design and how well it relates to its audience.

The Kentucky Tourism Council is a Frankfort-based state association that represents every segment of Kentucky's travel industry. The 640-member organization offers continuing education programs, works in the area of governmental relations and provides legislative advocacy for Kentucky's travel industry.

The department and **Obie Williams** scored first place finishes for the rack brochure "Living With Black Bears in Kentucky" and the "Elk Hunt Lottery" visitor's guide. Both were designed and produced by Obie Williams. Obie also produced a second place winner "Elk Hunt Lottery" print advertisement and **Charlie Baglan** took a second place with an "Elk Tag" television ad.

Michael Gray's "Take Me Fishing" visitor's guide scored two second places and an honorable mention. **Seth Stewart** and **Brian Blank** scored a second in the social media category, Facebook.

"Owls," continued

private land. Productivity may be hindered at unreliable nest sites, perhaps contributing to Barn Owl declines.

For example, many nests are discovered when hollow trees are cut down, grain bins are drained, or old barns are demolished. In 2010, KDFWR worked to ensure that all known nesting Barn Owl pairs had a safe and permanent nest site by installing many nest boxes on private lands. Overall, since 2006, KDFWR has installed 75 nest boxes on public and private lands. It is hoped that these efforts will encourage a more stable Barn Owl nesting population statewide.

Because most Barn Owls are on private land, the extent of KDFWR's knowledge of and ability to help Kentucky's Barn Owls depends greatly on the public's cooperation in reporting nests. Please report Barn Owl nests by calling 1-800-858-1549 or e-mailing Kate Heyden at *Kathryn.Heyden@ky.gov.*

Interested landowners that would like to install their own nest box can find construction plans via the internet at: *fw.ky.gov/navigation.aspx?cid=755&navpath=C753.*

Private landowners are encouraged to inform KDFWR of any nest boxes installed and if they become active. More information on Kentucky Barn Owls will also soon be available at: *fw.ky.gov/navigation.aspx?cid=755&navpath=C753.*

Department completes storm-postponed Town Hall meetings

The Department completed its full schedule of Town Hall meetings last month after mid-December winter storms forced postponement of two.

Commissioner **Jon Gassett**, Deputy Commissioners **Benjy Kinman** and **Hank Patton**, and division directors finished the nine-meeting statewide tour with stops last week in Morehead for the Eighth District and Edgewood with the Fifth District.

The Department began its nine-meeting schedule Monday, Nov. 29, at Kentucky Dam Village.

Six more Town Hall meetings followed at Powderly, the Kentucky Horse Park, Greensburg, Louisville, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, and London before mid-December snow and ice pushed the Morehead and Boone County meetings into January. Hundreds of sportsmen and sportswomen came out during the tour.

Fifth District sportsmen and women brought their thoughts and comments to the floor microphone this month during a Town Hall meeting at the Edgewood Senior Center.

The Town Hall meetings all started at 7 p.m. and lasted well into the evening as Department customers discussed their ideas and freely interacted with division directors. All were anxious to help. There were many excellent discussions.

New bank fishing area at Guist Creek Lake

During November, the Department completed the acquisition of a three-acre tract of land at Guist Creek Lake.

Guist Creek Lake is a 317-acre state-owned impoundment in Shelby County. The new three-acre tract is located in the upper arm of the main tributary of Guist Creek where Hwy 1779 crosses the lake.

Ultimately, the desired use for this tract of land will be to develop a parking area for bank angling access to the lake, as well as the construction of a new fishing pier.

Central Fisheries District biologist **Jeff Crosby** has helped manage this fishery for more than 15 years. "Guist Creek Lake is one of the premiere bass fisheries in central Kentucky. Its reputation is for quality largemouth bass, not numbers."

Crosby believes that anglers at Guist Creek Lake can expect another good year in 2011. "Anglers should experience a high number of 15-inch and larger bass at Guist Creek Lake in 2011." While the densities of 15-inch and larger fish are on the increase, Crosby cautions that the abundance of really big bass (20 inches) is about on par with previous years.

Guist Creek Lake also contains a good population of hybrid striped bass. "The potential for a trophy hybrid striped bass is always there. This past fall, we sampled numerous fish in the 20-inch and larger size class."

The Department currently owns a 50-foot buffer around the entire perimeter of Guist Creek Lake. Unfortunately, anglers must gain landowner permission to cross private property in order to access the buffer in most places around the lake.

Crosby believes that catfish and panfish anglers will benefit most from the development of the new bank fishing access. "We have manipulated stocking densities of channel catfish over the past several years and observed a big response in terms of the quality of the catfishery.

In conjunction with a 12-inch minimum size limit, the modification of stocking densities has really helped to increase the overall size of the average channel catfish at Guist Creek."

ANNUAL GREENWING ADVENTURE

Eighteen youth came out for the annual Greenwing Adventure hunt at Ballard Wildlife Management Area and several commercial areas nearby, January 7-9. The youth, who qualified for the adventure by earning their Outdoorsman Patch last summer at Conservation Camp, scored well, taking 24 ducks and geese. Department staff from Law Enforcement, Wildlife, Information & Education Division and the Commissioner's Office staffed the hunt for the youngsters. Many other people donated time, blinds, food, and prizes for the event. Above right, Melinda Driskell pauses with youth hunters Coleman Begley and Adam Storms and hunter education instructor Nikki James. Bottom right, Clay Brummal, Wesley McCloud, Tayler Davis, Sgt. Garry Clark and Officer Tony Dunker scored an excellent day hunting, taking five ducks and three geese.

5th District trappers workshop

Approximately 60 enthusiastic students participated in the 5th District trappers workshop held at the Bobwhite Club in Campbell County November 6-7, 2010. The two-day workshop, sponsored by the United Trappers of Kentucky, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, allowed students to actually engage in the complete trapping and fur handling experience. Experienced trappers assisted the students with various types of land and water sets on day one. On day two, the traps were checked and the fur bearers harvested were properly skinned, fleshed and stretched.

A special "Thanks" goes to the Bobwhite Sportsman's Club for allowing this event to take place on their property, as well as, to the many volunteer trappers who are willing to share their knowledge with future potential trappers.

SNOWS AND BLUES

Retired First District Captain Larry Ashford still finds time to visit the Ballard Wildlife Refuge where he worked for more than 30 years. He snapped this shot of "Snows and Blues" last month on the area and sent it in for those of us throughout the rest of the state to enjoy. He said this moment is representative of the full and never-ending wildlife encounters he enjoyed throughout his career.