



## OFFICER EXCHANGE, A TRIP OF A LIFETIME

*By: Conservation Officer Mike Campese, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, CANADA*

**AS I SAT** at the NAWEOA conference in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario Canada I had always wondered what it would be like to do an officer exchange in the United States. Then it happened, my name was called! After getting over the initial surprise, the next question I heard was, where are you going to go? After pondering many states, and after speaking with Officers Jason Blaylock and Rob Heflin, I settled on Mississippi. After coordinating with Captain Calvin Fulton of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MD-WFP), my trip was arranged.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 I loaded up the car equipped with maple syrup and many items provided by the Ontario Conservation Officers Association (OCA) to hand out. I began my journey on a nice day in Ontario 1 °C (34 °F) and after the 17 hour drive I arrived at Holmes County State Park where it was 6 °C (43 °F). There I met Conservation Officers (CO) Brent Madden and CO Derrick Scott (both training officers), who were out on a run doing physical training with a class of new recruits, following the runners on an ATV. After a quick tour of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks



**CO Heflin checking waterfowl hunters at Howard Miller WMA**

Conservation Officer Training Academy, I settled into my cabin and was invited to the training officer's area. There I met SGM Ron McMillan, Lt. Megan Fedrick and Lt. Marcus Christon, where I learned about the extensive structured training received for the Mississippi Game Wardens. Much different than the 4 weeks of training I received!

After a night at the training academy, I met CO Rob Heflin who was nice enough to let me ride along with him for the next two days. We headed to Officer Heflin's patrol area in the Mississippi Delta and right away there was some action, but not the natural resources kind! While sitting at the rail crossing near Tchula, a car decided to pass a bunch of

vehicles and cross the rail crossing that had lights flashing and the signal arm down. Officer Heflin put his blue lights and siren on warning the motorist not to cross, but the driver failed to take the warning. It was here I saw my first citation issued.

Next we went to the Sky Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) where along with Heflin's supervisor Glenn Jackson we checked out a complaint of people trespassing with motorized vehicles on the WMA land. A private landowner had a sign up charging people \$10 to cut across his property to access Sky Lake, but was failing to tell them that they weren't allowed to use motorized vehicles once they got onto the WMA! Entrepreneurship at its best!

Throughout the patrol I was amazed to see the food plots for deer, waterfowl and doves put in by the MDWFP to improve hunting opportunities for hunters, which is something that doesn't happen in Ontario.

My next treat was going for a delicious lunch to the Varsity in Belzoni. When in the Catfish Capital of the World, what else can you eat but catfish? I also had hush puppies for the first time which Officer Heflin got a kick out of. After a Christmas BBQ for the youth



## LIONS EAT RHINO POACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

**PARTIAL** human remains and clothing of at least two (and possibly three) suspected rhino poachers, who were apparently eaten by lions, have been discovered in the Sibuya reserve near the south-east town of Kenton-on-Sea, in South Africa.

A silenced high-powered rifle, an axe, and wire-cutters were also found, when an anti-poaching team arrived on the scene. Several lions had to be tranquilized before the human remains could be recovered.

Sibuya reserve owner Nick Fox said "They strayed into a pride of lions - it's a big pride so they didn't have too much time. We're not sure how many (poachers) there were - there's not much left of them."

The reserve lost three rhinos to poaching in 2016, and there has been a significant increase in rhino poaching in recent years to feed growing demand for rhino horn in parts of Asia.



**Myself with alligator seizure that was going to be disposed of**

group CO Heflin works with, we went on a night patrol looking for hunters who had baited for waterfowl by doing crop manipulation (flooding a crop area and then knocking the crop down so waterfowl will come into the wet area). We set up a remote camera to catch images of the persons hunting over the baited area, and at 0200hrs we called it a night. Not bad for my first day of work!

Back at it at 0730hrs CO Heflin and I patrolled the Howard Miller WMA where I saw thousands and thousands of geese flying around the delta. There, along with CO's Clint Norris and Stalard Williams (CJ), CO Heflin checked waterfowl hunters as they came in.

The hunt at Howard Miller WMA for waterfowl is a draw hunt on specific days and starts at sun up and ends at noon. During this time, hundreds of waterfowl are harvested. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, for example, 395 birds were harvested in the morning hunt!

After the morning hunt we all went for lunch at a restaurant called Onwards (another great place to eat) where we met up with CO Lee Harvey, who we worked with for the afternoon, loading up his truck with seizures at the Mahannah WMA and the Delta National Forest – Sunflower WMA.

This was my first opportunity to see an alligator that had been seized. Certainly not something I would ever see in Ontario!

After two amazing days of patrol with CO Heflin I made my way to CO Jason Blaylock's place where we went out and patrolled along the Natchez Trace at 2230hrs. Coming from a place you can go all deer season and only see a couple of deer, I was amazed at the amount of deer that were everywhere in Mississippi. During our patrol I also got a chance to see a wild hog that was 300+lbs! As wild boars are starting to pop up on the landscape in Ontario, it was interesting to see the amount of damage this invasive species can do. Officer Blaylock took a shot at the hog and hit it, and at 60 yards, the bullet from a 30-06 didn't even go right through it!

The next morning we were off to the Attala County Justice Court where Officer Blaylock had a case where a 19-year old male was charged with head-lighting and unlawfully possessing deer. It was alleged that this young man and his friends went out head-lighting two

nights and shot 20+ deer. Unfortunately for this group, Officer Blaylock was able to catch the other perpetrators by the text message and snap chat pictures they were sending as he was speaking to the young man. The power of social media! It was also through my visit to the court that I learned that those hunters from Louisiana often choose to pay the fine for hunting without a licence, as it is cheaper than actually purchasing a licence!

At a trip to the MDFW and Parks headquarters, I was able to meet Captain Calvin Fulton who made the arrangements for my trip, as well as Captain Dale Bell and Lt. Colonel Chris Harris.

Throughout our conversation it became apparent that there are many differences between Ontario and Mississippi. Some questions I got were, if you don't take your sidearm home, what would you do if you came across a robbery? Or, how would you respond to calls after hours if you don't have your patrol vehicle at home? I explained that there is not enough vehicles for each officer where I work, and that we travel to the office each shift, kit up and start from there. We also don't have police powers like they do in Mississippi.

After touring the licencing area and communication centre, I got to be a tourist, and had a quick tour of the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science. After seeing a two-headed snake, I decided I will have to come back and bring my son!

When we got back on the road we



**Captain Fulton and myself at the MDFWP Law Enforcement Headquarters**



**CO Edwards and Heflin waiting for commercial fishermen to pull his illegal paddlefish net on the Mississippi River**

checked a trapper who had trapped an opossum. The man advised he was hoping for a raccoon. This was a shock to me as in Ontario they are seen as nuisance animals who eat garbage and not a desirable food. I was later informed by Officer Blaylock that raccoons are eaten by some for special occasions!

On December 14th, 2017 Officer Blaylock and I started our day looking for hunters who were hunting over bait. It is illegal to hunt within 100yards of bait and it's illegal to place bait directly on the ground in Mississippi. On the ATV patrol we found a few stands that were within 100yards of bait, and a few stands that had corn and rice bran placed on the ground. Although we didn't find hunters in them today, Officer Blaylock will be following up once I leave. Then we went on a patrol of what I heard Officer Blaylock say was "Happy Halla". It was only after I had him spell it that I learned it was Happy Hollow.

One thing I had hoped to see in Mississippi was paddlefish, so it was exciting when Officer Heflin and I met

up with CO Cole Edwards at the Port of Rosedale to head out on the Mississippi River to check commercial paddlefish nets. We patrolled up river and came across a lone male in a sail boat stuck on a sandbar on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi. As we helped pull the boat off the sandbar, I got the chance to step into Arkansas, to make it the sixth state I was in during my trip.

As we continued to patrol we came across two commercial paddlefish nets, which were determined by Officers Heflin and Edwards to be an illegal size.

In one of the nets we found a Pallid Sturgeon which is the first endangered species I've got to live release. While Officer's Heflin and Edwards were collecting their evidence, the owner of the nets arrived. After the gentleman pulled his nets, Officer Heflin placed him under arrest and he was taken to the Bolivar County Sheriff's Department Jail, as fishing with an illegal mesh size for paddlefish is a Class 1 offence with mandatory arrest. He was booked and a \$4000 bond was set. He was issued two



**CO Jason Blaylock with items provided by the Ontario Conservation Officers Association**

citations and his nets were seized.

My last day December 16<sup>th</sup> started off with an early morning of checking illegal deer baiting spots with Officer Blaylock. After the patrol, I was again shown some great southern hospitality and treated to a family Christmas breakfast by Officer Blaylock's in-laws. Despite being stuffed, we were back out in the field to meet up with CO Phillip Fancher in an area where we heard some gun shots and tried to find the location of the possible hunters. We also met up with CO Gilbert Barham for an ATV patrol. Here we found two incidents of people hunting over illegal bait. We finished the day off with dinner at Carmack Fish House for some more catfish and headed home at 2045hrs.

Throughout the trip, I also had opportunity to work with various officers investigating night hunting and gunshot complaints, setting up deer a decoy, looking into illegal deer dumping carcass sites, and investigating illegal



**CO Edwards and myself with a Pallid Sturgeon rescued from illegal paddlefish net on Mississippi River**



**CO Blaylock and Barham dealing with hunters caught hunting over illegal bait and too close to bait**

animals brought to a taxidermist.

It was an amazing experience to see new species such as massive Cypress trees, armadillos, bobwhite quail and fox squirrels (boy are they big squirrels!). I also got to try new culinary delights such as catfish, hush puppies, and Rotel (canned diced tomatoes and green chilies) that you mix with Velveeta cheese. I loved that so much, I brought some cans home for my family to try!

On December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at 3:45am I hit the road for my travel home and after driving a total of 4198 kilometers on my trip, I arrived home to 4 inches of snow on the ground. My amazing trip where I met some of Mississippi's finest game wardens, and was fondly referred to as "Canada", had come to an end.

I would like to thank the OCOA for supporting this trip, Colonel Steve Adcock for allowing me to come to work with the MDWFP officers, Captain Fulton for making the arrangements for me to come to Mississippi, the MDWFP for arranging accommodations within Homes County State Park, and all the Officers who worked with me, including those I didn't get a chance to name in this article.

A extra special thanks goes out Officer Blaylock and his wife Krista, and Officer Heflin for opening up their homes to me, being incredibly welcoming and allowing me to work with them for the week.

This truly was a trip of a lifetime!!

## LOST AND FOUND

Ohio State Wildlife Officer Craig Porter, Jefferson County

**WHAT STARTED** as a regular day hunting deer would turn into one of the easiest cases I have ever made.

It was mid-October of 2017 when I was heading home from an afternoon of hanging in the stand. I didn't have much luck in the woods, so I was letting it rip on my Polaris RZR in a haphazard effort to ease the pain. I was driving some trails on property that my family owns, and I am the primary care taker. I was about a mile and a half into my trip home when I realized I didn't have my cell phone. I knew that it had been in my pants pocket, and after the wild ride it didn't take much to figure the fate

of my Samsung. I made a half-hearted attempt to look for it, but the leaf litter and mud proved to be too much. I chalked it up to the cost of doing business. One insurance claim, and 3 days later I was back in the game.

Fast forward nearly 2 months to December 12<sup>th</sup>. It was post Deer-Gun Season in Ohio, so things have quieted down a skosh. I was working out in the middle of my H.I.I.T. exercise routine when my cell phone started buzzing. I gave it a glance and didn't recognize the number, so I figured I would let it go to voicemail while I kept my swell on. A few short minutes later, same number again. Two things struck me about this number. First, it was a local number so I knew it was probably one of the local hill-jacks who somehow got ahold of my personal number and was calling me about injured animal mama drama. Second, the last 4 digits of the phone number were my unit number: 1388. I thought that was a bit odd, and at the same time, made me wish I had that number myself. Nonetheless, I finished my workout, chugged down some water and gave it a ring.

Without being verbatim, the conversation went something like this:  
"Me: Hi, yes this is Craig Porter. I had a missed call from you."  
"Awwhhhh, hey mannnnn. I just wanted to let you know I found your phone today while I was hunting."  
(After a nano-second or two of mental processing I realized this otherwise good-samaritan was heading down path number two, AKA the wrong one)  
"Me: Oh yeah, do any good?"  
"Yeaaaaa mannn. I popped a real nice doe."  
"Me: That's cool man. Where exactly did you find my phone?"  
"Mannnn, that thing was up on the hill above the strip-pits."

After some further discussion, and a Q and A session that to a person with an IQ above room temperature would come



off as suspicious, I left the conversation something like this:

*"Alright buddy, I appreciate the call. I will be up to get my phone."*

I created an incident, and ran my suspect, a Mr. Grimes, who of course is a convicted felon forbidden from owning any firearms, I then talked it over with some other officers and devised a plan. Due to the facts:

- 1: This guy lives at the ridgetop above me, and I live in the valley below, and higher ground always has the advantage right?
- 2: This guy has kids that are in the same class as my children. Seeing as I have within the last three months gotten two fathers whose children are also in class with my kids indicted on over twenty felony and misdemeanor charges, maybe I should let someone else handle this one right?

Well, that's not exactly how it went down. Another officer and myself attempted on numerous times to make contact with Mr. Grimes, at his residence and by phone. Conveniently Mr. Grimes didn't want to talk to the game wardens. So after a voicemail and an ultimatum, he reluctantly returned my call a few hours later. We agreed to a meeting time which was set for two days later. I could hear the anxiety in his voice and figured two days should suffice to let him sweat it out a bit.

December 19<sup>th</sup> was the day. I went to the Grimes estate, or compound if you prefer, and met with Mr. Grimes. After three raging mutts and one pissed off wife, I was able to get Mr. Grimes to put on some shoes and talk with me in the patrol truck. After advising Mr. Grimes