

The Wrack Line

Newsletter of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge • Newburyport, MA



United States Fish & Wildlife Service

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Refuge Law Enforcement: A Legacy of Conservation in Action

Like most units within the National Wildlife Refuge System today, Parker River NWR is managed by a professional interdisciplinary staff. One of these disciplines — law enforcement — has played a very important role on national wildlife refuges since the early dawn of the System. While the refuge's federal wildlife officers are among its most visible staff, they may also be the least understood by the visiting public. In this issue of *The Wrack Line* we will introduce the reader to the world of refuge law enforcement through the impressions and experiences of its two practitioners — officers Christopher Husgen and Gareth Williams. Here, in two different formats, we make those introductions:

18 Years at Parker River

By Christopher Husgen

I always liked being outside, and used to spend my summers as a kid in Maine in a cabin on a small lake. We had electricity, a hand pump for water, and an outhouse, and I found myself happiest in my rowboat with my dog, Alex, fishing, or hiking the woods. I later worked at a camp teaching about wildlife for a few summers, and then leading overnight bicycle tours for kids for many summers. I knew that I loved nature, and studied wildlife biology in college. Since I loved working with kids in nature, I decided to continue with my studies and pursued a master of education so that I could teach school. I worked for one year as a school teacher in southern New Hampshire, and just yearned to be outside of the brick block walls. I applied for a summer job.

I was lucky enough to obtain a position as a seasonal naturalist at Olympic National Park in Port Angeles, Washington. I had never been to the west coast, having grown up in Massachusetts, and flew out, rented a car, and after my first week of training, bought a used car with my savings from teaching. I never went back. I was able to learn about a whole different world and I was in heaven. I was teaching in the outdoors, learned great skills as a naturalist, and on my free time, I hiked, ran, backpacked and fished for wild cutthroat and eastern brook trout in wilderness streams, and high country lakes.

Continued on page 7



Interview With an Officer

By Gareth Williams

What is your favorite part of being a Federal Wildlife Officer?

Without question, my favorite aspect of the job is the variance of duties throughout the year. Parker River NWR is a very seasonally-driven station and our job duties are dictated accordingly. For example, the spring months bring increased public use from general outdoor enthusiasts, including bikers, hikers, birders, photographers and kayakers.

My top priority is public safety and resource protection during these months. The summer season here means focusing a strong effort towards migratory bird protection, specifically the piping plovers and least terns, as the majority of our beach closes down for their nesting season and habitat protection. Trespassing and disturbance are common violations during the summer. The fall and winter seasons are my favorite, however, as my focus turns more to the game warden side of the job where sport fishing, deer hunting and waterfowl hunting enforcement become top priorities. No day is quite the same in this line of work and that tends to make for an interesting career in any field.

Do you work with law enforcement (LE) personnel from other agencies and jurisdictions?

Absolutely. Given the small size of our agency and respective LE division, our cooperation with outside agencies is critical. Without this outside assistance,

Continued on page 9

Great Marsh Warriors Need Your HELP!

By Frances Toledo Rodriguez,
Biological Technician

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and Mass Audubon are looking for volunteers to help with their ongoing project to control and eradicate perennial pepperweed in the Great Marsh. Perennial pepperweed is an invasive plant that is new to the East Coast. Parker River Refuge and Mass Audubon is working with many conservation partners, towns, State, volunteers and local schools to contain and eradicate this invasive plant before it takes over our salt marshes. Pepperweed is a recent invader to New England and is threatening our salt marshes. Pepperweed produces thousands of highly viable seeds annually, which are then dispersed by wind and by water. In areas with wet, saline conditions pepperweed forms dense, single species stands which displace native species. It is feared that if allowed to spread unchecked, pepperweed may continue to degrade salt marches and expand its range into other habitats, displacing imperiled wildlife like the New England Cottontail and Saltmarsh Sparrow. In New England, infestations of pepperweed are mainly found near the coast and on coastal islands. Stands often occur at the upper edges of salt marshes above the high-tide line, frequently forming dense stands. It also occurs along highways, where it grows in disturbed areas near roads.

Volunteers are needed to help pull and monitor this invasive plant in Salisbury, Amesbury, Newburyport, Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Essex, and Seabrook, NH this coming summer. Our goal is to control or eradicate pepperweed before it becomes as pervasive as Phragmites or purple loosestrife. Volunteers are essential to the success of the pepperweed control project. Last year with the help of volunteers we were able to treat 67% (768 sites) of all our identified sites with over 1,500 hours of donated time. Since the beginning of this group in 2006 volunteers have donated a total of 8,500 hours!

Volunteer support is the key to the success of the pepperweed project. Volunteers come from schools, colleges, clubs, conservation



Volunteers have contributed thousands of hours to the effort to control the invasive pepperweed plant.

organizations, community groups and interested individuals. Volunteers are involved in every part of the project; they participate in pulls, lead groups, adopt sites, apply herbicide, conduct outreach, obtain landowner permission, help transport volunteers and licensed applicators by boat, and map pepperweed locations. Massachusetts License Pesticide applicators are also needed and encouraged to participate and support this project.

If you're interested in helping with this project, please email your name, contact information (email or phone), and the town you're interested in working to Frances Toledo-Rodriguez at Frances_Rodriguez@fws.gov or 978-465-5753 ext. 203 or Liz Duff at lduff@massaudubon.org

For those individuals interested in learning more about our program and participating as volunteers there will be two training sessions:

Pepperweed Volunteer Training: May 18th, 9-12pm offered by the Plum Island Beautification Society. From 9-9:30(aprox) there will be a short presentation at the Plum Island Hall (PITA). From 9:30am to 12pm the group will move to Shore Street Plum Island, MA to get some hands on experience in the field.

Pepperweed Volunteer Training: May 28th, 3-5pm hosted by Mass Audubon at Ipswich Library.

The American Woodcock: A Sign of Spring

By Kaytee Hojnacki, Biological Technician

Walking past an old field on an April evening, you hear an odd sound. It sounds like someone holding their nose while saying “peent”. What can it be? Then up through the sky flies a bird, wings twittering as it flies high in the sky, before racing back down to earth. The “peent” begins again. Why, of course this is the mating display of the bog sucker. Never heard of it? How about mud bat? Labrador twister? Timberdoodle? Maybe you know it by its more common name, the woodcock. The mating displays of these goofy looking birds are a sure sign that spring has sprung.

Most commonly found in wet shrublands or thickets, the woodcock can also be found in forests and abandoned fields. Their mix of browns, tans and black feathers help this chubby little bird blend into the leaf litter, where it searches for its favorite food, earthworms. In a single day, a woodcock can consume its weight in worms, although it may also eat snails, spiders, millipedes, or other insects it finds on the forest floor. To catch earthworms, the woodcock will stick its long bill into the soil, and then open just the tip, to grab hold and pull one out.

Although technically a shorebird, the woodcock has adapted to living away from the shore. In order to avoid being eaten by predators found in the forest, these birds have large eyes set far back and on the side of their heads. With these eyes, they can see at all angles, even behind them! If a predator comes near, they will sit motionless, relying on their camouflage to keep them hidden. If this doesn't work the woodcock will burst into flight, rapidly beating its wings.

After flying north from their wintering grounds in the Deep South, males will begin their mating displays in shrubby fields, forest openings, power line right-of-ways, or other similar habitats. A female will visit many of these “singing grounds” before she chooses a male to mate with. After mating, the female will lay her eggs in a nest she makes by scraping a slight depression in the ground. The fluffy young are able to follow the female 24 hours after hatching, being fed by mom as they wander along.

This spring, just as its starting to get dark, I hope you find yourself at an open area near the woods. You'll be treated to one of the most entertaining shows on earth. Or at least you'll be able to giggle at the goofy calls of the American woodcock.



The “sky dance” performed by the American woodcock is a sure sign of spring.

Photo: Matt Poole/FWS

The Snowy Owl Invasion: More than Just a Pretty Face!

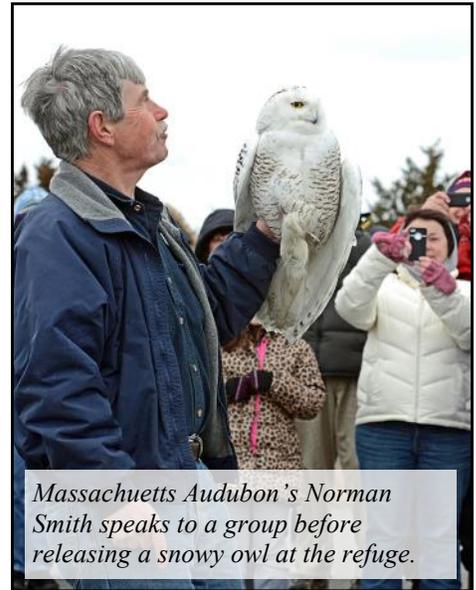
By Linda Schwartz, Volunteer/Master Naturalist

This has been a record year for the presence of snowy owls in Massachusetts. They were last seen in the area, in significant numbers, 2 years ago. This winter their presence received more publicity than ever before, sometimes resulting in people management challenges for refuge staff. Frequent sightings of the owls in the vicinity of the “Pink House” and the Sgt. Donald Wilkinson drawbridge caused minor traffic jams as enthusiastic people – armed with cameras and binoculars – sought their very own snowy owl encounter.

I am sure that *Bob Lobster* was not complaining about the increased business they must have enjoyed with the owls hanging out on the house across the street and, more recently, one or two just before the bridge. The owls certainly are majestic creatures. Their beautiful white feathers and golden eyes make them quite the spectacle. (The popularity of Hedwig in the Harry Potter series probably doesn’t hurt either!). On many days this winter, the refuge visitor in search of a snowy owl encounter needed only to be on the lookout for a crowd of people with cameras, tripods, and spotting scopes.

The snowies were frequently on the news this winter all over the northeast. There were many stories about how many there had been and how a couple of individuals had even been spotted as far south as Florida and Bermuda (I guess we can all use a nice vacation!...) There were also stories about how the owls can be a problem near airports which, unfortunately, are one of their favorite wintertime hangouts due to the tundra-like, flat, grassy terrain. While the owls may in fact help to keep other birds away from airports, they themselves pose a potential threat to airline traveler

safety. Some readers will recall news stories about airplane accidents that were caused by birds getting entrained in jet engines. Massachusetts Audubon’s Norman Smith, who has been trapping and carefully relocating snowy owls from Logan Airport for 30+ years, caught and released at least 100 snowies this winter – a number of them released on the refuge.



Massachusetts Audubon’s Norman Smith speaks to a group before releasing a snowy owl at the refuge.

Parker River NWR may be the second most visited national wildlife refuge in the thirteen state northeast region (well behind first place finisher Chincoteague NWR in Virginia), but its capacity to absorb large numbers of people (and their motor vehicles) is very limited. When word spread that Norman Smith would be releasing a snowy at the refuge’s Lot 1 on a sunny Saturday afternoon in February – and that Mr. Smith, as he always does, would be willing to talk about the owl and its conservation with onlookers – the masses gathered! In fact, about two hundred people gathered for the event.

The abundance of snowy owls this winter presented both opportunities and challenges. I’ve already described some of the challenges. But their presence also provided many refuge visitors with a rare and very special wildlife experience – an experience from which they walked away with a better understanding of this nomadic, majestic predator and efforts to both study and conserve it.



A snowy owl perching on the roof of the “Pink House” attracted a large crowd. Vehicles parked on both road shoulders made for unsafe travel conditions.
Photo: Patricia Lane Evans

Meet Refuge Volunteer Richard Buba

By Jean Adams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Richard Buba started volunteering in January 2013. In such a short time, he has proven to be a valuable (and handy) maintenance volunteer. Richard is a very self-motivated volunteer that needs only a truck and tools to get the job done. Many times all I need to do is say "Richard...you know what we need..." and, whatever it is, it is likely done in short order and more often than not better than what I envisioned. I am amazed at what he can accomplish on his own without any assistance from anyone else. He has built benches, cleared brush, put up very large signs, installed spotting scopes, and repaired countless broken boards on the boardwalks. In addition, his quirky outfits, and laid back style, make him a pleasant and interesting addition to Parker River's volunteer cadre. Recently, I asked Richard to sit down and pen his thoughts on volunteering. What follows are his responses:

Why did you want to volunteer?

I was motivated to volunteer because it afforded me an opportunity to give back in a small way to the refuge, which has given me so much pleasure over the years.

What did you do before you retired?

I was an electrical engineer that ended up on the dark side in sales and marketing of high tech computer products. In that role, I traveled (too much) but I made friends all over the world.

What do you like most about volunteering?

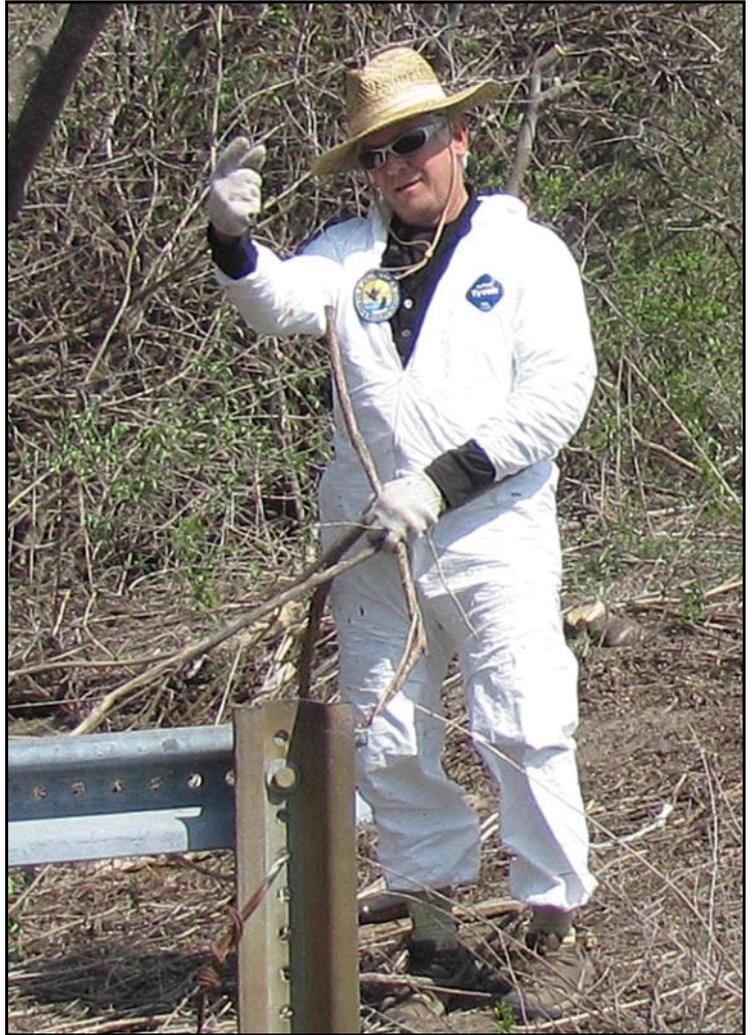
The best part about volunteering is having the satisfaction of contributing to the upkeep of the refuge. In addition there are not many meetings! No office time!

Any memorable moments?

Volunteering at the refuge provides many memorable moments. One such memory was catching a glimpse of an osprey effortlessly catching its lunch. Simply beautiful.

Any advice to other volunteers?

Don't forget to bring your sun block and wide brimmed hats! It is better to have "hat hair" than to be overexposed to the sun!



What's the most important message you'd like to pass along to the public?

Being a volunteer at the refuge offers satisfaction on many levels. It is important to remember that there are many people whose combined efforts and dedication make the refuge a world class destination for us all.

The refuge is really lucky to have Richard as part its team. This past year is hopefully just one of many in which Richard will volunteer for Parker River NWR. Thank you, Richard!



Gardening for Wildlife

By Nancy Pau, Wildlife Biologist

People garden for many reasons, the most obvious being love of plants and pride in their property. Other top reasons for gardening include relaxation and “feeling connected to nature”. In a recent Vermont survey, over 70% of gardeners said they garden to preserve wildlife habitat. This is good news to the birds, the bees, and other wildlife, because wildlife habitat is rapidly shrinking, especially in the Northeast. In his book, “Bring Nature Home”, Doug Tallamy challenges every homeowner in America to share their garden with wildlife; thereby creating a mosaic of backyard wildlife habitat patches that connect larger nature preserves together.

I’m taking up Dr. Tallamy’s challenge as we try to landscape our little piece of old farmland in West Newbury. I’m not doing it purely for the wildlife, however. As a mom to two young boys, I don’t get to hike as much as I used to. Gardening for wildlife will allow me to enjoy the native plants and wildlife that I love. As an added bonus, the wildlife garden will provide endless hours of adventure and free play for our two boys. So, if you’re inspired to create some wildlife habitat in your own backyard, here are some considerations to keep in mind:

Use native plants when possible. Native plants support a lot more wildlife than the common nursery plants because insects, the bottom of Nature’s food chain, have evolved with them. As an example, an oak tree supports over 500 species of butterflies and moths, while a forsythia bush supports only 1. Native plants also provide nectar and berries for wildlife at the right time. Blueberries flower just when hummingbirds are migrating through the area. Native shrubs are loaded with nutrient rich berries that birds need when they migrate through in fall. Here are some of my personal favorite native plants for wildlife. (For more detailed list, check out new-englandwild.org or www.ct-botanical-society.org):

- Trees: oaks, tulips tree, maples, white pine, white cedar,
- Small trees: shadbush, cherries, red bud, American hazelnut, pawpaw, birch, red juniper, muslewood, Carolina silverbell
- Small shrubs: dogwood, viburnums, bayberries, inkberry, blueberries, meadowsweet
- Perennials: milkweeds, butterfly weed, Joe Pye weed, wild columbine, cardinal flower, bleeding

- hearts, New England aster, bloodroot, blue vervain, lupine, foam flower.

“Leave a corner of your garden for the fairies.”

Animals need shelter to hide from predators. These can include thick shrubs (thickets), wood piles, ground cover and leaf litter. Over the last few decades, our gardens have gotten “neater” and we’ve removed “unsightly debris” in favor of lawn and mulch. Leaf litter is where Nature recycles nutrients, and where most insects live. By making our gardens neater we’ve lost many of our beloved wildlife species, like fireflies and bluebirds. In addition to woody debris, consider planting some common wildflowers in a corner of your garden. Flowers like aster, common milkweed, Joe Pye weed, and Queen Anne’s lace attract a lot of beneficial insects.

Think about landscape context. When deciding which wildlife you want to attract, think about what’s around your land. Are you surrounded by forests, near wetlands, or in a sunny field? This will determine which wildlife will come to your yard. If you’re near a forest, plant berry-producing shrubs for songbirds. If you’re in a sunny field, flowering nectar perennials will attract pollinating butterflies, moths, and bees. A natural grass mix will attract grassland nesting birds like bobolinks, meadowlarks, or bluebirds.



Youngsters learn about native plants and gardening. FWS photo.

Think about year-round wildlife needs. Most people try to provide nest boxes for birds. However, very few birds nest in these structures. There are a handful of birds that will nest in a garden; but a much greater number will visit your garden for food and water. So, think about what wildlife needs most during stressful times, like fall migration and winter, when food is scarce. For both of these seasons the most important thing is shelter and food. You can also provide water throughout the year; but remember to provide water at ground level for insects and frogs as well.

Officer Husgen, continued

When the fall rolled around, I did not have a job, and fortunately was hired across the country in Everglades NP in southern Florida. Talk about extremes. I drove across the U.S. with a map on my lap, and all of my worldly goods in an old Toyota station wagon. I was going to teach environmental education at the first NPS environmental education program in the country. It was great. I went back to Washington, and back to the Everglades and hit every state except South Dakota in my travels. I could not drive to Hawaii.

I spent three summers in the Olympic Mountains, and every time there was a rescue on the trails that I knew so well, or a fire, the law enforcement officers responded. I wanted in on that action. I also observed folks shortcutting trails, or camping in closed areas while I was out hiking, and had no authority to protect the Park that I loved so well. I decided to pay my way to the seasonal law enforcement academy and chose the one in California that was supposed to be one of the best.

I obtained my first job in law enforcement with the FWS as a seasonal Refuge Officer at Loxahatchee NWR in Florida. It was a good introduction to the law enforcement experience, and I learned as I went.

I spent my next summer in Alaska at Denali, NP. It had always been my dream to see Alaska, and it was spectacular. I patrolled both populated visitor areas, as well as some remote areas. I performed backcountry first aid, and carried my first dead body off of a mountain. I patrolled by cruiser, air, ATV, and hiked. Much time was spent keeping the visitors from the moose cows that dropped their calves near the road. It was a great job.

I was getting pretty tired traveling across the country to keep employed, and also of living essentially in virtual poverty, so I felt that I would have a better shot of getting permanent work in the Park Service in the northeast and I took a job at Cape Cod National Seashore. I had known the Cape well from my bike trip days, and was lucky that I was going to have a role coordinating and conducting kids environmental education programs for some of the time, and plain clothes law enforcement for the other part of my time. A dream summer for me.



Officer Christopher Husgen teaches a youngster how to cast.

That fall, the Director of the National Park Service came to Faneuil Hall in Boston to address NPS staff, and I went over to hear him speak on my day off. Not being shy, I asked what he was doing to help seasonal employees get permanent work. Well, after the talk, I showed him a package of information that I had put together with photos of the kids that I had taught, and he told me to write him a letter. I did.

I took a seasonal job that winter at the Statue of Liberty/ Ellis Island, and caught the last boat to Liberty Island one cold December night, with a full moon rising over Manhattan, and spent my first night in New York City in an apartment under the Statue. Wow, culture shock! I spent a little over 5 months working nights on Ellis Island, and fortunately only a month sharing a room under the Statue. My dad had arrived in the United States from war torn Europe after World War II and the first thing that he saw was the Statue. It meant a lot to me to work and protect such a historically significant place.

NPS Director Kennedy wrote me back during that time, and said that he had forwarded my letter to

the Regional Director of the NPS. Soon afterward, I was contacted about a job teaching ranger skills at the National Park Service Gateway Job Corps in Brooklyn.

This was a far cry from my dream of working in the outdoors protecting the natural resources and national treasures that I so loved, but it was a way in the door to employment in the federal system. It was a huge challenge to live in Staten Island and work in Brooklyn and challenged my understanding of the world. I worked to try to provide an opportunity for employment to poorly educated, inner city, poor kids, often having grown up in gangs. It was tough, but my most memorable experience was when I received a handwritten card from a woman that I had mentored. Her life had been pretty horrible, and she had many challenges, but she told me that I had "saved her life." She had spent over a year in my class, and had little hope for employment, but I helped her get into the US Marine Corps. She was a wonderful person and I'll never forget her. Her name was Felicia.

I finally found my way to Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, back in my home state of Massachusetts. At first I thought that it was just a way to get a permanent job in law enforcement, and it did provide that opportunity, but then I learned to love the marsh. I was able to patrol the beach on an ATV, and the marsh in a boat, and learn about the subtle beauty of the marsh. I learned to catch striped bass, and then learned to hunt waterfowl, and have not enjoyed any activity more.

Parker River may not have the majestic beauty of 200 foot Douglas fir trees in the Olympic Mountains, or the grandeur of the Muir Glacier of Denali, but if you spend time there, it has its own wonders. Watching the sun rise over the ocean beach, or set over the marsh at Parker River is spectacular. It never looks the same.

My experience here has become particularly valuable lately because of the challenges and opportunities that I have been able to explore. I do best when I feel valued, and have challenges. I have been fortunate to share my varied job experience as a Field Training Officer, and have had five trainees over the past few years. We are very busy, and there is no shortage of training opportunities for officer trainees to contact people in any number of enforcement situations. There is plenty of traffic and trespass enforcement, but the Refuge can also provide

opportunities for contacts with visitors engaged in wildlife observation, birding, hunting and fishing.

In the time that I have been at Parker River, there have been two suicides, an attempted suicide, some assaults, a plane crash, and many boats washing ashore, sometimes with their operators in them, and a couple of whales washed up on the beach. I picked up a human jaw once in the waves after receiving a phone call from a man that was encouraged by his friends at work to report having found it and dropping it again on the beach the day before. He told me it was near the seagulls and shells. At first I was skeptical, and when I asked how he knew it was human, he told me the teeth had fillings. Further conversation led me closer to the jaw. The family of the deceased appreciated learning of the fate of their loved one.

Another significant challenge, and a sense of being valued has come from work I've done as a mentor in a special Student Conservation Association intern program and my role as a Diversity Change Agent. Working to make the workplace more comfortable and accepting of diverse employees, and everyone, has real meaning for me.

I hope you have a better sense for me and my journey. I strive to continue to improve in my position as a Field Training Officer, a mentor, a firearms instructor, and colleague, and look forward to new challenges, and ways to feel of value in my work.



Photo: Matt Poole

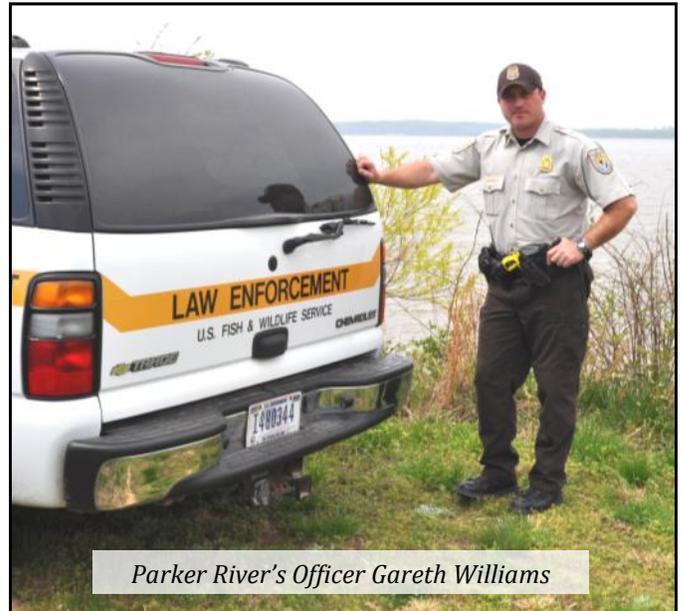
Officer Williams, continued

we would not be able to do our job nearly as effectively to serve the public and our staff. Like nearly all refuges in the System, here at Parker River NWR we work very closely with a number of agencies on the local, state and federal level. They include:

- Newbury PD, Newburyport PD and Massachusetts State Police – all assist us with one of our most critical needs in backup protection, as well as running record checks, information sharing and additional patrol/presence on our refuges
- Newbury Fire/EMS – Respond to any call for emergency medical services, serious injury, etc.
- Massachusetts Environmental Police/New Hampshire Fish & Game – work with us during the varied hunting and fishing seasons to provide assistance with enforcement and information sharing in and around our refuges
- US Coast Guard – responds regularly to any water related incidents, including search and rescue and assisting us with water safety training
- USFWS Special Agents – handle long-term investigations and higher profile incidents

When/how/why did you decide to become a Federal Wildlife Officer?

As a boy, I grew up spending a lot of time fishing, hunting and being in the outdoors with my family. The outdoors has drawn my interests for as long as I can remember. When I turned 16 years old, my grandfather took me to his local rod and gun club to attend a Massachusetts hunter safety/education course so I could get my first hunting license. I will never forget meeting Lt. Fletcher with the Massachusetts Environmental Police during that course and being absolutely fascinated with what he did for work. At the end of the course, I asked him, "how do I get your job?!" Lt. Fletcher gave me some of his time and explained what he believed to be a good course of action for my future. After graduating high school, I was initially accepted to Northeastern University and their civil engineering program. It only took me 1 year there to realize that although they were paid well, I did not want to be an engineer after all and began to look at a career in landscape architecture. That interest soon waned and I decided to work towards what I had always wanted since attending that hunter safety course. I was accepted and transferred to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and enrolled in their Natural Resource Conservation program. I graduated with a BS in Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation; however,



Parker River's Officer Gareth Williams

during my time as an undergrad, I volunteered regularly at our regional office in Hadley, MA, right down the street. During that time volunteering for the USFWS, I quickly realized who I really wanted to work for. After graduation, I still had a great interest in conservation law enforcement and had the opportunity to enroll in the National Park Service's seasonal law enforcement academy in Amherst, MA. After graduation, I was hired by the National Park Service and was extremely happy for the opportunity; however, I still dreamed of working more on the side of conservation law enforcement and for an agency like the USFWS. I continued applying for jobs with USFWS and took the MA Environmental Police's civil service exam. It took a couple of years more, but I was finally offered a position with USFWS in Virginia and off I went. After working nearly 7 great years in Virginia, I accepted a station transfer opportunity here to Newburyport, MA in February of 2013 and things have been going very well.

What aspect of your job might surprise the reader?

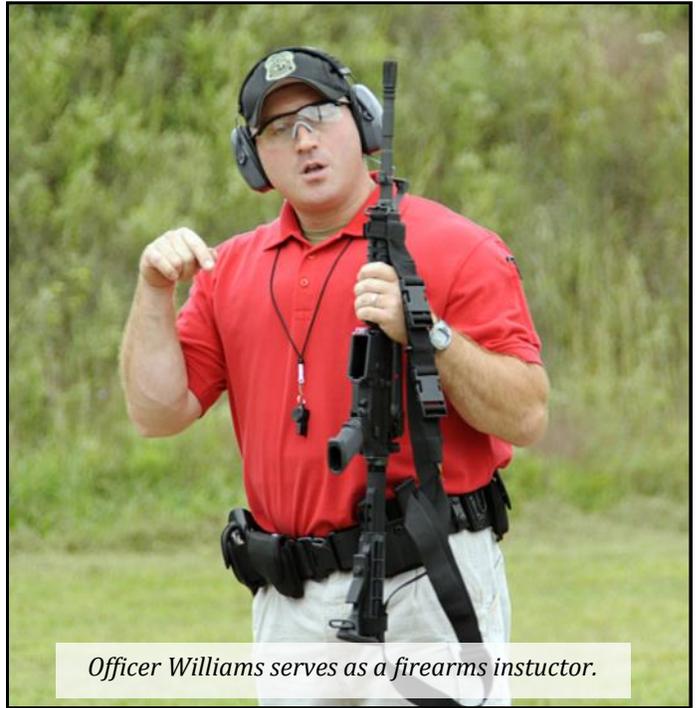
Hard to say exactly, that is a tough one. When talking with a large number of the people I encounter in the field, I find that many of them are not aware of exactly who we are, much less what we do. I think in turn some folks are generally surprised to find a full time law enforcement presence on their refuge. Aside from that aspect, I think many might be surprised in the variance of our job duties in the field, as well as some of the additional duties that our officers take on. For example, I assist the Regional Law Enforcement program as a Firearms

Instructor, weapons armorer and a Field Training Officer. A number of our Officers serve also as K-9 Officers, Control Tactics Instructors and Motorboat Operator Instructors. It adds an additional challenge to the job and tends to be a very enjoyable aspect of the job.

Can you describe the training that one goes through in order to become a Federal Wildlife Officer? Currently, once an applicant is considered for hire, passes physical fitness testing, a psychological test and background investigation, they are sent to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, GA to enroll in the Land Management Police Training program for 18 weeks. There trainees become proficient with firearms, control tactics, driving skills, legal statues, etc. Upon successful graduation from the Academy, students are then sent to our National Conservation Training Center in WV for 3 weeks of FWOBS (Federal Wildlife Officer Basic School). This training is geared towards agency specific needs, such as learning our 50 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations), MBTA (Migratory Bird Treaty Act), waterfowl identification and a number of other federal statutes like the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, etc. Upon graduation of FWOBS, trainees begin 12 weeks of FTEP (Field Training Evaluation Program). This is typically done in 3 phases, at 2 different stations/refuges and with a primary and secondary Field Training Officer. The trainee is evaluated, critiqued and ranked on a daily basis and if successful, then graduates to working in the field at their assigned station.

How do the duties of a Federal Wildlife Officer support the work done by other USFWS professionals?

Federal Wildlife Officer's spend the majority of their time working in the field and, in turn, routinely assist all divisions in the USFWS, like biology, visitor services and maintenance. For example, since we are "out there" much of the time, we may assist our biologists some evenings with their projects by setting a moth trap for a study, regulating water levels in the impoundments or assisting with predator/invasive species control. During larger public events, we will assist visitor services with traffic and crowd control or provide law enforcement perspective for various in-house training programs for volunteers, etc. During certain times of the year, our maintenance staff can be helped out with storm clean up and boundary posting needs. With a seemingly ever-shrinking budget in recent years, we all



Officer Williams serves as a firearms instructor.

are continually asked to do "more with less" in our various divisions. I find often the best thing is to work hard towards having a diverse, well rounded set of skills and a maintaining a solid work ethic to help alleviate the work load for the entire staff.

Do you have any career goals beyond working as a Federal Wildlife Officer at Parker River NWR?

Certainly. One of the great things about the USFWS is that we have refuges throughout the nation and many opportunities to work in some very neat places for those willing and able to move around. Our agency leaders have been working hard in recent years to expand our career ladder within the law enforcement division. Until now, we have had somewhat limited opportunities for advancement, as far as positions go. Currently, the majority of our officers serve in a field level, patrol-based function on our national wildlife refuges. We then have 7 Zone Officers throughout the region that assist with patrol, training coordination, general liaison work with the courts, local police departments, etc., 2 Supervisory Officers at 2 of our multi-officer stations and our Regional Chief. Recently, however, our leaders are working hard to establish some new positions, including additional Supervisory Officers, Training Officer positions and perhaps an additional K-9 Officer. I have only been here at Parker River NWR for a year and am finally settling in, but would be very interested in competing for an advancement position when they become available. I can tell you in the short term that I am extremely happy working for the USFWS, I worked very hard to get here and it would take a very unique opportunity with another agency for me to leave.

The Seasonal Rhythms of the Lower Road

By Frank Drauszewski, Deputy Manager

As we all know, the winter was long, cold, and snowy. The weather had a direct impact on the ability of refuge visitors to drive south of the Hellcat area – first because of snow cover and secondly because of the freeze – thaw cycle.

The lower road south of Hellcat is an unpaved road composed of a coarse aggregate surface commonly referred to as gravel. The gravel used consists of varying amounts of crushed stone, sand and *fin*es. Fines are silt or clay particles which can act as a binder. In 2013, the refuge had the 2.8 mile long lower road resurfaced with up to 8” of this aggregate material. Approximately 14,253 tons of it was used in the process. The total cost of the project was over \$600,000.

The lower road was closed to vehicles for much of the winter, as mentioned, due to snow/ice and the freeze thaw cycle. Plowing snow on this road is hard on equipment and the refuge, unlike state and town highway departments, does not plow with the storm. We do not have the budget to support those types of operations. Management has decided to only plow the paved road as far as Hellcat, opening the lower road to vehicles when conditions warrant.

During a January thaw this year the lower road was opened one weekend when rain moved into the area and turned the road into a rutted, muddy mess. After that it refroze and remained closed to motor vehicles for a period of time. The refuge has gotten both negative and positive comments about the lower road closure. It makes for a nice walk, snow shoe, or cross country ski experience – and the wildlife doesn't mind either! Once the road thawed and dried out, it was graded and reopened to motor vehicles.

Swallow Weather

*On Plum Island, in early August,
the swallows
feel a restlessness so compelling,
their flocking
is a turbulence,
a sudden weather.
You pause on the road,
delighted.
You have your father's eye
for discrepancy,
the outlier,
the white sliver of a bird,
a Least Tern,
caught in this weather,
joyriding
on a commotion of air.*

By Nancy Jasper

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