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DEC Environmental Conservation Officer Highlights ECO Actions for Late March to Early April

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Environmental Conservation Officers (ECOs) enforce the 71 Chapters of NY Environmental Conservation Law, protecting fish and wildlife and preserving environmental quality across New York.

In 2016, the 286 ECOs across the state responded to 26,400 calls and issued 22,150 tickets for crimes ranging from deer poaching to corporate toxic dumping and illegal mining, black market pet trade, and excessive emissions violations.

"From Montauk Point to Mount Marcy, from Brooklyn to Buffalo, the ECOs patrolling our state are the first line of defense in protecting New York's environment and our natural resources, ensuring that they exist for future generations of New Yorkers," said Commissioner Basil Seggos. "They work long and arduous hours, both deep in our remote wildernesses and in the tight confines of our urban landscapes. Although they don't receive much public fanfare, the work of our ECOs is critical to achieving DEC's mission to protect and enhance our environment."

Recent missions carried out by ECOs include:

Unlawful Dumping - Suffolk County

On March 22, ECO Mark Simmons responded to a complaint of illegal dumping at a local school bus company. ECO Simmons found a hole six-feet deep and roughly 30-feet long at the site, loaded with debris. Further inspection revealed tail pipes, mufflers, brake parts, fuel tanks, and other old bus parts that had been discarded in the hole. Officer Simmons sent photographs of the debris and petroleum-stained ground to the town of Brookhaven's environmental expert and the DEC Spills Unit. On March 29, a joint inspection by Brookhaven and DEC confirmed the evidence. The town of Brookhaven has ordered the bus company to remove the debris so that DEC can continue an investigation with soil samples. The town is also revoking an open building permit and requesting a new site plan. ECO Simmons issued four tickets to the school bus company for water quality and solid waste violations.



ECO Simmons with an old bus and illegally dumped debris

Loaded Rifle Riding Shotgun – Ulster County

On March 26, an Ulster County Sheriff's Deputy contacted ECO Jeannette Bastedo requesting assistance with a subject illegally possessing firearms. The deputy had stopped a vehicle in the town of Ulster driven by an individual who was wanted for violating a family court order of protection. The Deputy observed a loaded rifle in the front seat. A second loaded rifle was later discovered in the vehicle and determined to have been reported stolen in Arizona. ECO Bastedo charged the subject with two counts of possession of a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle. Additional felony charges of criminal contempt of court in the first degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the fourth degree, and a misdemeanor of criminal contempt of court in the second degree were also filed by the Deputy. The man was arraigned in the Town of Ulster Court and remanded to the Ulster County Jail.

What a Croc – Richmond County

On March 27, ECOs Zach Brown and Spencer Noyes discovered a Craigslist posting for an 8-foot "Alligator Skin" for sale for \$160 in Staten Island. The posting advertised the skin as "perfect for a bar, restaurant, or man cave." ECOs Noyes and Brown contacted Richmond County ECO Michael Hameline, who contacted the seller to determine if the skin was still available. The ECOs then set up a meeting to purchase the skin. ECO Hameline met with the seller and the two agreed to a purchase price of \$160. It was determined that the seller did not possess the proper permits to possess or sell the skin. Noyes and Brown assisted Hameline in seizing the skin as evidence and issued tickets. The seller was informed of the rules and regulations regarding the possession of alligator parts. The skin was later identified as an American Crocodile. It will be used for future environmental education and outreach.



ECOs Brown, Hameline, and Noyes with the crocodile skin

Alligators in Lyons Falls – Lewis County

On March 28, ECO Fay Fuerch was contacted by the Lewis County Sheriff's Office regarding two alligators in a residence in the village of Lyons Falls. A tenant of the residence met ECO Fuerch and handed her a Ramen noodle box with two alligator hatchlings in it. He told her that two other individuals had picked up the hatchlings at a pet store in Florida and brought them to New York one week earlier. ECO Fuerch located the two people that had transported the alligators from Florida and they admitted to purchasing them from a pet store. The baby alligators had only been fed earthworms since leaving the pet store and did not appear to be in good health. Both subjects were issued tickets for the illegal possession of the alligators, returnable to West Turin Court. The alligators were taken to the Thompson Park Zoo in Watertown for veterinary care and temporary housing. Arrangements are currently being made for the alligators to be transferred to an educational facility once they are healthy.



ECO Fuerch and the alligator hatchlings along with their "cage"

Alligator Products in the Street – New York County

On March 29, ECOs Adam Johnson and Spencer Noyes performed a plainclothes buy of a pair of alligator skin shoes and handbag offered for sale on Craigslist in Manhattan. The ECOs found the post on Craigslist a few days earlier and set-up the buy after confirming that the seller did not have a license to sell alligator/crocodile parts in New York. The undercover buy occurred in midtown Manhattan on the sidewalk of 1st Avenue. After completing the sale, ECO Johnson identified himself as an ECO and issued the defendant a summons for the sale of certain wild animals or parts returnable to New York County Court on June 28. The alligator shoes and handbag were seized as evidence.



Illegally sold Alligator handbag and women's shoes

Bobcats are Not Pets – Jefferson County

On March 29, ECOs Kevin Holzle and Peter Jackson were contacted regarding a complaint of a subject in possession of a live bobcat. It is illegal to possess a bobcat without a permit. When the ECOs arrived at the residence, vehicles were parked in the driveway but there was no sign of movement inside. The officers spoke with a neighbor, who stated that the subject was home and that the bobcat was locked in a shed outside of the residence. The subject eventually came out and admitted to keeping a live bobcat in his possession. He claimed that the bobcat was struck by a vehicle three weeks prior and he was caring for the animal. The ECOs, with the help of Lt. Steve Bartoszewski, seized the bobcat and released the uninjured animal back into the woods. The subject was charged with illegal possession of wildlife and is due to appear in Town of Theresa Court in late April.



Jefferson County bobcat in a cage

The One that Got Away – Delaware County

On April 1, ECOs George Wilber and Nathan Doig responded to a motor vehicle accident in the town of Franklin. The accident was originally reported as a roll-over into the Ouleout Creek with four people in the car. The ECOs were the first responders at the scene and determined that all of the occupants were out of the car and the driver had sustained only minor injuries to his hand that did not require medical attention. However, the vehicle was located roughly 500 yards downstream. The ECOs determined that the incident had occurred while the operator was fishing. Due to poor weather, the other occupants had remained in the vehicle while the driver fished, and one of the passengers had knocked the idling vehicle out of gear, causing it to roll into to the creek. The three passengers jumped out of the car before it sunk, and the driver injured his hand while attempting to stop the runaway car. The Franklin Fire Department oversaw the removal of the waterlogged vehicle with no environmental damage to the creek.



Runaway Car in Ouleout Creek

Vulture – Genesee County

On April 2, ECO Gary Wilson received a call from Genesee County Dispatch stating that a concerned motorist had reported an injured Turkey Vulture standing on State Rt. 5 in the town of Stafford. The vulture had been hit by a vehicle and was at risk of being struck again. ECO Wilson responded to the location, found the bird, collected it in a five-gallon pail, and promptly transported it to a local wildlife rehabilitator.



ECO Wilson and the injured turkey vulture

Spring Trout Stocking is Family Fun – Albany County

On April 5, ECOs Kurt Bush, Jason DeAngelis, and Chris Valenty assisted DEC staff and community volunteers in stocking the Lisha Kill Creek in the town of Colonie with brown trout from DEC fish hatcheries. The officers assisted with public safety and traffic, but were also able to join the fun, helping excited children to release and later fish for the trout.



Region 4 ECOs Helping Stock Trout and Teaching Fishing Techniques

If you witness an environmental crime or believe a violation of environmental law occurred please call the DEC Division of Law Enforcement hotline at 1-844-DEC-ECOS (1-844-332-3267).

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