

Operation Northcoast turns up heat on poachers

More than 70 wildlife officers and investigators converged around the Interstate 75 and Interstate 77 corridors and from Port Clinton to Cleveland on March 12. Their mission: Operation Northcoast.

Operation Northcoast is an example of the extent that wildlife professionals will pursue violators. Their goals are to even the odds between the honest and the dishonest, to protect what cannot protect itself, and to preserve the very right to hunt and fish.

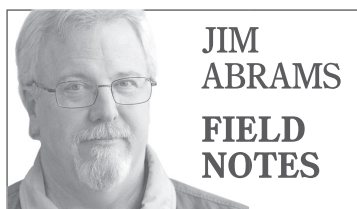
How do investigations like this develop?

It begins with wildlife officers noticing inconsistencies and suspicions, and recording the information in a report. These are reviewed by district investigators and supervisors for enforcement action or filed for future reference and intelligence.

Information is also forwarded to the Columbus Central Office of the Division of Wildlife and to the Covert Investigation Unit supervisor for further scrutiny and dissemination to affected districts.

There are also public reports. These concerns include suspicions, rumors and witnessed violations. These calls can be directed to a wildlife officer, toll-free hotline, policeman, sheriff's deputy, or state trooper. If the county-assigned wildlife officer has been doing his job, information will be forwarded to division personnel.

Next comes a complex evaluation that results from intersecting information. A report in



JIM ABRAMS
FIELD NOTES

one county crosses information gained in another. A license plate or permit number pops up in several reports. Harvest reports show inconsistent information, time frames or license-purchase history.

This web of scrambled information may look like a snarled bait-casting reel but, with patience, the knots loosen.

Wildlife's district law coordinators use local resources to target the suspected criminal activity. Aircraft are scheduled and specific projects are set up. Wildlife officers turn up the heat, recording information and contacts.

Sometimes these puzzles gain the focus of the Division of Wildlife's specialized covert investigation unit, a collection of officers who fly under the radar of their uniformed counterparts. They are the shadow in the shadows.

In the end, success in Operation Northcoast was achieved like most investigations: surveillance, observation, information gathering and just good old fashioned "game-warden" work.

Operation Northcoast led investigators and officers into six counties; Wood, Ottawa, Richland, Erie, Lorain and Cuyahoga, taking nearly two years to com-

plete. At 7 a.m. on March 12, over 70 wildlife officers converged on predetermined rendezvous points.

At 8 a.m., with search warrants in hand, suspects were contacted simultaneously.

By the end of the day, seven search warrants were issued, felony warrants executed, over 50 interviews conducted, hundreds of pounds of venison seized, 115 deer heads/antlers confiscated, taxidermy mounts were nabbed including bears, turkeys, bobcats, an owl and even some chipmunks.

Officers seized a Chevrolet Trailblazer, commercial fish cleaning equipment, meat processing gear, firearms, photographs and phones.

Suspected violations include felony commercialization of sport-caught fish, commercialization and sales of deer meat, sale of moonshine and food stamp fraud and a variety of deer-related charges. Officers and investigators are still sifting through the information and prosecutors are formulating the criminal charges that will levy some justice.

This investigative knot has been untangled and it's starting to look like a noose.

Along the Way:

There's good news for folks looking to catch a stringer of yellow perch without a trip to Lake Erie, especially those of us who live in Hancock County. Division of Wildlife biologists report that Findlay Reservoir 2 offers some of the state's best inland yellow perch fishing and is considered one of the top five spots to wet a line in

northwestern Ohio.

Good numbers of large perch over 10 inches are caught every year and shoreline fishing in the spring and fall can be productive over the fish attraction structures. If fishing from a boat, start along the dike opposite of the boat ramp and move east.

In summer, the deep water in the eastern part of the reservoir usually holds perch. When the reservoir is being filled, the area near the inflow on the northwest dike is usually good for a variety of species.

The reservoir has an improved concrete ramp and launching dock, but remember that there is a 10 horsepower limit for gas motors. For more fishing forecasts and a list of other top inland lakes by species, visit www.wildohio.gov.

Step Outside:

- The new hunting seasons have been approved. Visit www.wildohio.gov for information.

- Tomorrow: International Defensive Pistol Shoot. Registration at 9 a.m. Program at 10 a.m. UCOA, 6943 Marion Township 243, Findlay.

- Thursday-Friday: Trap & Skeet, 5 p.m. UCOA.

Abrams is a retired wildlife officer supervisor for the state Division of Wildlife in Findlay. He can be reached at P.O. Box 413, Mount Blanchard, OH 45867-0413 or via email at jimsfield-notes@aol.com.

Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS VAIL

Did you know that April is National Foot Health Awareness Month? According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, approximately 20 percent of people have at least one foot problem annually. It may be the result of poor-fitting shoes, or the result of an underlying health problem such as peripheral neuropathy, diabetes or obesity.

The average person takes approximately 10,000 steps per day, which add up to about 3 million steps per year. We carry approximately four to six times our body weight across the ankle joint when climbing up stairs or walking steep inclines. Good foot health is essential for an active life.

With 26 bones plus 33 joints, our feet serve as the foundation for the rest of our body. If the feet are not mechanically sound, it can affect the knees, hips and even the lower back. You'll need your feet to carry you an average of 115,000 miles in your lifetime, so, avoiding foot problems should be a priority.

Follow these tips to improve your feet health.

- Inspect your feet daily and use a mirror to check the bottom of your feet for injuries, cracks, peeling, or dry skin. This is especially important if you are diabetic to avoid infection or a non-healing wound.

- Wear shoes in public places where you may suffer cuts leading to infection, contract athlete's foot fungus or plantar warts on the bottom of your feet.

- Dry your feet and between your toes after showering to avoid fungal infections. Then, moisturize feet and heels with a good lotion.

- Don't leave nail polish on 24/7, which may lead to brittle nails or fungus. I recommend three weeks on and one week off every month.

- Remember your feet need sunscreen too! Apply between toes and on ankles to avoid sunburn and prevent skin cancer, which often goes unnoticed in this area of the body.

- Stretch your feet, ankles and lower legs daily and before exercising to keep the muscles strong and to avoid injury.

- Maintain a healthy weight through diet and exercise such as walking, stationary bike, or treadmill. Excess weight puts pressure on the feet leading to general foot pain, heel pain, stress fractures, circulatory problems and arthritis.

- Keep your diabetes under control by checking your fasting blood sugar daily. See your endocrinologist regularly and have an annual foot inspection with a podiatrist to check for problems such as loss of circulation or loss of sensation (neuropathy).

- Wear shoes with good support and a low heel. Keep high heels below 2 inches in height.

If you like to wear flats or those trendy ballet flats, alternate with shoes having good support. Make sure shoes have enough space without rubbing or squeezing toes.

Remember the "thumbnail rule" for space between end of shoe and toe and don't forget your longest toe may be your second, not your first. Use custom orthotics to provide arch support.

- Replace your walking or exercise shoes every six months or 500 miles in order to avoid foot and heel pain when the inside of the shoe begins to wear and lose support.

- Your feet flatten as you age. There is a good chance you will not wear the same size in shoes your entire life.

- If your child complains of recurring foot pain, stumbles frequently or has foot problems such as in-toeing that makes him/her unable to keep up with peers in normal activities or sports, see a podiatrist for a thorough evaluation.

- Don't play doctor! If you suffer a toe, foot or ankle injury, seek medical attention from a podiatrist.

The sooner you are treated, the better outcome you will have. Untreated injuries can result in bones not healing properly, causing recurring pain, limited mobility and development of arthritis in the affected joints.

Vail is with the Step Alive Foot and Ankle Center, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System experts may be sent to Weekend Doctor, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.



Vail

HOME

The right flowers can optimize your outdoor living space

By LAURIE WURTH PRESSEL

Greenhouses are brimming with lovely flowers of every size, shape and color at this time of year. You may be eager to bring some of these beauties home to liven up your landscape and garden.

Without a doubt, the right flowers can enhance your enjoyment of your outdoor living space. If you're a novice gardener, here are some tips to guide you when flower shopping this spring.

Don't be too eager.

If you want to play it safe, don't plant tender annuals such as petunias, impatiens, geraniums, zinnias and more, until May 15. After this date, a frost is less likely in Hancock County. It can be hard to wait that long, especially if there's a nice bout of weather.

So here's another option. Purchase your flowers early and keep them watered and in a sheltered spot outdoors, but wait to plant. This way, you get the best selection, you "harden off" your flowers, that is, prepare them for surviving outdoors, and you can always pull the flats/pots indoors if a freeze or frost is predicted. Come May 15, you will be ready to plant.

Know the difference between annuals and perennials.

Annuals complete their life cycle in one season. They will flower most of the summer, die with the fall frost, and won't return the next spring.

Perennials come back every spring, living for three or more years. Perennials have a shorter bloom period than annuals. Most bloom each year around the same time for a two-to-four-week period, then won't bloom again until the following year.

They also require some annual maintenance, such as

cutting them to the ground in the fall or spring, and dividing them every three to five years. Most flower gardens contain a mix of annuals and perennials.

Know your hardiness zone.

The plant tags on all perennials will be labeled with a hardiness zone. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture updated the Plant Hardiness Zone Map and put Hancock County in Zone 6a, which means perennials need to be able to survive down to minus-10 degree temperatures to make it through the average winter.

The previous map listed Hancock County as Zone 5.

Because our winters tend to be unpredictable, you may want to purchase perennials that are labeled as hardy to Zone 5a. This would ensure they survive during a harsh winter like the two we experienced before this last winter.

Read plant tags.

Plant tags provide a wealth of information in addition to the hardiness zone. Most include information about the flower's daily sun requirement, preferred soil type, whether it likes a dry or moist site, and its expected height and width.

Read these plant tags carefully when you are flower shopping. This information means the difference between success and failure.

If you have a sunny and dry spot in your landscape, and you pick out flowers that love shade and moisture, you have little chance that those flowers will flourish. You may even want to write down the names of flowers you like, then do further research online before you make your final purchases.

Be realistic.

All gardeners, novice and experienced, sometimes have bigger dreams and intentions than actual time and money.

When flower shopping, remember that every flower

requires time and effort in planting, watering, weeding, and fertilizing.

Flowers planted in containers and hanging baskets dry out quickly, especially during the hot part of summer, so be prepared to water daily or more. The best advice is to start small and see how it goes. Once you discover the joy of flower gar-

dening, you may find that your garden expands every year.

For more information, Cornell University provides a useful website at www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening.

Pressel is an Ohio State University Extension Master Gardener volunteer intern in Hancock County.

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