

# On Patrol

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

## The Canadian Cullers—Franklin County

During a routine check of anglers on the Salmon River in the town of Constable, ECO Jorge Sibbert discovered two men who had 19 rainbow trout in a live trap near the stream bank. Since the daily possession limit for trout is five per person, the ECO questioned the subjects—both from Quebec—who explained that they always kept all the fish they caught and then let the smaller ones go before leaving. A practice called culling, it's illegal to do this because it usually results in a high mortality rate for the fish that are let go. ECO Sibbert released the trout and then escorted the two men to town court where they were each fined \$100.

## Crappie Fishing Doesn't Pay—Monroe County

Hearing about the possible upcoming illegal sale of a large amount of black crappie at a local fish market in Rochester, ECOs Matthew Dorrett and Shaun Dussault contacted ECO Bruce Hummel who went to the market and posed as a customer. Hummel watched as three men brought in several containers of black crappie. The fish were weighed, and after the men agreed on a price, the store owner handed over a large amount of money. Since the commercial sale of many species of native freshwater fish—including black crappie—is illegal in New York, Hummel called for assistance and when ECOs Dorrett, Dussault and Frank Lauricella arrived, they arrested the suspects and seized the evidence—476 pounds of black crappie. Further investigation revealed that the same individuals made at least one previous sale of 100 pounds of crappie to the fish market. The fish market owner and the three men were charged with felony-level illegal commercialization of protected fish, and later paid more than \$15,000 in fines.

## Ranger Aid—Cattaraugus County

One evening, DEC Rangers Martin Flanagan and Wayne Krulish were patrolling the Zoar Valley Multiple Use Area and overheard radio transmissions indicating a local police officer had been shot. Since the incident occurred just 1.5 miles away, they quickly responded to see if they could be of assistance. The rangers were the second back-up unit to arrive on the scene. Ranger Flanagan provided medical treatment to the injured Gowanda police officer while Ranger Krulish monitored the scene for safety. As additional police units arrived from numerous state, county and local police agencies, both rangers continued to assist in trying to apprehend the shooter. Unfortunately, the shooter had already fled the scene, but thankfully the police officer made a full recovery.

### Ask the ECO

**Q:** How do I contact an Environmental Conservation Officer if I witness a violation or have information about illegal activity involving fish and wildlife?

**A:** The quickest way to report an environmental violation is to dial **1-800-TIPP-DEC**—a toll-free number connecting you to a statewide dispatch center that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A dispatcher will take your information and then contact an ECO to respond. You can call this number to report all kinds of environmental crimes or illegal activity you may have witnessed, and all callers can remain anonymous. To reach a specific ECO, there is a complete list of ECO phone numbers, arranged by county, in DEC's Freshwater Fishing Guide, DEC's Hunting and Trapping Guide, and on our website at [www.dec.ny.gov/about/50303.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/50303.html).

**HELP STOP POACHERS AND POLLUTERS IN THEIR TRACKS**  
**CALL**  
**1-800-TIPP-DEC**

Contributed by ECO Lt. Tom Caifa and Forest Ranger Lt. John Solan

Carl Heilman II



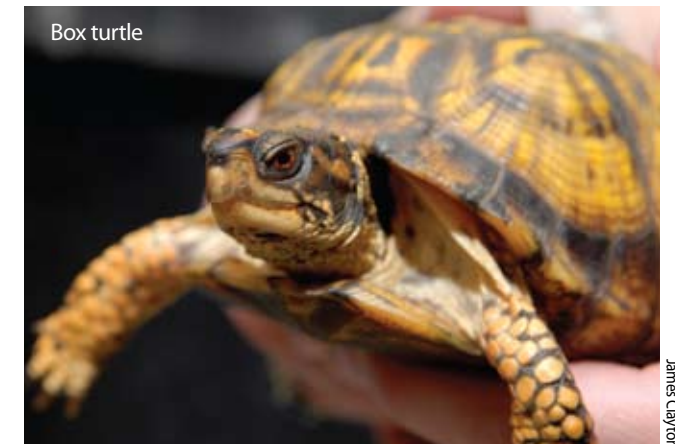
Baby snapping turtles

James Clayton



Rattlesnake

Richard Thomas



Box turtle

James Clayton

## Operation Shellshock

In one of the most extensive undercover operations DEC has ever undertaken, the Bureau of Environmental Crimes Investigation, working with a number of other state, federal and international offices, uncovered an international black market for poaching, smuggling and illegally selling protected native New York species of reptiles and amphibians. Dubbed "Operation Shellshock," the investigation began in 2007 and documented that thousands of New York turtles were being laundered through "middlemen" in other states, and then shipped overseas for meat and other uses. More than 2,400 individual turtles, snakes and salamanders were involved in the documented crimes, represented by such species as timber rattlesnakes, wood turtles, snapping turtles, Eastern hognose snakes and box turtles. Investigators spent hundreds of

hours afield, online and at shows with reptile poachers and illegal collectors, building cases from the ground up. The operation covered a large geographic area, involving officials from various states, the U.S. government, the New York State Attorney General's Office, Environment Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The investigation led to charges against 18 individuals for 14 felonies, 11 misdemeanors and dozens of violations.

Reptiles and amphibians are important environmental indicators of the health of the planet. As such, illegal trafficking of these species can have long-term, detrimental effects on the ecosystem. We hope that the success of this sting operation sends a strong message that buying and selling New York's native species will not be tolerated.